

CONCEPT NOTE on the EVENT and WORKSHOPS IN BARI: Sustainable and Innovative Food Systems: The Mediterranean Diet as a Tool for Tourism and Local Development in EUSAIR Communities

The promotion of the "**Mediterranean Diet** and local organic and origin production" is outlined in Action 3 (4.3.5) of Topic 3, which focuses on the 'Greening of Tourism Products and Services' within Pillar 4: Sustainable Tourism, as approved in the revised **EUSAIR ACTION PLAN** (SWD(2025)114 final). In complementarity with Topic 1.3 Maritime and Marine Governance and Services and its Action 1.3.5: Promote the development of Skills within Pillar 1 Blue Sustainable Economy and its regional Skills Partnership initiative.

This Action 3 of Topic 3 of Pillar 4 Sustainable Tourism highlights the opportunities presented by **including the Mediterranean Diet/MD in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list**. Specifically, the Mediterranean Diet was registered by UNESCO in 2012 as part of the world's cultural heritage. Additionally, Cultural and Trade routes established by the Council of Europe, which traverse EUSAIR countries (such as Iter Vitis/routes of wines, Routes of the Olive Tree, and the Historic Cafés Route), provide avenues for promotion.

UNESCO recognizes the Mediterranean Diet as an anthropological pattern that reflects the food culture created, invented, and transmitted by Mediterranean communities over centuries. **In 2012, the FAO listed also the Mediterranean Diet as one of the most sustainable diets in the world:** "The Mediterranean Diet constitutes a set of skills, knowledge, practices, and environmental and cultural traditions that extend from nature to the table."

MD it is also based on the cultural implications brought about by the **WTO's/World Trade Organization/Agreement and GATT since 1994, as well as the intellectual property rights** addressed in the TRIPS Agreement, Article 22. This article states that "Cultural preservation provides one possible justification for protecting 'Geographical indications.' Origin Product identifies a good as originating in a country, region, or locality where specific qualities, reputation, or other characteristics of the good are attributable to its geographical origin." The geographical indication and organic products in international trade are not merely commodities; they incorporate the local culture, biodiversity, and ethics of the societies where they are produced, fostering mutual understanding among people and civilizations.

Within Pillar 4: Sustainable Tourism, the Mediterranean Diet should be a Strategic Flagship Project, aiming at :

- Promote local, organic, and geographical indication food products
- Encourage sustainable rural and agritourism
- Protect cultural landscapes and biodiversity
- Incentivize eco-tourism over mass coastal tourism
- Create multi-stakeholder networks including farmers, cultural operators, and tourism businesses
- Enhancing Cultural Tourism as a tool for sustainable development in local communities, in EUSAIR macro-region through the promotion and empowerment of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe with linkages on MD.
- Mobilise EU Programmes and Funds
- Capitalise on good practices and existing projects
- Foster Synergies, complementarities and partnerships between various actors and sectors

These objectives align with the EU Green Deal, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the European Strategy for Sustainable Tourism, due in 2026.

Following the KEY MESSAGES communicated during the Workshop session of Pillar 4 on "Cultural Tourism and Mediterranean Diet as a Tool for Local Sustainable Development," held at the 10th EUSAIR ANNUAL FORUM in Crete on 7 May 2025, it is essential to note them:

- Preserving the cultural and natural heritage of the region is crucial for the future of sustainable tourism.
- Diversifying tourism products enhances the sustainability of the Communities in the Adriatic-Ionian region.
- The richness and diversity of the gastronomy in the Adriatic-Ionian region should be preserved and promoted widely.

-The EUSAIR region has several **comparative advantages** such as a large part in terms of biodiversity, cultural diversity and sensitive environmental areas, rich and high potential for quality food production, a large part of sea and inland lakes and rivers and rural areas, a high contribution of tourism and food production to GDP per country. This implies a high potential for distinction and interconnection of the **TOURISM components in GREENING of the environment, culture and food sector in the supply chain, which can be transformed to competitive advantages enhancing the EUSAIR region's economic, environmental and social sustainability.**

- Promoting the Mediterranean Diet through origin products and organic farming and ecotourism, agritourism, rural tourism, fishing tourism, and cultural tourism can serve as a means to mitigate the brain drain and depopulation trend in SEE and achieve a sustainable and prosperous Adriatic-Ionian region.

The Mediterranean Diet is in alignment with the "EU Green Deal" and 'From Farm to Fork Strategy for a Fair, Healthy, and Environmentally-Friendly Food System' (EC Com/2020/381 final), since it incorporates elements of a healthy and environmentally-friendly food system, including gastronomy, organic farming, local origin products, rural tourism, agro and fishing tourism, ecotourism, eco-districts, and cultural tourism.

The OBJECTIVES and activities envisioned in the revised EUSAIR Action Plan under the promotion of the Mediterranean Diet and local, organic, and origin production include:

- Valorizing Geographical Indications (GIs) as an essential part of the Mediterranean Diet and driver for developing rural tourism, which can contribute to socio-economic diversification, rural community development, and enhancing regional identity. Increasing awareness that GIs are essential commodities that form an integral part of social, environmental and cultural heritage.
- Promoting organic farming practices to enhance the sustainability of agricultural and food systems, supporting biodiversity, ecosystem health and Eco districts, thus reinforcing the authenticity and appeal of the region's tourism offerings.
- Enhancing an intangible and sustainable food culture, a "way of life" that embraces important physical, socio-cultural, economic, and environmental benefits, and a "strategic asset for the development of the economy, peace, and cohesion among the peoples of the Mediterranean basin"¹, playing an important strategic role as food-associated habits for the Food Policies in the Mediterranean area, both for the metropolitan cities and for the rural areas.

¹ AO Italy and FAO Highlight the Importance of the Mediterranean Diet for the Sustainable Management of Land and Water Resources. [(accessed on 12 April 2023)]. Available online: <https://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1261467/icode/>

- Fostering dialogue, skills acquisition and collaboration in joint activities among tourism, maritime services and agri-food operators through multi-stakeholder mechanisms such as thematic platforms, networks, living labs, and open innovation hubs.
- Relying on Smart Specialization Strategies (S3) supporting Mediterranean Green and Just Transition in the countries of the Adriatic-Ionian Macro-region.
- Developing synergies such as with Euro-MED Transnational Interreg Program and its project: Mediterranean Diet Go! that transfers the main MD.net achievements to foster rural lifestyle, healthy products, MD values and landscape as tourism opportunity through innovation and networking in MED regions as destinations for international tourism.
- Capitalizing on all other previous Interreg outputs (e.g. iHERITAGE project funded by ENI CBC, “Mediterranean Diet - When Brand Meets Peoples” funded by Euro-MED, FOOD4HEALTH project funded by Interreg IPA CBC Italy-Albania-Montenegro 2014-2020, Silver Wellbeing project funded by Interreg CBC Greece-Italy 2014-2020, Hortas TOP project funded by Interreg Europe 2014-2020, PROMO-MED through Interreg Volunteer Youth, EuroMED Meddiet project 2021-27 etc).

By implementing the Topic 3 of Pillar 4 of the revised EUSAIR Action Plan, **a new Interpillar (P 4 on the Lead and P5 and P1 contributing on MD Skills) Strategic umbrella Interpillar Flagship project on MD is necessary to coordinate activities, as well as to develop new policy initiatives, activities, and projects** that foster synergies, complementarities, and capitalization on good practices derived from EU, national, and regional programs. For promoting the above objectives we propose that the EUSAIR Presidency of North Macedonia, in cooperation with DG Regio, CIHEAM, the PCs of TSG 4 and **speakers from** TSG 4 and 1 and 5, Agri, and MOVE/Grow, and MD experts, organize **on September 29 and 30, 2025 a WORKSHOP/EVENT in CIHEAM (Mediterranean Agronomic Institute) Campus in Bari, Region of Puglia, <https://www.iamb.ciheam.org/>**

TARGET GROUP / Invited Participants: expected registered onsite participants: 75 (for 16 participants free accommodation is provided by CIHEAM Campus)

- PCs and Members of EUSAIR TSG 4,1,5
- Responsible Officers of Ministries of Tourism, Culture, Trade, Agriculture and Rural Development; regions; development agencies
- Agricultural paying agencies, IPARD agencies and agricultural and Cohesion policy programmes Managing Authorities and JS.
- Members of Skills Partnerships and local authorities from EUSAIR and Southeast European countries
- EGTCs of SEE, Civil society organizations, Consumer organizations, Agrifood Partnerships and Clusters
- Members from the TSG 4 workshop session Panel at the 10th EUSAIR Annual Forum in Crete, Greece
- EUSAIR IPA Adrion 3 GSPs: 1 EUSAIR FPLP Slovenia, 2 EUSAIR STEP Marche region, 3 SP4EUSAIR Croatia, 1, Monitoring and Evaluation work package of Greek FP and EUSAIR Youth Council members and Interact
- Key Stakeholders: UniAdrion members, AII-Chamber of Commerce Associations, CIHEAM, IFOAM, EUSAIR and SEE regions, AREPO <https://www.arepoquality.eu>.

Organisation Team for the ‘Mediterranean Diet’ Workshop/Event: PCs of TSG 4 and P4 Workshop Moderator of 10th EUSAIR Annual Forum session, in Cooperation with EUSAIR Presidency and FLP and PCs 1 and 5, and CHIEAM and DG Regio/D1/SEE Team.

DG Regio/D1/SEE Team: Gilles Kittel, Georgios Emmanouil, Maria Galewska