

Shababuna: An Innovative Project for Our Euro-Mediterranean Youth

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Today, one of the major demographic trends in the Mediterranean region is a clear decrease in the youth population on the northern shore in contrast to a notable increase on the southern shore. It is, therefore, necessary to open spheres of joint cooperation that enable us to ensure the wellbeing of young Mediterranean citizens. It is in this framework where the Shababuna project was created, which embraces a wide range of actors and aims to strengthen the capabilities of the regional and local authorities, as well as the civil society organizations in the Moroccan region of L'Oriental to raise awareness and better inform its youths about the risks of and alternatives to irregular migration. In this meeting space of multiple actors, young people can play a more active role in defining their own future.

Today in the Mediterranean, youths are facing many challenges, such as high unemployment levels, gender inequality and social exclusion, which have worsened with the Covid-19 pandemic but also with the climate crisis, as well as an increase in migration flows and violent extremism.

We are referring to one of the most important groups in the region. Out of the over 560 million people living in the countries surrounding our *Mare Nostrum*,¹ one out of three Europeans is

under 30,² while in the Southern Mediterranean they account for 48% of the population.³ In the last 40 years, the number of young people on the northern shore of the Mediterranean has been reduced by 26%, while in the south it has almost doubled, and it seems that the population projection for the next few years confirms this contrasted tendency in the region.⁴

It is therefore absolutely essential to open spheres of joint cooperation that enable us to ensure the wellbeing of these young Mediterranean citi-

1. Elena Ambrosetti, "Demographic Challenges in the Mediterranean", *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2020*, IEMed, 2020, pp. 300–304 (www.iemed.org/publication/demographic-challenges-in-the-mediterranean).

2. Eurostat 2022, "Young people in Europe. A statistical summary": <https://bitly.co/JtxJ>

3. UfM Youth Strategy 2030, "Euro-Mediterranean Youth Towards a Common Goal", p. 9: <https://bitly.co/JtxA>

4. Isabelle Blöss-WidmerMake, "Way for Numbers: The Age Race in the Mediterranean", *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2022*, IEMed, 2022, p. 174 (<https://bitly.co/JtxI>).

zens, promoting projects and collaborations around a common challenge that affects us all on both sides of the region in today's highly changing world.

This approach encompasses the collaborative work of a wide range of actors, including civil society organizations, local and regional authorities, and youth networks and associations, to develop solutions that adapt to the specific needs of the Mediterranean population, and particularly young people. It is precisely in this meeting space of multiple actors where young people can play a more active role in defining their own future, with greater understanding, ownership and acceptance of their environment and context, thus ensuring the sustainability of the actions and their outcomes.

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Hence, increasingly more Mediterranean territories are placing the focus on decentralised cooperation and multilevel governance to collaboratively face these challenges. In light of the principle of subsidiarity, this stimulus is also based on the recognition of European institutions that certain EU public policies can be more efficiently implemented at a regional and local level,⁵ such as migration and asylum policies.

Shababuna; Our Youth: Informed and Well-Prepared to Choose Their Future!

An innovative example of this positive collaborative tendency is the European project Shababuna; our youth: informed and well-prepared to choose

their future! of the 2019 call by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) of the European Commission;⁶ which the Ministry for Foreign Action and European Union of the Government of Catalonia has led since 2021 and which will end in 2023. Collaborative partners include the Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation (ACCD); the Catalan Fund for Development Cooperation (FCCD); the Government of the Swedish region of Skåne; the Italian NGO Tamat; the Autonomous University of Barcelona; and the University of Girona. Moreover, L'Oriental Regional Council in Morocco is an associate partner.⁷ One of the innovative dynamics of this project focuses on the role of L'Oriental Regional Council, which coordinates and monitors the participation of other Moroccan institutions, associations and organisations involved in different activities to be implemented in the field. This active participation of a Southern Mediterranean actor adds value to the AMIF project, which focuses on the internal dimension of the European migration and asylum policy and, as a pilot initiative, shows not only the importance of but also need for EU external cooperation in this field.

The objective of the Shababuna project is to strengthen the capabilities of the regional and local authorities, as well as civil society organizations in the Moroccan region of L'Oriental to raise awareness and better inform its youths about the risks of and alternatives to irregular migration. Once again, the project has sought to open the perspective and go further, including a space for interaction and information between young people, institutions and the social fabric on the professional and academic opportunities in the region. Its contribution to change and the transformation in this field probably charac-

5. Andrea Noferini, ¿Es «algo» mejor que «nada»? *La gobernanza multinivel y el Comité Europeo de las Regiones en los procesos políticos de la Unión Europea*, Monografías CIDOB, 81, 2021, p. 76.

6. European Commission, DG HOME, "Awareness raising and information campaigns on the risks of irregular migration in selected third countries and within Europe", TOPIC ID: AMIF-2019-AG-CALL-04, <https://bit.ly.co/Jtxi>

7. European Commission, DG HOME, "Call for proposals document, Transnational actions on asylum, migration and integration", AMIF-2019-AG-CALL, version 1.1, ref. Ares (2019)7688088 - 13/12/2019, art. 5.2.b): "Eligibility of applicants and co-applicants".

terises the project's approach: it provides information and the necessary tools to young people in L'Oriental so that they make grounded and reasoned decisions about such an important and crucial issue as their future, whose direction is, or should be, in their own hands.

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Shababuna also responds to the growing and relevant role of the European regions in the management and implementation of European migration and asylum policies, although distancing itself from the traditional integration and social inclusion of migrants in their territories to focus on the important task of collaborating hand in hand with our neighbours from the south and to confront shared threats such as irregular migration.

The project's action is divided into three main blocks: the study of the frame of reference, awareness-raising and information activities for youths, and strengthening of the regional and local authorities' capabilities. Next, we detail each of them with an explanation on the outcomes achieved so far:

In the first place, the project develops in a frame of reference that includes, on the one hand, an analysis of the main motivations of youths when undertaking their migration project, as well as the information sources, methods and tools that influence their behaviour and on which they base their decisions. On the other, the project includes an assessment of the needs

of the regional and local public actors to carry out awareness-raising campaigns on the risks of and alternatives to irregular migration, analysing the networking with the associative fabric and other relevant actors in the region. In this respect, the analysis conducted by the Autonomous University of Barcelona and the University of Girona through more than 200 questionnaires among young people aged between 14 and 25 in L'Oriental region, as well as almost 100 questionnaires among young people in the Moroccan communities living in Catalonia thanks to the collaboration of the Catalan Fund for Development Cooperation, highlights that the desire to migrate develops and is especially relevant in the early stages of the life of these young people (before 18), a desire that increases as the level of and access to studies decreases or when youths, usually motivated by external factors, drop out of formal education.⁸

In the second place, the action focuses on the work with and by the young people in L'Oriental region, as well as of the Moroccan communities living in Catalonia. Thus, a small educational kit has been produced that includes a set of creative and informative tools, which, thanks to the validation and collaboration of the L'Oriental Regional Academy of Education and Training, have been presented in several workshops organised by the local association AS-TICUDE, monitored by TAMAT, in 30 schools⁹ in the three main provinces in the region: Oujda, Nador and Driouch. The presentation of the workshops included the participation of over 1,500 young students aged between 12 and 22, mostly between 14 and 17. During these

8. Shababuna Project (AMIF 2019): "D.2.1 - Étude de ligne de base; analyse contextuelle pour la définition de la stratégie de communication auprès des jeunes candidats à la migration irrégulière de la région de l'Oriental (Maroc)". University of Girona, 10 January 2022.

9. Bearing in mind the studies on the frame of reference, thirty schools of the *École de la deuxième chance* were selected to provide a second schooling chance for youths and adolescents who have dropped out of formal education, and introduce a new teaching method based on preparing the student for social-professional life and adapt it to the conditions of the labour market.

workshops, tests were performed before and after the presentation of the information tools to assess the students' change of behaviour, whose result generally pointed at incipient changes in the perception and understanding of information, which shows the need to continue working with young people in this direction. Audiovisual material has also been collected on the diverse stories of young Moroccan migrants who have wished to actively participate in the implementation of the Shababuna project and, more specifically, in diverse FCCD workshops. Thus, they have shared current motivations, experiences and perspectives of their migration project, from making the decision to arriving in different Catalan towns.

Bearing in mind our digital era, an app has been developed so that all this information, especially on employment opportunities and vocational training programmes, is only a click away; that is, within the real reach of youths in L'Oriental. In this respect, a promotional plan on social media has also been produced through local civil society organizations in order to monitor the views and interactions with the programme and assess its impact and sustainability.

Finally, and with the aim of improving cooperation between decentralised authorities and civil society organizations in L'Oriental with counterpart actors in Catalonia, the third block of the action focuses on strengthening the capabilities of the competent authorities in the field of migration, civil society and other relevant actors through the exchange of knowledge and best practices of technical collaboration of the FCCD, ACCD and Skåne. In this way, a set of information and awareness-raising tools is provided on the risks of and alternatives to irregular migration, as well as on the access to the professional and academic opportunities available in the region. The purpose is for the competent authorities embrace to the spirit of the project and manage it once completed, thus ensuring sustainability not only of the outcomes but also of the positive impact created.

Young, Woman, and Mediterranean: The Importance of Promoting Change from Within

One of the challenges faced by multilevel governance is guaranteeing the long-term impact of collaborations and their positive results, for which the commitment of all the actors involved is essential. As far as the Shababuna project is concerned, in this completion phase it is especially relevant to establish agreements with regional and local authorities, as well as with civil society organizations and other relevant actors, to ensure the continuous development, updating and use of the information and awareness-raising tools created, in order to guarantee the sustainability of the results of the action.

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Beyond the continuation of the project, it is clear that initiatives such as Shababuna open the door to multiple opportunities for collaboration on the path of decentralised cooperation, especially in the implementation of public policies focused on youths.

As a young and Mediterranean woman, I feel directly challenged by this issue and, at the same time, as coordinator of the implementation of the Shababuna project – that is, from a professional perspective –, I have been able to better understand the challenges, but above all the opportunities, of promoting decentralised cooperation on and by youths in the region. In terms of promoting the implementation of projects and programmes with a tangible positive impact on the daily life of young women, I think it is crucial that they are involved in the entire lifecycle of projects and programmes, from the design of the call and the proposal to the evaluation of the results, including the implementation of the activities and initiatives and their monitoring.

In this way, on the one hand, this helps identify our real needs to define strategic objectives, tools that must be developed and expected results in an effective way; and, on the other, the involvement and commitment of youths is ensured, not only during the implementation of initiatives but also in the dissemination and exchange of best practices, which, in turn, make it possible to drive and promote more spaces for cooperation.

At a general level, I consider it essential that the youth factor be the nexus of collaborative governance and be applied across public policies on transcendental issues for the region, such as the challenges of migration, the climate crisis or high unemployment rates that affect us directly and disproportionately. Now more than ever, at a time of

change in traditional decision-making models and the opening the negotiating tables to other actors, we need our voices to reach the political, economic, cultural and social spheres of our territories and be heard in all fields of action. These participatory spaces and platforms of dialogue enable us to develop skills adapted to our objectives, empower us and get us involved in issues that directly affect us; and at the same time, they enable us to bring our realities from one side of the Mediterranean to the other. Only in this way will we be able to jointly face the present and future challenges in the region. Only in this way will we be able to be effective engines of transformation towards more sustainable, fair and inclusive models and societies in which we can freely build our lives.



Euro-Arab Youth Forum in 2021.