

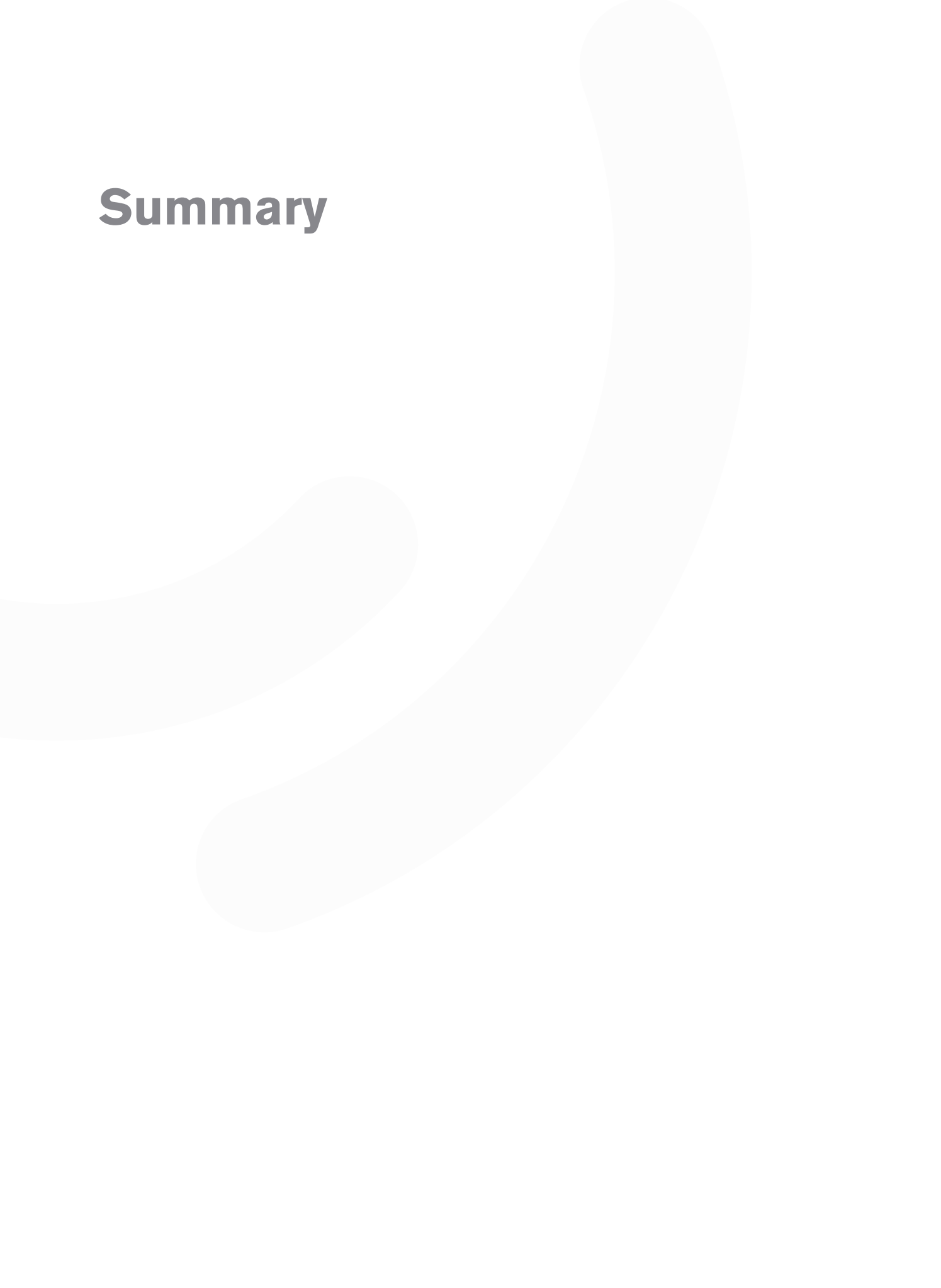
VIII EUROMED YOUNG RESEARCHERS FORUM

Shaping the Digital Future
of the Euro-Mediterranean Region

Mollina, 15-17 September 2025

Report

Summary



This year's edition of the Euromed Young Researchers Forum focused on "Shaping the digital future of the Euro-Mediterranean region" and was held in the framework of the University on Youth and Development, organised by the North South Centre of the Council of Europe on "Empowering youth for digital safety".

Digitalisation is transforming governance, human rights, and sustainable development across the Euro-Mediterranean region, creating both unprecedented opportunities and profound challenges. The integration of digital tools in key areas such as migration management, urban planning, and youth participation is reshaping how societies address pressing social, political, and environmental issues. On one hand, technological innovation promises greater efficiency, transparency, and inclusivity, from open waste data and digital port infrastructures to AI-driven greening initiatives and youth-led digital economy projects. On the other hand, the growing reliance on digital systems raises critical concerns

around privacy, fundamental rights, and social equity. Artificial intelligence is increasingly influencing asylum procedures, with implications for fairness and procedural guarantees under the EU AI Act, while digital technologies originally designed for border securitisation have potential to be repurposed to investigate missing migrants. Moreover, technology-facilitated gender-based violence and the lack of safeguards for youth data rights highlight the risks of exclusion and exploitation in an unevenly digitalised landscape. As digital transformation accelerates, the region must balance innovation with ethical and rights-based frameworks to ensure a future that is sustainable, inclusive, and humane.

The VIII Euromed Young Researchers Forum aimed to spark dialogue among young scholars, policymakers, and practitioners on how digital transformation can be harnessed for the common good in the Euro-Mediterranean context. By critically examining the intersections of technology, governance, human rights,



and sustainability, the forum sought to generate actionable insights and policy recommendations, while empowering a new generation of researchers to shape the digital future of the region.

This year's edition brought together brought together **33 participants from 15 different countries**, representing **think tanks, research centres, and universities** from across the Euro-Mediterranean region. This diverse group included **Master's and**

PhD students, as well as early-career analysts and researchers, reflecting a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds and perspectives. The mix of academic and policy-oriented profiles enriched the discussions, fostering an environment of peer learning and cross-regional collaboration. This diversity not only enhanced the quality of debate but also embodied the Forum's spirit of dialogue and cooperation between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean.

WORKING SESSION I

Digital Transformation on Migration: Exploring risks and opportunities

Chair

Natália Sabol Tkáčová

Project Manager for Friedrich Naumann Foundation
for Freedom office in Prague

Speakers

Dmitry Erokhin. Research Scholar in the Cooperation and
Transformative Governance Research Group of the IIASA
Advancing Systems Analysis Program

Konstantina Liontou. Young Legal Professional specialising in
European Union Law

Nabil Ferdaoussi. HUMA-Institute for Humanities in Africa,
University of Cape Town

Discussant

Tasnim Abderrahim

Non-Resident Scholar, Middle East Institute.



The first Working Session of the VIII Euromed Young Researchers Forum provided a critical examination of the intersections between migration governance, technology, and fundamental rights in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Young researchers engaged in pressing debates on how digitalisation and artificial intelligence (AI) are transforming migration processes, from the management of asylum applications to the securitisation of borders, and how these shifts affect the lives and rights of migrants.

One of the key themes of the session was the growing reliance on AI technologies in border control across the EU and its southern neighbours. Research highlighted the paradoxical role of such technologies: while designed to monitor and restrict mobility, they could also be repurposed for humanitarian objectives, particularly in tracing and identifying miss-

ing migrants along Mediterranean routes. This counter-forensic perspective called for the redirection of powerful surveillance infrastructures toward inclusive and rights-based approaches, emphasising the role of families, civil society, and international organisations in confronting migrant disappearances.

Another central issue discussed was the integration of AI into EU asylum procedures. Although AI tools are increasingly used to streamline processes such as language recognition, transcription, and case matching, their deployment raises serious concerns about transparency, accountability, and procedural fairness. Participants warned that algorithmic errors or biases could directly undermine the fundamental rights of asylum seekers, potentially leading to wrongful rejections and unlawful discrimination. The EU AI Act was identified

as a potential safeguard, yet the debate underscored the urgent need to ensure that regulatory frameworks effectively protect human dignity and due process in such high-stakes contexts.

A third dimension addressed the role of digital platforms and online narratives in shaping public perceptions of migration. By analysing migration discourse on platforms such as YouTube and through search data from Google Trends, researchers showed how digital content reflects, amplifies, and sometimes distorts debates on migration in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Findings revealed the dominance of certain narratives and sentiments, as well as the spread of misinformation, with implications for both policy-making and public opinion. This approach underscored the importance

of understanding digital discourse not merely as a reflection of migration debates but as an active force shaping them.

Throughout the discussion, participants converged on the importance of balancing innovation with fundamental rights, and of interrogating the ethical and humanitarian consequences of technological shifts. By critically examining AI-driven governance, border securitisation, and digital discourses, the session emphasised the need for inclusive, transparent, and rights-respecting frameworks in addressing migration challenges. Far from being merely technical questions, these debates touch upon the core values of justice, accountability, and human dignity in the Euro-Mediterranean region.



WORKING SESSION II

Harnessing Digital Transformation for an Inclusive and Sustainable Future in the Euro-Mediterranean region

Digital Sustainability and Innovation

Chair

Giuseppe Scandone. President & Environmental Specialist at QG Enviro

Speakers

Elias El Hayek. Lawyer and Senior Legal Advisor at Transparency International Lebanon

Rami Khoucha. Algerian Forestry Engineer

Safaa Drissi Bourhanbour. PhD Candidate at Mohammed V University in Rabat (UM5)

Mahmoud Arbouch. Senior Economist at the Policy Center for the New South (PCNS)

Discussant

Manuel Langendorf. Senior Analyst and Editor at Middle East Minds

Digital Rights, Youth, and Gender

Chair

Zienab Anwar. Monitoring and Evaluation Expert

Speakers

Mariam Daoud. Master's student in Innovation Management

Martina Canesi. Postgraduate student in Diplomatic Studies at LUISS School of Government

Discussant

Gihan Abouzeid. Senior Advisor at the Arab Network for Development (ANND)

Building on the reflections from the first Working Session, the focus of the Second Working Session was on exploring the role of digital transformation in shaping an inclusive and sustainable future for the Euro-Mediterranean region. The discussions were organised around two thematic clusters, highlighting both the opportunities and the risks associated with digitalisation. Together, they underlined the extent to which digital technologies are transforming governance, economic resilience, and social dynamics, while at the same time raising complex questions of rights, justice, and inclusion.

The first cluster, *Digital Sustainability and Innovation*, emphasised how digital technologies can act as drivers of ecological transition, efficiency, and accountability. The debates centred on the importance of transparency in environmental governance and the way digitalisation is reshaping strategic sectors such as

waste management, maritime trade, agriculture, and urban planning. The potential of digital platforms to improve sustainability outcomes was widely acknowledged, but also the risks of exclusion and inequality if these tools remain inaccessible or are deployed without sufficient regulatory oversight. The conversation repeatedly returned to the need for multi-stakeholder cooperation, particularly in contexts such as Morocco's agricultural sector, where rural youth and women risk being left behind in the digital transition. The digitalisation of ports was also discussed as both an opportunity for efficiency and a vulnerability to cyber threats, highlighting the importance of balancing competitiveness with resilience. The cluster concluded with a recognition that technological innovation must be embedded in transparent governance frameworks and supported by inclusive policies if it is to serve as a genuine lever for sustainability.



The second cluster, *Digital Rights, Youth, and Gender*, turned the focus toward the ethical and social dimensions of digitalisation. Discussions underscored the growing tension between technological innovation and the protection of fundamental rights, particularly around privacy and data governance. The Right to Be Forgotten emerged as a central issue, with concerns that the increasing reliance of AI on vast and often immutable datasets complicates the enforcement of this right. Participants highlighted the urgency of ensuring that youth are not only aware of their digital rights but actively engaged in shaping data policies, bridging the current gap between regulation and lived realities. Alongside this, the debate on technology-facilitated gender-based violence against migrant women shed light on one of the most urgent and underexplored challenges in the region. The use of mobile phones and digital platforms, while indispensable for communication and connection, was recognised as a double-edged sword

that can also expose women to harassment, surveillance, and exploitation. The discussions stressed that addressing these risks is not only a matter of individual safety but also of social cohesion and inclusion.

The Working Session highlighted the dual nature of digital transformation: it offers remarkable potential for sustainability and empowerment, but it also introduces profound risks if not accompanied by strong safeguards. Both clusters pointed to the importance of transparency, rights protection, and inclusive participation as conditions for ensuring that technological change strengthens rather than undermines resilience in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Young researchers underscored that digitalisation must be treated not as a purely technical process but as a deeply political and social one, requiring coordinated regional approaches, robust governance, and the active involvement of youth and civil society.



Capacity Building for Young Researchers



As part of **EuroMeSCo's capacity-building initiative**, training sessions are organised each year to strengthen the research skills and capacities of think tankers and young researchers, based on identified needs. Within this framework, the **EuroMeSCo Workout** programme offers interactive, hands-on, and practice-oriented courses delivered by experienced trainers from the research and think tank community. Participants engage collaboratively through group work, peer learning, and expert feedback, applying knowledge to real-world policy contexts.

In the **2025 cycle**, the **VIII Euromed Young Researchers Forum** incorporated this capacity-building component as a key element of its programme. Two tailored sessions on *Policy Analysis Writing and Advocacy Strategies for Think Tankers and Researchers* were organised to enhance participants' analytical and advocacy capacities, particularly in relation to digital governance, migration, and human rights in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

EuroMeSCo Workout on Policy Analysis Writing

The session **Policy Analysis Writing** was facilitated by **Tasnim Abderrahim**, a researcher focusing on migration, mobility, and EU–North Africa cooperation. She is a **Non-Resident Scholar** at the **Middle East Institute (MEI)**.

Drawing on her expertise, this session aimed to strengthen participants' capacity to produce concise and impactful **policy briefs** that translate research findings into actionable recommendations. Through practical exercises, participants learned how to structure analytical arguments, identify policy entry points, and communicate evidence in a way that resonates with decision-makers, civil society, and media audiences.

The training encouraged participants to view policy analysis not only as a technical process but also as a tool for informed advocacy, connecting academic insights with ongoing policy debates in areas such as digital transformation, migration governance, and human rights. This approach empowered young researchers to enhance the policy relevance of their work and engage more effectively in the regional dialogue on digitalisation and inclusion.

EuroMeSCo Workout on Advocacy Strategies for Think Tankers and Researchers

The session **Advocacy Strategies for Think Tankers and Researchers**, delivered by **Gihan Abouzeid**, **Senior Advisor at the Arab Network for Development (ANND)** and an expert with over 28 years of experience in inequality, gender equality, and social justice, focused on designing **digital advocacy initiatives** grounded in **community-based research (CBR)**. Participants learned to translate local evidence into policy influence through online campaigns, applying a **Gender Equality Integration Checklist** across five case studies on migrant protection, economic inclusion, education access, digital rights, and climate-responsive urban planning. Through collaborative exercises, they developed practical advocacy plans and digital communication strategies that highlight women's leadership, challenge stereotypes, and promote equitable policy reforms. The session demonstrated how inclusive, evidence-based advocacy can strengthen human rights, advance social justice, and ensure that digital transitions benefit all communities.

The University on Youth and Development (UYD) and the Euromed Young Researchers Forum

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The Forum was held in the framework of the University on Youth and Development (UYD), organised by the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe in Mollina, Spain, from 15 to 21 September 2025. For more than two decades, the UYD has stood as the most long-standing summer university of its kind, serving as an international hub for youth meetings, advocacy, and exchange of good practices. Each year it gathers hundreds of young people, youth workers, decision-makers, and institutional representatives to debate, learn, and cooperate on issues of shared concern. More than a simple training event, the UYD provides a unique space for intercultural dialogue, capacity-building, and collective reflection on the most pressing challenges faced by the global youth movement.

In 2025, the UYD was organised around the theme “*Empowering Youth for Digital*

Safety”, in line with the North-South Centre’s Medium-Term Strategy (2024–2027) and the Council of Europe’s priorities for cooperation with the Southern Mediterranean. The annual Joint Programme, designed by the Joint Pedagogical Team together with partners, connected participants across all activities through plenary debates, interactive workshops, cultural exchanges, and encounters with the local community. Using non-formal education methods, it created an environment where young people could critically engage with the theme while also strengthening their leadership and advocacy skills.

Hosting the Euromed Young Researchers Forum within this framework underscored the added value of situating academic and policy-oriented discussions in a broader intercultural and participatory en-

vironment. The presence of young researchers from both shores of the Mediterranean enriched the dialogue by bringing diverse perspectives, lived experiences, and disciplinary approaches to the table. Beyond the immediate outcomes of the working sessions, the forum benefited from the UYD's role as a meeting point between research, policy, and practice.

Crucially, the Forum's celebration within the UYD also highlighted the importance of creating spaces of exchange and

mutual learning among young people from across the Euro-Mediterranean region. By fostering dialogue between different contexts and perspectives, such encounters strengthen bonds of trust, promote mutual understanding, and lay the groundwork for more fruitful cooperation in the long term. In a region often marked by political, economic, and social divides, empowering youth to connect and collaborate across borders is essential to building resilient partnerships and advancing shared solutions.

