

EMEA at COP29

Baku, Azerbaijan

13th November - 21st November 2024



COP29
Baku
Azerbaijan

Table of Contents

EMEA EVENTS:

- Formal Partner's opening at the Mediterranean Pavilion 3
- Call for Green Transition Projects: Highlighting Interreg NEXT MED Financing Opportunities for Climate Action 5
- Unlocking Climate Finance in the Mediterranean: Leveraging Guarantee Schemes, Development Banks, and Private Capital for Net Zero and Climate Resilience 9
- Nature Finance: Catalyzing Green and Nature-Based Solutions while Addressing Nature-Negative Finance 13
- Building Green Skills: Equipping Mediterranean Talent for the Green Jobs Era 17
- Mediterranean Forests 20

EMEA Online Side Events:

- Agroforestry: exploring diverse financing schemes for sustainable land use 22
- Accelerating the Green Transition: Balancing Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies 27
- Navigating Climate Challenges: A Collective Approach for the Mediterranean region at COP29 33
- Linking Brain Capital and Natural Capital: Paving the Path for a Brain- and Nature-Positive Economy 36

Formal Partner's opening at the Mediterranean Pavilion.

13th November 2024 | 14:30 - 16:00

The Mediterranean Pavilion, Blue Zone, F1B - COP 29



The Mediterranean Pavilion at COP29 officially launched with its formal Partner's Opening, setting a collaborative tone for the conference. Moderated by Grammenos Mastrojeni, Senior Deputy Secretary General for the Union for the Mediterranean, the session brought together representatives from Pavilion's partner institutions, including: CIHEAM, ECCO, Earth Day Europe, Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA), Friedrich Naumann, Interreg NEXT MED, MedWave and Prima.

This opening session underscored the Pavilion's collective mission to inspire transformative dialogue, foster regional solidarity, and drive sustainable solutions. Positioned as a catalyst for meaningful climate action, the Pavilion highlights the Mediterranean region's proactive approach to addressing global climate challenges.

Prof. Rym Ayadi represented the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA) and emphasized EMEA's commitment to tackling the region's unique climate challenges. From its base in Barcelona, EMEA works as a non-profit organization committed to empowering local stakeholders, fostering dialogue across diverse sectors, and shaping policies grounded in rigorous research and evidence.



Prof. Ayadi painted a sobering picture of the Mediterranean region, describing it as a climate change hotspot warming 20% faster than the global average. This stark reality underscores the urgent need for targeted strategies that balance adaptation and mitigation, tailored specifically to the region's vulnerabilities and opportunities.

With a strong focus on climate finance and eco-innovation, EMEA is pioneering mechanisms such as guarantee schemes and blended finance to unlock critical funding for climate resilience. Prof. Ayadi emphasized the organization's commitment to decarbonization and resource efficiency, championing nature-based solutions that work in harmony with the environment. Collaboration across academia, industry, government, and civil society, she noted, is the key to advancing these goals. She also highlighted EMEA's central role in fostering partnerships and scaling solutions to meet environmental and economic challenges. Through its active participation in the Mediterranean Pavilion, EMEA continues to underscore its dedication to creating a resilient and sustainable future for the region. Its efforts aim not only to influence policy but also to mobilize the financial and intellectual resources needed to drive meaningful action.

Prof. Ayadi concluded by sharing EMEA's robust engagement at COP29, which includes organizing five critical events. Two of these are being held at the Mediterranean Pavilion, while three will take place online in the coming week. These events will explore climate finance, nature-based solutions, sustainable land use, and the intersection of brain and nature capital—reflecting the organization's holistic approach to addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by climate change.

"As one of the most climate-vulnerable regions in the world, the Mediterranean requires innovative, collaborative, and financially sustainable approaches to resilience and decarbonization. At COP29, the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA) is honored to be part of the Mediterranean Pavilion for the third time since its inception, where we will bring stakeholders together to advance solutions that address the unique climate challenges our region faces. By unlocking climate finance, promoting nature-based solutions, and advocating for brain- and nature-positive economies, EMEA aims to pave the way for a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient future for the Euro-Mediterranean and African regions."



Call for Green Transition Projects: Highlighting Interreg NEXT MED Financing Opportunities for Climate Action

14th November 2024 | 11:00 - 12:00

The Mediterranean Pavilion, Blue Zone, F1B - COP 29

The event on the *Call for Green Transition Projects*, organized under the **Interreg NEXT MED Programme**, brought together key stakeholders to discuss opportunities for financing climate action projects in the Mediterranean. The event highlighted the upcoming €83 million EU-funded call aimed at addressing the root causes of climate-induced mobility in the region, such as disaster risks, drought, high temperatures, and water scarcity.

The session featured a rich agenda with presentations, panel discussions, and insights from leaders in the field of climate action, focusing on how the call for green transition projects will support low-carbon, scalable solutions for risk prevention, climate adaptation, and resilience-building. The special emphasis on youth-led projects, empowering young organizations to lead climate resilience initiatives, was a central theme throughout the discussions.



Opening Remarks

The event was moderated by **Vincent Ernoux**, Coordinator for the Western Mediterranean at the Interreg NEXT MED Programme, who introduced the objectives of the session. He was followed by **Moray Gilland**, Head of Unit for Macro-regions, Transnational/Interregional/External Cooperation, Enlargement Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission. Gilland stressed the importance of fostering regional cooperation in creating a greener and more inclusive Mediterranean.

Martin Heibel, Communication Manager for Interreg NEXT MED, and **Alessandro Pischedda**, Programme Officer for Interreg NEXT MED, provided an in-depth overview of the call. The presentation focused on key aspects of the call, including its thematic priorities and guidelines for participation. They highlighted the program's goal to address climate-induced challenges and support projects that will build resilience, prevent risks, and create sustainable futures for Mediterranean communities.



Expectations from the Call for Green Transition Projects

Prof. Rym Ayadi, Founder and President of the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA), shared her organization's key expectations as a potential partner in the Interreg NEXT MED Programme.

Key Points from Prof. Ayadi's Address:

- **Regenerative Principles:** EMEA emphasized the importance of supporting projects that integrate regenerative principles, which prioritize the health of ecosystems, the promotion of flow circulation, and resilience-building.
- **Nature-Based Solutions:** Prof. Ayadi stressed the need for projects that address climate challenges such as water scarcity, soil degradation, and biodiversity loss through nature-based approaches like agroforestry, regenerative agriculture, and the use of natural infrastructure (e.g., wetlands, green corridors).
- **Climate Adaptation and Risk Prevention:** The EMEA's focus is on promoting projects that prioritize climate adaptation, such as regenerative land-use practices and energy-efficient infrastructure to mitigate disaster risks.
- **Youth and Community Empowerment:** EMEA advocated for youth-led initiatives and partnerships with grassroots organizations to empower local communities and enhance climate resilience.
- **Innovation and Digital Solutions:** EMEA highlighted the importance of integrating cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain, and IoT to enhance resource management and energy efficiency in Mediterranean climate projects.

Other Panelists' Contributions

- **Marta Junquera**, Team Leader at the UNEP-MAP Regional Activity Center for Sustainable Consumption and Production - MedWaves, introduced her organization's work under the Barcelona Convention, focusing on regional policy-making and environmental projects. Junquera emphasized the importance of changing business models through grassroots initiatives to ensure a successful green transition. She shared successful projects on textile and plastic waste management, noting their positive impact on both people and nature.
- **Sergio Ponsá Salas**, representing the Interreg Euro-MED Innovative Sustainable Economy Mission at BETA Center, discussed the efficiency of Interreg NEXT MED programmes in supporting municipalities and local communities. He underscored the need for alliances with other regional programs and highlighted the critical role of capitalization projects in ensuring the sustainability of climate initiatives.



Conclusion

In his closing remarks, **Grammenos Mastrojeni**, Senior Deputy Secretary General for the Union for the Mediterranean, emphasized the importance of bottom-up approaches to sustainability. He argued that local territories must be activated to foster democracy and empower workers within local authorities. He highlighted the substantial financial support provided by Interreg and the PRIMA Foundation, stressing that the funds available at COP29 are crucial for driving real, impactful change.

The event successfully set the stage for a deeper collaboration among stakeholders in the Mediterranean, providing a roadmap for accessing the Interreg NEXT MED funding and developing scalable, nature-based, and innovative solutions to climate challenges. By focusing on youth, community empowerment, and regenerative principles, the programme promises to drive transformative climate action across the Mediterranean region.

EMEA at COP29

**Unlocking Climate Finance in the Mediterranean:
Leveraging Guarantee Schemes, Development Banks,
and Private Capital for Net Zero and Climate Resilience**

Prof. Rym Ayadi
President and Founder of EMEA (Moderator)

Beatrice Moro
Senior Policy Advisor, ECCO the Italian Climate Change Think Tank

Luc Morio
Partner at FINACTU

Nagla Bahr
CGC-Daman BOD - Executive Board Member

Mais Sha'ban
Associate Professor of Banking and Finance at AlZaytoonah University of Jordan and EMEA Research Fellow

Lina Mobaideen
CEMP, Project Development Manager Jordan Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Fund

Ines Duarte
Project Manager, Energy and Climate Action, UFM

Vincent Ernoux
Coordinator of the Interreg NEXT MED Programme for the Western Mediterranean

Unlocking Climate Finance in the Mediterranean: Leveraging Guarantee Schemes, Development Banks, and Private Capital for Net Zero and Climate Resilience

14th November 2024 | Time: 14:30 -15:30.

Place: MedPavilion - Blue Zone, Area E, F1B

At COP28, over 130 countries committed to a global pledge to triple the world’s installed renewable energy capacity to at least 11,000 GW by 2030. The Mediterranean, situated between the global North and South, has an opportunity to contribute to this ambitious target through a unified regional approach to decarbonization. By harnessing its vast renewable potential—especially in solar and wind, estimated to exceed 3,000 GW—the Mediterranean region can significantly reduce fossil fuel dependence, bolstering regional cooperation, economic resilience, and social stability.

Yet, achieving this vision requires approximately \$700 billion to bridge the renewable energy investment gap, a challenge that presents an opportunity to create around 3 million jobs across the Mediterranean. Key to meeting this target is a well-structured financial strategy that leverages public-private collaboration, supportive governance, and the alignment of financial flows with the Paris Agreement.

To unlock these investments, the region must have a clear and cohesive financial strategy—one that combines long-term government policy commitments with strong governance frameworks and involves National and Regional Development Banks, Multilateral Development Banks, Export Credit Agencies. Guarantee schemes will be pivotal in addressing financial barriers: they play a crucial role in reducing risks for private investors, incentivizing climate adaptation and mitigation projects, and mobilizing private sector finance at scale. By reducing investment risks, guarantee schemes have proven effective in accelerating climate-related projects in vulnerable regions, facilitating public-private partnerships, concessional loans, risk mitigation, and other financial tools that drive climate action.



Opening Remarks by Prof. Rym Ayadi:

Prof. Ayadi opened the session by emphasizing the pivotal moment the Mediterranean is facing in terms of climate action. She highlighted the region’s vulnerability to climate change and the potential to lead in innovative climate solutions. The session’s focus was on exploring the role of guarantee schemes, development banks, and private capital in bridging the financing gaps needed for climate action. Prof. Ayadi stressed that effective collaboration between public and private sectors is essential for mobilizing the financial resources required to meet regional and global climate goals. She also noted the importance of integrating green financial inclusion to ensure that underserved communities can participate in the green transition.



Setting the Scene:

Beatrice Moro, Senior Policy Advisor at ECCO (Italian Climate Change Think Tank), discussed the **TeraMed initiatives** and the urgent need for public and private finance to implement the Mediterranean region's green transition goals. She stressed the importance of de-risking tools and a coordinated financial strategy, which includes both northern and southern Mediterranean countries. Moro advocated for a comprehensive approach to climate finance, leveraging public incentives and policies to mobilize private investments.

Luc Morio, Partner at FINACTU, outlined the importance of guarantees in scaling up climate finance. Morio identified key conditions for guarantees to work effectively, including maintaining liquidity and ensuring they do not cover more than 50% of the risk. He also stressed the need for guarantees to be linked to local institutions and for the development of counter-guarantee schemes, similar to reinsurance in the insurance industry. This approach would increase transaction volumes and facilitate more significant green investments.

Panel Discussion:

Nagla Bahr, Executive Board Member of the **Euro-Mediterranean Guarantee Network (EMGN)**, discussed the gap in climate finance and the crucial role guarantees can play in risk-sharing and risk-transfer. She emphasized that guarantees are one of the most efficient financing tools, proven during the pandemic. Bahr highlighted the potential for new guarantee products, such as equity guarantees and local currency bonds, to support green projects. She also discussed the importance of regional cooperation in tackling climate finance challenges.

Lina Mobaideen, Project Development Manager at the **Jordan Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Fund**, presented Jordan's approach to climate finance, which includes lowering interest rates and providing guarantees to support private sector investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency. She emphasized the importance of collaboration with international partners, such as the World Bank, in enhancing capacity building and knowledge transfer.

Mais Sha'ban, Associate Professor of Banking and Finance at Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, focused on the role of Credit Guarantee Schemes (CGSs) in promoting financial inclusion and de-risking green investments. She discussed how CGSs can provide crucial support to SMEs and green technologies that may not be commercially viable without such backing. Sha'ban also highlighted successful examples, such as Tamwilcom Morocco, where innovative financial products have been introduced to support green initiatives.



Ines Duarte, Project Manager at the **Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)**, presented the UfM's role in supporting regional collaboration for green finance, particularly through its partnership with EMGN. She emphasized the need for collective efforts in addressing climate challenges and the importance of regional financial mechanisms in unlocking climate finance.

Vincent Ernoux, Coordinator of the **Interreg NEXT MED Programme**, discussed the financing challenges in the Mediterranean region and how his program is addressing them. He outlined how Interreg NEXT MED supports 15 countries in tackling climate-related issues and how new financial models can be developed to fund green projects across key themes such as renewable energy, climate adaptation, and risk management.

Q&A Session:

How to unlock climate finance which requires collective effort through national and individual initiatives, which are dominant in the region?

Regional organizations such as the **UfM** have a pivotal role to play and active participation in international forums such as **COPs** are key to fostering collaboration. There was also a call for the development of regional indices that are attractive to investors and programs that integrate multi-level stakeholder partnerships.

Prof. Ayadi : "Unlocking climate finance is essential to the green transformation. Guarantee schemes, development banks, and private capital are key tools that, when leveraged effectively, can close funding gaps critical for decarbonization and climate resilience. Guarantee mechanisms reduce financial risks, attract private investment, and enable local economies to pursue sustainable growth. Development banks and public-private partnerships provide scalability and long-term alignment, while private capital brings the agility and innovation needed to address dynamic regional challenges. Additionally, green financial inclusion ensures that underserved communities and small enterprises can access the resources needed to participate in and benefit from the green transition, fostering equitable and inclusive development."

[Link to Video Recording](#)

Nature Finance: Catalyzing Green and Nature-Based Solutions while Addressing Nature-Negative Finance

15th November 2024 | Time: 18:00 -19:00.

Place: MedPavilion - Blue Zone, Area E, F1B



EMEA at COP29

Nature Finance: Catalyzing Green and Nature-Based Solutions while Addressing Nature-Negative Finance

 <p>Prof. Rym Ayadi President and Founder Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (Moderator)</p>	 <p>Dr. Nathalie Hilmi Section Head of Environmental Economics, Centre Scientific de Monaco, EMEA Advisor</p>	 <p>Ekkehard Ernst Chief of the Macroeconomic Policy Unit, International Labour Organization, President of Geneva Macro Labs</p>
 <p>Torsten Thiele Founder, Global Ocean Trust and Senior Advisor, Blue Carbon Accelerator Fund, EMEA Advisory Board Member</p>	 <p>Markus Müller Chief Investment Officer ESG & Global Head of Chief Investment Office Deutsche Bank - Private Bank</p>	 <p>Alejandro Lafarga Programme Officer of the Interreg NEXT MED Programme for the Western Mediterranean</p>

EMEA | MEDITERRANEAN COALITION | Union for the Mediterranean

The aim of the event was to understand how financial mechanisms, such as green finance, nature-based solutions (NbS) finance, and the reduction of nature-negative finance, can be harnessed to drive a transition toward a nature-positive economy. This critical dialogue brought together key stakeholders from the financial sector, governmental bodies, and environmental NGOs to discuss innovative pathways for mobilizing capital to restore and protect ecosystems, address climate challenges, and ultimately catalyze the green transition.

Opening Remarks by Prof. Rym Ayadi, Founder and President, EMEA

Prof. Ayadi set the stage for the discussion by emphasizing the urgent need for economies to shift toward a positive, sustainable model. She highlighted the role of green growth in this transition, noting that financial innovation could drive substantial change but might also lead to disruptions in existing systems. The key questions posed included: “Where are we headed with climate finance?” and “Can nature finance truly accelerate the green transition?” Prof. Ayadi underlined the importance of leveraging nature finance as a powerful tool for the future, noting that the outcome of COP29 could significantly influence this trajectory.



Panel Discussion

Nathalie Hilmi, Section Head of Environmental Economics, Centre Scientific de Monaco, EMEA Advisor

Nathalie Hilmi’s presentation focused on the evolving role of nature-based solutions (NbS) in addressing climate change and biodiversity loss. She outlined the progress made since COP28, particularly regarding NbS research, and stressed the importance of recognizing cultural ecosystem services alongside traditional ecological ones. Hilmi emphasized the need for scaling up NbS and integrating them into both local and regional policies. She highlighted the European Union’s restoration laws as a critical tool for incentivizing financial sector participation and meeting the global 2030 sustainability goals.



Ekkehard Ernst, Chief of the Macroeconomic Policy Unit, International Labour Organization (Online Intervention)

Ernst addressed the intersection of global and local development, emphasizing the role of carbon markets in both developed and developing countries. He pointed out that while carbon markets are becoming more prominent, efforts to address climate change are still insufficient. Drawing on a project in New Zealand, Ernst illustrated how focusing on vulnerable areas can create significant social justice impacts by fostering job creation. He highlighted the urgent need for innovative financing models and called for enhanced international cooperation to tap into the full potential of nature finance.

Torsten Thiele, Founder, Global Ocean Trust, Senior Advisor, Blue Carbon Accelerator Fund

Thiele provided insights into the growing importance of blue carbon mechanisms, focusing on coastal ecosystems such as mangroves. He explained the complex, regenerative nature of blue carbon systems and their potential for financing projects with social and environmental benefits. Thiele also discussed the challenges facing the insurance industry, including rising costs due to unrecognized environmental risks, and suggested that granular data and improved risk management tools are essential. He advocated for the inclusion of NbS in future infrastructure designs, emphasizing their financial viability and ability to attract investment.

Markus Muller, Chief Investment Officer ESG & Global Head of Chief Investment Office, Deutsche Bank

Muller addressed the evolving role of the financial sector in nature finance. He shared insights from Deutsche Bank's pioneering efforts to incorporate nature advisory services into its operations. Muller stressed the importance of using data-driven approaches, enabled by AI, to make informed decisions that align with sustainability goals. He argued that there is no actual "finance gap" but rather a credibility and viability gap that can be bridged by developing attractive financial alternatives. Muller also pointed to the need for polycentric models and global standards to ensure that financial markets can help solve global environmental challenges, particularly in the Global South.

Alejandro Lafarga, Programme Officer, Interreg NEXT MED Programme for the Western Mediterranean

Lafarga presented the work of Interreg NEXT MED, which has been enhancing cooperation across the Mediterranean since 2007. He highlighted the significance of EU funding in supporting nature-based solutions and decarbonization projects in the region. With over 200 million people living within the cooperation area, Lafarga emphasized that successful pilot projects can act as models for scaling solutions and attracting further investment. He concluded by stressing the need for better governance, stronger collaboration with educational institutions, and a more robust regulatory framework to tackle climate change adaptation in the Mediterranean.



Key Takeaways and Recommendations

1. **Regenerate Natural Ecosystems:** It was widely acknowledged that the regeneration of ecosystems is essential for addressing climate challenges and preserving biodiversity. Concerted efforts at all levels—global, regional, and local—are required to restore and protect ecosystems.
2. **Common Frameworks and Understanding:** A recurring theme was the need for common frameworks to guide international efforts. While decentralized solutions have their merits, a unified approach is critical to achieving global sustainability goals.
3. **Action on Existing Commitments:** Speakers emphasized the importance of moving beyond discussions and taking concrete actions on the commitments already made. Political will is crucial to ensuring that existing tools and frameworks are effectively implemented.
4. **Reducing Risks in NbS:** There is an urgent need to reduce the financial and environmental risks associated with nature-based solutions. International institutions must play a role in de-risking these investments to make them more attractive to the private sector.
5. **Credible Public-Private Financing Solutions:** The private sector has an important role to play in financing nature-based solutions. However, this requires the development of credible, sustainable financing models that can attract investment while addressing environmental degradation.

[Link to Video Recording](#)



Building Green Skills: Equipping Mediterranean Talent for the Green Jobs Era

16th November 2024 | Time: 12:30 -13:30.

Place: MedPavilion - Blue Zone, Area E, F1B

As the global green transition accelerates, millions of green jobs are projected to emerge, creating new opportunities and challenges for the labor market. These jobs require a unique blend of green skills—both technical and soft—essential for fostering environmental sustainability and economic resilience.

The event highlighted the existing green skills gap between market needs and youth competencies, emphasizing the urgency of bridging this divide to prepare younger generations for the green jobs era. It also showcased success stories and the Interreg NEXT MED Programme's initiatives aimed at empowering Mediterranean youth through green transformation and eco-youth cooperation projects.





Opening Remarks

The event began with an introduction by **Vincent Ernoux**, Coordinator for the Western Mediterranean at the Interreg NEXT MED Programme. He outlined the event's objectives, emphasizing the importance of equipping Mediterranean talent with green skills to drive sustainable development and economic growth in the region.

Giuseppe Provenzano, Research, Innovation, and Employability Manager at the Union for the Mediterranean, presented findings from the Union for the Mediterranean Study on Green Skills and Jobs in the Mediterranean Region. The study provided valuable insights into the state of green skills and employment in the Mediterranean, offering a foundation for the discussions that followed.

Rym Ayadi, Founder and President of the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA), delivered a speech on the role of green brain capital as the cornerstone of a systemic transition to green skills and jobs in the Mediterranean. She emphasized that integrating brain health, ecological intelligence, and innovation is crucial to empowering individuals and communities. Prof. Ayadi's vision highlighted the potential of green brain capital to address climate challenges and foster a resilient, inclusive green economy.



Alejandro Lafarga, Programme Officer at the Interreg NEXT MED Programme, shared success stories from the Programme's green skills projects. These initiatives demonstrate the transformative potential of targeted investments in youth capacity building and sustainable development. By providing practical training and fostering innovation, these projects have enabled young people to develop the competencies needed for green jobs.

Martin Heibel, Communication Manager at Interreg NEXT MED, elaborated on the Programme's commitment to the Mediterranean region's green transition. He outlined the main features of the call for green transition projects, with a particular focus on initiatives aimed at enhancing green skills among youth.

Ghada Ahmadein, Senior Manager at the Arab Network for the Environment and Development (RAED), presented an overview of green capacity-building activities in Arab countries. Her intervention emphasized the importance of regional collaboration and grassroots initiatives to equip young people with the skills required for a sustainable future. By aligning training programs with market needs, these activities help close the green skills gap and create pathways to employment in the green economy.

[Link to Video Recording](#)

Mediterranean Forests

16th November 2024 | Time: 13:30 -14:15.

Place: Greek Pavilion- Blue Zone



COP29
Baku
Azerbaijan



COP 29
GREECE

Mediterranean Forests

Saturday 16 November 13:30 Greece Pavilion

Moderator



Kostis Tselenis

Chairman of the Board

Generation Forest Invest /
Hellenic Impact Investing Network



Charles Karangwa

Global Head

IUCN Nature Based
Solutions Center



Eleni Myrivili

UN Chief Heat Officer

UN Habitat and UNEP



Yeganeh Forouheshfar

Senior Researcher

The Euro-Mediterranean
Economists Association

The session emphasized the urgent need to combat threats such as climate change, wildfires, and desertification while exploring pathways for sustainable forest management. Key themes included climate resilience, regional cooperation, resource mobilization, and the potential for replicating successful nature-based solutions models in the Mediterranean context.

The session was moderated by **Mr. Kostis Tselenis**, Chair of the Hellenic Impact Investing Network and Generation Forest Invest. He introduced the panel by emphasizing the dual ecological and economic significance of Mediterranean forests and the urgent need for innovative, science-based, and collaborative approaches to their protection.

Panel Discussion

Charles Karangwa, Global Head of the IUCN Nature-Based Solutions Center, elaborated on the global perspective of nature-based solutions and their applicability to the Mediterranean. He advocated for integrating these solutions into national policies and economic planning.

Dr. Eleni Myrivili, Chief Heat Officer for the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and City of Athens, shared insights on combating urban heat islands and the role of urban forestry in enhancing resilience to climate change. She highlighted the intersection of urban planning and forest conservation as a critical area for action.

Dr. Yeganeh Forouheshfar, Senior Researcher at the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA), stressed the importance of adopting regenerative business models. She remarked: To preserve our natural capital, and our forests in particular, we must pivot from extractive business models towards nature-positive and regenerative practices. This shift is not just about reducing harm; it's about actively restoring ecosystems, creating a new economic paradigm where nature thrives and business prospers together.

Discussion

Prof. Rym Ayadi, President of EMEA, highlighted the profound connection between forests and human health. She underscored the symbiotic relationship between environmental health and human well-being, emphasizing the need for holistic approaches to forest conservation.



EMEA ONLINE SIDE EVENTS

Agroforestry: exploring diverse financing schemes for sustainable land use

19th November 2024 | 14:00-15:30 CET on ZOOM

Co-organised by the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association, Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and Sustainable Transformative Alliance (STA)



EMEA at COP29 | **Financing Agroforestry: Exploring Diverse Financing Schemes for Sustainable Land Use**

 <p>Yeganeh Forouheshfar Senior Researcher at EMEA (Moderator)</p>	 <p>Tiago Zibecchi Researcher at EMEA</p>	 <p>Enrique Doblaz Ecology researcher, transfer officer, consultant at CREAM</p>	 <p>Martin Lukac Professor, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague</p>
 <p>Hafsa El Bekri Advocacy and Executive Strategy Senior Associate, at Positive Agenda Advisory</p>	 <p>Marek Chalupnik Co-Founder & COO at DeepRoots</p>	 <p>Gerry Lawson Policy Advisor at EURAF</p>	 <p>Andrea Casadesús BETA Technological Center and Coordinator of BETA Research Group</p>

Logos: EMEA, STA, REFOREST, Union for the Mediterranean

BACKGROUND

Agroforestry, the practice of integrating trees and shrubs into agricultural landscapes, offers significant environmental, economic, and social benefits. It enhances biodiversity, improves soil health, increases crop resilience, sequesters carbon, and provides sustainable livelihoods for farmers. Despite these benefits, the adoption of agroforestry systems has been hindered by limited access to financing tailored to its unique characteristics and long-term nature. The discussion is expected to highlight agroforestry's potential to drive environmental restoration and economic resilience while acknowledging the financial challenges tied to its long-term and dual-output nature. Participants are expected to emphasize the need for innovative financing models that align with agroforestry's extended timelines and sustainability objectives.



Public financing mechanisms, including government subsidies, grants, and policy incentives, are likely to be presented as crucial for supporting agroforestry at its early stages. Complementing these efforts, private-sector tools such as green bonds, carbon credits, and equity investments are expected to be proposed as essential drivers for scaling operations and attracting large-scale capital. The role of blended finance and impact investing will be explored, focusing on how these approaches can combine public and private capital to reduce investment risks while fostering sustainability-driven returns. The financing gap faced by smallholder farmers is anticipated to be a central theme, with proposed solutions including microfinancing, farmer cooperatives, and community-based credit schemes aimed at improving access to funding.

Participants are expected to feature innovative financial instruments tailored to agroforestry's specific needs. Mechanisms such as Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES), carbon credit financing, agroforestry-specific insurance products, and sustainability-linked loans will likely be highlighted as practical tools for rewarding environmental stewardship and linking financial terms to sustainability milestones. The session is taught to assess both challenges and emerging opportunities for scaling agroforestry financing. While long-term investment requirements, regulatory complexities, and limited alignment with sustainability frameworks are expected to be discussed as key barriers, advances in monitoring technologies, expanding carbon markets, and evolving policy landscapes will likely be recognized as promising developments that could unlock agroforestry's full potential.



SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION



Opening Remarks by Moderator, Yeganeh Forouheshfar

Yeganeh framed agroforestry as a pivotal solution for achieving green transitions aligned with the broader objectives of COP29, labelled the “Finance COP.” She highlighted the urgency of mobilizing \$1.3 trillion annually for climate action and stressed the need for innovative financing to unlock agroforestry’s potential. The session was connected to the Sustainable Transformative Alliance (STA) initiative, launched at COP27, aimed at promoting regenerative practices that restore ecosystems while ensuring financial viability for practitioners.

Presentation by Tiago Zibecchi

Tiago underscored agroforestry’s environmental and socioeconomic benefits, including carbon sequestration, biodiversity enhancement, and diversified farmer incomes. He identified six key adoption barriers: high-risk perception, knowledge gaps, limited market access, high entry costs, costly monitoring, and disconnected policies. To address these, he proposed a hybrid carbon farming scheme comprising ex-ante payments, action-based incentives for ecosystem services, and continuous advisory support, emphasizing the role of blended finance and de-risking tools like insurance funds.



Presentation by Martin Lukac

Martin highlighted agroforestry's role in combating climate change and restoring degraded soils but acknowledged the challenges of transitioning from monoculture farming. He presented a three-phase agroforestry adoption model, emphasizing the critical middle phase where farmers face costs without immediate returns. He called for targeted financial support during this stage to bridge income gaps and encourage long-term investment.

Presentation by Hafsa Elbekri

Hafsa Elbekri stressed the need to align agricultural financing with sustainability goals, particularly in the Global South. She criticized current misallocated public agricultural support and called for clearer financing standards. Highlighting Africa's agricultural challenges, she urged greater investments in technology, infrastructure, and research, alongside expanded access to development finance institutions and better data collection systems.

Presentation by Marek Chalupnik

Marek Chalupnik addressed agroforestry's financing difficulties due to its uneven cash flow, requiring substantial upfront investment with delayed revenue. He emphasized that carbon markets alone cannot close the financing gap, especially for small-scale projects. His solution involved combining revenue streams from subsidies, nature-based investments, and corporate partnerships while reducing risk through off-take agreements and packaged agroforestry investment propositions.

Presentation by Gerry Lawson

Gerry Lawson examined European policies supporting agroforestry through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), pointing out challenges in defining agroforestry and measuring its environmental benefits. He noted that current policy frameworks often fail due to unclear definitions, complex regulations, and inconsistent implementation. He advocated for standardized agroforestry mapping, better financial incentives, and integration of agroforestry into carbon farming frameworks linked to CAP payments.

Presentation by Andrea Casadesús

Andrea Casadesús highlighted agroforestry's role in enhancing climate resilience and food sovereignty within Mediterranean countries through the PRIMA-funded Transition Project. She pointed out challenges such as limited advisory services and cultural resistance to change. Her proposed solutions included fostering cross-regional collaboration, promoting microfinancing and cooperatives, and establishing harmonized carbon certification standards that recognize agroforestry's wider environmental contributions.



Presentation by Enrique Doblas

Enrique Doblas emphasized the ecological value of agroforestry for biodiversity preservation and ecosystem services. He highlighted how different tree species provide varying environmental benefits, urging the development of local Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) models. These models would enable long-term financial support through ecosystem service payments for carbon, water conservation, and biodiversity protection, ensuring broader agroforestry adoption.

Session of Q&A

During the Q&A session, the panelists shared their expectations for COP29, focusing on the need for more support and recognition of agroforestry and nature-based solutions. Marek emphasized the importance of treating agroforestry as a distinct solution, highlighting its role in land sharing and its potential to address climate challenges. Gerry underscored the necessity of integrating agricultural and forestry carbon accounting under Article 6, while Hafsa recommended harmonizing standards regionally and sharing best practices at the multilateral level, drawing on the G20 as a platform for setting global guidelines. Enrique agreed on the importance of nature-based solutions, advocating for investments in local solutions that have proven effective. Andrea stressed the need for aligned policies across regions to integrate agroforestry into climate action, with an emphasis on regional knowledge exchange and flexible financing. Tiago concluded by discussing the potential for de-risking agroforestry investments through mechanisms like insurance, guaranteed funds, and blended finance, while also addressing the disparities between the Global North and South. The session ended with optimism for COP29 to support better financing for agroforestry and nature-based solutions.



Accelerating the Green Transition: Balancing Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies

Organised by the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association in the framework of the Sustainable Transformative Alliance

20th November 2024 | Time: 16:00 - 17:00 AZT/13:00-14:00 CET

Event format: Online via ZOOM



EMEA at COP29 | Accelerating the Green Transition: Balancing Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies

Prof. Rym Ayadi
President and Founder of EMEA (Moderator)

Beatrice Moro
Senior Policy Advisor, ECCO the Italian Climate Change Think Tank

Prof. Giovanni Ferri
Professor of Economics, LUMSA University

Kwame Sarpong Barnieh
Partner, Head of Governance, Risk and Compliance Services, KPMG Ghana

Prof. Ali Rhouma
Senior Project Officer at PRIMA Foundation

Dr. Lawrence Jones
Senior Vice President, International Programs, Edison Electric Institute (EEI)

Funsho Allu
Partner, TIA Capital Management



BACKGROUND

The green transition, a shift toward a sustainable and low-carbon economy, is essential for addressing the global climate crisis. As the impacts of climate change become more evident, nations and industries face the dual challenge of both mitigating future emissions and adapting to the unavoidable consequences of climate disruption. The balance between mitigation—efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions—and adaptation—measures that increase resilience to climate impacts—is critical in defining how societies can achieve sustainable development.



While mitigation focuses on long-term strategies such as reducing carbon emissions through renewable energy and energy efficiency, adaptation emphasizes immediate actions to protect communities, infrastructure, and ecosystems from climate impacts like extreme weather, sea-level rise, and shifting agricultural patterns.

On November 20th, 2024, the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA) co-organised within the framework of the Sustainable Transformative Alliance a COP29 Side Event webinar entitled, “Accelerating the Green Transition: Balancing Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies”, which was part of the Mediterranean Pavilion at COP29. The event brought together an international group of experts across many sectors for an in-depth and insightful discussion. The speakers explored how countries, businesses, and financial institutions can integrate both mitigation and adaptation approaches to create a balanced, comprehensive strategy for the green transition.

The moderator of the session, Professor Rym Ayadi, President and Founder of EMEA, opened the event by highlighting the importance of finding comprehensive solutions for the world to tackle the ongoing climate change crisis. She noted that this is particularly challenging for developing countries, which face the complex task of balancing mitigation and adaptation strategies. To ensure global progress in the green energy transition, she emphasised that both approaches must be pursued simultaneously and with equal commitment.

Prof. Ayadi also pointed out that advocacy efforts are complicated by the absence of a unified Mediterranean voice in negotiations. Reflecting on the recent developments in Baku, she noted that negotiations had been centred on climate finance, particularly on the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) aiming to replace the outdated \$100 billion annual target with a more ambitious framework exceeding \$1 trillion. The goal of the proposed framework is to create a more equitable, needs-based approach to climate finance, especially for developing countries, while emphasizing the importance of integrating mitigation and adaptation priorities. Prof. Ayadi highlighted that, as the world is on track to exceed 3°C warming, regions like the Mediterranean will experience increasing cascading effects – social, economic and climatic- that will especially impact already vulnerable populations.



Professor Ayadi then introduced the speakers:

- Beatrice Moro, Senior Policy Advisor, ECCO the Italian Climate Change Think Tank
- Prof. Giovanni Ferri, Professor of Economics, LUMSA University
- Kwame Sarpong Barnieh, Partner, Head of Governance, Risk and Compliance Services, KPMG Ghana
- Ali Rhouma, PRIMA Foundation
- Dr. Lawrence Jones, Senior Vice President, International Programs, Edison Electric Institute (EEI)
- Funsho Allu, Partner, TIA Capital Management

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION

Beatrice Moro, Senior Policy Advisor at ECCO, stressed in her intervention the need for balanced and effective climate finance under the NCQG. She noted the mixed outcomes of the previous \$100 billion commitment; while it raised awareness and promoted global action, it faced criticism for favoring mitigation over adaptation and relying heavily on non-concessional loans. Ms. Moro argued that the NCQG must address both the scale and structure of funding, with specific targets for mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage. Grants for adaptation and loss and damage must be prioritised, particularly in vulnerable regions, as these areas often lack private sector investment due to their limited potential to generate revenue.

Focusing on the Mediterranean as a climate change hotspot, Ms. Moro underscored the urgency of localized adaptation strategies altogether with shared mitigation goals. She called for integrated projects that address both adaptation and mitigation without negative trade-offs, citing reforestation as a dual-purpose example. Ms. Moro also introduced the TerraMED initiative, which aims to install one terawatt of renewable energy capacity in the Mediterranean by 2030. While mitigation remains critical, she argued, adaptation efforts tailored to the region's specific vulnerabilities must be prioritized to build resilience effectively.

Reacting to a comment by Prof. Ayadi on the need to embed biodiversity in adaptation and mitigation approaches, Ms. Moro emphasized the importance of the "non-significant harm" principle in climate projects, underscoring the need to consider broader environmental objectives, such as biodiversity, alongside mitigation efforts. The EU taxonomy could be regarded as a successful regulatory framework, ensuring that projects like solar panel installations account for biodiversity impacts. Ms. Moro advocated for investing in nature-based solutions, which effectively address both mitigation and adaptation goals while promoting an integrated approach to climate action.



The following speaker, Prof. Giovanni Ferri from LUMSA University, stressed the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration to build an integrated, holistic approach to climate mitigation and adaptation. This perspective, he added, should be extended to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly as global value chains are increasingly shifting to regional models. He discussed the challenges SMEs face in contributing to mitigation and adaptation, particularly in terms of environmental and social impact measurement through sustainability reporting, which many SMEs struggle with due to a lack of resources and expertise.

Prof. Ferri proposed that AI could be an innovative solution for helping SMEs measure their sustainability impacts and contribute effectively to the climate agenda. While AI may have limitations, it could offer a scalable and cost-effective way for SMEs to generate accurate ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) reports, making it easier for them to participate in mitigation and adaptation efforts within value chains. He also acknowledged that the role of leading companies and their ESG reporting would play a key role in driving this change, as they would require their suppliers to comply with sustainability standards. Prof. Ferri concluded that AI-driven solutions could empower SMEs to overcome current barriers and contribute to the climate transition.

Building on Prof. Ferri's insights, Prof. Ayadi noted that SMEs face challenges in aligning with mitigation and adaptation goals within regional value chain. This is because they often struggle to distinguish between mitigation and adaptation in business terms, as these areas often overlap or complement each other. Furthermore, the limited access to finance that SMEs tend to face limits additional investments. Therefore, Prof. Ayadi emphasised the importance of defining projects that qualify for mitigation and adaptation efforts, recognizing the trade-offs between short-term costs and long-term benefits. For instance, initial investments in energy-efficient technologies may involve significant upfront costs but lead to long-term savings and resilience. In terms of adaptation, she stressed that it must be integrated into business models to ensure future resilience and stable cash flows. Prof. Ayadi suggested that measures such as insurance frameworks and risk-managing infrastructures could be part of a comprehensive approach to support SMEs in navigating these challenges.

The role of ESG in supporting organizations to balance mitigation and adaptation effectively was then discussed by Mr. Kwame Sarpong Barnieh, Partner and Head of Governance at KPMG Ghana. He stressed that ESG offers strategic framework to understand and integrate the green transition into business operations. Governance, as a core element of ESG, is critical for setting long-term goals, aligning business strategies with environmental priorities, and shaping policies and board decisions. He noted that the 'E' or environmental component addresses the immediate and long-term impacts of business activities, which requires organisations to assess their environmental footprint and implement adaptive and mitigative actions accordingly.



Mr. Sarpong further underscored the importance of transparent reporting as a key aspect of ESG. He argued that robust reporting frameworks help businesses demonstrate responsibility, avoid greenwashing, and inspire confidence among stakeholders. The social component of ESG, he noted, also plays a crucial role by connecting businesses to their broader societal and value chain impact. As a result, ESG constitutes a growing strategy that enables businesses to balance adaptation and mitigation while also fostering trust and accountability.

Regarding the adoption of ESG frameworks by African SMEs, Mr. Sarpong emphasised that some challenges remain due to gaps in data management and formalized competencies like reporting and governance. He highlighted the role of financial incentives, such as discounts on green financing, as key motivators for SMEs to engage with ESG practices. However, he stressed the need for governments and regulators to provide clear guidelines and frameworks to support data collection and standardization.

The following speaker, Prof. Ali Rhouma from the PRIMA Foundation, highlighted the centrality of SMEs to Mediterranean economies and their challenges in adapting to climate change, particularly due to limited government incentives and the high costs of advanced technologies. He stressed the importance of addressing policy and regulatory barriers to make adaptation more appealing. Regarding innovation, PRIMA is making efforts to implement the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem (WEFE) Nexus approach to synergize climate adaptation and mitigation while addressing maladaptation caused by siloed policies. Therefore, he advocated for policy integration to align adaptation and mitigation goals effectively.

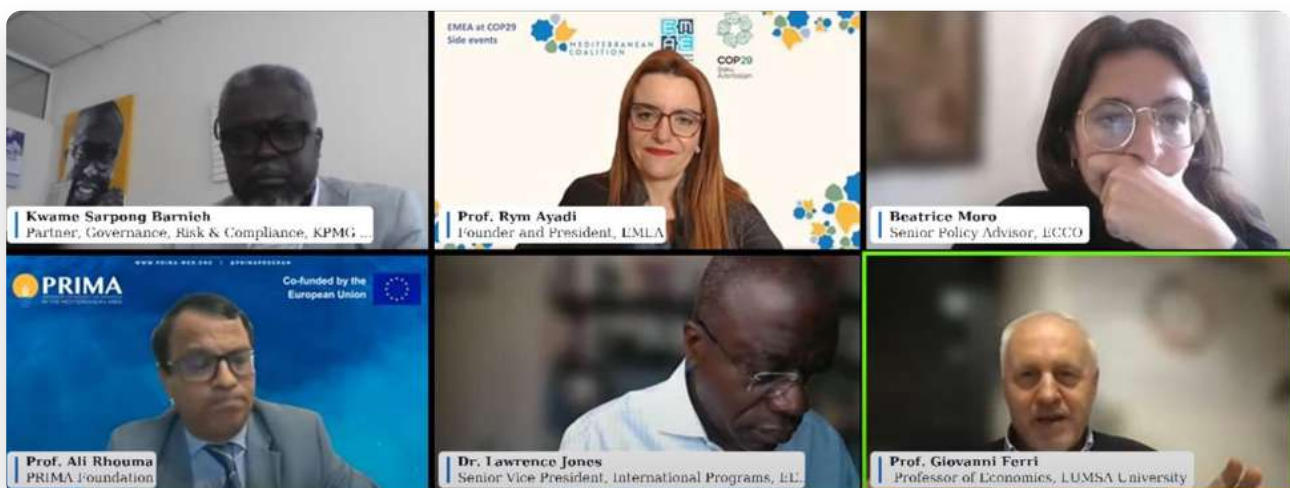
In addition, Prof. Rhouma outlined innovative solutions funded by PRIMA, including agroecology practices, precision irrigation, and the use of AI and big data analytics for energy efficiency and climate impact modeling. Despite these advanced solutions, he identified challenges like high upfront costs, limited infrastructure, and behavioral issues. The overcoming of these challenges requires citizen engagement and private sector involvement, as well as hybrid strategies combining technology with nature-based solutions. Prof. Rhouma also called for systemic science-policy integration to embed these practices in regulations and planning.

Dr. Lawrence Jones, Senior Vice President of the Edison Electric Institute, emphasised in his intervention the critical role of the energy sector in the energy transition. He introduced a taxonomy that includes “hardening” infrastructure as a dual-purpose solution for resilience and sustainability. He highlighted trade-offs and discussed land use challenges, such as renewable energy projects competing with areas needed for carbon sequestration or agriculture. Dr. Jones also noted the economic trade-offs between short-term and long-term investments in adaptation and mitigation, stressing the importance of public buy-in to manage these dilemmas.

He also explored the need for integrated resource planning that optimizes investments for both adaptation and mitigation, despite diverse time horizons and constraints. Dr. Jones pointed out the tension between energy transition purists, who demand rapid shifts to clean energy, and pragmatists, who advocate for affordable and gradual transitions. Pragmatic flexibility is needed to soften limitations while maintaining progress, such as in the case of Australia's reconsideration of nuclear energy. He concluded by advocating for balanced approaches that harmonize pace, affordability, and environmental urgency, while emphasizing the importance of candid, inclusive discussions among stakeholders.

Finally, Prof. Ayadi shared insights from Funsho Allu, from TIA Capital Management, who stressed the necessity of de-risking mechanisms like guarantees, credit enhancement tools, and greater involvement from global institutions such as MIGA. He highlighted the need for additional incentives to address the long-term and short-term trade-offs in resource allocation. Some of the key considerations include aligning economic and social priorities, securing buy-in from consumers and end-users, and navigating varying time horizons for investments.

[Link to Video Recording](#)



Navigating Climate Challenges: A Collective Approach for the Mediterranean region at COP29

20th November 2024 | Time: 14:30 -15:30 Baku time

Place: MedPavilion - Blue Zone, Area E, F1B (hybrid)

Organised by: ECCO - the Italian Climate Change Think Tank, Imal Initiative for Climate and Development



The session explored the Mediterranean region's climate and energy related challenges and discussed the agenda of priorities across key climate policy areas on regional adaptation, finance and energy. The event was hosted by the Med Alliance of Think Tanks on Climate Change (MATTCCCh) and co-organised by ECCO think tank and the Imal Initiative for Climate and Development.



BACKGROUND

Mediterranean countries face a shared and urgent threat: climate change. Rising temperatures, water scarcity, droughts, wildfires, and sea level rise impact both shores, with serious consequences for economic growth, security, and migration. As a climate change hotspot, the region urgently needs a unified voice in climate diplomacy. Despite common risks, Mediterranean countries remain divided in their responses. Only collective strategies and joint action can effectively address these challenges.

In this context, COP29 represents a watershed for the Mediterranean region offering a crucial opportunity to present a unified voice, push for tailored solutions, and influence global climate action. It also provides a platform to address security issues, promoting regional cooperation for a more resilient future. At the same time, innovative initiatives around the Mediterranean can serve as a global first mover for a new model of cooperation of win-win partnerships at the global scale, contributing significantly to COP29 results, in line with COP28 outcomes and looking forward to COP30.

To this end, the MATTCCh, a network of think tanks and research centers representing 25 institutions across 10 Mediterranean countries, will host an event at the Mediterranean pavilion at COP29. The event, titled Navigating Climate Challenges: A Collective Approach for the Mediterranean at COP29, aims at exploring the Mediterranean region's climate and energy related challenges and set the agenda of priorities across key climate policy areas on regional adaptation, finance and energy. Focusing on inputs and insight provided by the experts and practitioners members of the Alliance ahead of COP29, the event is intended as an outcome of a collective reflection proposing actionable recommendations for regional stakeholders.



The session opened with a keynote speech by Grammenos Mastrojeni, Senior Deputy Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean, emphasizing the region's shared climate threats and the necessity for collective strategies. A panel discussion, moderated by Giulia Giordano, Director of Mediterranean and Global Strategy, ECCO - the Italian Climate Change Think Tank, featured insights from Bengisu Özenç, Founding Director, Sefia, Alicia Perez Porro, Head of Policy Engagement & Institutional Relations, CREAM, Iskander Erzini Vernoit, Co-Founder and Director, Imal Initiative for Climate and Development and Yeganeh Frouheshfar of EMEA. The dialogue explored innovative solutions for regional adaptation, climate finance, and energy, highlighting actionable recommendations to foster resilience and collaboration ahead of COP29.

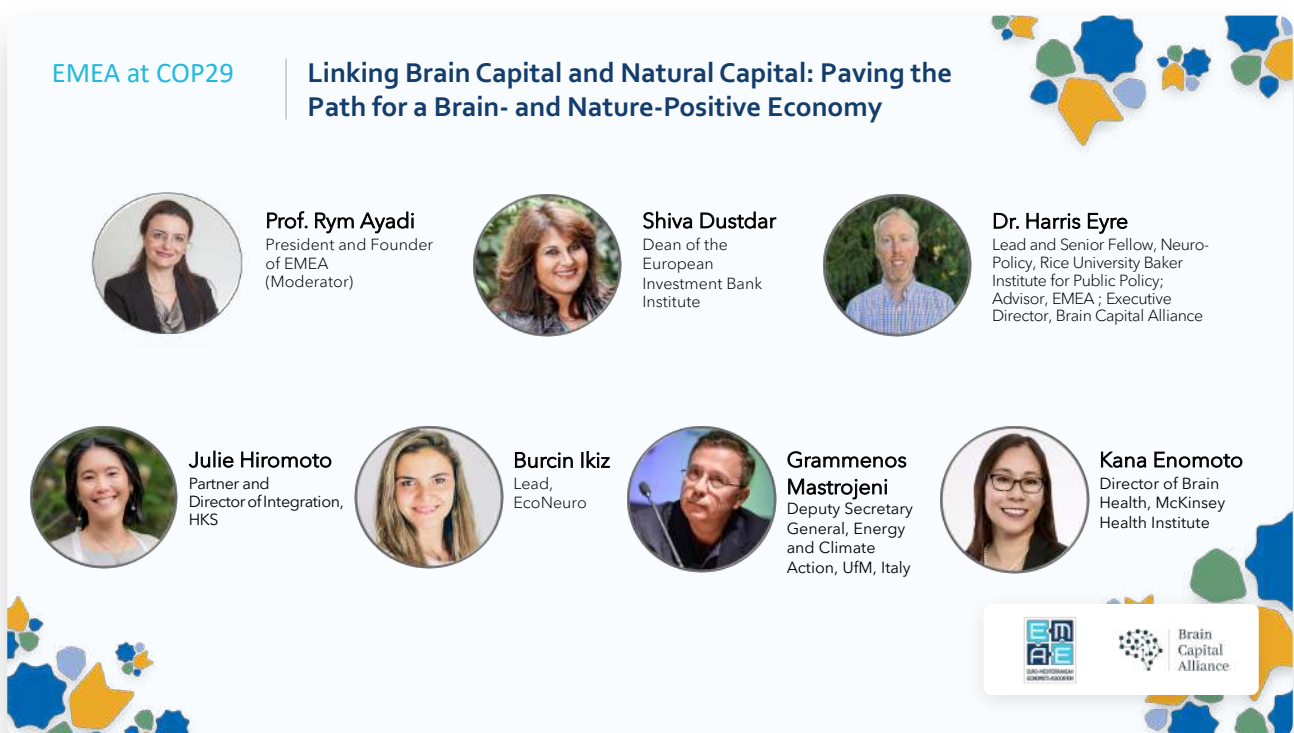
[Link to Video Recording](#)

Linking Brain Capital and Natural Capital: Paving the Path for a Brain- and Nature-Positive Economy

Organised by the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association and the Brain Capital Alliance

21st November 2024 | Time: 18:00-19:00 AZT/15:00-16:00 CET (60min)

Event format: Online via ZOOM



EMEA at COP29 | Linking Brain Capital and Natural Capital: Paving the Path for a Brain- and Nature-Positive Economy

Prof. Rym Ayadi
President and Founder of EMEA (Moderator)

Shiva Dustdar
Dean of the European Investment Bank Institute

Dr. Harris Eyre
Lead and Senior Fellow, Neuro-Policy, Rice University Baker Institute for Public Policy; Advisor, EMEA; Executive Director, Brain Capital Alliance

Julie Hiromoto
Partner and Director of Integration, HKS

Burcin Ikiz
Lead, EcoNeuro

Grammenos Mastrojeni
Deputy Secretary General, Energy and Climate Action, UfM, Italy

Kana Enomoto
Director of Brain Health, McKinsey Health Institute

EMEA | Brain Capital Alliance

BACKGROUND

Brain capital, which encompasses both brain health and brain skills, represents a critical asset in the economy of the future. However, data points towards a brain-negative economy—one that depletes brain capital due to factors such as poor mental health, stress, unhealthy food systems and climate change. Transitioning to a brain-positive economy—where brain capital is preserved, enhanced, and even regenerated—is crucial for building a sustainable, thriving global economy. At the same time, nature capital, the ecosystems and resources that sustain life and economic activity, plays a pivotal role in this transformation by supporting mental well-being and sustainable development. We are in a nature negative economy and urgently need to move to nature positivity.



On November 21st, 2024, the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA) co-organised with the Brain Capital Alliance a COP29 Side Event webinar entitled, “Linking Brain Capital and Natural Capital: Paving the Path for a Brain- and Nature-Positive Economy”, which was part of the Mediterranean Pavilion at COP29. The event brought together an international group of experts across many sectors for an in-depth and insightful discussion. The speakers explored the intersection between brain capital and nature capital and how their integration can support a resilient, brain- and nature-positive economy. Participants delved into strategies for reversing the depletion of brain capital while safeguarding natural ecosystems, ensuring that both brain health and the environment are prioritized in future economic models.

The moderator of the session, **Professor Rym Ayadi**, President and Founder of EMEA and Co-Founder of the Brain Capital Alliance, opened the event by emphasising the urgency of addressing intertwined global challenges, including climate change, social inequality, and mental health. She highlighted the transformative potential of integrating brain capital and nature capital as interconnected frameworks to drive systemic change. Economic models must be reconceptualised to prioritize well-being, resilience, and planetary health, advancing from sustainability to regenerative thinking. Prof. Ayadi also pointed out that this shift would require leveraging science, research, innovation, policy, and investment to tackle societal challenges and build equitable economies.

Professor Ayadi then introduced the speakers:

- Shiva Dustdar, Dean of the European Investment Bank Institute
- Harris Eyre, Lead and Senior Fellow, Neuro-Policy, Rice University Baker Institute for Public Policy, Executive Director, Brain Capital Alliance
- Julie Hiromoto, Partner and Director of Integration, FAIA, Living Future Accredited, WELL AP, LEED AP
- Burcin Ikiz, Lead, EcoNeuro
- Grammenos Mastrojeni, Senior Deputy Secretary General, Union for the Mediterranean
- Kana Enomoto, Director of Brain Health, McKinsey Health Institute



SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION

Dr. Harris Eyre, representing the Brain Capital Alliance and the Brain Economy Hub, introduced the concept of the “brain economy” as a critical frontier in global leadership, deeply interconnected with nature capital. He emphasized that the current state of brain health, which he described as “in the red,” poses a significant challenge at a time when optimal brain performance is crucial. The costs of mental and neurological conditions are estimated at \$2.1 trillion annually, and are growing at a rate of 5% per year. These conditions present across the lifespan, from autism to Alzheimer’s, represent a substantial societal burden.

Dr. Eyre argued that a shift in perspective in which brain health is regarded as an asset, rather than a cost, is needed. He highlighted the importance of building “brain capital,” which encompasses both brain health and brain skills such as analytical thinking, creativity, resilience, and agility. Regarding the link between brain capital and natural capital, the latter improves brain health through cleaner environments, reduced pollution, and increased access to green spaces, while brain capital drives innovation and resilience needed for a sustainable future. Dr. Eyre also emphasized the need to bridge gaps between disciplines and find the right balance in the use of indicators to measure progress effectively.

Following this intervention Burcin Ikiz, Lead at EcoNeuro, underscored the deep connection between brain health and the environment, emphasizing that a functioning brain relies heavily on the health of the natural world. Environmental factors like polluted air, contaminated water, and insufficient access to green spaces negatively affect brain health. Disruptions to ecosystems and biodiversity, coupled with the impacts of climate change, amplify risks to both physical and mental well-being. She noted that extreme weather events such as floods and wildfires often result in long-term psychological stress, intergenerational mental health challenges, and developmental impacts for children exposed to harmful environmental conditions during pregnancy.

Despite these challenges, Dr. Ikiz stressed the resilience of both the brain and the planet, provided they are given the opportunity to heal. Neuroplasticity offers hope for brain recovery, while ecological restoration can reverse damage to nature. She called for integrated actions, including policies to clean the environment, increase access to green spaces, and incentivize sustainable practices. Dr. Ikiz argued for the need of a multidisciplinary approach that is based on collaboration between governments, businesses, and communities to embed brain health considerations into climate discussions and broader policy frameworks.



The intersections of climate change, mental health, and the broader implications for brain capital were further discussed by Kana Enomoto, Director of Brain Health at the McKinsey Health Institute. She highlighted survey data showing that nearly half of European respondents in 2022 reported high levels of distress due to climate change, surpassing distress levels related to COVID-19. This reflects findings from other studies, particularly among young people, who experience emotions such as guilt, shame, and anger linked to environmental concerns. Ms. Enomoto emphasized that these stressors erode communal ties, social inclusion, and collective problem-solving, all key components of a thriving brain economy. At the McKinsey Health Institute, she advocates for a holistic approach to well-being, integrating mental, physical, social, and environmental health to enhance both longevity and quality of life.

She also stressed the importance of early intervention. Research indicates that addressing mental, neurological, and substance use disorders early in life has significant benefits for individual and societal productivity. As insufficient investment remains a key challenge, Ms. Enomoto advocated for measurable goals, cross-sector collaboration, and innovative financing mechanisms. She noted that scaling known interventions such as behavioral therapies, preventive programs, and workplace wellness initiatives, could reclaim millions of productivity years currently lost to brain health challenges.

The next speaker, Julie Hiromoto from FAIA, shared some insights on the deep connection between the built environment and brain and nature capital. She highlighted how the spaces where people live, work, learn, and heal have a significant impact on cognitive well-being, public health, and environmental sustainability. The built environment is a positive force for change, and Ms. Hiromoto called for intentional, strategic approaches to designing spaces that promote cognitive health and social well-being while addressing critical environmental challenges. Through principles like biophilic design, which integrates natural elements into built spaces, she illustrated how thoughtful design can reset mental focus, reduce stress, and inspire creativity.

Ms. Hiromoto also provided knowledge of design strategies that foster better outcomes across sectors. In education, enriched environments enhance social and emotional learning, while in health-care, strategically placed respite spaces support the mental health of caregivers. Beyond individual buildings, she stressed the importance of reimagining transitional urban spaces as areas for social interaction and mental restoration. Globally, Ms. Hiromoto advocated for inclusive solutions such as nature-based materials and self-built resources that can benefit underserved communities.

Shiva Dustdar, representing the European Investment Bank, addressed the importance of intentional investment in the brain economy, calling for the integration of a brain health perspective into public and private sector investments. She emphasised the EIB's dual role as a leading public investor in the EU and a climate action pioneer, noting that over 50% of the bank's lending aligns with the Paris Agreement. While health and infrastructure have been key areas of focus, she underscored the need for targeted investment strategies to address the brain economy, advocating for approaches that leverage collaboration and innovation.

While citing the EIB's groundbreaking infectious disease financing initiative, which mobilized resources for COVID-19 vaccine development, Ms. Dustdar emphasized the power of de-risking mechanisms like forgivable loans to attract private capital to high-risk, high-reward projects. Instruments like green and sustainability bonds have transformative potential, and she argued that they could inspire similar tools for brain health. To address the existing gaps in foundational research and scalable innovations, she stressed the need to align public and private capital, collaborate with researchers, and clearly identify financing needs.

Finally, Grammenos Mastrojeni, Senior Deputy Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean, underscored the critical need to harness brain power to overcome the cognitive traps that undermine sustainability. Health and sustainability are intrinsically linked, and historically individuals were naturally wired to recognise the balance between personal and environmental well-being. However, Mr. Mastrojeni argued that modern societal choices driven by comfort and convenience have disrupted this balance. He noted that co-evolution has shaped humans to thrive in equilibrium with nature, but mass production and over-specialization have hindered our ability to perceive this correlation.



Mr. Mastrojeni further discussed the cultural and cognitive biases, such as "border bias" and over-specialization, that affect our understanding of interconnected systems. The tendency to isolate priorities, he argued, has led to segmented solutions that fail to address holistic needs. He called for a shift towards integrated thinking, imperative to tackle global challenges effectively. To do so, the reconnection with human natural instincts through general, interdisciplinary approaches is paramount.

[Link to Video Recording](#)









Thinking and acting for the future of the Mediterranean and Africa



COP29
Baku
Azerbaijan