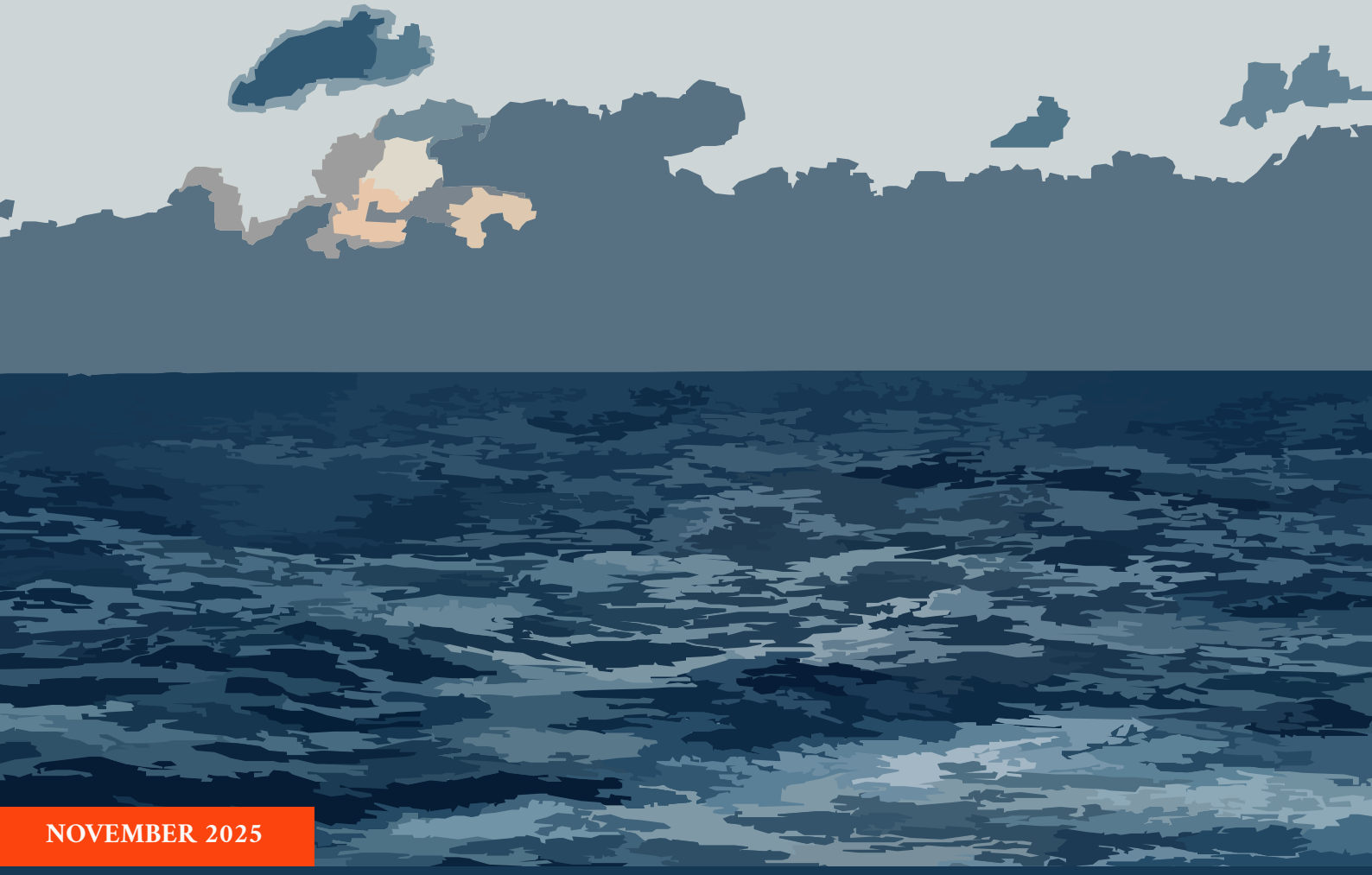
Photo: Dimitris Panagiotaras | Unsplash



NOVEMBER 2025

THE MEDITERRANEAN MANIFESTO

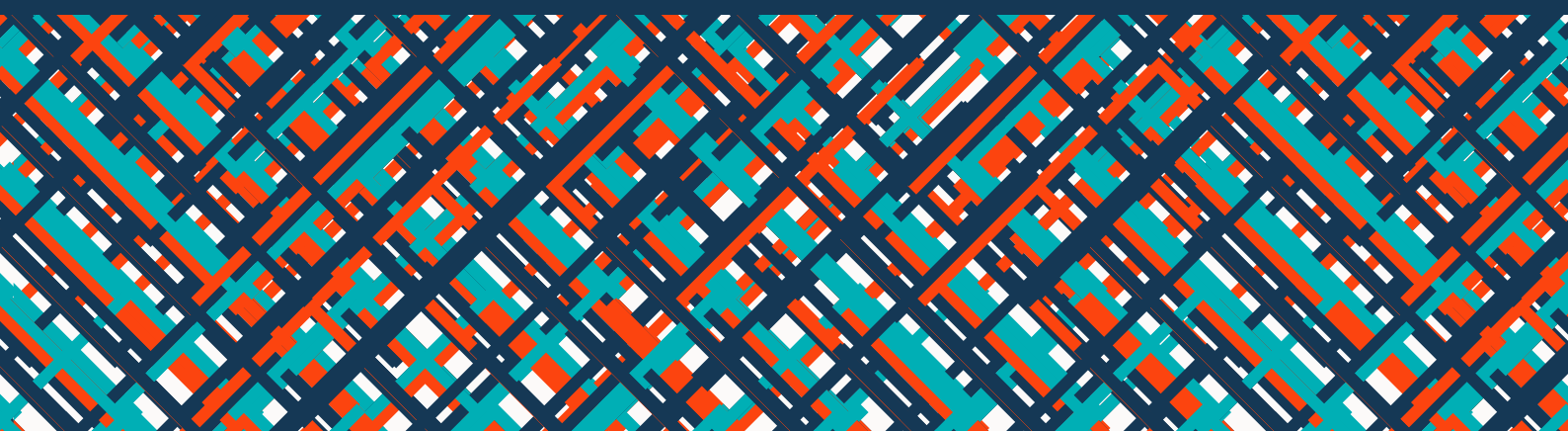


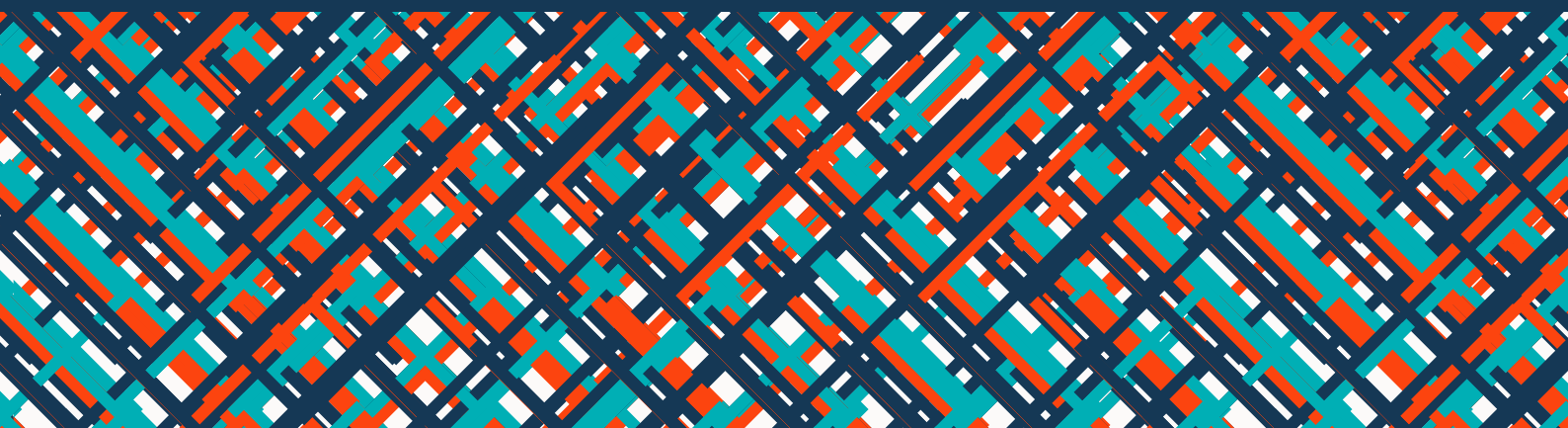
Photo: Dimitris Panagiotaras | Unsplash



NOVEMBER 2025

FOR A RENEWED PACT OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

In light of the launch of the EU's Pact for the Mediterranean, civil society organisations from the northern and southern Mediterranean call for a fundamental rethink of Mediterranean cooperation



INTRODUCTION

In the context of the launch of the **Pact for the Mediterranean**, the undersigned organisations wish to express our concerns and aspirations for the future of the region.

Today, the Mediterranean is marked by multiple overlapping crises: persistent forced displacement, prolonged conflicts, wars, occupation and genocide, rising inequalities, shrinking civic space, and a climate emergency[1] that year after year worsens the lives of millions of people. The Mediterranean Sea is also one of the most dangerous migratory routes in the world, where human tragedy unfolds daily as a direct result of political choices.

In this context, the **Pact for the Mediterranean** seeks to re-set relations between Europe and the so-called Southern Neighbourhood advancing a geopolitical and strategic investment agenda structured on three pillars: people, economies, and preparedness, migration management & security[2]. As explained by the first ever European Commissioner for the Mediterranean, Dubravka Šuica, the Pact seeks to revitalise the spirit of the three-decade-old Barcelona Process by implementing concrete initiatives and delivering tangible results in areas of shared interest. Notably, several initiatives will be developed in the fields of higher education, professional training and employment, particularly in sports and sustainable tourism. The Pact also will promote a targeted approach to engaging the private sector in the region, especially in the renewable energy sector in North Africa, as a means to enhance the EU's energy security and autonomy. Lastly, the Pact will aim to strengthen cooperation on labour migration through the Talent Partnership, alongside efforts in migration management, security, the "fight against terrorism", organized crime, and preventing radicalisation. [3]

However, reality risks falling short of rhetoric. It raises concerns that, until a new MFF is approved, the Pact may face challenges in securing adequate funding to fully realize its objectives. Moreover, the implementation proposal shared within the latest Joint Communication of the European Commission foresees occasional civil society engagement, instead of regular, compulsory dialogues and accountability mechanisms with civil society actors and human rights organisations, as eventual partners and implementers of the Pact. Finally, the Pact should include clear human rights safeguards across its three pillars. The context of EU attempts to make finance conditional on border control also risks adding perverse incentives.

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[1]The region has faced its hottest summer on record for the third year running. Record-breaking heatwaves have raged from France to Egypt, and wildfires have struck Spain, Albania, Greece, Portugal, France, Italy, Montenegro, Greece, Cyprus, Syria and Turkey. Warming, water shortages and crop failures push up prices, forcibly displaces communities, threaten ecosystems, and make working conditions dangerous (see: Southern Europe swelters as heat threatens outdoor laborers | AP News)

[2]"The Pact for the Mediterranean One Sea, One Pact, One Future", Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Brussels, 16.10.2025. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_25_2384

[3]MedCat conference on the New Pact for the Mediterranean

It is no coincidence that the Pact was conceived in the wake of another, **the European Pact on Migration and Asylum**, itself heavily criticised by civil society organisations, NGOs, parliamentarians, activists and human rights academics for entrenching securitisation, migration containment and externalisation of borders;[4] as well as in parallel with a new EU's cooperation and investment strategy, **Global Gateway**, which focuses on promoting European interests — particularly those of the private sector- over genuine partnerships aimed at reducing poverty and inequality.[5] Both approaches risk **deepening the historical asymmetries between the two shores** of the Mediterranean and further eroding the foundations of cooperation based on dignity, human rights and social justice.

Some powerful countries are shifting toward a more transactional approach to global politics, using limited development funds to secure access to fossil fuels, raw materials and ensuring stricter border controls. In the EU, a crucial area of focus is defence and securitisation, however, this strategy risks undermining human security and deepening divisions across the Mediterranean.

This is not just about how Europe positions itself towards the Mediterranean neighbours: what is at stake is the Mediterranean we want to build at a time of rising reactionary politics and growing attacks on multilateralism.

Will the EU respond to the climate and inequality crises and ongoing conflicts with more walls, more militarisation, more extractivism?

Or will it commit to genuine partnerships grounded in mutual recognition, shared responsibility, the defence of the common good and the upholding of human rights?

As activists, civil society organisers and human rights defenders from the Mediterranean we question: Who will really benefit from the Pact whose design and implications remain unclear?

It is not too late, however, to realise the ambition and vision contained in the thinking around the Pact for the Mediterranean. Doing this requires a more holistic, expansive, and inclusive approach. Drawing on shared history and connections and bringing together people and ideas from across its diverse communities, people across the Mediterranean can transcend historic inequalities and build a shared future.

As civil society, we affirm that the Mediterranean can and must be a space of hope, solidarity and transformation. We therefore call on European institutions to reorient the focus of the Pact for the Mediterranean and rebuild Euro-Mediterranean relations in ways that promote:

[4] Manifesto: Por un Mediterráneo y un Sur Global donde se respete la vida

[5] Who profits from the Global Gateway? | Oxfam International

1. A NEW APPROACH TO MEDITERRANEAN COOPERATION BASED ON **REBUILDING TRUST**, HORIZONTALITY, MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERCOMING EUROCENTRIC MODELS

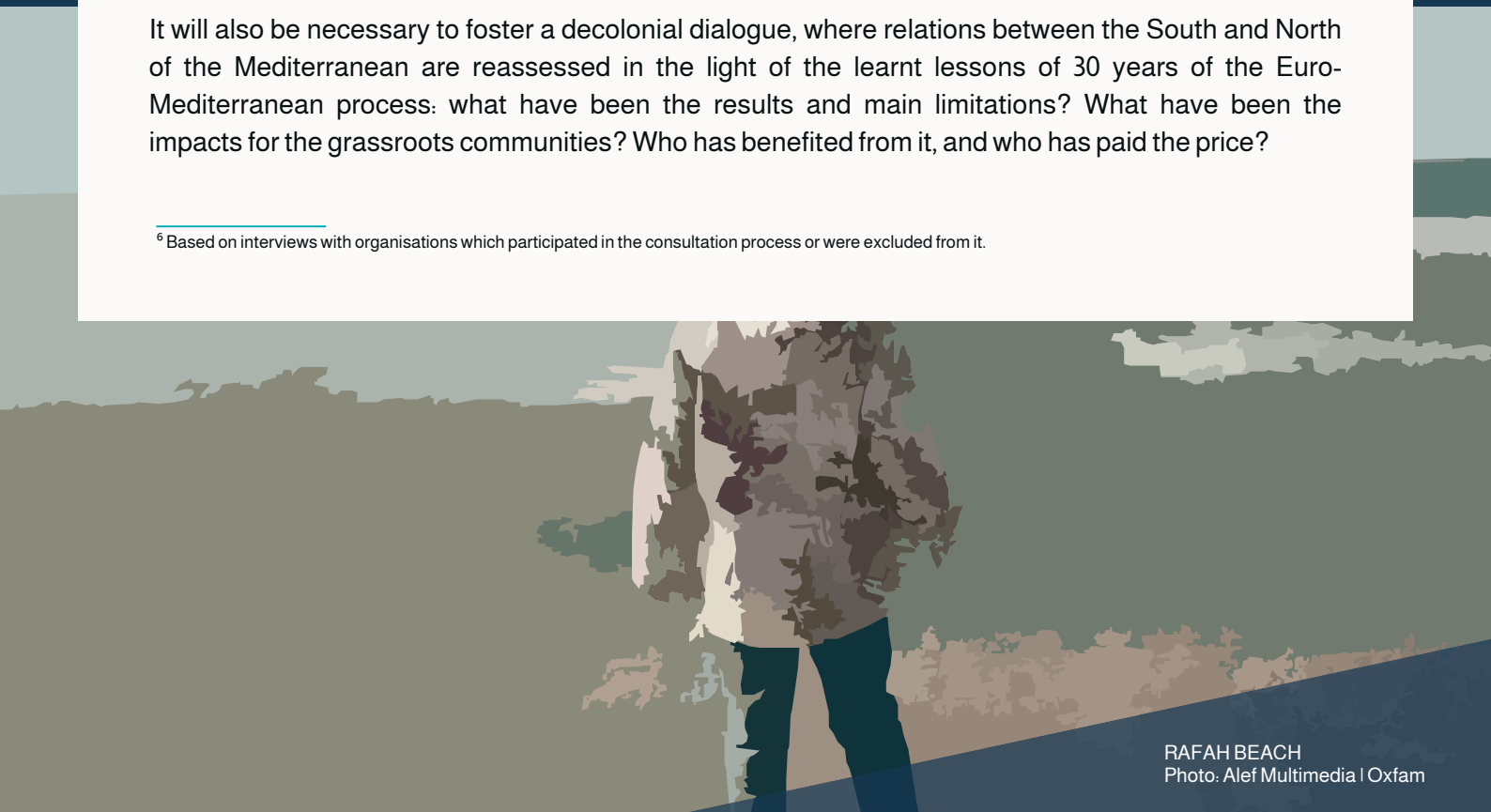
Consultation processes launched so far by the EU have proven insufficient. The European institutions have failed to meaningfully engage those most affected by the Pact's decisions.[6] For any Mediterranean partnership to be credible, European institutions must shift power: they must listen to and act upon the voices of local communities and grassroots organisations. The top-down, Eurocentric approach that has dominated Euro-Mediterranean relations in the past must give way to horizontal models of cooperation focused on the real priorities of the populations of the global South.

This requires structural, rather than ad hoc, participation and inclusion of organised civil society, local actors, young people, local communities and social movements in the design, implementation and evaluation of the priorities and commitments undersigned in the Pact. Communities and civil society are at the root of any solution to the crises outlined above. At its best, and properly supported, civil society demonstrates a model of hope, solidarity, and transformation.

Mutual accountability must underpin these processes, ensuring that both European institutions and Southern actors are equally responsible for delivering on commitments and measuring progress. For too long, the EU has imposed obligations and monitoring frameworks on Southern Mediterranean countries while shielding itself from any tangible scrutiny; this double standard has further entrenched power asymmetries and eroded trust. A genuine partnership demands that Europe itself be held accountable to clear benchmarks and timelines, with failures and lessons learned shared and assessed. Beyond time-bound initiatives, the indicators of these bidirectional assessments should be rights-based, focused on impact on development standards, inequality reduction and gender justice results, assessing structural and systematic challenges to sustainable development in the Mediterranean.

It will also be necessary to foster a decolonial dialogue, where relations between the South and North of the Mediterranean are reassessed in the light of the learnt lessons of 30 years of the Euro-Mediterranean process: what have been the results and main limitations? What have been the impacts for the grassroots communities? Who has benefited from it, and who has paid the price?

[6] Based on interviews with organisations which participated in the consultation process or were excluded from it.



RAFAH BEACH
Photo: Alef Multimedia | Oxfam

2. AN ECONOMIC AGENDA TO **REDUCE INEQUALITIES**

The economic gaps between the two shores of the Mediterranean, between countries and within countries, continue to grow year after year. The pandemic and cost-of-living crisis have deepened inequality in countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia[7] or Spain.[8] While elites and corporations continue to prosper, austerity policies have eroded public services and widened divides. Women and marginalised groups, who rely most on affordable, quality services, are bearing the heaviest burden.[9] Persistent trade balance inequalities, driven by structural dependence on imports and the privileging of European exports, further weaken local economies and constrain the capacity of Mediterranean countries to pursue inclusive development. [10]

A key driver of this injustice is taxation and the lack of progressive redistribution policies. Across the region, the tax burden falls heavily on middle and low-income populations while wealth taxes are largely absent, and the richest contribute little compared to their means.[11] This undermines governments' ability to invest in health, education, social protection, and other essential services. Instead, austerity and debt repayments dominate fiscal priorities, leaving ordinary people to shoulder the cost of inequality.

The EU's Global Gateway strategy, centred on promoting European private sector investment amidst weak accountability mechanisms towards local actors, communities and civil society; risks replicating extractive and unequal models. When engaging with Global Gateway, the Pact for the Mediterranean must make sure that any initiative responds to social and development objectives, put local communities in the driving seat, and limit the negative effects on populations and the environment. Furthermore, the Pact should mobilise further public resources and ODA committed to an inequality reduction agenda with the following goals:

- Specific deliverables and indicators contributing to the reduction of poverty and inequalities, including gender and explicit targets for reducing inequalities in line with SDG 10. Specifically, the Inequality marker should be applied to all projects.

- Strengthening capacities and resources for Mediterranean countries to design and lead National Inequality Reduction Plans.

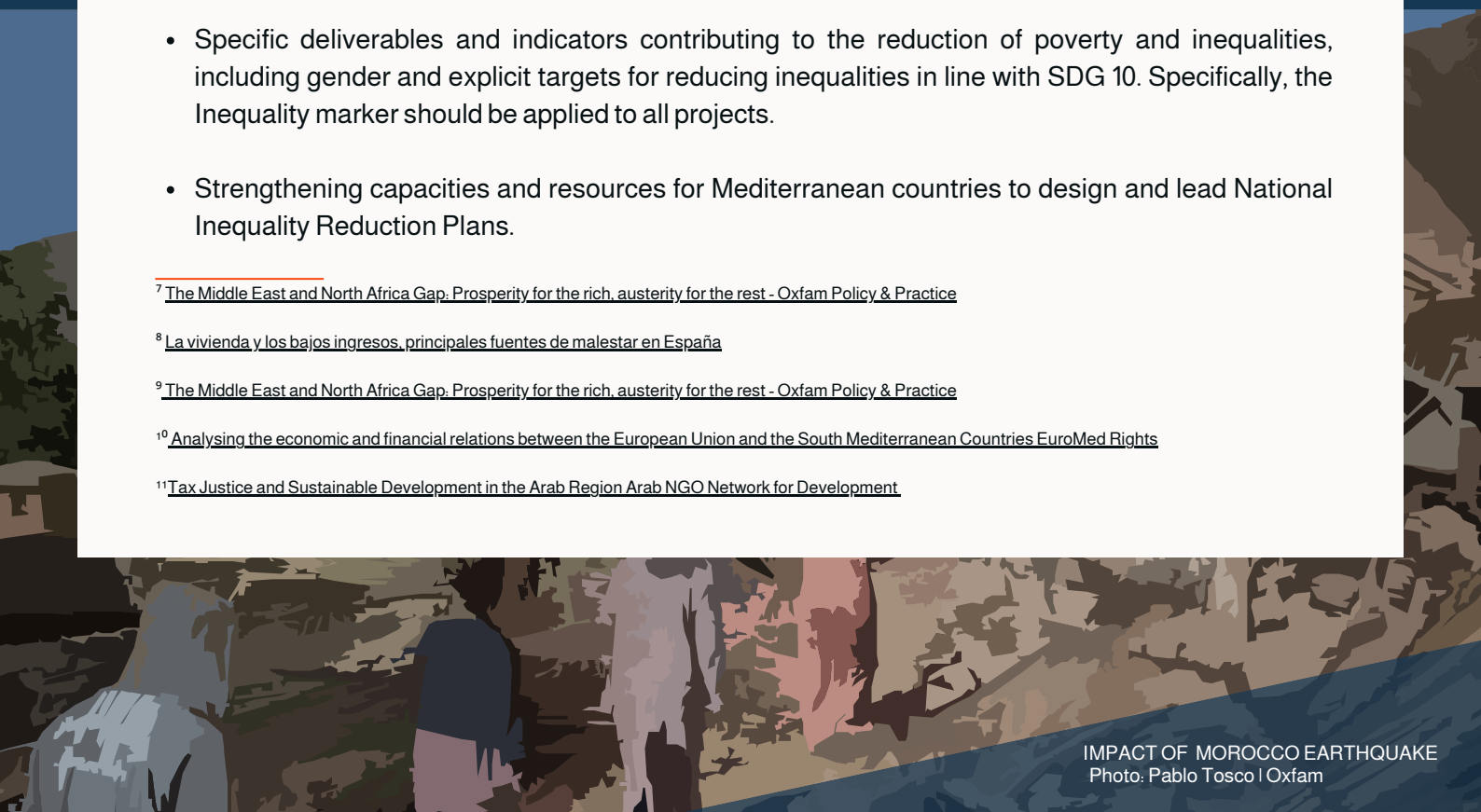
[7] The Middle East and North Africa Gap: Prosperity for the rich, austerity for the rest - Oxfam Policy & Practice

[8] La vivienda y los bajos ingresos, principales fuentes de malestar en España

[9] The Middle East and North Africa Gap: Prosperity for the rich, austerity for the rest - Oxfam Policy & Practice

[10] Analysing the economic and financial relations between the European Union and the South Mediterranean Countries EuroMed Rights

[11] Tax Justice and Sustainable Development in the Arab Region Arab NGO Network for Development



IMPACT OF MOROCCO EARTHQUAKE
Photo: Pablo Tosco | Oxfam

2. AN ECONOMIC AGENDA TO **REDUCE INEQUALITIES**

- Progressive taxation reforms, including wealth and corporate taxes, to ensure the richest pay their fair share and implementation of policy coherence on tax.
- Universal, gender-responsive quality public services in health, education, care, energy, and water.
- Measures to address structural trade imbalances, supporting fairer trade relations that strengthen local economies and reduce dependency.
- Debt relief and cancelation measures to free up resources currently drained by repayments, so countries can invest in people and resilience.
- Privilege sustainable and solidarity-based local economies and conduct due diligence on international corporations involved in the projects.
- Promote stronger national labour legislation and legal frameworks to achieve wages that enable dignified standards of living, as well as dignified working conditions in alignment with ILO standards, regardless of workers' migratory status.
- Recognise women's and girls' poorly paid and unpaid care work as a major contribution to the economy and address its uneven distribution as a priority, by implementing policies and universal, accessible and quality public services to redistribute care work more fairly and dignify domestic workers' labour and living conditions.

Without these commitments, the Pact will only reinforce structural inequalities and further entrench the imbalance between North and South.



SEVERE DROUGHT IN JORDAN
Photo: Paula González | Oxfam

3. HUMAN MOBILITY BASED ON **RIGHTS AND DIGNITY**

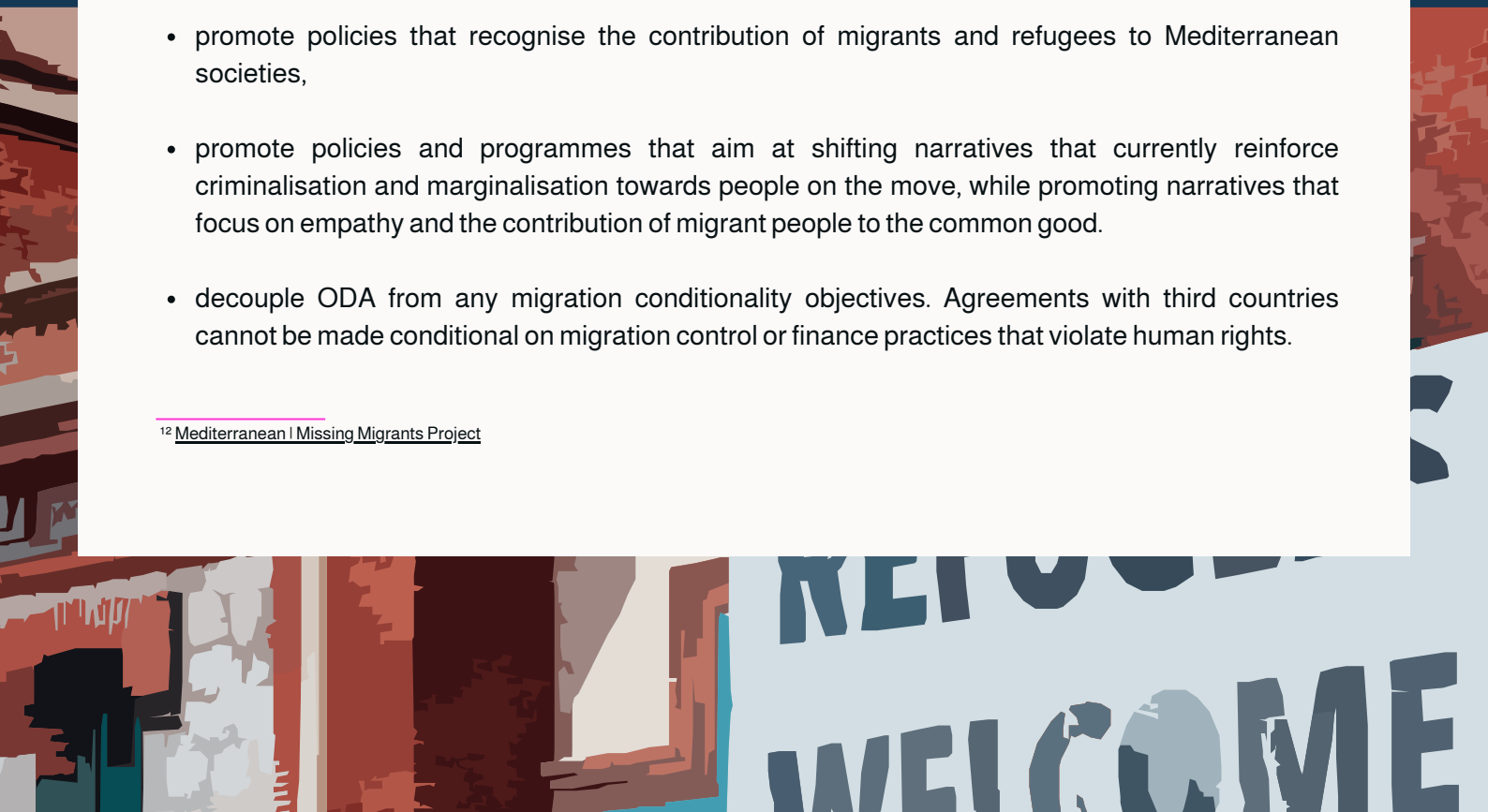
According to IOM data, more than 32,000 people have died since 2014 trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea.[12] A joint future cannot be envisioned while countless lives are lost in the Mediterranean or forcibly returned to contexts of violence, as a direct result of EU's policies of border externalisation.

Migration is not a "problem to be contained" or a "threat." It is a historical human reality and a source of mutual enrichment within the Mediterranean. For decades, the EU has reduced migration to a question of livelihoods, proposing narrow "solutions" through private sector investment, economic opportunities and job creation through grants, as well as infrastructure support in countries of origin. This framing not only ignores the agency and rights of people on the move but also denies the deeper drivers of displacement in the region: protracted wars, authoritarian repression, systematic violations of human rights, and states unable or unwilling to meet the basic needs of their populations. Human mobility is a right and a global public good that a Pact for the Mediterranean must place at its centre.

This requires a change of approach in European migration and asylum policies. The Pact for the Mediterranean must:

- prioritise and scale up safe and legal pathways, fair and accessible asylum systems,
- respect for the principle of non-refoulement,
- protect the human rights of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees,
- guarantee the protection of human rights defenders of the rights of migrants and refugees,
- promote policies that recognise the contribution of migrants and refugees to Mediterranean societies,
- promote policies and programmes that aim at shifting narratives that currently reinforce criminalisation and marginalisation towards people on the move, while promoting narratives that focus on empathy and the contribution of migrant people to the common good.
- decouple ODA from any migration conditionality objectives. Agreements with third countries cannot be made conditional on migration control or finance practices that violate human rights.

[12] Mediterranean | Missing Migrants Project



4. AN ALLIANCE FOR **CLIMATE JUSTICE** TO ENSURE JUST ECOLOGICAL TRANSITIONS

The Mediterranean region is quickly becoming a climate change hotspot, warming at a rate 20% faster than the global average[13], exacerbating food insecurity, water scarcity, desertification and social unrest. This is a reality not unrelated to inequalities at all, as the wealthiest in MENA disproportionately contribute to climate change while insulating themselves from its consequences. In 2022, the richest 10% were responsible for 60% of emissions, while the poorest 50% of the region contributed only 10%. [14]

The Pact for the Mediterranean must therefore prioritise climate justice. This means recognising and addressing the profound inequalities at the heart of the crisis. Climate adaptation and ecological regeneration can bring communities together, supporting both people who need to leave and stay; repairing ecosystems that support life and bringing people together. The Pact must commit to:

- Cutting inequality-driven emissions: ensuring the richest households and polluting corporations reduce their carbon footprints fastest and furthest.
- Scaling up fair climate finance: delivering new and additional public funds so that Southern Mediterranean countries can adapt and recover without being pushed deeper into debt.
- Investing in resilient public systems: prioritising food security, water access, health, and social protection to shield vulnerable communities from climate shocks.
- Ensuring just transitions: channelling investment into renewable energy and green jobs that benefit workers and local communities, not just European private sector interests.
- Implementing coordinated ecological regeneration and emergency response and adaptation programmes across the whole region.
- Putting means and programmes to protect and further connect climate activists across the Mediterranean, as a response to the current criminalisation of protest and activists' fundamental rights.

[13] First Climate and Environmental Change Report in the Mediterranean

[14] Not Everyone Is in the Same Boat: Climate and inequality in the Middle East and North Africa - Oxfam Policy & Practice



5. UPHOLD AND **SUPPORT MEDITERRANEAN CIVIL SOCIETY** ACTIVISTS AND GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS IN ALL ITS DIVERSITY

On both sides of the Mediterranean, we are witnessing a worrying democratic backsliding: shrinking civic space, the rise of anti-rights movements, and the consolidation of populist and reactionary leaderships. Activists, journalists, feminist leaders and human rights defenders are facing increasing persecution and repression. At the same time, Israel's genocide in Gaza lays bare the systematic and deliberate violations of International Law, sustained by the impunity Israel enjoys and by the silence and complicity of Northern governments.

In this context, it is urgent that the Pact commits to **strengthening its financial, technical and political support** for civil society, human rights defenders, and the feminist and women's rights movements, which have been the driving force behind the main democratic advances in the region. Their survival is critical to strengthening a democratic and diverse Mediterranean rooted in human rights. Their voices must be heard, and their proposals must shape binding decision-making processes.

The Mediterranean can be a space for encounter, dialogue and hope. A space where human rights are respected, inequalities are reduced, and a common future is built. As civil society, we commit to continue working toward this horizon while speaking out against injustice. What we need now is political will, coherence, and courage. A political and economic strategy beyond borders that protects, preserves and strengthens human and environmental flourishing in the Mediterranean is both possible and urgent.



TOMATE GREENHOUSE IN GAZA
Photo: Alef Multimedia I Oxfam

SIGNATORY ORGANISATIONS:

- Oxfam
- Arab NGO Network for Development
- MENAFem Movement for Economic, Development, and Ecological Development
- Asociación Senda de Cuidados
- Asociacion Territorio Doméstico
- Asociación Colectivo Agar, espacio de investigación y encuentro desde la diversidad
- APDHA - Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de Andalucía
- The European Center for Populism Studies (ECPS)
- NOVACT
- ISGlobal
- EuroMed Rights
- Associació Internacional de Solidaritat i Cooperació - SUDS
- Comissió Catalana d 'Acció pel Refugi
- Sant Just Solidari
- Dedalus social cooperative
- Justícia i Pau Catalunya
- Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH)
- La Coordinadora de Organizaciones para el Desarrollo-España
- Lafede - Justícia Global
- NGOs Platform of Saida-Lebanon
- Arab Reform Initiative