

Celebrating the Day of the Mediterranean: Over 200 researchers and experts to participate in PRIMA webinar on Med diet and Sustainability

PRIMA to fund 11 projects with 32 million Euros in Section 1 this year

On the occasion of Mediterranean Day, Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) has organized a webinar on the challenges and opportunities of the Med diet

Barcelona, 26th of November 2021. Yesterday, representatives from the European Commission (EC), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and PRIMA have discussed the importance of the Mediterranean diet to fight increased obesity in the region.

Discussions have taken place during the webinar "**The Future of Sustainable Mediterranean Diet: Challenges, Opportunities and Actions**" organized on the first-ever Mediterranean Day.

This event has provided an opportunity to present the importance of the Mediterranean diet at different perspectives (health, environment, socio-economic and cultural). With welcome and inspirational talks from the organizers, keynote presenters have focused on identifying the key enablers, drivers as well as obstacles against shifting towards this eating pattern, trying to answer two basic questions of the day: How and Why towards Mediterranean diet. The webinar has highlighted that many chronic and non-communicable diseases (such as cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases) are emerging from being overweight and obesity as one of the causes. The high number of obese European preschool children is one example.

The welcoming speeches were held by Professor Angelo Riccaboni, Chair of PRIMA, as well as Isidro Gonzalez, Deputy Secretary General of UfM, and Karen



PRIMA programme is supported by Horizon 2020,
the European Union's Framework Programme
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Fabbri, Deputy Head of Bioeconomy in the Food Systems Unit of the European Commission.

“PRIMA has always been playing a very active role in social change and Med diet, and a major initiative that has funded 140 projects so far”, **Angelo Riccaboni** explained. **Isidro Gonzalez** has expressed the need for more innovation and cooperation to enhance climate change, energy and health, especially regarding the blue food, because of the employment creation potential for the Southern shore of the Mediterranean.

From the European Commission, **Karen Fabbri** has invited researchers to apply to Horizon Europe programme under The Green Deal and the Farm to Fork strategy. Both Ayoub Al-Jawaldeh, Regional Advisor Nutrition for the Eastern Mediterranean at WHO, and José Valls Bedeau, Policy Officer of the Food Systems and Food Safety division at FAO, have held keynote speeches about sustainable Mediterranean Diet.

Ayoub Al-Jawaldeh highlighted that almost half of the population in Northern and Middle Eastern Mediterranean countries are overweight. From his side, **José Valls** added that more than 3 billion people in the world cannot afford a healthy diet, while 14% of the produced food globally is wasted. “Improving food systems means improving the delivery of healthy diets, reducing the environmental impact and making them more accessible, affordable, equitable and safe”, he said.

Afterwards, the PRIMA actions towards a sustainable Mediterranean diet have been discussed. **Octavi Quintana**, Executive Director of PRIMA, and **Mohamed Wageih**, Agrofood Project Officer at PRIMA, have shared their thoughts about the set of values, lifestyle and a social-cultural approach behind the Med diet. They elaborated how PRIMA could support the Med diet by funding research project that encourage healthy and sustainable practices in the region.

An interactive session moderated by **Omar Amawi**, Deputy Director of PRIMA, has witnessed a participation from over 100. The audiences of the webinar interacted through replying on questions about their awareness and knowledge about the Med diet.

In the Roundtable that followed, presentations of different case studies of sustainable Med diet in the region, moderated by **Sandro Dernini**, from IFMed and CIHEAM-Bari was held. He highlighted on the value of the Med Diet 4.0 model. Many cases from Lebanon, Spain, Maghreb and Portugal have been presented by excellent researchers in the region.



This session has shed the light on various countries' achievements towards sustainable Mediterranean diet. The event outcome will feed the PRIMA future calls and topics preparatory process.

Luis Serra Majem, from Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, has detailed the last achievements: improvement of research, valorisation of Med diet as a cultural and culinary pattern, and boosting of the sustainability concept.

Nahla Hwalla, from American University of Beirut, talked about the nutrition transition and low adherence to Med diet because of the increasing shift to the Western diet. "We have to retrieve the Mediterranean diet by routine monitoring of food consumption and with a strategical road map participated by all drivers of food systems for each country".

Anna Maria Gomes, from Catholic University of Portugal, explained the Keywords for achieving the Med diet are technology and innovation, co-design and a multi-stakeholder's approach.

"The lack of awareness and high consumption of food high in sugar and fat are the biggest challenges", **Rekia Belahsen**, from Chouaib Doukkali University, claimed from Maghreb.

Last but not least, the results of PRIMA 2021 Section 1 have been announced by **Mohamed El Shinawi**, Co-chair of PRIMA. With a total budget of 32 million euros, eleven new projects have been chosen from which three projects tackle the Med diet.

About PRIMA

PRIMA -Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area- is an ambitious science diplomacy program that aims to build R&I capacities and develop innovative solutions for agro-food systems and integrated water provision and management in the Mediterranean area competitive calls for funding. The partnership consists of 19 countries, including 11 EU Members States and eight non-EU Mediterranean Countries, on an equal footing basis (co-ownership, co-management and co-funding) supported by the European Commission.

For more information, please visit <https://prima-med.org/>



PRIMA programme is supported by Horizon 2020, the European Union's Framework Programme for Research and Innovation

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