10/11/2023

Mediterranean Agricultural Market Information Network (MED-Amin)

MED-Amin Action Plan 2024-2026

In ten years, MED-Amin has achieved its first objectives: (1) establishing **trust** and constructive **dialogue** around a **common methodological framework**; (2) developing **partnerships** for **transparency** and **knowledge sharing on cereal markets in the Mediterranean**; and (3) disseminating **consolidated information** to public and private stakeholders in the region.

These objectives were achieved, with minimal resources, thanks to the constant mobilization of MED-Amin national Focal Points and solid partnerships with international institutions which directly contribute to the success of the network, such as the United Nation Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS), the Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture (GIEWS), the International Grains Council (IGC), the European Commission: Directorate General for Agriculture (DG Agri), and Joint Research Centre (JRC), and the French National Establishments of Agricultural and Seafood Products (FranceAgriMer).

Since 2020, the regional and international context was marked by a succession of multifaceted crises, with direct repercussions on food supply and sometimes on food security of Mediterranean populations. In this context, MED-Amin member countries called for strengthening: (1) information for **early warning and rapid response**; (2) **communication** and **visibility** of Med-Amin products; and (3) MED-Amin **political and strategic dimension**.

This 2024-2026 MED-Amin Action Plan is organised along three priority axes, based on recent contributions from member countries and experts on Early Warning (conclusions and priorities raised at the 9th MED-Amin Annual Meeting, Zaragoza, November 2022; bilateral exchanges with Strategic Resource Persons; and the first Strategic Meeting held on 30 November – 1 December 2023 in Paris). This Action Plan also builds on the achievements of MED-Amin 2021-2023 Action Plan.

With renewed **political support** for the MED-Amin network, this Action Plan will ensure that MED-Amin activities are consolidated, disseminated and further contribute to early warning. Strengthened **political collaboration** will facilitate rapid response. A **communication** strategy will promote MED-Amin core products and new developments to policy makers and key market operators, and help **mobilize the resources needed** to support and expand MED-Amin activities.

Origins of the network

MED-Amin network was established in 2014 at the request of the Ministers of agriculture of the 13 CIHEAM countries.

MED-Amin objectives

MED-Amin contributes to "Increasing access to food" and developing information systems on "agricultural commercial markets" (priorities 7 and 15 of *CIHEAM Action Plan 2025 for the Mediterranean* (CAPMED 2025)).

Focal Points

The national Focal Points are the main actors of MED-Amin network. They mobilize information, methodologies and skills at national level, share them and benefit from them.

Strategic Resource Persons

In 2020, MED-Amin member countries designated Strategic Resource Persons among decision-makers in charge of food security and agricultural markets. Strategic Resource Persons ensure that the network is anchored in national and regional priorities and ensure its political support.

Presidency

The Presidency is held for about one year by the host country of the annual network meeting, starting from the date of the meeting. MED-Amin President contributes to the visibility of the network through communication actions. It guarantees the political dimension of the network and the anchoring of activities in regional policies.

Secretariat

MED-Amin Secretariat is held by the International Center for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM). It is hosted by CIHEAM Montpellier.

Main funding

Since its creation, MED-Amin has been mainly funded by CIHEAM, the French Ministry of Agriculture and the member country which hosts and co-finances the annual meeting. Diversifying and increasing network's resources is essential for its long-term action and sustainability.

AXES OF THE 2024-2026 ACTION PLAN

1. Strengthening information for early warning and rapid response

Most Mediterranean countries are increasingly dependent on cereal imports, thus vulnerable to very volatile international markets. The Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) is the most dependent worldwide on wheat and barley imports, with more than 30% of global imports and a constantly increasing, almost inelastic demand. This dependence and the scarcity of water and soil resources make the region particularly vulnerable to the combined effects of climate change and geopolitical, commercial or technological tensions. In this context, Mediterranean countries wish to strengthen their capacities to predict shocks and crises (short-term perspectives), to prepare for them and to engage in a transformation of agricultural and supply systems in the longer term towards more resilient systems.

The establishment of an **efficient Early Warning System on cereal markets** in the Mediterranean region is the main common priority of MED-Amin member countries (2020 survey of national referents). Recent crises have amplified this need.

A warning system requires: (1) early production forecasting; (2) sufficient knowledge of utilizations and stocks; and (3) targeted knowledge of the strategic factors of market development, at both national and international levels. It must rely on existing systems for monitoring agricultural markets and related markets in energy and agricultural inputs, nationally and internationally. Since 2022, the Secretariat has set up a working group of international experts on early warning, to advise and support MED-Amin in strengthening early warning capacities. This expert group recommended a modular approach, organised in 8 tasks (see box beside). Some of these tasks have been completed, others are in progress. The MED-Amin Action Plan 2024-2026 must continue and accelerate these achievements, in constant synergy with national and international partners whose objectives converge, for mutual benefits.

Since 2022, a group of international experts has advised and supported the MED-Amin network on early warning. This group brings together experts from AMIS, the European Commission (DG Agri, JRC), GEOGLAM, GIEWS, IGC and WFP. The group of experts recommended a modular implementation of the following priority tasks, and proposed to be involved in their implementation:

1. Map national information systems.

2. Identify priority information needs and cooperation mechanisms for contingency plans. Summarize them in a Policy Brief.

3. Identify gaps in the collection of cereal balance data, and the production of cereal balance sheets.

4. Identify the main international monitoring and early warning systems that could provide relevant indicators for Mediterranean countries.

5. Prepare a "Mediterranean monitoring and early warning dashboard" with the most critical variables and information.

6. Establish an information system on durum wheat: export prices, evolution of supply and demand, trade, prices => IGC Durum Bulletin.

7. Develop quantitative cereals yield forecasting: identify possible models, identify information needs for calibrating the most promising models to test on a pilot project.

8. Design an integrated early warning system.

These tasks are, as far as possible, integrated into this Action Plan.

1.1. Improve early production forecasting

Accurately and timely characterizing next national production, in volume and quality, is essential to determine import needs or export capacities. Since 2017, MED-Amin has developed a methodology for early forecasting of cereal harvests (winter cereals: soft wheat, durum wheat and barley) with the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (JRC) and national Focal Points. Together, they draw a qualitative assessment of future production at the **subnational level**, based on Earth observations (remote sensing) and expertise from the field. The early forecast Bulletins, produced three times per campaign (in March, May and June), have a rapidly increasing audience, thanks to constant improvements in relevance, precision and timeliness.

- ⇨ The Secretariat and the Focal Points are committed to continuing and improving early harvest forecasting. In particular, the Focal Points will annually update the **baseline database** and assess **crop conditions** (in consultation with relevant national information sources) in the pre-targeted sensitive areas identified by the JRC. Based on this feedback, the Secretariat will prepare timely Bulletins in the shortest timeframe possible. The Secretariat, the JRC and the Focal Points will contribute to the **broad and targeted dissemination** of these Bulletins.

- ⇨ With the support of the JRC and the Early Warning Expert Group, the Secretariat will assess the feasibility of **forecasting cereal crop yields**, to refine harvest forecasts, and anticipate cereal collection and external supply requirements. This assessment may be based on: (1) a synthesis of existing **quantitative models**; (2) an identification of the **most promising models** for MED-Amin countries; (3) an identification of **information needs** for model calibration and warning signals.
- ⇨ Focal Points will verify the existence of previous works on yield forecasting in their countries and share feedback and lessons learned from those initiatives at the occasion of an upcoming meeting or webinar.
- ⇨ New: The Secretariat and the expert group will call upon one or two volunteer member country(ies) to test the feasibility of the yield forecasts, in view of a possible pilot project. The pilot project will allow existing national systems to be supplemented and improved, avoiding redundancies, and in return, will identify a calibrated candidate model that could be useful to other Mediterranean countries. In the next Action Plan, a skills-building program for the use of remote sensing data to anticipate disturbances and assess impacts will be proposed; future developments may also focus on forecasting grain quality.

1.2. Improve knowledge of utilizations and stocks

Knowing domestic production is key to estimate **demand and future needs for import, export opportunities, storage**, etc. To reach this objective, it is fundamental to know domestic availability, including stocks (volumes, but also the state of infrastructure), as well as the trends and determinants of domestic cereal use. In general, consumption is inelastic but changes in prices or availability may lead to some transfer from one commodity to another, or from one utilization to another. The establishment of **forecast balance sheets of supply and demand**, based on trends (historical series) and the forecasting of future needs, are tools **allowing anticipation**. Since its creation, MED-Amin has supported member countries in building these cereal balance sheets. Despite efforts, the shared cereal balance sheets remain incomplete to date, with data too disparate and insufficiently updated to be used for forecasting.

- ⇨ With the support of the Strategic resource persons, the national Focal points will bring together the necessary institutions to continue the **collection and consolidation of historical data and their updating** as the marketing year progresses.
- ⇨ The Secretariat will attempt to mobilize the necessary expertise to analyse available data in terms of completeness, consistency and quality, **identify gaps** and provide recommendations to consolidate the databases.
- ⇨ **Training sessions** will help develop a culture of forecasting on food security issues. These sessions will address the fundamentals of monitoring and analysis of agricultural markets, **the elaboration of supply and demand balance sheets**, and their use in forecasting.
- ⇨ If a member country requests it and mobilizes the minimum necessary resources, the Secretariat will call on partner institutions to co-organize **a training workshop for co-building forecasting balances**, in-situ, to maintain and strengthen national team skills, with particular attention to the estimation of uses, stocks and losses, which are often insufficiently documented, and the use of remote sensing tools. This workshop would bring together national expertise in statistics, market analysis and intelligence, forecasting, etc.

MED-Amin collected a database of national cereal balances for the 5 commodities monitored (soft wheat, durum wheat, barley, maize and rice), from 2008/09.

The Secretariat has developed a methodological handbook to help country representatives extract national statistical data and format them into an international standard (AMIS) presented in "grain equivalent".

The Secretariat also carried out capacity building activities for national teams in charge of statistics, crop monitoring and production forecasting (Tunisia in 2016, Algeria in 2017, with the contribution of AMIS and FranceAgriMer), as well as remote training sessions (webinars in 2021 and 2023 with FranceAgriMer).

1.3. Provide targeted knowledge of the strategic factors of market development

The actors who decide on supplies, processing and export in Mediterranean countries need a solid understanding of the functioning, calendar and availabilities (in volume, quality and price) of national and international markets to inform and guide their decisions. Production and market conditions in cereal exporting countries are important, but also the conditions of input market (fertilizers, seeds, energy, etc.). Countries have an interest in timely information on trade, monetary and geopolitical tensions; weather hazards; climate change impacts, etc. Information of interest for the Mediterranean exists, spread out across various sources. MED-Amin contributes to selecting and compiling information of importance for the Mediterranean. But this effort should be strengthened to provide relevant, early and regionalized warning signals to public and private decision-makers.

- ⇨ The Secretariat will continue to regularly **actively monitor and share current events** on cereal markets for member countries.
- ⇨ In partnership with the International Grains Council, the Secretariat will continue to organize webinars **between major cereal exporting countries and Mediterranean countries**, targeting early information on available grains volumes (early summer), and quality (fall).
- ⇨ New: The Secretariat will send to member countries a questionnaire on harvest **quality categories (exporting countries) and grain quality criteria for consumption and processing (importing countries)**. This could result in the publication of a technical note and reinforced cooperation between Mediterranean importing countries.
- ⇨ New: with the support of the expert group, the Secretariat will prepare a "**MED-Amin monitoring and early warning dashboard**". This dashboard will build on **existing national and global information systems**, by extracting relevant indicators for the region and developing possible specific indicators. It will rely on **strategic partnerships** to get access and target priority information. In parallel, MED-Amin will organize experience sharing on information and early warning systems, existing or in project, at the Member countries level.

Since 2021, MED-Amin Secretariat has collaborated with the International Grains Council (IGC) to organize webinars bringing together the main cereal exporting countries and MED-Amin member countries, some of which are net importers of cereals. These early exchanges of information allow to anticipate the supply strategies of public or private operators. These exchanges mainly involve exporters from the Black Sea region (Ukraine, Russia, Romania in particular), South America (Brazil and Argentina) and North America (Canada and USA), Australia, as well as European exporting countries (e.g. France, Germany, Türkiye).

2. Strengthen communication and visibility of MED-Amin products

MED-Amin's publications are the subject of increasing attention, as evidenced by a very rapid increase in the number of downloads and the interest shown by both public and private structures. To be fully effective, particularly with the aim of early warning and rapid response, this information must reach public and private decision-makers. This implies well-targeted information, made available quickly, in a suitable form, to the decision-makers themselves or their advisors.

Specific mobilization in each country of the network is necessary to better inform operators, decision-makers and key users of MED-Amin's activities and products, and thus increase the impact of the network. The joint efforts of the Secretariat, Focal Points and Strategic resource persons are necessary to achieve this objective.

- ⇨ The Secretariat will continue to provide regular market information, in Press Reviews (monthly), Newsletters (bimonthly), Early Harvest Bulletins (3 per year), a new "monitoring and early warning dashboard" and information regularly disseminated on the social networks of MED-Amin, CIHEAM and partner institutions. It will renew its website and create a link allowing any actor to subscribe to the network's open publications.

- ⇨ New: In each country, the Focal Points will establish a **list of contacts and structures** potentially interested in MED-Amin publications (policy decision-makers, academics, cereal sector operators, public and private technical teams with responsibilities in agricultural market monitoring, early warning, food security, statistics and modelling) and will send them links allowing them **to subscribe to publications and communications on MED-Amin's social media.** The Secretariat will keep the Focal Points informed of the number of subscriptions.

- ⇨ The Secretariat, Focal Points and Strategic resource persons will present the network's activities in **regional and international events** (e.g. conferences on grain markets and trade organized by the IGC, AMIS, FAO, UkrAgroconsult, Fastmarket, the European Commission, stock exchanges, "Durum Days" in Italy or the Pan-African Conference on Food Security, Global Food Security Conference, etc.).

- ⇨ New: The Focal Points and Strategic Resource Persons will co-organize with the Secretariat **national information webinars** on MED-Amin for interested partners from the public and/or private sectors. The Secretariat will propose a 2-hour format, opening room for discussion.

- ⇨ The Secretariat will successively ask each Strategic Resource Person to contribute to the **editorial** of a MED-Amin Newsletter on a news or issue of national or regional interest of their choice.

- ⇨ The Secretariat will call on voluntary countries or partners to propose a **translation in national language** of key network publications (Policy Brief, etc.).

Since 2022, MED-Amin Secretariat has produced a slideshow presenting the history, objectives, activities of the network and its main results. This document, is made available, in French and English, to Focal Points and Strategic Resource Persons, to help them share network information with public and private stakeholders.

MED-Amin website has a dedicated members section, which allows for private access to working documents.

- ⇨ During MED-Amin annual meetings, **press conferences** will be co-organized with the national authorities of the host country.

3. Strengthen MED-Amin political and strategic dimension

During the MED-Amin 2022 meeting (Zaragoza, Spain), member countries recommended strengthening exchanges at a more political level, to: (i) explore the relevance of a Strategic Forum; (ii) strengthen the exchange of information on public policies and lessons learned; (iii) identify priority information needs and indicators for decision-makers; (iv) strengthen strategic coordination with international partners (AMIS, IGC, JRC, GIEWS, etc.); (v) strengthen institutional and financial support for the network .

Despite the successive crises associated with the Covid-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine and the impacts of climate change, there is currently no Mediterranean process to support coordinated action to rapidly address the risks of food crises. Such technical and governance systems rarely exist at national level in Mediterranean countries. In this context, cooperation on Early Warning and Rapid Response has been identified as a joint priority.

- ⇨ MED-Amin member states will continue to **co-organize, on a voluntary and rotational basis, the network's annual plenary meetings** with the Secretariat**.** Those meetings intend to promote and strengthen cohesion, trust and interactions between technical referents (Focal Points) and main partners. Private sector and public policy decision-makers will be invited depending on the topics covered. A scientific presentation will be offered to strengthen the science-decision interface. An agenda session will be open to the Strategic resource persons (remotely), depending on the possibilities and themes covered.

Annual Meetings

Since 2014, MED-Amin network has organized nine plenary meetings: Paris (2014), Izmir (2014), Rome (2015), Tunis (2016), Valletta (2018), Meknes (2019), two virtual meetings in 2020 and 2021, Zaragoza (2022).

Strategic reports

Since 2014, the MED-Amin has published and disseminated three Policy briefs on: the cereal context and policies in the Mediterranean (2016); harvest forecasts and early warning in the Mediterranean (2017); the challenges of transparency on cereal markets in the Mediterranean: what are the respective roles of the public and private sectors? (2019).

- ⇨ New: in conjunction with the Strategic Resource Persons, the Secretariat will endeavour to **strengthen the strategic dialogue between Mediterranean countries**. In particular, member countries will explore the relevance of a **Strategic Forum** dedicated to food security issues and exchanges on food crisis management within MED-Amin. They will explore the feasibility and possible modalities of building a coordination and crisis management Mechanism shared between Member countries. The AMIS Rapid Response Forum will be analysed specifically to identify potential transferable elements to MED-Amin. The Strategic resource persons will meet regularly (at least once a year, and once every two years face-to-face) to share their strategic orientations, the measures taken for ensuring food security, the emergency management and the anticipation of food crisis (and more generally on the development of resilient food systems) and lessons learned, including ex-post evaluation or feedback on measures adopted. The themes addressed could include: contingency plans, adaptation strategies to climate change, strategies to reduce or manage dependencies, inter-sectoral crisis management platforms, communication in periods of crises, etc. The strategic exchanges will result in the publication of at least one **Policy Brief or Strategic Report** over the Action Plan period. In the recent context of a succession of crises impacting food markets, the inclusion of MED-Amin on the agenda of the next CIHEAM Ministerial Meeting (Morocco, 2024) would be an excellent opportunity to promote the achievements and products of the network and to renew its political momentum after 10 years of existence.

- ⇨ The Secretariat will **continue and strengthen existing partnerships**, to ensure synergies and increase the impact of MED-Amin actions. Key partners participate in MED-Amin events. Events are co-organized and publications co-produced. Since 2023, the Secretariat has also participated as a formal or informal observer in partner events (e.g. IGC and AMIS). This approach, maximizing synergies, will be continued.

- ⇨ The Secretariat will **develop new alliances to facilitate the collection and processing of new indicators.** In particular, the Secretariat will develop partnerships with institutions that hold relevant information for an early warning system for the Mediterranean to feed in the "MED-Amin Monitoring and Early Warning Dashboard", or are capable of producing such information (e.g. regional indicators). Prospects for synergies with the private sector in order to gather this data will be explored.

- ⇨ With the support and guidance of the Strategic Resource Persons, the Secretariat will apply for **funding** to strengthen **national and regional rapid response capacities**, by supporting volunteer countries in one or more of the following areas:
  - An **improvement in supply and demand balances**, based on workshops bringing together the various national staff concerned and international partner experts, and benefitting from the experience of the private sector.
  - The **development of inter-sectoral public-private platforms**, bringing together the main actors in cereal value chains, to exchange perspectives, broaden sources of information, develop more realistic estimates, and encourage the emergence of rapid solutions in crisis.
  - A **diagnostic analysis of grains sector and supply chain vulnerabilities and risks in the Mediterranean region, of logistical and organizational capacities and bottlenecks**, which could draw on the lessons of recent crises. This will allow to identify ways to control dependencies and to consider strengthened collaborations among countries.
  - **The mobilization of a Mediterranean scientific and academic community** on cereal markets and the prevention of food crises.
  - The **design of an early warning and rapid response infrastructure:** the necessary means, skills and information sharing systems; based on the guidelines from the Early Warning Expert Group.

In 2023, CIHEAM Montpellier coordinated the preparation of a PRIMA Section 1 project (RESILient Wheat Supply Chains in MEDiterranean Countries). Bringing together 11 institutional and research partners from Algeria, Egypt, France, Lebanon, Morocco, Spain, Tunisia and Türkiye, this proposal aimed to draw lessons from recent crises to inform emergency measures, warning and rapid response systems through multi-sectoral and multi-actor partnerships at national and multilateral (Mediterranean) levels, to improve the resilience of cereal supply chains in the region. Although this project was not selected, it could serve as the basis for a new proposal to address current issues in the supply of cereals and cereal products. The evaluators recommended to broaden participation in the private sector and to better articulate activities implemented through MED-Amin and at national level in the proposal (extracts from the evaluation).