



Union pour la Méditerranée  
Union for the Mediterranean  
الإتحاد من أجل المتوسط



## **MEDITERRANEAN CAPITALS OF CULTURE AND DIALOGUE**

### **ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

### **CALL FOR APPLICATIONS FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN CAPITALS OF CULTURE AND DIALOGUE 2026**

**REFERENCE: AC01/24**

**DEADLINE: July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

***JANUARY 2024***

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## 1. Background

As a follow-up to the Declaration of 17 June 2022 in Naples of the Ministers of Culture of the Euro-Mediterranean region and of the recommendation of more than 200 representatives of civil society from twenty Euro-Mediterranean countries in the white paper "Plaidoyer Méditerranée 2030", presented in Marseille in February 2022, the concept of "**Mediterranean Capitals of Culture**" was endorsed by the 43 Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the UfM at the 7th UfM Regional Forum in Barcelona on 24 November 2022. The UfM Secretariat and the Anna Lindh Foundation Secretariat (ALF) have prepared the Terms of Reference, endorsed by the UfM Senior Officials, and published online on 25 April 2023<sup>1</sup>.

The "Mediterranean Capitals of Culture & Dialogue" (MCCD) initiative was launched in 2023 and is now in its second edition. The initiative consists of two cities, one from the North and one from the South of the Mediterranean, designated by the 43 Member States of the Union for the Mediterranean for one calendar year. The two cities will implement cultural, socio-economic, and sporting programmes to highlight their heritage and cultural policies, respective Mediterranean identities, and shared Euro-Mediterranean vision.

The two cities will be invited to collaborate in the manner and level of interaction they deem appropriate. The initiative is expected to develop regional ties and dialogue through culture, encouraging deeper mutual understanding and stronger solidarity within the Euro-Mediterranean region and strengthening the ability to promote the region's diverse cultures. The designation will also represent an opportunity for socio-economic development for local and regional territories by promoting cultural and creative sectors and, indirectly, tourism.

It is reminded that the main objectives of the MCCD initiative are:

- to enhance the richness and diversity of the Euro-Mediterranean region and contribute to intercultural dialogue;
- to highlight the Euro-Mediterranean identity of the cities involved while promoting their historical and cultural heritage;
- to promote local action and that of civil society, which is increasingly dynamic and active in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation;
- to develop the network of territorial cooperation in the Mediterranean while uniting the members of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership by creating a bond between selected North and South cities;
- to provide public platforms to address socioeconomic, cultural, and identity issues of regional relevance.

## 2. Call for applications for the title of Mediterranean Capital of Culture and Dialogue 2026

The aim of this call is:

- to invite applications from candidates in UfM countries wishing to bid for the "Mediterranean Capitals of Culture & Dialogue " title for the year 2026 (MCCD 2026);
- to lead to the designation of two of these candidates as Mediterranean Capitals of Culture & Dialogue 2026.

To assist candidates in preparing their bids, this call provides an overview of the criteria that will be applied for assessing their applications, as well as information about the selection procedure. In Annex I, candidates will also find the application form they must complete.

The UfM Secretariat and the Anna Lindh Foundation Secretariat, under the purview of the UfM Senior Officials, are responsible for coordinating the initiation, evaluation, selection, and organisation procedure for the MCCD 2026 title.

The Advisory Committee is responsible for the preliminary assessment of candidatures against the

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/1-FINAL-Capital-of-the-Mediterranean\\_Advisory-Committee\\_TORs.pdf](https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/1-FINAL-Capital-of-the-Mediterranean_Advisory-Committee_TORs.pdf)

definition of criteria before their selection by UfM Senior Officials. The Advisory Committee is composed of a representative of the following organisations: the UfM Secretariat, the Anna Lindh Foundation Secretariat (ALF), and the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM).

The *Union for the Mediterranean* (UfM) is an intergovernmental Euro-Mediterranean organisation which brings together all countries of the European Union and 16 countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean to enhance regional cooperation, dialogue and the implementation of projects and initiatives with tangible impact, with an emphasis on young people and women, to address the three strategic objectives of ensuring: stability, development and integration to the region. The Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean, based in Barcelona, is the permanent structure dedicated to the intergovernmental Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. It ensures the operational follow-up of the regional priorities identified, in partnership with key international actors. It promotes region-wide cooperation projects and initiatives that address the root causes of the current regional security and socio-economic challenges. For further information: <https://ufmsecretariat.org/>.

The *Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures* (ALF) was created in 2005 as an international intergovernmental organisation based in Alexandria. The Foundation, inspired by Anna Lindh's legacy, is committed to fostering intercultural dialogue within its mission of nurturing inclusive societies where diversity is celebrated and everyone's voice is valued. By promoting peace, justice, and strong partnerships, the Foundation strives to create a world where people from diverse backgrounds live in harmony through open and meaningful intercultural exchanges. ALF brings together organisations, institutions, policymakers, and other change-makers from all Euro-Med countries to open a dialogue and cooperate. People meet, learn, and collaborate through the Foundation's different projects and initiatives in different fields to empower them to create a chain of positive change that touches more lives and communities. Its action grounds on the two main bodies of the Foundation: Its Civil National Networks with more than 4,500 members and the 42 Members States of its Board of Governors. For further information: <https://www.annalindhfoundation.org/>.

The Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) is an assembly of local and regional representatives from the European Union and its Mediterranean partners. It was set up in 2010 by the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) together with territorial associations allowing elected representatives from the three shores of the Mediterranean Sea to represent their local and regional authorities politically, including towards the EU and the UfM, maintain political dialogue and promote interregional cooperation. ARLEM also represents the local and regional level at UfM summits. ARLEM brings together 80 members and 2 observers from the EU and its Mediterranean partner countries through its annual Assembly. Members are representatives of regions and local bodies and hold a regional or local authority mandate. For further information: <https://cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/international-cooperation/pages/arlem.aspx>

### **3. Criteria for the designation of a city for the title of Mediterranean Capital of Culture & Dialogue 2026 under this Call**

#### **3.1. Eligibility criteria**

All submitted applications must fulfil the following criteria to be considered eligible and to be reviewed by the Advisory Committee:

- the Leading Applicant must be located in a member state of the Union for the Mediterranean<sup>2</sup> regardless of whether they represent cities on the coast or inland;
- the Leading Applicant must be a local or regional authority representing a city, regardless of the size of the city. The designation of local or regional authority in this call refers to public administrations whose responsibility covers only a local part of the territory of a member state.
- Applications may involve the city's surrounding area, but the title is awarded only to the city itself and not the whole area. Therefore, the application shall be made under the name of the city;

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<sup>2</sup> The list of member states of the Union for the Mediterranean is available here: <https://ufmsecretariat.org/who-we-are/member-states/>

- A city can only be awarded the Mediterranean Capital of Culture & Dialogue title once.

### **3.2. Award criteria**

The award criteria for assessing the applications are divided into eight categories corresponding to the provisions listed in the Terms of Reference, available online<sup>3</sup>

- 3.2.1. Programme (partial score: 20/100)
- 3.2.2. Euro-Mediterranean dimension (partial score: 25/100)
- 3.2.3. Content and objectives of the cooperation between the two Mediterranean Capitals of Culture & Dialogue (partial score: 8/100)
- 3.2.4. Civil Society engagement (partial score: 15/100)
- 3.2.5. Governance and Management (partial score: 12/100)
- 3.2.6. Communication (partial score: 5/100)
- 3.2.7. Environmental impact (partial score: 3/100)
- 3.2.8. Financial capacity (partial score: 12/100)

#### **3.2.1. Programme (partial score: 20/100)**

Regarding the programme, the following requirements shall be considered:

- the applicant is not required to create an entirely new cultural programme for the title. Ongoing and planned cultural activities for 2026 can be included in the programme, provided they meet the requirements;
- the applicant is not required to follow a standard programme template or foresee a minimum number of activities. The applicant shall elaborate its programme according to its cultural strategy, governance, budgetary and management capacities;
- the cultural programme shall cover the year of the MCCD 2026 title;
- the programme shall be coherent and consistent, with a cultural and artistic vision and strategy, clear objectives, and a documented ability to deliver;
- the programme shall give a general overview of the structure, including the range and diversity of the activities and main events that will mark 2026;
- the applicant shall offer a programme coordinated by local authorities with the support of a coalition of non-governmental and civil society actors in the conception and implementation phases (e.g., cultural institutions, schools and universities, sports institutions, civil society organisations, and other relevant actors);
- the programme shall be rich and varied enough to involve the general public, specifically young people, the elderly and women, and inform them of ongoing regional projects they could benefit directly from;
- the programme shall strengthen the capacity of the cultural and creative sectors;
- the programme shall promote tangible and intangible cultural heritage;
- the use of innovative digital tools and creative methodologies will be highly valued;
- concerning the salience of the proposed activities, applicants shall refer to the definition of culture set forward in UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), namely that "*culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs*" (UNESCO, 2001);

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<sup>3</sup> [https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/1-FINAL-Capital-of-the-Mediterranean\\_Advisory-Committee\\_TORs.pdf](https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/1-FINAL-Capital-of-the-Mediterranean_Advisory-Committee_TORs.pdf)

- the program shall culminate in a large celebration on the Day of the Mediterranean (28 November 2026).

### **3.2.2. Euro-Mediterranean dimension (partial score: 25/100)**

Regarding the Euro-Mediterranean dimension, the following requirements shall be considered:

- every application must be based on a cultural programme combining local objectives with a solid Euro-Mediterranean vision;
- the programme content shall broaden the understanding and awareness of citizens on the richness and diversity of cultures in the Euro-Mediterranean region, as well as on the commonalities between these cultures, heritage, and history;
- the proposed programme shall include activities promoting cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, greater mutual understanding, and integration across the Euro-Mediterranean region;
- the programme might address regional challenges identified by UfM members, namely<sup>4</sup>:
  - Environmental and climate action.
  - Sustainable and inclusive economic and human development.
  - Social inclusiveness and equality as essential elements in the socioeconomic development of the region.
  - Digital transformation.
- the programme shall feature Euro-Mediterranean artists and participants and encourage international partnerships to attract the interest of a broad Euro-Mediterranean and international public.

### **3.2.3. Content and objectives of the cooperation between the two Mediterranean Capitals of Culture & Dialogue 2026 (partial score: 8/100)**

Regarding the content and objectives of the cooperation between the two Mediterranean Capitals of Culture & Dialogue 2026, the following requirements shall be considered:

- the MCCD 2026 title will be assigned to two cities, one representing the North of the Mediterranean and one representing the South of the Mediterranean;
- each candidate city shall submit one application, which will be evaluated as a stand-alone application;
- the application shall include viable and assessable modalities and content to enable collaboration with a counterpart city, if desired and when possible.

Candidates may but are not obliged to refer to cooperation agreements with a counterpart city established in view of the MCCD application process. While the inclusion of pre-existing cooperation agreements with another city applying in the framework of the MCCD initiative is allowed and encouraged, each application will be assessed separately. In the case of a pre-existing cooperation agreement in the framework of the MCCD initiative, awarding the MCCD designation to one of the two cities will not necessarily imply the counterpart's success. Still, it will be highly valued in the evaluation process.

### **3.2.4. Civil Society engagement (partial score: 15/100)**

Regarding the engagement of Civil Society, the following requirements shall be considered:

- Civil society refers to all forms of social action carried out by individuals or groups who are neither connected to nor managed by state authorities.
- the applicant shall prove the involvement of the local civil society community in the conception and implementation of the programme;

- the applicant is strongly encouraged to create a partnership with at least one civil society organisation member of the ALF National Civil Society Networks<sup>4</sup>;
- the applicant shall develop inclusion measures to ensure activities are accessible to all parts of society, including young people, the elderly, and women. The programme shall provide opportunities for a broad and diverse range of citizens to attend or actively participate in the activities;
- the programme shall involve educational institutions to promote intercultural learning, enhance intercultural competencies and skills, and strengthen intercultural knowledge;
- For-profit stakeholders can be involved, provided they are engaged in public-private-civic partnerships.

### **3.2.5. Governance and management (partial score: 12/100)**

Regarding governance and management, the following requirements shall be considered:

- the applicant must ensure and supply evidence of full political support and a commitment from all local, regional, and national authorities concerned;
- the applicant shall provide detailed information in the application on the governance structure and management to ensure proper delivery and implementation of the programme and to facilitate cooperation with the different partners at the local and international levels;
- the applicant shall ensure and supply evidence of an adequate and viable infrastructure to host the title;
- the applicant shall clarify the internal monitoring, evaluation, and quality control systems they intend to implement.

### **3.2.6. Communication (partial score: 5/100)**

Regarding Communication, the following requirements shall be considered:

- the applicant shall foresee a communication strategy and provide a detailed plan to ensure wide national and regional accessibility, visibility, and dissemination;
- the applicant is encouraged to comply with the UfM and ALF communication and dissemination guidelines.

### **3.2.7. Environmental impact (partial score: 3/100)**

Regarding the environmental impact, the following requirements shall be considered:

- the applicant shall address the environmental impact of the submitted programme, including through the identification of risks and mitigating measures.

### **3.2.8. Financial capacity (partial score: 12/100)**

There is no direct financial support for the Mediterranean Capital of Culture & Dialogue 2026; therefore, applicants must bear all costs related to implementing their programmes.

The Advisory Committee will assist the designated cities in establishing contacts with potential donors for project-based funding where required and invite selected cities to consider mutual support where feasible. Financial support from the private sector is allowed when relevant and respectful of the eligibility and award criteria. The UfM Secretariat will ensure that some of its meetings and events expected in its annual work programme will be organised in the selected MCCD, ideally one per division

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<sup>4</sup> A list of ALF member organisations can be found at the following link:  
<https://www.annalindhoundation.org/networks>

(i.e., six events).

Regarding the financial capacity, the following requirements shall be considered:

- the applicant shall provide information about the annual budget for culture in the city over the last five years before the submission of the application;
- the applicant shall provide information about the operating budget (i.e., funds that are expressly set aside to cover operational expenditure, namely day-to-day spending on services) and capital budget (i.e., funds that are explicitly set aside to cover capital expenditure, namely primary and long-term expenses, e.g., infrastructures) that will be devoted to the implementation of the MCCD 2026;
- the applicant shall provide a breakdown of the operating budget and the capital budget for the MCCD 2026, with details on funds coming from the public sector (city, region, state) and the private sector (sponsorships and public-private partnerships);
- the applicant shall specify the fund-raising or partnership strategy if the private sector's involvement is foreseen.

#### **4. Procedure for the designation of a city for the title of Mediterranean Capital of Culture & Dialogue 2026 under this Call**

##### **4.1. Application process**

###### **4.1.1. Formal criteria of the application**

Candidates are invited to comply with the following formal requirements when drafting their application. Applications which do not follow these requirements will be considered ineligible:

- applicants shall fill in the application form in Annex I, answering all the questions listed;
- the application shall be written in one of the three official languages of the UfM: English, French, and Arabic;
- the application shall not exceed 60 pages in A4 format, size 12, font Times New Roman. Applicants may include illustrations, graphics, or any other visual elements (such as logos), but these are considered included in the page limit;
- the application shall be submitted with the annexes no later than **July 7<sup>th</sup> by 12 hrs CET (GMT + 2)**

###### **4.1.2. Submission of applications**

To reply to this call, eligible candidates wishing to apply for the MCCD 2026 must complete the online registration form on the MCCD website and upload the mandatory annexes:

Annex I: Application Form

Annex II: Declaration of Honour

Annex III: Legal Entity Form

The application procedure is available at the following link:  
<https://ufmsecretariat.org/fr/mediterranean-capitals-of-culture-and-dialogue/>

The Advisory Committee will acknowledge receipt of the application within five working days.

###### **4.1.3. Deadline**

Applications shall be submitted with the annexes no later than **July 7<sup>th</sup> by 12 hrs CET (GMT + 2)**



## **4.2. Evaluation process**

### **4.2.1. Eligibility check**

The Advisory Committee will check the eligibility of the applications. The applications will be rejected if one of the following points applies:

- the applicant does not meet the eligibility criteria set under section 3.1.;
- the application does not meet the formal criteria established under section 4.1.1.

### **4.2.2. Award criteria evaluation**

The Advisory Committee will:

- assess the applications that passed the eligibility check;
- agree on a ranking of pre-selected applications against the scores defined in the score table provided in Annex V;
- and submit the ranking with recommendations to the UfM Senior Officials for review and selection.

UfM Senior officials will proceed with a review and select two cities (one from the North and one from the South) to hold the MCCD 2026 title and notify the Co-Presidency, the ALF Secretariat, and the UfM Secretariat.

The two successful applicants will be notified via email before the formal announcement. The formal announcement of the title assignment will occur at the 9<sup>th</sup> UfM Regional Forum (end of November 2024).

The applicants whose applications were not awarded will also be notified via email before the formal announcement.

## **5. Further information**

Information on the MCCD can be consulted on the initiative's website: <https://ufmsecretariat.org/fr/mediterranean-capitals-of-culture-and-dialogue/>

Candidates interested in the title can obtain further information from the Advisory Committee at the following address: [info@medculturecapital.com](mailto:info@medculturecapital.com)

Requests for clarifications will be taken into consideration up to 15 days before the deadline for submission of the applications. The Advisory Committee, if the clarification is of public interest, will make the reply available on the MCCD website in a specific Q&A section.

The Advisory Committee will also organise online info-sessions on a regular basis. The information regarding the sessions will be available on the MCCD website and social media platforms.

## **6. Application documents**

The following list contains the templates to be downloaded from the MCCD website, filled in and uploaded at the end of the online registration process:

- Annex I: Application Form
- Annex II: Declaration of Honour
- Annex III: Legal Entity Form

## **7. Monitoring and Implementation**

Once the announcement of the two Mediterranean Capitals of Culture & Dialogue is made, the UfM

Secretariat and ALF Secretariat, with the technical support of the Advisory Committee, will establish contact with the awarded candidates' governance teams to accompany the two cities, including:

- fine-tuning the conception of their programmes;
- setting up the programme;
- implementing the programme;
- and applying close monitoring, evaluation, and quality control.

Three meetings will be arranged to follow up on the preparations in 2025 (i.e., a preliminary meeting, a mid-year meeting, and a final preparatory meeting). As required, *ad hoc* meetings can be set before and during the Mediterranean Capitals of Culture & Dialogue 2026.

The Advisory Committee will act as a depository of MCCD good practices to be proactively established, assembled, kept up to date and shared with candidate cities. For such a mechanism to be effective:

- the UfM Secretariat and the ALF Secretariat, with the support of the Advisory Board, shall perform a lesson-learned report after each evaluation, selection and assignment process;
- designated cities shall provide within two months after the completion of their activities a full report, including lessons identified that the Advisory Board shall take into account for future processes.

## **8. Communication**

As stated under 3.2.6., awarded cities will be responsible for ensuring the visibility of the initiatives, their communication, and the dissemination of relevant results. Nonetheless, the UfM Secretariat, the ALF Secretariat and ARLEM will support these efforts through their respective communication teams, including:

- facilitating the development of a joint visual identity for the two MCCDs 2026;
- highlighting cross-cutting communication and dissemination actions;
- strengthening the overall coherence of the communication and dissemination actions of the two designated cities;
- as well as disseminating the initiative's results through their broad audiences (media and stakeholders).

## **9. List of Annexes**

The following list contains the Annexes attached to this Call:

- Annex I. Application Form
- Annex II. Declaration of Honour
- Annex III. Legal Entity Form
- Annex IV. Calendar
- Annex V. Scores table