

Preface by the OECD

The countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region share a wealth of historical and cultural links that have shaped some of the most brilliant pages of human history. Today, this part of the world also shares a series of important challenges that demand urgent policy responses. From climate change to youth employment; from a wise management of the movement of people to an effective response to the impact of the COVID-19; the need to articulate and implement ambitious strategies is evident. For the OECD, the Euro-Mediterranean region is one of strategic relevance, a unique combination of member and partner countries that are linked through a regional policy dialogue facilitated by the Middle East and North Africa-OECD Initiative on Governance and Competitiveness for Development. Regional integration is a central focus of this initiative, an instrument for countries to build inclusive, resilient and sustainable economies in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The OECD works side by side with the Union for the Mediterranean to realise this common purpose within the framework of a long-standing and valued partnership.

This first *Progress Report on Regional Integration in the Union for the Mediterranean* provides rigorous, evidence-based research on integration in the region, building on OECD's methodologies and expertise. It reviews the state of Euro-Mediterranean integration through indicators covering trade, finances, infrastructure for transport and energy, the movement of people, research and higher education. The quantitative and qualitative indicators presented allow readers to gauge the advancements made so far, and the distance yet to cover.

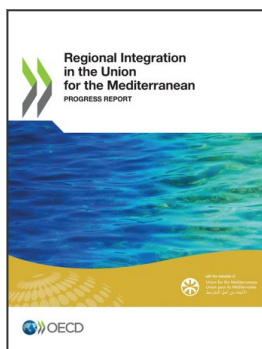
The approach that is adopted to monitor regional integration in the report has distinctive features. *First*, for each of the integration dimensions examined, the notion of integration reflects on a series of considerations on the conditions that should exist in a country to ensure that the benefits from regional integration can be fully realised. *Second*, the study uses a limited number of sound indicators. It applies OECD principles of data quality, which encompass relevance, accuracy, accessibility and interpretability. *Third*, by conducting analysis at a granular, disaggregated level, the study unveils developments in regional integration that have taken place but remain “under the radar” of pattern and trend analysis conducted at the more aggregate level.

The analysis and recommendations outlined in this report are the result of a participative process, including extensive consultations with policy makers and experts across the region. The aim is to contribute to a deeper understanding of regional integration dynamics in the Euro-Mediterranean and, most importantly, to provide actionable tools to ensure that reforms translate into tangible impact. In a few years, a new *Progress Report* will review and assess the effectiveness of the implementation process, and measure the achievements of integration in the critical policy domains covered by the publication. Political commitment to implement reforms will be key to achieve these results. We invite governments and non-governmental stakeholders to join forces and to respond to the challenges and needs of the Mediterranean region, promoting its much needed integration.



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