



## NEXTGEN4MED: Empowering the Next Generation of Water Researchers for the Mediterranean

### KEY MESSAGES

1. Climate change impacts on Mediterranean water resources are present-day realities requiring urgent action.
2. Pressing water challenges in the Mediterranean region require empowered young leaders with interdisciplinary skills and collaborative networks.
3. Early-career researchers face fragmented support systems, limited access to networks, and few pathways towards real-world impact.
4. NEXTGEN4MED unites three PRIMA projects (SALAM-MED, OurMED, NATMed) to create a dynamic, collaborative, youth-driven initiative.
5. The initiative builds bridges between disciplines, generations, and countries to tackle complex water governance challenges.
6. NEXTGEN4MED is powered by a vibrant network spanning universities, research centres, NGOs, SMEs, and stakeholders across the Mediterranean basin, united by a shared vision for a more inclusive, resilient, and innovative approach to water governance in the Mediterranean and beyond.
7. The network's expertise includes water resources management, modelling, machine learning, groundwater governance, participatory action research and nature-based solutions
8. NEXTGEN4MED aims to create a supportive ecosystem for early-career researchers and young professionals working on the sustainability of the Mediterranean region by delivering workshops, training, research collaborations, and proposal development support.
9. The initiative fosters intergenerational dialogue and systems thinking in water governance.
10. Investing in the next generation today creates the foundation for a resilient, inclusive, and water-secure Mediterranean future.

### SUMMARY

The Mediterranean region faces unprecedented water challenges driven by climate change, including rising temperatures, growing water scarcity, ecosystem degradation, and increasing social tensions. These are not distant threats but present-day realities affecting communities across the basin. NEXTGEN4MED (NG4M) is a youth-led initiative aimed at creating an interdisciplinary, multi-cultural network of young researchers focused on sustainable water management in the Mediterranean region and beyond. Born from the collaboration of three PRIMA-funded projects (SALAM-MED, OurMED, NATMed), the initiative has grown to over 60 members. NG4M recognises that addressing the Mediterranean's complex water challenges requires more than advanced science or policy; it requires empowered individuals who can bridge disciplines, navigate complexity across diverse



socio-ecological contexts, and ignite collaborative action across borders.

Water is fundamentally a technical, social, political, and deeply cultural issue. NG4M functions as both a growing community and a catalyst for change, anchored in the Mediterranean context yet globally relevant. The initiative aims to foster intergenerational dialogue in water governance, develop capacity among young professionals and researchers through practical workshops and training, encourage innovation and systems thinking, and connect emerging talent with institutions, networks, and decision-makers. By creating bridges between disciplines, generations, and countries, NG4M aims to ensure the next generation of water researchers for the Mediterranean have the leadership needed to adapt and thrive in an era of accelerating socio-environmental change.

## RESEARCH AND RESULTS

NG4M addresses a critical gap by creating a supportive ecosystem where early-career researchers can grow, contribute, and lead. The initiative is powered by a vibrant alliance spanning universities, research centres, civil society organisations, SMEs, and water stakeholders from across the Mediterranean. This diverse network has gathered 60 members in less than a year, bringing expertise in water resources management, modelling, machine learning, groundwater governance, nature-based solutions, and participatory action research. Since its establishment, the initiative has achieved significant milestones across three key areas. In capacity development, the first workshop was held in May 2025 focusing on combining scientific and local ecological knowledge for co-designing innovative Nature-Based Solutions, followed by a summer school on par-



ticipatory processes and environmental conflict mediation. A 5-week project proposal writing course is currently underway, featuring guest speakers and experts to support NG4M members in developing competitive funding applications. Concerning networking and knowledge exchange, two intergenerational panel sessions have catalysed dialogue: “From Projects to Partnerships: A Mediterranean Dialogue on Land and Water Sustainability” (May 2025) and “Rethinking the futures of Mediterranean land and water” (November 2025), producing a Joint Communication. NG4M was also involved in the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration webinar series, forging partnerships with other youth-led initiatives, and in PRIMA Project Days, engaging with the broader PRIMA community. In research collaboration, NG4M will co-host a scientific session titled “Towards Equitable, Multisectoral Water Management Under a Changing Hydrological Cycle” at the EGU General Assembly 2026, providing members with visibility in the international research community.

This comprehensive approach, combining capacity building, intergenerational dialogue, and research opportunities, demonstrates that empowering young professionals with proper support yields concrete outcomes in knowledge co-creation, collaborative action, and policy engagement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen NEXTGEN4MED and support the next generation of researchers for a sustainable Mediterranean, the following strategic recommendations are proposed:

**1. Funding and institutional support.** Policymakers and funding bodies should establish dedicated mechanisms for youth-led water initiatives that support intergenerational collaboration and long-term capacity development. This includes multi-year funding streams that enable continuity beyond individual project cycles, allowing networks like NG4M to sustain their activities. Universities and research centers should create formal pathways connecting early-career researchers with decision-makers, ensuring research findings translate into policy recommendations.

**2. Formalised partnerships.** Academic institutions, civil society organisations, private sector entities, and government agencies should develop structured partnerships that create sustainable career pathways for young water professionals. The initiative's engagement with PRIMA should be strengthened through formalised mechanisms that give young researchers a consistent voice in Mediterranean water policy discussions and programme design.

**3. Knowledge exchange and capacity development.** The capacity development and research collaboration activities developed by NG4M should be adapted and replicated for other critical environmental challenges facing the Mediterranean. Intergenerational dialogue, exemplified by successful panel sessions, should be institutionalised through annual forums that facilitate knowledge transfer between experienced professionals and emerging leaders.

**4. Network expansion.** The collaborative model established by SALAM-MED, OurMED, and NATMed should inform similar youth-led initiatives addressing other Mediterranean environmental challenges. Digital platforms and communication channels should be enhanced to maintain connectivity across geographical and disciplinary boundaries, particularly for members in underrepresented regions.

**5. Monitoring and learning.** Evaluation frameworks should track the initiative's outcomes, document lessons learned and identify areas for improvement.

These recommendations aim to build a resilient, connected network of early-career professionals equipped to address Mediterranean water challenges through collaborative research, evidence-based policy engagement, and transformative innovations





# Next Gen4MED

Together, we will organize impactful events, drive cutting-edge research, and create opportunities for growth and development. Join us and become part of a dynamic community shaping the future of water in the Mediterranean: the next generation is the key to a sustainable tomorrow!



**SALAM-MED**  
sustainable  
approaches  
to land and  
water  
management  
in mediterranean  
drylands



[www.salam-med.org](http://www.salam-med.org)

**Nucleo Ricerca Desertificazione NRD**  
**Università degli Studi di Sassari**  
V.le Italia 39a - 07100 Sassari - Italia  
Tel.: +39 079 213102/3 / Fax: +39 079 219394  
E-mail: [salam\\_med@uniss.it](mailto:salam_med@uniss.it) / [nrd@uniss.it](mailto:nrd@uniss.it)  
**SALAM-MED Website [www.salam-med.org](http://www.salam-med.org)**
