



ACCESS TO

# NETWORKS, COLLABORATIONS & CONTACTS

## ANALYSIS REPORT ON THE CENTRALISATION OF DIGITAL DATABASES



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POLO UNIVERSITARIO  
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DI FIRENZE



**PROJECT NAME**

RESults Enabling Transitions: mapping, synthesising and mainstreaming sustainable, green and circular business support achievements in the MED region, for replication and policy-making

**ACRONYM**

RESET

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**BUDGET**

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**DISCLAIMER**

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# ABOUT THE PROGRAM

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The 2014-2020 ENI CBC Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme is a multilateral Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) initiative funded by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). The Programme objective is to foster fair, equitable and sustainable economic, social and territorial development, which may advance cross-border integration and valorise participating countries' territories and values. The following 13 countries participate in the Programme: Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Palestine, State Of, Portugal, Spain, and Tunisia. The Managing Authority (MA) is the Autonomous Region of Sardinia (Italy). Official Programme languages are Arabic, English and French. For more information, please visit: [www.enicbcmmed.eu](http://www.enicbcmmed.eu)

The European Union is made up of 27 Member States who have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, during a period of enlargement of 50 years, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.

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# INTRODUCTION

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## ABOUT THE PROJECT

In recognition of the Mediterranean accelerating employment and environmental crises, there are various calls for action to create a sustainable and inclusive economy that 'works for everyone'. As the region thrives towards developing and implementing measures for a sustainable green transition, RESET aims to facilitate economic and social development via supporting the creation of sustainable and green businesses. The project will gather, analyse and synthesise learnings regarding 'what works' within the field of sustainable and green business support, and seeks to upstream this knowledge effectively. It will support local, national and regional stakeholders to make use of this knowledge to create strategies, policies and regulations to stimulate the green economy. RESET targets seven Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, State Of and Tunisia) and will address the whole enabling eco-system - from European Union (EU) projects, local initiatives and policies to national and regional policies and regulations - to capitalise on knowledge related to training, advice, networking services, access to funding and markets, as well as Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) protection, with a focus on women and youth inclusion.

For more information on the RESET project, please visit the link below: <https://www.enicbcmmed.eu/projects/reset>

## ABOUT THE ANALYSIS REPORT - ACCESS TO NETWORKS, COLLABORATIONS AND CONTACT

Within the RESET project, 19 key projects (listed in Annex I) were identified to be included in the capitalisation process, with the aim of supporting their capitalisation and replication in other countries in the Mediterranean region and by diverse stakeholders.

The themes identified during the mapping process of the project were:

1. Knowledge on Circular Economy Practices
2. Knowledge on Access to Finance
3. Access to Networks, Collaborations and Contacts

The main objective of this report is to provide an analysis of the implementation of selected outputs within the 19 identified key projects under the theme of "Access to Networks, Collaborations, and Contacts".

The report is designed to support stakeholders in identifying, capitalising on, and benefiting from existing outputs to enhance their work in relation to the identified theme.

More specifically, the selected outputs cover "Centralisation of Digital Databases" as a sub-theme, and explore several aspects including but not limited to the methodology used, lessons learned, and potential for capitalisation.

For further outputs produced by the identified 19 key projects, please visit the RESET website in the following link: <https://reset-web.onrender.com/#>

## METHODOLOGY

The analysis report relies on qualitative research methods. A desk review and analysis of secondary data were conducted to provide an overview of the selected theme “Access to networks, collaborations and contacts” in the target countries. In addition, relevant case studies within the RESET identified project outputs were selected. The selection criteria was based on feedback received from the project managers (PMs) of the selected identified projects within RESET as well as feedback received from local stakeholders in the seven target countries. For the selected case studies, interviews were conducted with the PMs to gather further and updated information and identify capitalisation needs and opportunities.

This analysis report explores the capitalisation of existing case studies working towards increasing the access to networks, collaborations and contacts for green and circular start-ups in the Mediterranean region. It identifies the key factors that have contributed to the success of these projects, and provides recommendations for how to improve their capitalisation in the future.

**Disclaimer:** The information collected and presented in this analysis report is based on data collected during interviews conducted with the relevant project managers, complemented by data found online.



# CENTRALISATION OF DIGITAL DATABASES IN THE MED REGION

## OVERVIEW ON ACCESS TO NETWORKS, COLLABORATIONS, AND CONTACTS

Access to networks, collaborations, and contacts is an important theme within capitalisation efforts on existing sustainable, green, and circular business support achievements in the Mediterranean (MED) region<sup>1</sup> for several reasons.

Firstly, it can help businesses to identify and access resources that they may not otherwise be aware of. For example, networks can provide businesses with access to funding, technical assistance, and marketing opportunities. Secondly, it can help businesses to learn from the experiences of others. By connecting with other businesses that are working in the same field, businesses can learn about best practices and avoid making the same mistakes. Finally, it can help businesses to build relationships with key stakeholders. By networking with government officials, policymakers, and other decision-makers, businesses can advocate for policies that support sustainable, green, and circular businesses.

In addition to these benefits, access to networks, collaborations, and contacts can also help businesses:



Overall, access to networks, collaborations, and contacts is an essential tool for businesses that are looking to capitalise on existing sustainable, green, and circular business support best practices in the MED region.

## RATIONALE FOR ANALYSING THE CENTRALISATION OF DIGITAL DATABASES

**The current lack of a centralised digital database for stakeholders<sup>2</sup> to access networks, collaborations and contacts at the MED regional level is hindering the full potential for capitalising on existing sustainable, green, and circular business practices.**

There are currently several different organisations and digital networks that provide support to sustainable, circular and green businesses in the MED region through online platforms, however, they are scattered and often difficult to find. This makes it rather complex for businesses to identify the resources they need, hindering collaboration between them. In addition, there is a lack of one centralised digital database that showcases the progress of sustainable businesses in the MED region. This renders it difficult to measure the social, economic, and environmental impact of these businesses and to identify best practices. The issues created by the lack of a centralised digital database are summarised in the schematic below.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In this analysis report, the "MED region" refers to the following countries: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, State Of and Tunisia.

<sup>2</sup> Sustainable, green and circular businesses, Financing Organisations, BSOs, Governmental Organisations etc.

<sup>3</sup> Abu-Ghazaleh, S., & Alsharif, M. (2017). The role of networks in supporting sustainable entrepreneurship in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 142(2), 349-363.

<sup>4</sup> Díaz-Martínez, D., & Rueda-Cantucho, J. (2019). The impact of networks on the performance of sustainable businesses: Evidence from the Spanish manufacturing industry. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 228, 1273-1281.

<sup>5</sup> Kemp, R., & Pearson, P. (2007). The effectiveness of policy instruments for promoting sustainable innovation. *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 17(3), 185-208.

#### DIFFICULTY FOR BUSINESSES TO FIND THE RESOURCES THEY NEED

There are a number of different organizations and digital networking platforms that provide support such as knowledge sharing, networking and access to finance for sustainable businesses, but they are often scattered and difficult to find. A centralised database would make it easier for businesses across the Med region to find the resources they need, and it would also help to ensure that businesses are aware of all the options available to them. There is an evident need for a go-to platform that would provide a clear destination for sustainable businesses, green entrepreneurs, and support organizations.

#### DIFFICULTY FOR BUSINESSES TO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER'S JOURNEY

Businesses that are working on similar projects or sectors could benefit from learning from each other's journey. A centralised database would make it easier for businesses to find each other and share experiences i.e., a company just starting its journey could get in contact with a peer that is further along in its journey in a different country in the Med region and through discussion gain valuable lessons to make their journey simpler.

#### DIFFICULTY FOR BUSINESSES TO ADVOCATE FOR POLICIES THAT SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE BUSINESSES

Businesses need to be able to work together to have a strong voice in policymaking. A centralised database would make it easier for businesses in the same country to connect with each other and to work together to advocate for policies that support sustainable businesses. Additionally, networking with businesses outside of their countries with countries that have more sustainability enabling legislative environments could provide useful benchmarking information regarding best legislative practices.

## CHALLENGES TO THE CREATION OF A CENTRALISED DIGITAL DATABASE

The creation of a centralised digital database to support sustainable practices and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Mediterranean region faces several challenges.

Limited resources both human and financial make it challenging to host such a platform across the countries within the scope of RESET. The fragmentation across the region due to different political, economic, and legal systems renders it difficult to establish a unified approach towards a centralised digital database. Additionally, the current lack of data standardisation, makes it even more tough to integrate data from various countries and sources, resulting in data inconsistencies that can negatively impact sustainability-related decision-making<sup>6</sup>. Stakeholders in the region may also resist change due to concerns over data privacy, security, or control, leading to hesitancy in adopting a centralised digital database for sustainability initiatives. However, obstacles are not uniform and consistent across the region as some are more noticeable in some countries than others.

In Algeria and Tunisia - the lack of digital infrastructure and low internet penetration is a significant challenge to participating in a centralised digital database for sustainable practices. The limited availability of skilled labour, as well as the lack of political will, is another obstacle. The implementation of standardised data management systems is essential, but there are challenges in adopting uniform standards across different sectors and industries<sup>7</sup>.

In Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt, the political instability and lack of resources also pose significant bottlenecks to the centralisation of digital databases. The fragmentation of the region's political, economic, and legal systems makes it difficult to establish a unified approach towards a centralised database. There is also a lack of awareness about the benefits of digital technologies in the sustainability sector, which leads to a lack of investment in such initiatives. Inadequate digital literacy and data privacy concerns are also significant challenges in these regions<sup>8</sup>.

In Israel, there are concerns about data privacy and security, which could lead to hesitancy in participating in a centralised digital database for sustainability initiatives. Additionally, the lack of standardisation in data management systems could lead to data inconsistencies that could impact sustainability decision-making. Political conflicts between Israel and its neighbouring countries also create challenges in establishing a unified database<sup>9</sup>.

Overall, the challenges of creating a centralised digital database for sustainable practices in the Mediterranean region vary significantly depending on the country. The region's fragmentation, lack of resources, inadequate digital literacy, and data privacy concerns are common challenges that need to be addressed through collaboration among governments, businesses, and other relevant actors to ensure that the creation of a centralised digital database can support sustainability practices.

<sup>6</sup> Regional Action and Monitoring of the 2030 Agenda in the Mediterranean. (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://www.sdsn-mediterranean.unisi.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2020/11/MED\\_SDG2020-def\\_compressed.pdf](https://www.sdsn-mediterranean.unisi.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2020/11/MED_SDG2020-def_compressed.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Social and green economies in the Mena region: through sustainability, public policies and SDGs. Gianluca Pastorelli, Anastasia Costantini, Samuel Barco Serrano. CIRIEC No. 2022/03.

<sup>8</sup> Capacity Development for Changing Mindsets in the Arab Region - Governance Institutes Forum for Training in the Middle East and North Africa (GIFT-MENA). (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://unpan.un.org/sites/unpan.un.org/files/Changing%20mindsets%20report%20-%20chapter12.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Environmental Insecurity in the Middle East." E-International Relations, 15 May 2019, <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/05/15/environmental-insecurity-in-the-middle-east/>



# CAPITALISATION OPPORTUNITIES IN THE MED REGION

## ANALYSIS OF EXISTING OUTPUTS

Several project outputs mapped within RESET work towards improving access to networks, collaborations, and contacts through the development of digital databases.

From the 19 key projects identified, the below project outputs have been selected as case studies to be analysed for this sub-theme:

1. GRASPINNO Forum
2. GRASPINNO Database for SMEs and Businesses
3. Businessmed Country Desk (BCD) Platform



## CASE STUDY 1: GRASPINNO FORUM



### OUTPUT SUMMARY

GRASPINNO Forum is a transnational Mediterranean forum connecting different stakeholders allowing them to share knowledge, join panels, connect, and more.



### WHO IS IT FOR

Regional Authorities  
National Authorities  
National Policy makers and Regulators  
Local Authorities  
Networks  
Support Programs  
BSOs  
Start-ups  
Entrepreneurs  
NGOs



### WHAT ISSUE DOES THIS OUTPUT SOLVE?

This output can be a valuable tool for information sharing, networking, problem-solving, advocacy, and capacity building. It provides a platform for individuals and organisations to connect and collaborate, and can help to build stronger communities and advance common goals.

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM IMPLEMENTATION

### STRONG POINTS

- Considered as user friendly
- Described as a simple platform, where users rated it as non-complicated
- Enables collaboration and discussions for problem-solving
- Considered as a useful tool for knowledge sharing, networking, advocacy, and capacity building

### CHALLENGES/ ASPECTS TO IMPROVE

- Inactivity of participants: Forum participants are not very active, most activity is found in social media where people are mostly engaged

### HOW CAN IT BE CAPITALISED FOR THE GREATER REGION?

A link to this Forum could be plugged into the websites of the Chambers of Commerce, the Local or Regional Authorities and any other main stakeholder site (such as SESOs websites and platforms), hence increasing the number and diversity of the Forum's users. The creation of a software application version of the Forum might also be a beneficial idea considering the low level of interaction existing on the online platform. For this Forum to be more efficient, there also needs to be support from the local government, advocating for participation so that most stakeholders are involved.

## CASE STUDY 2: GRASPINNO DATABASE FOR SMEs AND BUSINESSES



### OUTPUT SUMMARY

The database acts as a tool to facilitate better communication between green product and service providers and public procurers, with the ultimate goal of promoting sustainability and green procurement.



### WHO IS IT FOR

National Authorities  
Local Authorities  
Start-ups  
Entrepreneurs



### WHAT ISSUE DOES THIS OUTPUT SOLVE?

The database helps minimise mismatching between public funding and procurement, based on specific criteria and the available green products and services available in the market. Through the database, both product and service providers along with public procurers can identify what is available for them currently in the market and more informed green public tenders can be designed.

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM IMPLEMENTATION

### STRONG POINTS

- Considered as a user-friendly database with easy navigation features
- Helps participating stakeholders gain a deeper understanding of key market players
- Provides physical capacity building activities e.g., trainings for partners, public authorities and SMEs

### CHALLENGES/ ASPECTS TO IMPROVE

- Limited features: Limited availability of features in the existing database e.g., tools, sectors etc. (cooling and heating systems are the most dominant sectors now)
- Reluctancy of SMEs: SMEs are reluctant to engage in such tools because of the perception that public procurement is a difficult and long process
- Absence of key players: Key players such as ministries and Business Support Organizations (BSOs) are currently absent from the database
- Limited influence on political will behind governmental tenders
- Difficulty maintaining the database information updated

### HOW CAN IT BE CAPITALISED FOR THE GREATER REGION?

There is a lot of potential to increase appeal and spread awareness of the existence and functionality of this database. Micro, Small & Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) need to be engaged and motivated to participate in the database by increasing their knowledge on how public procurement works. The functionality and matching element of the database should also be advocated towards ministries that are not part of it yet as well as BSOs advising MSMEs who can also act as database 'influencers' and get more participants on board. Incentives could be developed for MSMEs to encourage them to get on board while assistance in tackling procurement process derived issues through expert interventions or collaborations could further enhance capitalisation.

## CASE STUDY 3: BUSINESSMED COUNTRY DESK (BCD) PLATFORM



### OUTPUT SUMMARY

The EBSOMED digital platform has been developed with four main objectives: 1) Knowledge sharing through studies on various economic sectors in different countries, 2) Business matchmaking (open directory), 3) EUROMED business tool for events (Business-to-business (B2B) meetings online and physical) and, 4) Online e-learning module to capitalise on courses from EBSOMED



### WHO IS IT FOR

BSOs  
Start-ups  
Entrepreneurs  
Financial Institutions  
Researchers



### WHAT ISSUE DOES THIS OUTPUT SOLVE?

The program is working to be a multilateral cooperation platform, structured to bring together members of different backgrounds and economic specificities working towards a common goal. Through its four core objectives, it aims to provide participants with access to information as well as access to contacts.

### LESSONS LEARNED FROM IMPLEMENTATION

#### STRONG POINTS

- Adapts to identified bottlenecks e.g. development of e-learns, how to tutorials and videos and brochure dissemination to appeal to greater audiences
- Maintains continuous contact with BUSSINESSMED to keep base and reflect the interest of its members
- Established several feedback mechanisms within the tools for different levels of stakeholders e.g. surveys, evaluation form distribution after B2B event completion, Monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) platform inhouse etc.

#### CHALLENGES/ ASPECTS TO IMPROVE

- Long time frame of the technical aspects of the database's development
- Preference towards physical events rather than digital
- Lack of hybrid interaction options
- Insufficient funds to keep updating the database
- Difficulty with increasing the number of registrations
- Difficulty maintaining engagement with the tool long term
- Difficulty in keeping the database constantly updated

#### HOW CAN IT BE CAPITALISED FOR THE GREAT-ER REGION?

This tool still maintains the potential to fully adapt to the strategies of BusinessMed. Additionally, it would be interesting if a long-term sustainability study were to be undertaken taking into account financial and institutional levels as well as potential synergies that can take place between this tool and similar initiatives.

The promotion of this tool via participating actors' websites is also important for increasing the tool's reach.

## CAPITALISATION OPPORTUNITIES ENABLING THE CREATION OF A CENTRALISED DIGITAL DATABASE

Based on the three case studies analysed within the context of this report, the following three topics were identified for future capitalisation opportunities ultimately interested in the creation/hosting of a centralised digital database for enabling access to networks, collaborations and contacts for green and circular businesses in the Med region. For a centralised digital database to have chances of survival the below need to be safeguarded first based on the case study analysis in the previous section.



IMPROVEMENT OF THE OVERALL OPERATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PLATFORMS



PROMOTION OF THE EXISTING DIGITAL DATABASES THROUGH CRITICAL STAKEHOLDERS



LONG TERM PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT

### IMPROVEMENT OF THE OVERALL OPERATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY OF THE DATABASES

Safeguarding the operational sustainability of digital databases is critical for their future survival. One of the main issues identified is the importance of maintaining up-to-date information on digital databases in order to ensure that businesses have access to the most accurate and relevant information. This includes information on funding opportunities, technical assistance, and marketing resources. By maintaining up-to-date information, digital databases can help businesses to save time and finances, and to make better business decisions.

There are a number of ways to maintain up-to-date information on digital databases. One way is to have a dedicated team of people who are responsible for updating the database on a regular basis. Another way is to use automated tools and AI to help keep the database up-to-date. Social media, search optimisation and AI integration are key for digital databases to keep up with their users' needs in an efficient and adaptive way.

The below are examples of ways to maintain up-to-date information on digital databases:

**Have a dedicated team of people who are responsible for updating the database on a regular basis.**

This team should be responsible for collecting new information, verifying its accuracy, and adding it to the database.

**Use automated tools that can help to keep the database up-to-date. There are a number of automated tools that can help to keep databases up-to-date.** These tools can be used to collect new information from a variety of sources, verify its accuracy, and add it to the database.

**Encourage users to submit updates.** Users of the database can be encouraged to submit updates to the database. This can be done by providing them with a simple way to submit updates, and by rewarding them for submitting updates.

**Use social media to promote the database. Social media can be used to promote the database** and to encourage users to submit updates. This can be done by creating social media accounts for the database, and by sharing updates about the database on social media.

European Union (EU) funding for the same project output or through complementary projects with new funding opportunities can also be used to maintain up-to-date information on digital databases. This funding can be used to hire a dedicated team of people to update the database, to purchase automated tools, and to promote the database.

## PROMOTION OF AVAILABLE DIGITAL DATABASES THROUGH CRITICAL STAKEHOLDERS SUCH AS BSOS AND GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES

Promotion of available digital databases through critical stakeholders such as BSOs and government ministries is crucial in order to increase awareness of their existence and to encourage businesses to use them. This can be done through a variety of channels, such as workshops, webinars, and social media. By promoting digital databases, critical stakeholders can help businesses to access the resources they need to succeed. For this to be successful, it is a prerequisite that the concerned stakeholders already have an efficient coordination mechanism in place.

### Specific ways to promote digital databases through critical stakeholders are the following:

- Insert a link to the database on the website of the key stakeholders in the ecosystem. This will make the database more visible to businesses and other stakeholders who visit the website.
- Promote the database through the social media channels of the critical stakeholders. This will reach a wider audience and raise awareness of the database.
- Host workshops and webinars to educate businesses about the database and its usage. This will help businesses to understand the benefits of using the database and to learn how to use it effectively.
- Partner with other organisations that can help to promote the database. This could include other government agencies, business associations, or non-profit organisations.

## LONG TERM PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT

In order to ensure that businesses continue to use digital databases for green and circular businesses and other ecosystem actors, it is important to maintain long-term participant engagement. This can be done by making the value of being part of the database clear to participants and engaging them in different ways.

One way to do this is to provide businesses with regular updates on the database. This will help to keep businesses informed about the latest information and resources that are available to them, such as funding opportunities, technical assistance, and marketing resources. Members can also be engaged through events or workshops that are designed to maximise the fulfilment of members and their combined goals. This could be achieved through internal business hacks, product launch promotion events allowing networking between members etc. Another way to engage businesses is to offer incentives for participation. This could include discounts on products or services, or access to exclusive content. Finally, it is important to make the database easy to use. This will help businesses to find the information they need quickly and easily, such as information about potential partners, collaborators, and contacts.

In addition to the above, it is also important to have established feedback mechanisms. This will help to identify areas of improvement or bugs to mitigate, as well as discover opportunities. For example, the BUSINESSMED Country Desk Platform created the idea for the e-learnings from its feedback process.

By following these steps, businesses can be made aware of the resources that are available to them and can be encouraged to use these resources to succeed.

# CONCLUSION

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Capitalising on the existing outputs and other similar RESET identified outputs working towards the creation of a centralised digital database for the purposes of matchmaking, networking, knowledge sharing and many other functions is extremely important for accelerating the growth of green and circular businesses in the MED region. Despite the numerous challenges involved with the creation of a centralised digital database, the need for such a tool is clearly understood by stakeholders. Based on the case studies analysed, there are already many areas the chosen outputs have made significant progress, on such as the navigation of the existing databases, their user-friendliness and the creation of feedback mechanisms. There are also evident areas of improvement which are well understood and have been identified by the current project teams but are difficult to be addressed due to the limited funding per output.

Due to the specificities of the region and the limited availability of human and financial capital, a regional centralised database drawing information from existing national digital databases offering access to networks, contacts and collaborations can yield great benefits for the countries within scope. This is because, through the centralised digital database, businesses will now have access to a much larger pool of resources, some of which come at no cost to them such as experience sharing and lessons learned from peers in different countries. For this endeavour to be successful however, the current issues faced by the existing national digital databases need to be optimised prior to integrating them. Otherwise, information provided on a centralised digital database will run the risk of not being up-to-date and accurate, failing to reach its potential beneficiaries, or keeping them engaged and active.

# ANNEX I - LIST OF THE 19 KEY PROJECTS TO BE CAPITALISED ON WITHIN RESET <sup>18</sup>



GIMED



IPMED



MEDSt@rts



U-SOLVE



EBSOMED



STAND Up!



HELIOS



INVESTMED



SIRCLES

<sup>18</sup> Readers can click on the project logos to visit the projects' websites.





# RESET

