



PRESS RELEASE

NEX-LABS CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT OF CROSS-BORDER INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP LOOKS TO THE FUTURE: TWO OPEN LIVING LABS ARE NOW ESTABLISHED, AS WELL AS A JOINT ACTION PLAN TO ENSURE A SUSTAINABLE WATER-FOOD-ENERGY ECOSYSTEM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN.

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Over the past three years, the [NEX-LABS project](#) launched a vast array of opportunities to support the growth of innovation and entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean region, specifically targeting the sustainability of our Water, Energy, and Food ecosystem. The project, which is funded by the European Union under the ENI CBC MED program, has come to its conclusion and has achieved the envisioned cross-border cooperation between public and private sectors and an array of recommendations to ensure our common future.

Governments, research institutions, businesses, startups, incubators, accelerators have come together from Italy, Lebanon, Tunisia, Cyprus, Spain, Egypt, and Jordan and created a network of innovation labs to provide support, training, and mentorship to young entrepreneurs and co-create and assess new products, services, or approaches in a real-world context. These labs have enabled the exchange of knowledge, expertise, and best practices between startups and established business capacity and relationships which are fundamental ingredients to build a Mediterranean Region which is resilient and has agency on its growth, development, competitiveness, and sustainability.

The Mediterranean region is very diverse yet facing several common challenges such as reduced water and energy efficiency, looking into our future there will also be limited food production. The lack of infrastructure, technology, and human capital will impact our economy and our lives, whether rural or urban. Governments have all outlined a WEF sustainable development agenda aiming to accelerate innovation acquisition by research and development support and developing internal skills or financial resources to innovate small medium enterprises (SMEs), so not only through financial incentives, but also inclusive structural solutions.

Working with a stakeholders' systems approach, the Mediterranean Partner Countries (MPCs) aware of external and internal country-specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It was necessary for NEX-LABS MPCs to identify and publish [WEF best practices](#) settling the landscape for excellence to emerge.



Another major achievement of NEX-LABS projects is that two cross border Nexus Driven Open Living Labs (NDOLLS) were established, one with the collaboration of iPark in Jordan called AQABA Water-Energy-Food Open Living Lab, and another with Berytech in Lebanon called NEX-LABS NEXUS Driven Open Living Lab. The NDOLL in Lebanon is located at Saint Joseph University Sciences & Technology Campus Dekwaneh in Beirut, while the NDOLL in Jordan is hosted at iPARK's Aqaba incubator.

The NDOLLS are meant for Entrepreneurs, Innovators, Researchers, Startups and SMEs, Students, Industry and private sector representatives, Academia and Research representatives, Citizens, NGOs. NDOLLS participants did and shall continue, provided further funding will be found, to:

- Find direct support, advice, network to develop and launch innovative products/services.
- Collaborate and build synergies with WEF-NEXUS Stakeholders working across disciplines.
- Contribute to the development of innovative and sustainable solutions to solve challenges faced in Jordan, Lebanon, and MENA Region.
- Empower the WEF-NEXUS local ecosystem by generating value throughout the innovation development process.

The NDOLLS (Nexus Driven Open Living Labs) created with this project have helped to research evidence-based policy recommendations and to establish linkages between the various innovation players, as well as to facilitate idea generation, tailored training and coaching and summer schools. As a result, technological transfer, commercialization of research results and replication of experiences, is underway and useful for micro and small enterprises to grow in scope and scale.

Moreover, the **international consortium** has delivered on its capacity and growth promise:

- 40 hours tailor WEF innovation and entrepreneurship training to PA, SMEs, TTOs;
- A WEF nexus idea generation programme to 20 participants.
- A 5 day Med WEF Summer School to turn entrepreneurs into innovators.
- 3 WEF Nexus Innovation weeks with over 2300 participants and 160 side meetings.
- 10 WEF nexus conferences engaging 58 experts and 1000 participants.
- 70 vouchers and grants, amounting to an investment of €470,000, have been allocated for testing, innovation, incubation, or acceleration of Water-Energy-Food (WEF) solutions. Out of these, 46 beneficiaries of these vouchers were specifically from Lebanese and Jordanian researchers, innovators, entrepreneurs, and startups, covering aspects of commercialization, testing, innovation, incubation, and acceleration. Additionally, 28 participants across Italy, Egypt, Spain, and Cyprus were selected to benefit from innovation vouchers.
- 2 R2B2R missions, one to Tuscany (IT) and another to Catalonia (ES), engaging 20



individuals from southern Mediterranean countries, developing + 20 bilateral meetings and + 200 opportunities for collaboration, as a seeding approach that nurtures an ecosystem of WEF nexus specialists.

Within its defined scope NEX-LABS has delivered a **Nexus Joint Action Plan (NJAP)** which is a policy-oriented outcome that drives management focus from inputs to outputs and boosts the achievements and results of the NDOLLS. It is initiated to address future WEF nexus challenges in the European Union Mediterranean Partnership Countries (EU-MPCs) through design thinking dynamics. The NJAP serves as a roadmap that facilitates countries in developing WEF oriented NDOLLS and provides them support to overcome barriers during the implementation process.

As outlined in the Nexus Joint Action Plan (NJAP), NEX-LABS project Mediterranean partner countries (MPCs) and Nexus National Task Force groups (NTFGs), **highlight 8 priorities** needing to be addressed through the NDOLL¹ approach. Each priority has been divided in 4 categories: recommendation, action, outcomes, associated KPIs. The 8 priorities can be summarized as follows:

1. Reinforce cross-regional public-private-partnerships (PPP) and technology alliances.
2. Pursue cluster cooperation and agreements to share resources and best practices.
3. Create policies and practices to retain talents and technological transfer to industry.
4. Ensure continuity of current NDOLLS through improved allocation of EU funds, creation of national contact points, as well as effective communication of outputs and outcomes.
5. Further academic collaboration, frameworks, and policies for Intellectual Property.
6. Warrant Technology Transfer accessibility to a wide WEF impacted community.
7. Coordinate the strategic WEF nexus Mediterranean ecosystem, engaging younger generations to participate in national and sectoral strategies, as well as smart specialization.

All the above are important milestones towards the creation of a **sustainable ecosystem** in the **water, energy, and food nexus**. The results of the NEX-LABS project were celebrated in the final conference held in Aqaba, Jordan from 1 to 2 November 2023.

Enhancing cooperation for innovation and entrepreneurship across the Mediterranean region is what the project aimed to perform and is looking to ongoing efforts to research, build and transfer best practices, solutions, and agency on all impacted living livelihoods across the globe.

For more information on how to join the NDOLLS you can contact Seema Azzam s.azzam@iPARK.jo for the NDOLL in Jordan and Krystal Khalil krystal.khalil@berlytech.org for the NDOLL in Lebanon.

¹ NDOLL a networking space which integrates scientific industry government and social actors into an interactive innovation process that matches supply and demand.



ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

NEX-LABS project includes a partnership of 11 institutions (Autonomous University of Barcelona (ES), Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Center (TN), Royal Scientific Society-Aqaba Liaison Center (JO), Berytech Foundation (LB), INNOLABS SRL (IT), Academy of Scientific Research and Technology (EG), American University of Beirut (LB), Centre for promotional services to enterprises - Special Agency of Cagliari Chamber of Commerce (IT), Net7 Srl (IT), C.I.P Citizens In Power (CY), The Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development /Princess Basma Community Development Centre Aqaba (JO)) from 7 different countries across the Mediterranean. With reference B_A2.1._0124, NEX-LABS project is funded by the EU under the ENI CBC Med Programme. With a total budget of €3.450.984,97, the project has received a contribution of € 3.105.866,47 (90%).

ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

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, Portugal, Spain, 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.enicbcmed.eu

Explore the NEX-LABS Agora: the digital hub to be kept informed about the Water, Energy and Food news and updates in the Mediterranean <https://nexlabsagora.eu/>

For more information on the ENI CBC MED NEX-LABS project, please visit <https://www.enicbcmed.eu/projects/nex-labs>

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