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**COVER NOTE**

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From: Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director

date of receipt: 17 March 2026

To: Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union

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Subject: COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION Interim Evaluation of the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA)

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Delegations will find attached document SWD(2026) 92 final.

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Brussels, 17.3.2026  
SWD(2026) 92 final

**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**  
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION**

**Interim Evaluation of the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the  
Mediterranean Area (PRIMA)**

{SWD(2026) 91 final}

## Context

PRIMA is a public-public European partnership between the European Union and 20 Participating States, established under Article 185 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and launched in 2017. Currently, 20 countries participate in PRIMA: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain (EU); Israel, Tunisia and Türkiye (associated to Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe); and Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco (non-associated).

PRIMA supports collaborative research by international consortia with a focus on water, agriculture and agro-food systems, as well as the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems (WEFE) Nexus. Its Implementing Structure (PRIMA-IS) implements activities mainly in the form of calls for proposals in three sections:

- Section 1: organised by PRIMA and funded exclusively by Horizon 2020 and, since 2025, by Horizon Europe.
- Section 2: organised by PRIMA but funded by Participating States (PRIMA-PS).
- Section 3: organised and funded by Participating States.

The Mediterranean region is, according to the IPCC, “*a hotspot for highly interconnected climate risks*”. Its main economic sectors are “*highly vulnerable to climatic hazards*”; “*climate change threatens water availability, reducing river low flows (...), reducing hydropower capacity*”, and affecting agricultural yields in a context of expansion of desertification. R&I investments differ significantly between PRIMA Participating States (PRIMA-PS).

### PRIMA: Current state of Play

Between 2018 and 2024, 269 projects were funded under Sections 1 and 2 of PRIMA, with 2,591 beneficiaries.

Until end 2024, the EU allocated EUR 202.3 million to selected projects, EUR 9.64 million to administrative expenses, and EUR 1.88 million to operational costs for monitoring and evaluation. PRIMA-PS allocated EUR 456.8 million to projects:

- Section 2: In-cash, EUR 199.3 million, and in-kind, EUR 4.42 million.
- Section 3: EUR 256.3 million for Participating States Initiated Activities (PSIAs) and EUR 1.2 million for “other activities”. In-kind contributions amounted EUR 115.7 million (44.9%).

Organisations from EU Member States received 70.4% of the total budget under Sections 1 and 2. The main beneficiaries of the funding are Italy, Spain, Greece and Germany, followed by Morocco, Tunisia, Türkiye and Egypt. Participation data show that PRIMA mainly has an academic orientation, with public bodies and business playing only a “supportive role”. Business participation is much lower than in other relevant EU R&I instruments, including for SMEs.

### Evaluation findings

#### Effectiveness

PRIMA projects have produced 1,119 scientific publications. Publications by project are lower than under Horizon 2020 and its Societal Challenge 2 (Horizon 2020-SC2), with the same being true for average citations. The causes are the limited geographical coverage of PRIMA, the uneven resources dedicated to R&I in the different PRIMA-PS, and the smaller funding of PRIMA projects. PRIMA projects delivered eight patent applications.

Currently, projects do not systematically assess their innovation activities from the economic and financial point of view (e.g. costs and benefits compared with similar solutions, possible private investments). This limits the opportunity to exploit their innovation in the market or internally to the firm. Projects do not systematically report on their demonstrations' impacts, which are likely to have positive impacts at local level. It is therefore difficult to assess and quantify to what extent PRIMA projects help to directly address water and agro-food issues locally, and their social impact. These issues are common in EU-funded R&I instruments. PRIMA projects start at TRL 3 and jump 2-3 TRLs, which is comparable with the ongoing data of Horizon Europe.

### Efficiency

PRIMA is meeting most of its administrative targets, with administrative costs below the 6% ceiling set by the Basic Act. Stakeholders are pleased with the administrative procedures and resources required for proposal preparation and project management. However, Section 2 highlights inefficiencies due to diverse national procedures, impacting research execution and beneficiary capabilities. Measures to address this issue have been outlined but lacked sufficient time for full implementation and impact. Although time-related indicators (time to sign, time to grant, etc.) align with Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe standards, Section 2 performs less well in comparison to Section 1. Despite low success rates, particularly in Section 1, participation remains high, indicating sustained attractiveness. Although PRIMA produces fewer publications and IPR per project than other EU-funded programmes, its efficiency relative to funding is higher than under Horizon 2020-SC2 and comparable to Horizon 2020 overall.

### Coherence

PRIMA was designed to align with emerging international and EU policy priorities, such as the Agenda 2030, the Paris Agreement or the European Green Deal. It supports several EU strategies, including the Climate Adaptation Strategy and the Farm to Fork Strategy, maintaining consistency with current political agendas (e.g. Water Resilience Strategy, Mediterranean Pact). Operationally, PRIMA shares key goals with Horizon Europe, particularly with the EU Missions focused on ocean and waters, climate adaptation, and soil health. Efforts to create synergies with other funding mechanisms are underway to avoid missed opportunities to enhance project efficiency and impact. The lack of focus on deployment, in line with the Basic Act, makes it difficult to fully align with the current Commission's focus on competitiveness.

## EU added-value

PRIMA is built on collaboration among EU and non-EU Member States, emphasising co-creation, co-funding, and co-decision, based on the “equal footing principle” that promotes a more balanced relationship than traditional North-South cooperation logic. Although EU Member States receive most of the funding, participation by non-EU countries is much higher than in Horizon 2020-Societal Challenge 2 and Horizon Europe- Cluster 6. Data suggests that participation in PRIMA enhances the capabilities of non-EU PRIMA-PS to engage with Horizon Europe.

PRIMA attracts additional funding from Participating States, meeting legal obligations for funding matching between EU and PRIMA-PS. However, this is driven by Section 3 activities – which are not necessarily collaborative R&I actions. The financial leverage of PRIMA is 1.53, higher than the leverage of all institutionalised partnerships under Horizon Europe (1.44).

Countries like Italy, Spain, Tunisia, France and Morocco are the most central in network connections and participation. In fact, EU Member States that are central in PRIMA played key roles in EU R&I funding instruments with similar objectives; however, a notable achievement of PRIMA is that some Third Countries have also become central players. This is a very positive outcome and is aligned with PRIMA’s goals, but it may limit newcomers’ involvement.

## Relevance

Water issues are increasingly critical in the Mediterranean and broader European regions, highlighting the relevance of PRIMA's initiatives. Stakeholders agree that PRIMA effectively addresses these challenges through regional collaboration while adapting to shifting priorities and external shocks. However, emerging needs, such as digitalisation, and low adoption among farmers highlight gaps in PRIMA’s current scope, with stakeholders’ calling for more affordable solutions and synergies with other Horizon Europe projects.

Concerns persist over whether PRIMA's funding matches its ambitious goals. Although PRIMA aligns with the European Green Deal and the Commission’s priorities, its limited scale restricts its ability from enacting the widespread changes needed to address water issues. Nevertheless, PRIMA projects have positive impacts at local level, through actions on the ground, for instance providing clean water or sanitation to local populations in rural areas. Stakeholders emphasise that PRIMA delivers concrete, community-based solutions to adapt to climate change impacts and address water issues, but it has not been possible to identify or measure such impacts systematically. More focus and better follow-up of such local impacts, including social ones, would help to underpin PRIMA’s relevance.

PRIMA serves as a model for science diplomacy, fostering trust and cooperation in a geopolitically tense region.

## **Conclusions**

A strength of PRIMA’s is, paradoxically, its relatively small size. PRIMA projects cannot tackle the main drivers of water scarcity, water stress and pollution in the Mediterranean region as a

whole, i.e. climate change, demographic trends, urbanisation and unsustainable consumption and production patterns. However, they can, through demonstration sites and pilots on the ground, help to improve local peoples' living conditions. Some identified projects show that this is possible, but further improvements to the monitoring of these solutions and their impacts would be beneficial. PRIMA's current focus, and that of its projects, is mainly academic.

This evaluation shows that, while there is room for improvement, PRIMA is a positive example: it respects its targets, delivers results similarly to Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, and contributes to science and water diplomacy in the region.