



START CUP COMPETITION 2026

“Entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean”

Turin, Italy - 23-24 November, 2026

1. Background and Rationale

The UNIMED SubNetwork on Employability is launching a call for applications for participation in **the 7th edition of the Start Cup Competition – “Entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean”**.

The “Start Cup Competition – Entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean” is a contest of entrepreneurial ideas developed by university students enrolled in one of the universities around the Mediterranean basin. This competition aims to encourage participating teams from universities on both shores of the Mediterranean to present innovative ideas in the field of entrepreneurship.

The initiative was launched in **2018** in the framework of the [ERASMUS+ Capacity Building project RESUME](#) and is part of a series of initiatives organised by the UNIMED SubNetwork on Employability, whose objective is to promote cooperation between UNIMED members on the theme of entrepreneurship and employability and to strengthen economic and social cohesion by promoting, on the one hand, cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation, and on the other hand, sustainable local development.

The Start Cup Competition is a joint initiative by **UNIMED** and the **Lebanese University**, coordinator of the UNIMED SubNetwork on Employability, with the collaboration of **the European Training Foundation (ETF)** and of the **Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie – Moyen Orient (AUF)**.

UNIMED organise this 7th edition jointly with the [Lebanese University \(LU\)](#), the **Center for Careers, Innovation and Entrepreneurship (Centre MINE)** at the **Lebanese University**, with [ETF](#), [AUF-Moyen Orient](#) and with the [Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari – CIHEAM Bari](#).



The **7th edition of the UNIMED Start Cup Competition** is hosted by the **European Training Foundation (ETF)** and will take place in **Torino, Italy** at the premises of the **ETF on November 23rd and 24th, 2026**, with the aim to strengthen cooperation among Mediterranean higher education institutions, promote experiential learning, and showcase academic excellence, youth talent, and entrepreneurial mindset.

This two-day format combines **competition, academic dialogue, and skills immersion**, ensuring both educational impact and international exposure for participants and partners.

2. Objectives

2.1 General Objective

To promote student entrepreneurship, innovation, and cross-Mediterranean collaboration through a structured competition and knowledge-exchange experience.

2.2 Specific Objectives

- Encourage university students to develop **innovative, feasible, and impactful startup ideas**
- Promote **resilient thinking** by encouraging participants to design entrepreneurial solutions that can adapt, survive, and grow during economic, social, environmental, or health crises
- Strengthen **social entrepreneurial and employability skills** through pitching, feedback, and expert interaction
- Foster **academic and institutional cooperation** among Mediterranean universities
- Expose students to **real-world entrepreneurial ecosystems**

3. Target Audience

- All the students should be enrolled in one of the universities of two shores of the Mediterranean basin that are partners of UNIMED or AUF – Moyen Orient for the 2026 academic year, all faculties admitted. To know more details about the partners, please visit:

<https://www.uni-med.net/associated-universities/>

or

https://www.auf.org/les_membres/nos-membres/



- The students should be bearer of an **innovative existing entrepreneurial business idea** related to the topic of **“Entrepreneurship in Times of Change”**
- The students should take part in this competition with a single team (min 2 students and max 4 students per team) knowing that up to two members can represent the team in Italy if selected among the finalists
- Each team should indicate a team manager and a valid email address to which all correspondence regarding the competition will be sent
- Each team can participate with only **one “project idea”**
- The scientific committee has the right to exclude ideas that are not original or inconsistent with the objectives and spirit of the initiative
- Teams should have created their start-ups (Not necessarily registered)
- A prototype is required
- Participating teams can present their entrepreneurial ideas in **English or French**.

4. Event Structure & Program Overview

Day 1 – Start Cup Competition Day

Venue: European Training Foundation, Turin

Date: 23 November 2026

Theme: Entrepreneurship in times of change, Innovation & Mediterranean Cooperation

Institutional greetings:

- 9:00 – 9:30 Registration
- 9:30-10:00 Opening remarks

Morning Session – Round 1

- Presentation of competition rules and evaluation criteria
- Startup teams pitch their projects (e.g. 3 minutes pitch + 5 minutes Q&A)
- Jury evaluation and scoring



Networking Lunch

Afternoon Session – Round 2

- Startup teams pitch their projects (e.g. 3 minutes pitch + 5 minutes Q&A)
- Jury evaluation and scoring
- Deliberation and final scoring
- **Award Ceremony:**
 - Best Startup Project
 - Most Innovative Idea
 - Social or environmental impact Award

Day 2 – Academic Panels & Ecosystem Dialogue

Venue: Turin, venue to be confirmed

Proposed Activities:

- On November 24th morning the Start Cup students will have the opportunity to participate to the **Torino Skills Summit 2026: global skills for local development**, an international event organized by ETF. More details and a draft agenda will follow in the coming weeks.
- 1:00- 2:00 Networking lunch and informal exchanges
- 2:00- 5:00 Practical visit to Incubator

5. Sustainability & Follow-Up

- Integration of winning teams into incubation or mentoring programs
- Continued collaboration through UNIMED, AUF, ETF and CIHEAM Bari
- Documentation and dissemination of outcomes (reports, social media, publications)
- Exploration of future joint initiatives, exchanges, and competitions

6. Participation procedures

- The deadline to **express interest** to participate is **June 30th**, therefore each university interested to participate will have write to UNIMED and to the Start Cup Secretariat to the following email: unimed@uni-med.net and in copy start.cup@ul.edu.lb
- **Only one team** per university can participate in the "Start Cup Competition 2026".



- After June 30th, the Start Cup Secretariat will share the application form with the interested universities in order to be filled in with all the information related to the business idea, **by July 10th**
- Each of the teams participating in the “Start Cup competition 2026” will present, under pain of exclusion from the competition, the following documentation:
 - Registration certificates for the 2026 academic year of all students participating in the competition by sending an email to start.cup@ul.edu.lb **by July 10th**
- The selection to announce the chosen teams will take place on **July 17th**
- Online briefing and introduction for selected teams will take place **on July 22nd**
- A series of thematic and preparatory webinars will take place between September and November where all the selected teams will have to attend; dates and more information will follow
- Every university will have to nominate a focal person for a better and swift communication with the Lebanese University, coordinator of the UNIMED SubNetwork on Employability from one part and with the students of the home university from another part.
- For any assistance, please feel free to send an email at start.cup@ul.edu.lb

7. Documents to be submitted

The following documents should be submitted on **October 31st, 2026**:

- A Business Plan following the format that will be sent to all the universities participating in the competition.
- A Pitch deck (PPT presentation) according to the format that will be sent to all the participating universities but with free choice for the design.
- A Poster following the format that will be sent to all the universities participating in the competition.
- To upload the documents, it is possible to use wetransfer.com by sending the message to the following address start.cup@ul.edu.lb

8. Jury

For the evaluation of the finalist projects, a jury will be formed; more details about the members will be communicated soon.



Participation in the Scientific Committee does not provide for compensation. It is responsible for evaluating, in complete autonomy and discretion, the proposals submitted by the candidates for their admission to participation in the competition. The evaluation criteria are mainly originality, innovation, response to a need, economic feasibility.

9. Final prize

The team that wins the first prize at the “Start Cup Competition 2026” will have a prize of EUR 1,000.

10. Costs and expenses

UNIMED will be in charge of covering the flights and travel expenses as well as accommodation costs for two students for each team that will be selected from both EU and Southern Mediterranean students’ teams.

Up to three nights will be covered as well as lunches and dinners for November 22 to 24 included.

The arrival date is November 22 and the departure date is November 25th from the afternoon.

12. Confidentiality

All parties involved in this competition and in various ways in the organisation and implementation of the “Start Cup Competition 2026” (organizers, jury) will guarantee the confidentiality of the information provided by the participants.

The submitted entrepreneurial ideas and business plan documentation will be at UNIMED headquarters as the initiative coordinator.

