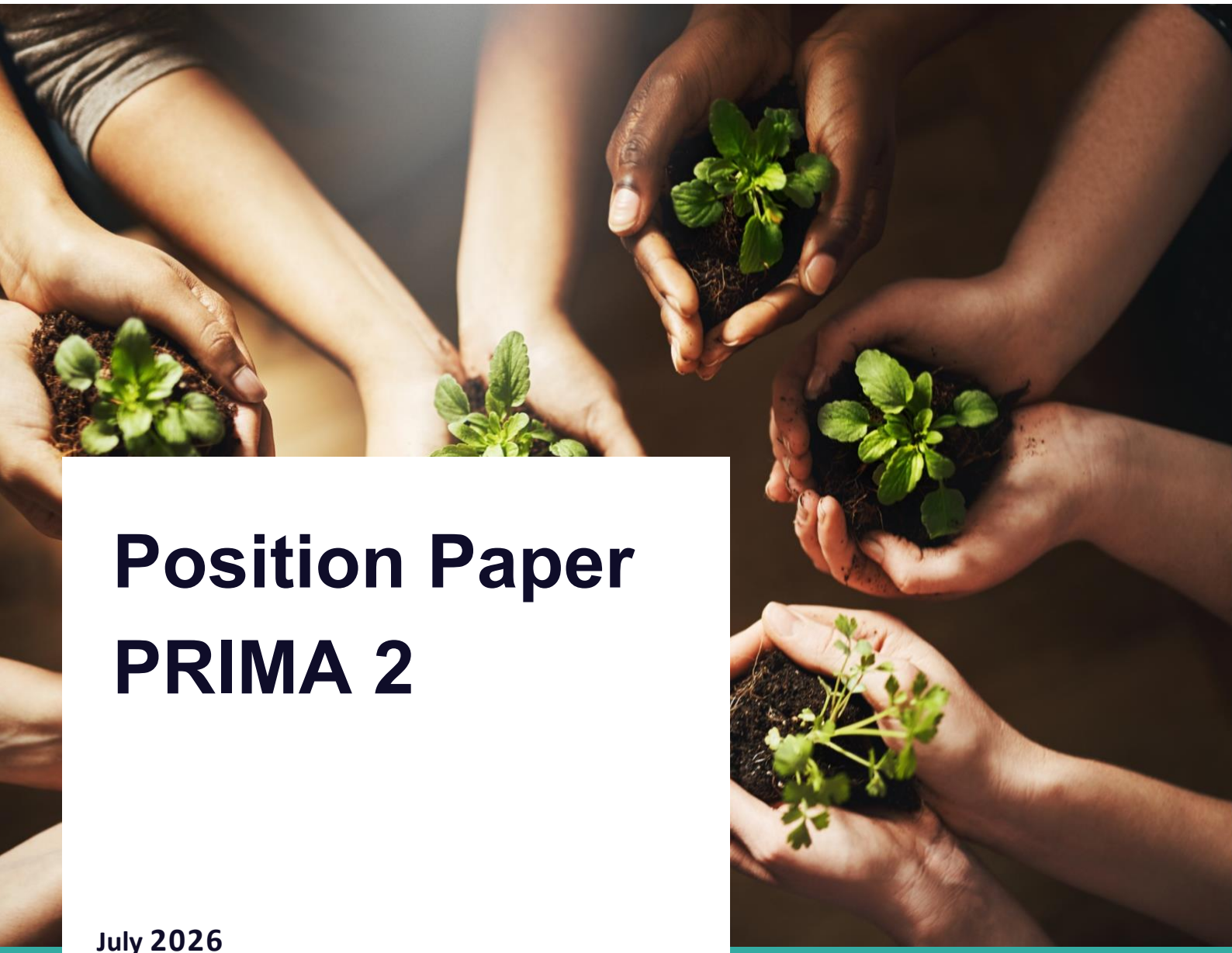


Position Paper PRIMA 2

July 2026

TOUR4EU
Tuscan Organisation of Universities and Research for Europe

TOUR 4 EU Tuscan Organisation of Universities and Research for Europe

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1. What TOUR4EU is

TOUR4EU - *Tuscan Organisation of Universities and Research for Europe* is an association established under Belgian law by the Tuscany Region in May 2018. It brings together, in addition to the regional authority, the seven Tuscan higher education institutions: University of Florence, University of Pisa, University of Siena, University for Foreigners of Siena, IMT School for Advanced Studies Lucca, Scuola Normale Superiore and Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies.
Based in Brussels, TOUR4EU aims to promote a shared regional research strategy and to increase the attraction of directly managed European funding to the Tuscan territory. In this context, TOUR4EU serves as an institutional liaison in Brussels, ensuring a coordinated representation of the Tuscan university system in relation to European research and innovation policy dossiers, particularly those concerning territorial cooperation, climate resilience, food security and the sustainable management of water resources in the Mediterranean.

2. Participation of Tuscan Universities in PRIMA

The Tuscan higher education system is recognised as a regional centre of excellence in higher education and research. Overall, it includes more than 8,800 professors, researchers and doctoral candidates, nearly 125,000 students and a dynamic innovation ecosystem comprising 164 university spin-offs and more than 359 research laboratories (according to 2025 data). Tuscany hosts a diverse higher education landscape, combining large comprehensive universities with smaller, highly specialised institutions. This diversity is reflected in varying levels of research intensity, differences in the composition of academic staff and differing capacities to secure competitive research funding.

The participation of Tuscan universities in PRIMA represents more than a quantitative achievement. It demonstrates a well-established capacity to build Euro-Mediterranean scientific partnerships, mobilise interdisciplinary expertise, and connect research with territories, businesses and public authorities. This positioning makes Tuscany particularly well placed to contribute to PRIMA 2, both as a reservoir of scientific excellence and as a testing ground for the demonstration, validation, and uptake of solutions developed through PRIMA-funded projects.

Between 2021 and 2025, Tuscan universities participated extensively in the PRIMA programme, confirming the Tuscany Region's position as one of Italy's leading hubs for Euro-Mediterranean research. According to data collected from the annual booklets published on the official PRIMA website, **18 projects** involving the University of Florence, the University of Pisa, the University of Siena and the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies received funding during this period, with these institutions acting both as project coordinators and as partners in international consortia. The projects span the programme's three main thematic priorities (water management, farming systems and the agri-food value chain) demonstrating the breadth of expertise within the Tuscan higher education system and the universities' capacity to contribute to the development of innovative solutions addressing the Mediterranean's most pressing challenges.

Tuscan universities acted as project coordinators in seven projects and as consortium partners in eleven, demonstrating not only a strong capacity to compete successfully in competitive calls for proposals, but also significant leadership in the establishment and management of international research consortia.
The University of Florence participated in eight projects, serving as coordinator in three of them. It is followed by the University of Pisa, which was involved in five projects and likewise demonstrated a

strong coordinating capacity, leading three projects. The Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies participated in three projects, coordinating one of them, while the University of Siena was involved in one project as a consortium partner.
From a thematic perspective, a strong concentration can be observed in the *Farming Systems* area, which accounts for nine of the eighteen funded projects. This highlights the strength of Tuscan expertise in agroecology, agroforestry, and sustainable agriculture. Projects focusing on the *Agri-food Value Chain* (five projects) and *Water Management* (four projects) follow, confirming a balanced presence across the three strategic thematic areas defined by PRIMA.
The temporal distribution of participation also points to a steadily increasing level of engagement by the regional higher education system. The number of funded projects rose from three in both 2021 and 2022 to four in 2023, reaching a peak of six projects in 2024, the highest level of participation recorded during the period, while two additional projects had already been funded in 2025.

The following section provides the complete list of projects awarded to Tuscan universities funded under PRIMA Partnership.

PRIMA - 2021 (3 projects)

University of Florence

1. Water Management – AG-WaMED: *Advancing non conventional water management for innovative climate-resilient water governance in the Mediterranean Area* (University of Florence coordinator)
2. Water Management – Mara-Mediterra: *Safeguarding the livelihood of rural communities and the environment in the Mediterranean through Nature-based Solutions* (University of Florence partner)
3. Water Management – SALAM-MED: *Sustainable Approaches to LAnd and water Management in MEditerranean Drylands* (University of Florence partner)

PRIMA - 2022 (3 projects)

University of Florence

1. Farming Systems – SUREPASTOR: *Management Strategies to Enable SUstainable REsilient AgroPASTORalism* (University of Florence coordinator)
2. Agri-food Value Chain – MoreMedDiet: *More on the adoption of a healthy Mediterranean diet* (University of Florence partner)

University of Pisa

1. Farming Systems – SHARInG-MeD: *Soil Health and Agriculture Resilience through an Integrated Geographical information systems of Mediterranean Drylands* (University of Pisa coordinator)

PRIMA - 2023 (4 projects)

University of Florence

1. Farming Systems – CYCLOLIVE: *From waste to resource: ReCYCLing OLIVE oil extraction byproducts for sustainable agricultural practices in the Mediterranean region* (University of Florence partner)

University of Pisa

1. Agri-food Value Chain – PLAMINPACK: *PLAnt-based antiMIcrobial aNd circular PACKaging for plant products* (University of Pisa coordinator)
2. Agri-food Value Chain – FoWRSaP: *Agro Food Waste Recovery: new processing technologies for food Safety and Packaging* (University of Pisa partner)

Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies

1. Agri-food Value Chain – AgriBioPack: *Valorizing Agrifood Residues for Bio-based Packaging Solutions* (Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna partner)

PRIMA - 2024 (6 projects)

University of Florence

1. Farming systems - RivAgroforMed: *REVitalization of AGROFORestry systems through agroecological transition for increasing farm productivity in the MEDiterranean* (University of Florence coordinator).
2. Farming systems - ASPmed: *Agroforestry practices for Agroecological transition towards sustainable Sheep and Poultry farming in the Mediterranean region* (University of Florence partner)..
3. Farming systems - SHARE: *Shared Innovations for Mediterranean Agroforestry Systems* (University of Florence partner).

University of Pisa

1. Farming systems - AGROFIG: *Fostering agroforestry benefits through fig tree cultivation in the Mediterranean* (University of Pisa coordinator).

University of Siena

1. Farming systems - COSMOS: *Coordinated Optimization for Sustainable Mediterranean Agroforestry with Truffles and High-Value Species* (University of Siena partner).

Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies

1. NUSYC: *Novel Urban Cultivation System enforcing green economy* (Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna coordinator).

PRIMA - 2025 (2 projects)

Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies

1. INVESTWATER: *Advancing sustainable WATER management through the upscaling of INnoVative naturE-based SoluTions to promote climatic adaptation* (Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna partner)

University of Pisa

1. SAGA: *SAlicornia genotyping for sustainable soil and farming: from Genes to Agroecology* (University of Pisa Coordinator)

3. The importance of continuing PRIMA 2

The continuation of PRIMA does not represent merely an administrative extension of the existing programme, but rather a strategic response to challenges that have become increasingly relevant for the European Union: water scarcity, climate adaptation, the sustainability of agri-food systems, the management of the water-energy-food-ecosystems nexus, and the stability of the Mediterranean neighbourhood.

From this perspective, PRIMA 2 can contribute to transforming the Mediterranean into an advanced testing ground for replicable solutions to enhance water and food resilience, while at the same time strengthening European science diplomacy and the European Union's capacity to foster cooperation on an equal footing with partner countries across the region.

The PRIMA Initiative, *Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area*, is an institutionalised partnership established under Article 185 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, bringing together the European Union and participating countries with the aim of strengthening cooperation in research and innovation across the Mediterranean region. Overall, the evidence gathered confirms the strategic value of PRIMA as a platform capable of integrating scientific research, foreign policy objectives, and Mediterranean and international cooperation, generating European public value by addressing systemic risks related to water, food security, and migration.

The findings suggest that PRIMA 2 should move towards an even more integrated, inclusive and impact-oriented model. Strengthening the dimension of equal partnership, ensuring greater continuity for territorial innovation instruments, improving funding coordination, and promoting increasingly stable cooperation networks represent the key conditions for consolidating the programme's contribution to sustainable development and resilience in the Mediterranean region.

Unlike industrial or technology-oriented partnerships, PRIMA stands out for its strategic nature, as it represents a cooperation instrument between the European Union and Mediterranean countries based on co-programming and co-funding. In view of the upcoming FP10 Framework Programme, it is therefore essential to preserve and further strengthen this territorial and geopolitical partnership model, which represents a replicable model of a policy-oriented programme capable of influencing strategic choices in the Mediterranean region and promoting scientific and political cooperation at regional level.

One of PRIMA's greatest added values lies in its capacity to promote a cooperation model that goes beyond the traditional distinction between the Northern and Southern shores of the Mediterranean. Scientific research should no longer be interpreted as a one-way process of knowledge transfer from European countries to those on the Southern shore, but rather as a process of co-creation based on complementary expertise and shared objectives. This approach is particularly relevant in the Mediterranean context, which is characterised by highly interconnected environmental and socio-economic systems, where challenges such as water resource management, sustainable agriculture, and climate change adaptation require common responses that transcend national borders. From this perspective, PRIMA also plays an important role in *science diplomacy* by fostering dialogue among institutions, universities, and research centres, and by indirectly contributing to the strengthening of relations among Mediterranean countries.

Among PRIMA's distinctive features, Living Labs represent one of the instruments with the greatest potential for impact. They provide permanent environments for experimentation, collaboration, and

the engagement of local stakeholders, creating connections between research, businesses, public authorities, and local communities. The experience gained so far demonstrates that the value of these infrastructures does not end with the completion of individual projects, but can provide a foundation for new research and innovation initiatives.

4. Key recommendations

- It is recommended to maintain the PRIMA Partnership under Article 185 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), ensuring the continuity of its co-programming model and preserving its strategic role in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.
- European Partnerships may also be justified where they contribute to resilience, sustainability, public goods, social cohesion, strategic autonomy or international cooperation in areas of high relevance to the Union, including through long-term, place-based and multi-country cooperation addressing shared regional challenges.
- It is recommended that PRIMA 2 further strengthen the transition from knowledge generation to the effective uptake of results, by introducing dedicated instruments for validation, demonstration in real-life contexts, engagement of end users, and the capitalisation of outcomes already generated by funded projects. Particular attention should be devoted to simplifying procedures and achieving greater alignment between European and national funding mechanisms, in order to reduce operational asymmetries among partners and ensure more balanced participation of stakeholders across the entire Mediterranean region.
- The contribution of Tuscan universities and TOUR4EU could be further enhanced through a common position explicitly highlighting the added value of PRIMA 2 for territories, universities, and European policies, while emphasising Tuscany's role as a regional ecosystem capable of connecting scientific excellence, applied innovation, and Mediterranean cooperation.
- With regard to the PRIMA Partnership, the standard project duration of 36 months is often insufficient for projects involving field experimentation, monitoring activities, and data collection, frequently leading to the need for administrative extensions. Greater flexibility, allowing project durations to be extended up to 48 months in duly justified cases, would improve the scientific quality of results while reducing administrative burdens.
- Within Section 2, the funding of partners depends on the national procedures established by individual countries. Significant differences in the timing of fund disbursement often hinder the coordinated start of project activities and represent a particular obstacle for organisations with more limited financial capacity. Greater coordination among funding bodies and the progressive harmonisation of procedures would contribute to making the programme more efficient and inclusive.
- It is recommended to introduce specific instruments aimed at consolidating existing Living Labs, enabling the preservation of the wealth of expertise, relationships, and experimentation developed throughout funded projects. At the same time, strengthening the multi-stakeholder approach could help address one of the main challenges of European research, namely the difficulty in effectively transferring technological and organisational innovation to the market and end users.