



Launch of the phase I¹ of the UfM Labelled Project **SKILLS FOR SUCCESS** and workshop on vocational training for girls and women.

Institut français du Liban, Beirut. 10th October 2014.

CONCLUSIONS

The Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean organised a workshop on vocational training for girls and women in Lebanon and the Euro-Mediterranean region in Beirut, Lebanon, on 10th of October 2014. The workshop supported the on-the-ground launch in Lebanon, Jordan and Morocco of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) labelled project *Skills for Success: Employability Skills for Women*, promoted by AMIDEAST. This project provides girls and women from the region with concrete skills and tools to enter the labour market.

The workshop was meant to analyze the current state of play, and identify best practices related to vocational education and training (VET) for young women in the Euro-Mediterranean, with an emphasis on Lebanon. The multi-stakeholder discussion gathered some 50 representatives of public authorities from Lebanon as the host country, the EU Delegation to Lebanon and Jordan embassy as the UfM Co-President, the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean, the International Labour Organisation, the European Training Foundation, numerous NGOs dealing with VT and women empowerment as well as academic and private sector representatives.

The workshop highlighted the very low participation of women and girls in vocational education and training in the Euro-Mediterranean region. It was stated that the progress in educational levels of women, often surpassing males, has not translated into a proportional increase of women participating in the labour market. A considerable part of skills and competences of women is therefore not contributing to the well-being of societies, families and individuals in terms of economic participation.

Despite progresses achieved, the discussion highlighted the causes of stagnation and sometimes even regression in women's rights as a result of both the current volatile political and security situation in the region and the prevailing stereotypes regarding the role of women in society. The participants welcomed the new Constitutions in the region guaranteeing gender equality and called for an effective translation of political commitments into concrete and enforced laws and measures for gender equality. Involving men in this process was deemed essential, as well as ensuring that gender equality is respected in the both public and the private sector.

The discussion further emphasised the need for complementarity between gender equality agenda and social protection, employment and entrepreneurship/SMEs policies as a prerequisite for reaching stronger involvement of women in the socio-economic development.

¹Phase I will be implemented in Lebanon, Jordan and Morocco



Additional efforts to strategically promote VET opportunities for women should aim at changing the prevailing negative image of the VET programmes and institutions. Bearing in mind the existing gap in labour market demand and supply, VET programmes need to be quality ones and match the needs of employers. Gender sensitive career guidance, educational material and learning environment (transport, teachers) can be completed by positive discrimination via providing more scholarships, setting quotas for female apprenticeships and providing fiscal incentives for private sector employers employing women and facilitating women's access to finance. More generally, it was stressed that many obstacles faced by women also related to cultural factors and to the global issue of women rights and the status of women in their society.

Project promoters presented several examples of concrete activities in Lebanon in favor of women, in the field of digital opportunities, entrepreneurship and work based learning programmes. The role of the existing 221 state-run centers for women's VET across Lebanon was highlighted, advising to expand their scope of activities beyond handicrafts-related activities to include ICTs, which represent new opportunities for women's socio-economic development. It was suggested to enhance the existing cooperation between the private sector and the academia by including public VET authorities in order to undertake curriculum reform to make them gender sensitive, but also to break down stereotypes. This would ultimately lead to the effective emergence of skilled women workforce, adapted to the needs of employers. On the other hand, it was concluded that women should be further supported and motivated for business creation and self-employment, fostering entrepreneurship on the educational level. It was also stressed that gender component should be promoted in all NGO projects dealing with VET in order to secure the maximum possible participation of women. Lastly, the workshop called for better information on labour market in order to understand the needs of the society itself.

The workshop highlighted that the UfM as a catalyst of regional programmes should adopt long-term approach for enhancing gender equality in education and training and *could act as a leading advocacy agent for change on the political level*. It should take advantage of its regional dimension covering both the EU Member States as well as all the Mediterranean countries and provide a political level umbrella and advocacy and lobbying platform for different policies and initiatives for promoting gender equality in the region. It was concluded that there are many good initiatives and devoted organisations working on gender equality in the region, but which needed higher political level commitment, support, peer pressure and continuous advocacy.

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