



Union for the Mediterranean
Union pour la Méditerranée
الإتحاد من أجل المتوسط

Rome Med Dialogues 2018

Policy Forum "Seizing the Future: Employing Youth in the MENA Region"

Rome, 23 November, 2018

Intervention by the UfM Secretary General

H.E. Mr. Nasser Kamel

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

At the outset, I would like to heartily thank the **Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation** and the **ISPI (Italian Institute for International Political Studies)** in Rome for this exceptional initiative that has become major milestone on the Mediterranean calendar given the scale of the discussions and the amplitude of views and perspectives presented and shared. I have personally enjoyed reading the 2017 report titled **Looking ahead: charting new paths for the Mediterranean¹**, and I would like to congratulate you for the excellent work.

¹ https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/pubblicazioni/rapporto_med_ispi_2017.pdf

Over the past four year, the 'Rome MED Dialogues' has been brilliantly consolidating its role as a global hub for high-level dialogue on Mediterranean issues of interest to a multitude of stakeholders within and beyond the Mediterranean region.

Furthermore, it has been instrumental in contributing to promoting a Mediterranean agenda with four pillars in mind, all of which are central to our work at the UfM Secretariat, namely **Shared Prosperity, Shared Security, Migration, and Civil Society and Culture.**

At the UfM Secretariat, we have been mandated by the Member States from both sides of the Mediterranean to promote regional integrating, foster human development and sustainable economic growth, ensure the contribution of our activities to regional stability and security, and enhance political dialogue amongst the Member States. The UfM Roadmap adopted last year by the UfM Ministers of Foreign Affairs made clear reference to the need to **engage in efforts on Prevention of Extremism and Terrorism**, the need to **address the root causes of Migration**, the urge to **bridge any cultural divides** through Intercultural and Interfaith Dialogue. These and many other structured activities of the UfM Secretariat in our areas of priority contribute to building an area of peace, stability, security and prosperity.

Despite the broad-ranging and pressing challenges in the region, the UfM has decided to adopt a **positive, action-oriented agenda**, and to work shoulder-to-shoulder with other development cooperation actors and players through a multi-stakeholders' approach that underscores synergies and complementarities. The **trajectory of the UfM Secretariat over the past few**

years has been one of mapping change and harnessing opportunities, and in that we have been greatly aided by an ample ecosystem of Governments, Public Administrations, Private Sector Companies, IFIs, Civil Society Organization, Academia, as well as Think Tanks like ISPI. As we chart new pathways for Mediterranean cooperation, we realize once and again that the regional nature of most challenges calls for an orchestrated approach and for meaningful and sustainable partnerships.

Shifting my attention to the issue of employing youth in the MENA Region, please allow me to share with you some evidence-backed facts.

Almost 65 percent of MENA's population is under the age of thirty, which means a huge base of human capital, but also a big challenge, as **youth unemployment in some MENA countries exceeded 30%**. Despite the higher investments made in education across the region, the desired impact in terms of improved productivity and reduced poverty is yet to be realized. We know that a lower quality of education is synonymous with lower employability prospects and less accessibility to sustainable, decent jobs.

Surprisingly, unemployment among highly qualified young people is higher than that among mainstream youth, which means that **higher education is not a guarantee of improved employment prospects**. The problem on both ends of the continuum is further aggravated for women, as the percentage of qualified **women's participation to the labour market** clocks around 25% or even less across the region. A report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) cited 1 trillion dollars in additional output that could have been possible if MENA governments had narrowed the gender gap between 2000 and 2011.

Much emphasis has been given recently to cultivating an entrepreneurial culture among the undergraduates and equipping them with skills for the future like cognitive flexibility, resilience and digital skills. **Turning the graduates from job seekers to job creators** has become part of the answer to the employment challenge in the region, and yet the educational system alone is never enough: proper legislative frameworks, innovative financial instruments, business linkages and symmetric access to information are all building blocks of a conducive environment without which a gratifying **return on investment in education and entrepreneurship** cannot be reaped.

The Private Sector has always been the **major vehicle of job creation** in the MENA Region since it accounts for **60% of GDP, over 80% of capital flows and 90% of jobs**, and yet, it remains to be **underdeveloped**. Investing in startups and supporting well-established companies always pays back in terms of fostering economic diversification and building resilient economies that, in turn, contribute to social stability and economic growth. Having said that, there are several **paths to engage the Private Sector in development efforts**. These include Multi-Stakeholder Policy Dialogue, transfer of knowledge and technologies, capacity building, technical assistance and replicating best practices.

At the UfM Secretariat, we are fully convinced that addressing the unemployment challenge in the region calls for **an integrated approach that focuses on both the demand and the supply sides of the labor market**, as well as the intermediation and matching between offers and skills. These are precisely the tenants of our flagship initiative, Med4Jobs. Launched in Tunisia in 2013, this initiative has eventually evolved into a pipeline of projects that

currently encompasses 13 UfM-labelled projects in the priority areas of Business Development and Employment, Higher Education and Research, and Social and Civil Affairs. Thematically, the projects focus on job creation, capacity building, SME development, cultivating a culture of entrepreneurship among youth and women and socio-economic empowerment of women, among others.

The UfM Med4Jobs initiative is part of our ongoing efforts to address the education-employment-inclusion nexus in the MENA Region, always with the realization that **youth is the greatest asset of our region**. Investing in youth is investing not only in the future, but also in the present with all the opportunities and challenges that it offers.

Finally, I would like to wish you all very fruitful discussions, and I avail myself of this opportunity to stress that the **UfM Secretariat stands ready and committed to collaborate with you on the attainment of our common regional goals** that guide our respective compasses and that ultimately seek to fulfill the legitimate aspirations of our people.