



Reinforcing the Innovation-Employability Nexus in the Mediterranean

Digital Steering Committee Meetings *

5 and 19 May 2020

5 May (Session 1)

UfM, supported by GIZ, is launching an initiative targeting mainly staff from universities, research centres, education ministries, and all complementary stakeholders (especially intermediary institutions and private sector) dedicated on the best practices and available tools that can be put in place in order to reinforce career opportunities of students, graduates and researchers. One focus of this action will be best practices suitable for PhDs, researchers, high-level graduates.

The planned pilot activities are currently:

- **Steering Committee meetings (5 and 19 May)**, in order to collect examples of best practices and create synergies with stakeholders and country representatives;
- **A publication**, structured as a communicational handbook, targeting universities, research centres and ministries, proposing strategies and initiatives for increasing innovation and employability.
- **Two pilot National Trainings** (in Tunisia and Jordan) focusing on how to implement innovation and employability tools;
- **A Regional Seminar** where high-level stakeholders from the Euro-Mediterranean region will be invited to exchange on best practices and network in order to inspire next steps.

The Steering Committee is expected to share information about existing best practices, needs on the ground and regional challenges, to suggest speakers and topics, and to connect this action with existing initiatives. This will be important in order to respond to the actual needs of the Mediterranean region, in synergy with already existing initiatives and in line with local conditions, while avoiding duplication. Feeding on the suggestions and feedbacks from the Steering Committee, the training and seminar format will be finalized in agreement with the hosting partners, in order to fine tune with local needs on the ground.

In addition to invited stakeholders (regional partners, innovation initiatives, university networks, international institutions and employability/innovation experts), Focal Points of the UfM Platform on Research and Innovation are also invited to attend in order to share relevant national best practices and help focus the activities through their experience.

Synthesis of the discussion of the First Session (5 May)

The event was opened by **Nasser Kamel**, UfM Secretary General, that expressed gratitude to attendees for giving their time to this relevant and important issue, even more so in the context of the unprecedented pandemic situation. Universities and research are key to dealing with the challenges that the Mediterranean region faces, especially in Southern Mediterranean states.



The situation was already challenging before the pandemic as youth receives a high level of education but also has one of the highest levels of unemployment.

University systems have functioned well under the strain of the crisis as institutions adapted to the lockdown, moving to an online mode, and thus able to provide their youth with a decent level of learning.

Moreover, research centres have focused in an impressive way in trying to find ways to deal with the pandemic in terms of treatment or vaccine, in sharing experiences on different courses of treatment, and also in terms of learning about this very new virus that we are still trying to find out more about how it functions and spreads and how we can best minimise the damage in terms of health notwithstanding the socio-economic damage.

The crisis will accelerate the trend to a clear shift in our societies towards a new set of jobs, the “jobs of the future”. The post-pandemic world will see an exponential growth in new demand for specific skills, especially those related to digitalisation, tele-working, and IT.

As educators and universities, we need to adapt to this by giving our young men and women the skills they need to work in these fields.

Johannes Laepple, GIZ, gave a welcome on behalf of GIZ, which is supporting this initiative on the employability-innovative nexus. One of the first UfM events on the topic of employability included a side event a year before on the Employment of Mediterranean University Graduates, which identified labor skill levels as a major constraint to hiring university graduates. One of the main conclusions was that there is still a large gap between the research world and the job market which prevents knowledge transfer from universities and research institutions to the job market and vice versa.

The Corona crisis will have a huge impact on the economies in the Mediterranean because young grads face even greater challenges to enter the labor market because companies are struggling and trying to cut costs and jobs. In this new context, applied innovation-cooperation and new cooperation models between research and business world are even more important.

Giuseppe Provenzano, UfMS, presented the initiative, giving a background on the rationale, past actions and foreseen followup, highlighting the importance of reinforcing the connections between universities/research centres, business/private sector and government. He also presented the results of the questionnaire that was held online before the meeting, with 38 respondents that have identified more than 120 valid initiatives that could be referenced in the planned publication and trainings.



Nina Volles, UfM Consultant, gave an overview of the technical methodology chosen for the publication, and presented some of the notable outcomes from the questionnaire.

Tour de Table

German Bernal-Rios, EC DG Education Youth Sport and Culture Unit C3 International Cooperation, presented the Erasmus+ Actions open to South Med Countries.

Sélim Mekdessi, Lebanese University and member of the UNIMED SubNetwork on Employability, presented some initiatives on employability from both the University and the UNIMED SubNetwork.

Léo Vincent of HOMERe, UfM-labelled project, presented the experience of HOMERe, offering a perspective and acquired lessons on industrial internships in the Mediterranean.

Fabrizio Porrino, Startup Europe Med, presented the SEMED collaboration with EU as a one-stop-shop connecting all actors of the ecosystem. SEMED will soon start broad communication to raise awareness of the platform. The platform produces business opportunities, matching with partners and universities to improve the innovation eco-system.

Yasmine Seghirate, CIHEAM, presented CIHEAM actions and perspective on the topic from an agri-food perspective, with connections into the green and blue sectors. Training centres are the basis of this challenge, and it was identified the need for innovation to adapt to what is coming next.

Derar Eleyan, Palestine Technical Uni. Kadoorie, pointed out the importance to identify the shortages between the private sector and HEI and inquired about the public availability of the final handbook.

Biljana Radonjic Ker-Lindsay, Associate Director at EBRD European bank for construction and Development, talked about how EBRD invests in private sector, in ICT and infrastructure in Med and beyond with employability interventions that go along with investment programmes. These programmes develop market relevant skills. Key enablers for innovation are digital skills. SMEs account for most business in the region and are particularly hard hit for lacking digital skills. Crisis is opportunity to encourage connections between these actors on the adoption of tech as a way to connect universities, business and government.



The meeting was closed by **Itaf Ben Abdallah**, Senior Advisor on Higher Education & Research, which introduced the next meeting with a focus on how to create business opportunities on innovation through sustainable economic development, cultural and creative sector. Finally, it was underlined how the initiative aimed at mapping and being aware of new and existing tools to maximise info and sharing between actors.

List of participants

NAME	ORGANIZATION	Position
Alsadag H E ALSADAG	Aljufra University, Lybia	Head of French Department
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Núria JOVÉ	Associació Catalana d'Universitats Públiques (ACUP) and Global University Network for Innovation (GUNi)	Head of projects
Krystel KHALIL	Berytech, Libanon	Projects Lab Director
Marco CUNETTO	BUSINESSMED	
Yasmine SEGHIRATE EL GUERRAB	CIHEAM	Policy and communications manager
BILJANA RADONJIC KER-LINDSAY	EBRD	Associate Director, Employment and Skills in the Gender and Economic Inclusion
Jerneja PENCA	EMUNI	Head of academic affairs
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Silvia BOJINOVA	European Commission	Policy Officer, DG Research & Innovation
Heinke VEIT	European Commission	Programme Manager, DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR)
Germán BERNAL-RIOS	European Commission	Policy Officer - Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
Heba GABER	European External Action Service (EEAS)	Regional Officer, Delegation to the Arab Republic of Egypt - Research and Innovation
Fabrizio PORRINO	FacilityLive	SVP Global Public Affairs
Axel LEISENBERG	France - Ministry for Higher Education, Research, and Innovation	Policy Officer, European International Cooperation



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