



Speaking points

Reinforcing the Innovation-Employability Nexus in the Mediterranean (RIE-N)

Steering Committee Meetings

Digital meetings hosted by the Union for the Mediterranean, 5 and 19 May 2020

First session, 5 May, 11.00

- The world is suddenly facing a major international crisis due to the pandemic of COVID-19.

We find ourselves in a radically changed world when compared a couple of months ago.

University campuses needed to close, face-to-face classes were halted, and exchange programmes cancelled.

- This global crisis will have a huge toll in our region, and but this is a time for renewed efforts and now more than ever we need to work together and be creative in addressing these new challenges.
- Many “old” issues remain, albeit transformed:
 - Unemployment and underemployment for many students and researchers, and especially young women;
 - brain drain;



- young people are not in education, employment, or training (NEET);
- and knowledge waste.

But also, climate change and unsustainable economic practices as a backdrop.

- While finding innovative solutions for recovery, our agenda must stay true to the **UN 2030 Agenda** based on sustainable development.
- Higher education and research institutions have demonstrated a great relevance in this phase, and we have much to learn from it:
 - Universities have gone digital with video classes;
 - research teams are hard at work on finding treatments and providing vital analyses.
- We have also seen the transformative potential of innovators, start-ups, and SMEs creating ventilators, digital platforms and new solutions.

There is a great potential we need to exploit by facilitating the development of relevant skills through partnerships.



- It is known that one of the reasons behind youth unemployment is a persistent gap between the skills acquired at universities and the requirements of business.

Additionally, more than **32% of Enterprises in some Southern Mediterranean Countries have identified labour skill levels as a major constraint to hiring.**

- This mismatch between supply and demand in terms of skills has been highlighted in the **2019 Ministerial Declaration on Employment and Labour** (Cascais, Portugal).
- Yet, many good practices are already addressing this issue based on the development of high-level skills through HE degrees, PhDs and research initiatives.
- Many initiatives already exist in the region for incentivising the creation of new start-ups, developing internship and industrial doctorate programmes, developing employability and digital skills among students and researchers.
- Many initiatives can be joined, duplicated or upscaled at local, national and regional level. Many stakeholders have found ways to connect universities, business and governments, creating synergies and win-win solutions.
- If we enhance information flows, we may tap into experiences already existing, avoid creating again the wheel and bring stakeholders closer together through inclusive multi-level, multi-stakeholder approach.



- The UfM, thanks to the support of the German Development Cooperation, identifies this as a priority, believing in the role of higher education and research institutions in the reconstruction efforts and the development of the region in the long run.
- The Union for the Mediterranean, with its variable geometry principle, is uniquely placed in facilitating the creation of new partnerships and initiatives by raising visibility and creating space for discussions, launching a regional debate on the matter.

Our aim remains supporting the precious work of all institutions and stakeholders working on this at all levels.

- We acknowledge and thank the participation of Focal points from the UfM Regional Platform working on Research and Innovation. And we thank all stakeholders that have contributed to our mapping questionnaire, which will help us shape our initiative.