



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



CENTER for MEDITERRANEAN
INTEGRATION | CENTRE pour
l'INTÉGRATION en MÉDITERRANÉE
مركز التكامل المتوسطي

Virtual event

A quality higher education for all in the Mediterranean: towards a renewed higher education agenda

1 June 2021

14:30 – 17:00 (CET)

*Online connections available for all participants and attendees
Simultaneous translation in English, French, and Arabic will be provided*

Context

The Mediterranean region holds one of the youngest populations in the world. The “youth bulge”, witnessed acutely in the southern Mediterranean, has contributed to creating a large university student population: across the entire Euro-Mediterranean region, this totals over 33 million. The youth bulge has significant implications for labor markets in the region: the World Bank estimates that in the MENA region, 300 million young people will join the labor market by 2050, requiring both the creation of millions of jobs and a duly prepared and skilled young generation.

These demographic trends in turn give education a key strategic role to play for the region when it comes to its resilience and sustainable development. For a prosperous Mediterranean, quality education systems, which train and skill an employable and empowered youth, are imperative. Yet education in the region faces several challenges and is failing to fulfil its promises for economic growth and social mobility, with many young people graduating without the skills and knowledge required for today’s changing labor markets.

Moreover, the existing challenges in providing quality education which translates into gainful employment are today being compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, the lockdowns and ongoing restrictions, as well as the economic fallout of the crisis. Further still, the disruption caused by COVID is prompting a general rethinking around the roles of education and employment. It is increasingly clear that structural changes and repositioning are occurring under the surface, altering perhaps permanently the role of education.

Within this context, ensuring a quality and relevant higher education for all in the Mediterranean region becomes an urgent step for wider regional development, and responds to the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

Supporting socio-economic transformation by improving the quality of education

The character of young people’s transitions from education to employment, from dependents to providers, will be determined by countries’ capacities to deliver relevant, quality education and vocational training. A massive investment in quality education is thus needed to allow the youth to meet their aspirations by granting them access to propitious channels of opportunity. Investing in skills for employability, as well as the promotion of student mobility and wider internationalization, and strengthened governance, can all play significant roles in achieving that goal.

Employability

As South Mediterranean countries seek to upscale their contribution to global or regional value chains, they are faced with the necessity of supplying the type of skilled labor that can produce these goods and services. Yet the persistent gap between the skills acquired at universities and the requirements of the job market is one of the major structural issues that education sector in the region faces. Indeed, over 32%¹ of enterprises in some South Mediterranean Countries have identified labor skill levels as a major constraint to hiring.

Internationalization

Internationalization is an important factor in determining quality of higher education. It also holds significant advantages for students, in terms of gains in 21st century skills, and the resulting boost in the employability of graduates for regional labor markets today. Yet to date, across the Mediterranean, internationalization has been implemented unevenly and with limited effect. A regional strategy ought to be promoted which pushes for deepening internationalization in the region, making it a higher priority for higher education institutions as well as wider stakeholders.

Student mobility and exchanges are an important part of this, yet a variety of activities carried out in domestic settings including, notably, ICT-enabled “virtual mobility”, extend internationalization’s benefits to a wider reach. Moreover, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, such activities emerge as key elements to be prioritized as part of the internationalization strategies of higher education institutions throughout the Mediterranean region.

Governance

University governance is key element for improving education outcomes and can be a driver of change: how institutions are managed can be a decisive factor in achieving their institutional goals. Strengthened university governance can also have spillover effects on internationalization processes, as internationalization is unlikely to take further hold at institutions with weak autonomy and in the heavily constrained policy and regulatory environment that characterizes many of the region’s education systems. There is a recognized need for the region’s higher education systems to find a balance between control and autonomy, coupled with strengthened wider governance practices, in order to best support learning outcomes for the region.

Political Framework and Objectives

The 2007 Cairo Declaration aspired towards the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education and Research Area. Almost 15 years have passed since, establishing a need, today, to rethink the needs and aims of higher education against current challenges and opportunities, paving the way for a new agenda for higher education in the Mediterranean region.

To this end, the CMI and the UfM are organizing a web-meeting to offer a space for a dynamic discussion, aimed at laying the bases for a renewed higher education agenda in the region. The event will allow decision-makers, practitioners and experts to discuss topics relevant to the improvement of higher education quality in the region and to share best practices and recommendations, which the UfM and CMI will then synthesize, proposing a way forward to relevant stakeholders. The discussions will help to boost engagement at the political level and push towards charting a path for possible future UfM Ministerial declarations.

¹ Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation (MBRF) & United Nations (UNDP/RBAS). Arab Knowledge Report 2014 Youth and Localisation of Knowledge. 278 (2014).

AGENDA

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14.10 Virtual room enabled

14.30 Opening remarks

- **Ms. Itaf Ben Abdallah**, Senior Advisor on Higher Education and Research, Union for the Mediterranean
- **Ms. Giulia Marchesini**, Senior Partnership Specialist, Center for Mediterranean Integration

14.45 Panel I: Ensuring a quality education through the promotion of internationalization, employability, and strengthened governance

Session 1: Employability

- **Mr. Raffaele Trapasso**, Economist, OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions & Cities
- **Mr. Mohammed Ali Khan**, Senior Education Specialist, IFC (World Bank Group)

Session 2: Internationalization

- **Mr. Kostis Giannidis**, President, Erasmus Student Network
- **Mr. Mohamed Abdel-Kader**, Senior Advisor, Aspen Institute (former Executive Director, Steven's Initiative)

Session 3: Governance

- **Ms. Roberta Malee Bassett**, Global Lead for Tertiary Education, Education Global Practice, World Bank

Q&A

16.00 Panel II: Towards a Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education and Research Area

- **Mr. Abdelhamid El-Zoheiry**, President, Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI)
- **Ms. Armela Dino**, Science Policy Analyst, Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation
- **Ms. Mauve Carbonell**, President, Tethys Consortium of Euro-Mediterranean Universities, Aix Marseille University
- **Mr. Francisco Marmolejo**, Higher Education President & Education Advisor, Qatar Foundation (former Global Tertiary Education Coordinator, World Bank)

16.45 Concluding remarks

- **Mr. Giuseppe Provenzano**, Advisor for Research and Innovation, Union for the Mediterranean
- **Ms. Blanca Moreno Dodson**, Manager, Center for Mediterranean Integration