

UfM Regional Dialogue with social partners

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Enhancing Skills For Better Employability



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



Deutsche Gesellschaft
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BUSINESSMED

Union of Mediterranean Confederations of Enterprises



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Concept note

UfM-Regional dialogue with social partners:

Enhancing skills for better employability; July 8, 2021

Social dialogue as an instrument of change has undergone several adjustments in the Mediterranean countries, leading its actors to be more and more involved in the social, economic, and environmental decision-making process.

Both Northern EU Member States and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries have been implementing dialogue strategies and policies that can take various forms in terms of actors involved and efficiency of the solutions proposed to specific labor market-related and societal issues, these processes being shaped by national contexts and social dialogue practices.

Moreover, social dialogue as a clearly established platform for labour-related discussions and collective bargaining purposes with official channels and recognized representatives tends to be given particular attention in times of uncertainty as social demands usually increase, seeking a more socially inclusive environment and secure livelihoods, and calling for substantial changes in economic growth and development models as a response to unprecedented challenges.

The Union for the Mediterranean Social Dialogue Forum held on 6-7 October 2020 reinforced the UfM's commitment to addressing social development matters in a collective endeavor that pays particular attention to including social partners of the region. From a broader perspective, the Social Dialogue Forum was a legitimate continuation of the Jordan bipartite Declaration of 2016 and the Cascais Ministerial Conference on Employment and Labor held in April 2019, which resulted in determining four priority areas for efficient labor market policies in the region: employment creation and entrepreneurship, stakeholders and funding partners' engagement, more inclusive labor markets, and skills and employability.

In this context, the Union for the Mediterranean partnered with BUSINESSMED, an organization that has long worked on the promotion of social dialogue, with the support of the European Commission, to **improve the involvement of Social Dialogue when addressing the challenges that labour markets face in the Mediterranean region**. As representatives of governments and employers in the region, both organizations have devoted increasing attention to social dialogue matters, along with their respective partners from intergovernmental organizations, civil society organizations, trade unions, local authorities and economic and social councils. The challenge being ultimately to come up with suitable regional solutions relying on widespread buy in, in a post-pandemic context that is increasingly calling for more country-tailored policies.

The new Joint Communication on a “Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood” adopted on 9 February 2021 proposes a new, ambitious and innovative Agenda for the Mediterranean, urging to address the governance, socio-economic, climate, environmental and security challenges faced by the Mediterranean region. Under this new Agenda, the EU highlights the key role as interlocutors of the social partners, as well as proposes to work together to support systems and recovery strategies that prioritise notably the social dialogue. Moreover, opportunities to up- and reskill should be an integral part of the recovery. Indeed, the pandemic has undoubtedly added a layer of challenges to the existing issues to tackle in the Euro-Mediterranean region, and labor market policies have definitely faced a situation that suggests

questioning pre-established policies, especially those related to migration. Whether it is caused by a brain drain, lower skills transfers, or informal labor perspective, the restrictions implemented in the Mediterranean countries and the shift in priorities that was operated not only exposed the development models but also imposed limits to immediate labor-driven solutions, forcing the countries of the region to rely on internal workforce supply and demand mechanisms that are very restrictive for recovery purposes in terms of room for maneuver and are more likely to widen existing imbalances between the respective economies.

On a side note, it seems undeniable, in light of the economic difficulties the private sector is facing worldwide and more specifically in our area of influence that induced a shift in country priorities, that the pandemic has slowed the limited but noteworthy social progress that has been initiated on employment and labour issues in recent years, with the risk of this leading to short-term disinterest in social dialogue.

We, as partners, are driven by the belief that social dialogue can be a powerful decision support instrument that can hardly be separated from the solution, as it represents a platform to reflect on what could have been handled with a better approach and what the different regulatory and economic measures we need to undertake to design proper economic and social protection policies and prevent future similar crisis.

This virtual discussion will provide an opportunity to build on past efforts towards more inclusive social policies in order to move a step further and start to envision concrete solutions to labor market issues through the window of skills policies in a social dialogue environment. The overall objective in terms of outcome will be to deliver solid recommendations that could feed into the UfM Ministerial Conference on Employment and Labour that is set to take place in 2022.



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