

Ministerial Declaration

of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Ministers in charge of Employment and Labour

(18 May 2022, Morocco – Marrakech)

1. The Ministers in charge of Employment and Labour of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) gathered at their fifth Ministerial meeting in Morocco in Marrakech on 18 May 2022. The Ministerial meeting was preceded by a Ministerial policy conference on employment and employability of the most vulnerable, especially among youth and women;
2. The Ministerial meeting was hosted by H.E. Dr Younes Sekkouri, Minister of economic inclusion, small enterprises, employment and skills of the Kingdom of Morocco and co-chaired by H.E. Mr. Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner in charge of Jobs and Social Rights, and H.E. Mr. Nayef Stetieh, Minister of Labour of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, in the presence of H.E. Mr. Nasser Kamel, Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean;
3. The Ministers agreed to focus this Ministerial Declaration on employment and employability of the most vulnerable, especially among youth and women.

The Ministers are recalling

4. The UfM Employment and Labour Ministerial Conferences held in Marrakech in 2008, in Brussels in 2010, at the Dead Sea in Jordan in 2016 and in Cascais in 2019;
5. The conclusions of the fourth UfM Social Dialogue Forum held on 6 and 7 October 2020;
6. The strong political commitment taken at the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Process, the UfM Regional Forum of 27 November 2020, and the UfM Regional Forum of 29 November 2021;
7. The renewed partnership between both shores of the Mediterranean with the adoption on 9 February 2021 of the Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on a “New Agenda for the Mediterranean” and its Economic and Investment Plan, and the adoption of the related Council of the European Union’s conclusions of 19 April 2021;
8. The third Social Summit held in Porto on 7 and 8 May 2021 which gave a new political impetus to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights;
9. The European Year of Youth 2022, placing youth at the heart of policy making and policy priorities; the UfM 2030 Youth Strategy; and, in the context of the “New Agenda for the Mediterranean” and the subsequent Council Conclusions of 19 April 2021, the increased efforts in strengthening women’s rights and in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment, taking note of the Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative on the third Gender Action Plan (GAP);

10. The commitment taken in the MENA-OECD Ministerial Declaration on Governance and Competitiveness for Development of 1 April 2021;
11. The 109th Session of the International Labour Conference of June 2021, dedicating its work and conclusions to social protection, skills, inequalities and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as International Labour Organisation's Global call to action for a human-centred recovery from the COVID-19 crisis that is inclusive, sustainable and resilient;
12. The G20 Education, Labour and Employment Ministers' Joint Declaration adopted on 22 June 2021 in Italy, as well as the Labour and Employment Ministerial Declaration adopted on 23 June 2021 in Italy;

The Ministers are acknowledging

13. The **challenges** discussed at the 2019 Ministerial Conference on Employment and Labour have unfortunately been exacerbated by the **COVID-19 pandemic**, leading to a learning loss, in some cases to an increase of child labour, a significant increase of poverty rates, in unemployment in general, and in particular of young people, notably of young women, to a deterioration of conditions for those in informal and precarious jobs, as well as to a widening of economic, social and territorial inequalities. Consequently, there is an even more pressing need for job creation and decent work for all, including fair wages, decent working times, occupational safety and health at work and social protection for all, as essential conditions for sustainable and inclusive growth. This includes also the digital labour platform workers, to make the most of the job-creating potential of digital platforms;
14. The need for a **long-term socio-economic recovery as well as resilient, sustainable, inclusive and connected economies** in the Mediterranean region. These are key shared priorities and prerequisites for social justice, an enabling environment for business, fair and rules-based international trade, attraction and retention of investment as well as creation of more decent jobs and sustainable economic opportunities. **Building back better** and **leaving no one behind** include in particular developing the full potential of the most vulnerable, especially among youth and women, so that they can play an active role as drivers of change in the socio-economic recovery, as well as the green and digital transitions. The recovery needs also to be gender-responsive and including persons with disabilities on equal basis with others. An enabling environment for competitive and sustainable enterprises, an increase of productivity as well as a reduction of informality are among the key areas that may contribute to employment creation and reducing inequalities;
15. The need to respond to global challenges and trends through the achievement of **the 2030 Agenda**, strengthening the efforts towards eradicating poverty, reducing vulnerabilities and addressing inequalities to ensure that no one is left behind;
16. The opportunity to renew the commitment to the financing and achievement of the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** in the region, in particular SDG 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning, SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, and SDG 10 on reducing inequalities;

17. The **structural challenges faced in some countries in the Mediterranean region**, , in terms of regional stability, human development and regional integration, such as:
- The high rates of inactivity, informal employment, structural unemployment, underemployment and the high number of young people Not in Education Employment or Trainings (NEETs),
 - The low female labour force participation and its effect on economic growth and inequality, as well as the situations of discrimination based on gender that still persist in the labour market,
 - The barriers, which prevent promising small enterprises from growing and hamper the creation of more decent jobs by the private sector,
 - The insufficient digital transformation, contributing to a widening of the digital gap,
 - Growing labour shortages and structural skills and competencies mismatches and gaps between labour force supply and demand,
 - The difficult school-to-work and job- to-job transition, the weakness of public employment services, insufficient cooperation with private employment services,
 - The poor efficiency and insufficient investment in technical vocational education and training (TVET) , as well as formal professional qualification processes for both youth and adults,
 - The high exposure to long term unemployment of the most vulnerable groups, especially among youth and women, that lead to exclusion, precariousness, and social discontent, and
 - The persisting negative effects of the high pressure on labour markets of the informal economy/undeclared work;
18. **The importance of the youth in the Mediterranean region**, as highlighted in the Ministerial Policy Conference as one of the biggest assets in the Mediterranean region. However, youth face insecurity and significant barriers to participate in public, social and economic life. Embracing aspirations of young people by drawing inspiration from their actions and insights is key for future policy making towards an inclusive green and digital recovery as well as for a well-functioning labour market. Improving services to outreach the NEETs and to meet the needs of youth and enhancing youth's employability and skills is critical to leverage their potential for bringing innovation and digitalisation to the recovery, economic growth, decent work and social inclusion;
19. The importance of **women's economic empowerment**, women being active drivers for the economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. Women in the region often work in temporary and part-time employment and significant gender gaps persist in wages, working conditions and pensions. As such, women have been severely hit by lockdowns and business closures, while at the same time continuing to carry out unpaid care work. Situation happened where women have been pushed into inactivity by lack of job opportunities or dropped out completely from the labour market. Women's access to the formal labour market and their engagement as entrepreneurs in the Mediterranean region remains one of the lowest in the world. Over the last decades, positively, female employment participation has increased significantly in the EU;

20. The **role that skills development – initial vocation training as well as lifelong learning - plays** to boost employability, inclusiveness, competitiveness and growth, to address better the challenges of green transition, technological change, and digitalization of the economy in the region, as well as to address the prominent and persistent issue of skills gaps and mismatches in the region. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the temporary closure or the introduction of more digital learning options in most of the training and education facilities in the region, which created some discontinuity of education and training provision in the last few years. This has made transition from education to labour market even more difficult, in particular for young people and women, and in some cases contributing to mental health problems, in the short, medium and long term;
21. The challenges in the transition towards more digital, green, resilient and inclusive societies and competitive economies require the engagement of all, and the **role of social partners and civil society** is crucial to achieve a just transition with benefits for all. Only a timely and meaningful social dialogue can lead to an enabling environment or sustainable enterprises and an inclusive recovery. One of the key conditions of success of strategies for smart, inclusive and sustainable growth is the quality, continuity and regularity of social concertation between the government authorities and the social partner organisations;
22. The importance of **Communities of Practice** which enable peer-to-peer exchanges, give opportunity to promote best practices and are a crucial form of knowledge sharing within the region;
23. The importance of **well-functioning national monitoring processes** whereby reliable and comparable disaggregated data and statistics are gathered to help developing and evaluating policies and reforms aimed at structural and sustainable changes;
24. The importance of solid and wide commitments towards **coordinated and evidence-based youth and women strategies and policies**, including public-private partnerships, to provide guidance and support to address their challenges and untap their potential;

The Ministers are willing to

25. Promote an **economy that works for people with youth- and gender-responsive employment and social policies** and support women's and youth engagement in building socio-economic resilience and recovery, while paying due attention to the most vulnerable people;
26. Promote a timely and meaningful **social dialogue, both tripartite and bipartite, freedom of association and collective bargaining** - including the involvement of social partners in the design, implementation and monitoring of economic and social policies - to help addressing notably the challenges of sustainable, inclusive, green and digital recovery, democracy, decent work for all, and social justice in the region. In this respect, welcome the fundamental contribution of the social partners of the region to the UfM cooperation on employment and labour;

27. Capitalize on the efforts deployed by social partners in both sides of the Mediterranean to engage with institutional, local, national, and international stakeholders to support the development of social dialogue at the appropriate levels as a leverage for societal change in the region, through regional projects such as SOLIFEM and SOLID;
28. Strengthen **regional cooperation and enhance regional integration** to address shared employment and social challenges, build relevant consensus and exchange knowledge and best practices. Explore relevant **sub-regional, trilateral and cross-regional cooperation** and joint initiatives between partner countries across the board;
29. Recognise the need to **address the challenges in line with the commitments taken by the United-Nations for the realisation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (2030 Agenda) and the International Labour Organisation** towards:
 - a. sustainable development;
 - b. the promotion of employment and decent work for all, including fair wages, decent working times, occupational safety and health at work and social protection;
 - c. a just transition to a green economy and skills necessary to adapt the workforce to the changing skills needs in view of an adjustment to the future of work;
 - d. strengthening public and private investments;
30. Take into account the recommendations of the **UfM Progress Report on Regional Integration** that was launched on 27 May 2021, and promote policies that support industrial diversification, including skills development, a digitalisation agenda and stronger integration in regional and global value chains – all aimed at promoting local jobs and sustainable economic models in partnership with the private sector as a key actor to reach regional economic transformation and to boost the skills developments;
31. Tackle the **digital skills gap and the digital gender divide, the digital accessibility gap for persons with disabilities and the infrastructure digital divide** between and within both shores of the Mediterranean. Explore **pathways for accelerating digital transformation** as a vehicle for the creation of more decent jobs, economic growth, and an important vector of innovation and creativity. Ensure that people can realise their potential and contribute to the digital transformation of society. Exchange best practices on new forms of work, such as teleworking and digital labour platform work;
32. Confirm their determination to **implement at national level** the policy orientations defined in this Declaration, in relation to employment and social dialogue, as well as to foster the cooperation on employment and labour within the UfM with concrete steps:
 - a. Intensify efforts to **promote employment and decent work, especially for youth and women**, to attract and retain more youth and women into the labour markets, reduce the gender pay and career advancement gap, create a favourable environment for youth and women's entrepreneurship and for an equal distribution of unpaid work between men and women;

- b. Focus on young people “**Not in Employment, Education or Training**” (NEETs). In this respect, take inspiration from the **EU Youth Guarantee schemes** for better employment, continued education, apprenticeship and traineeship, in accordance with regional and local contexts. Take advantage of the gradual opening to the Southern Neighbourhood of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. Provide and develop quality **apprenticeships, including support to private sector, as well as improved work based learning models**. Improve the quality of services available to support young people towards educational, training and professional activities;
- c. Explore innovative options to make **vocational education and training systems** more modern, inclusive, attractive, flexible, labour market relevant, and fit for the digital and green transitions, and more apt to support young people in preparing for their first job and adults to enhance or change their careers through upskilling and reskilling. Equip young people with knowledge, **skills** and competencies, including tailored guidance, which allow them to find employment opportunities, which thrive and meet the needs for a sustainable, human-centred and inclusive post-COVID recovery. Explore opportunities to establish an effective validation of non-formal and informal learning, including through establishing stakeholder partnerships with broad participation;
- d. Promote the **transition to formal employment for informal workers, especially women**, employed in the shadow economy , home-based work and in micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises as well as work in the agricultural sector and own-account and part-time work, by providing incentives for enterprises to ensure transition from informal to formal economy, promoting pilot projects to encourage and support the transition from informality to the formal market, extending social protection and ensuring fair wages that provide for a decent standard of living in accordance with diverse national wage setting systems; take measures to address unsafe and unhealthy working conditions that can characterize work in the informal economy by promoting occupational safety and health protection to workers in the informal economy;
- e. Foster **diversified and sustainable financing mechanisms** to support the development and implementation of education, training and employment policies , as well as their monitoring and evaluation;
- f. Recognize **social economy, social entrepreneurship and social innovation** as a resilient model – as emphasized by the COVID-19 crisis – and a vector for more decent job creation and expansion of economic opportunities, especially for youth and women, leading to a more inclusive economy in the Mediterranean region. Support the recognition and understanding of social economy organizations with the adequate regulatory framework. Promote social economy policies and legislation through advocacy and peer exchange and increase the level of collaboration between stakeholders (public authorities, business support organizations, investors and social entrepreneurs); increase the capacity and business competences of social economy support structures (SESOs) and prepare social entrepreneurs to scale up through technical assistance, tailor-made expertise (training, coaching and mentoring) and access to finance;

33. Continue developing and implementing policies and reforms aimed at **structural and sustainable socio-economic changes** in the Mediterranean region, linking economic policies (including trade and investment) with labour market reforms, with a strong focus on taking into account employment and decent jobs outcomes. In this respect:
- Express their strong support to the regional **Team Europe Initiative (TEI) on “Jobs through Trade and Investment” for the Southern Neighbourhood** whose objective is to better focus trade and investment policies and promotion instruments towards their impact on creating and maintaining decent jobs, in close cooperation with the policy sectoral dialogues of the UfM Regional Platforms;
 - Welcome the opening of an **UfM Hub for Jobs, Trade and Investment** and its objective to strengthen regional cooperation in the areas of employment, trade and investment, in particular through moderating dialogue and providing impetus to policy making as a knowledge resource to UfM Member States;
34. Pay particular attention to well-functioning **monitoring processes** in the field of employment and labour as well as to the quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the impact of actions undertaken. In this respect, welcome the presentation of the cross-countries report, as a result of the pilot phase. Confirm the importance of continuing and consolidating the work with the volunteering UfM Member States on the national monitoring processes. **Call for more UfM Member States to join this exercise.** Welcome the increase of the quality and, if conditions allow, of the scope of employment and labour information, data, analysis and strategy aiming at better understanding the impact of the policy actions notably on youth and women. Appreciate and welcome the continued support and technical guidance from the European Training Foundation;
35. Encourage and further develop the use of **Communities of Practice, notably on youth employment**, by:
- developing an approach based on partnerships across all relevant bodies and stakeholders, such as: employers, practitioners and policy makers, education and training institutions, social partners, civil society, employment services, providers of solidarity and civic activities, youth and women organizations and other concerned organizations;
 - building on the best practices and recommendations of previous Communities of Practice in the region such as those presented by the UfM-labelled project “Global Initiative on innovative employment services for youth (YouMatch)”, in order notably to improve the quality and efficiency in their services and to establish a network among them to share good experiences to boost the employment and employability of the most vulnerable, especially among youth and women;
 - nourishing and enriching peer learning and exchanges within networks and communities of practice with the outcomes and good practices resulting from the UfM monitoring exercise;
36. Confirm the **role of the UfM Secretariat** to accompany labelled projects related to youth employment and employability as well as to ensure appropriate co-ordination with, and provide assistance to the various stakeholders. Support UfM initiatives in this respect, such as the **UfM Grant Scheme for employment promotion - Regional response to the COVID-19 pandemic.**;



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The Hashemite
Kingdom of Jordan

37. Express their strong support for the **UfM Regional Platform on Employment and Labour**, and mandate this UfM Regional Platform to elaborate and support the implementation of a **Roadmap for Action 2022-2025** in line with the objectives of this Declaration;
38. Agree to convene the **sixth Ministerial Conference on Employment and Labour in 2025**;
39. Express their **gratitude** to the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco for its warm hospitality and to the UfM Secretariat for helping convene the meeting.