



## Sixth meeting of the High Level Working Group on Employment and Labour

28-29 March 2017, Barcelona

### Meeting Summary

On 28-29 March 2017, the sixth meeting of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) High Level Working Group on Employment and Labour (HLWG) took place in Barcelona, Spain, at the premises of the UfM Secretariat.

About 50 participants from employment and labour ministries and agencies in the UfM partner countries as well as representatives from European institutions/agencies and international organisations attended the meeting, which was co-chaired by the Commission and the Jordanian co-Presidency. Social partners' representatives from both shores of the Mediterranean were also present.

The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss **follow-up actions to implement the Ministerial Declaration** adopted at the third UfM Ministerial Conference on Employment and Labour (26-27 September 2016, Jordan).

To this end, the meeting focused on the **four key topics** of the Ministerial Declaration, which also reflect the structural labour market challenges in the region:

- job creation and entrepreneurship;
- youth employability, employment services and matching;
- the transition from the informal economy to formal employment, and
- social dialogue.

In the spirit of **peer learning and exchange of best practices**, each of these topics was introduced by the presentation of national experiences, policies or programmes presented by national representatives as well as social partners. In addition the debate was enriched by presentations by GIZ (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*), the European Training Foundation and the International Labour Organisation.

Participants requested to focus also on cross-cutting issues, in particular the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on labour markets (relevant notably for Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon), and the low participation rate of women in economic life. The impacts of digitalisation and automation were mentioned, as they have important consequences for the world of work and the skills needed for future jobs.

### ***The topics discussed***

1) On **youth employability and skills development**, the European Training Foundation (ETF) reported on the outcomes of the "Torino Process" (review of vocational education and training) and the project GEMM (Governance for Employability in the Mediterranean). They highlighted the



importance of skills anticipation and better school-to-work transition, illustrated by examples from several countries in the southern Mediterranean region.

**GIZ** (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*) presented an update of the UfM-labelled project YouMatch which promotes innovative approaches for employment services with a focus on job orientation, preparation and matching. The project builds on regional networks and wide stakeholder participation. The Open Innovation Fund provides financial and technical support for the implementation of innovative pilot projects.

**Finland** presented the One-stop Guidance Centres for youth which are easy access service points for young people and deliver multi-sectoral information, advice, guidance and support using a broad network of partners. The aim is to help young people find their path into education and employment. In a changing world of work, an efficient system of guidance and support becomes ever more important. "Pop up Guidance Centres" reach out to young people living in remote areas.

2) The session on **job creation** presented two contrasting approaches to tackle the issue. The **Belgian** example "microStart" gave insights into a successful scheme which promotes small-scale entrepreneurial projects through micro credits, targeted at disadvantaged groups. Several countries reported about similar national schemes and underlined that such initiatives also contribute to the transition from the informal economy to formal employment. By contrast, **Israel** explained that the presence of a highly skilled labour force can be a pull factor for attracting (foreign) investment and hence boost job creation. The Israeli high-tech sector was given as an example.

3) As regards the **informal economy / undeclared work**, the **ILO** gave a comprehensive presentation and underlined the win-win effects of the transition to formality, including as regards decent work for all. Integrated strategies, combining deterrence and an enabling environment, in conjunction with monitoring and capacity building, are needed to yield good results. The ILO recommendation 204 provides policy guidance and invites countries to prepare action plans on the transition to formality.

The EU Member States are engaged in a Platform to fight Undeclared Work, and the example of **Greece** illustrated a comprehensive strategy to fight undeclared work. The strategy was elaborated in a tripartite process (government, workers, employers) with the technical support of the ILO and it combines enforcement measures as well as preventive initiatives and incentives. **Morocco** informed about the national programme on the self-entrepreneur status, which aims at promoting integration into the formal sector, growth and employment and poverty reduction. In the ensuing debate countries highlighted among other things that labour inspectorates have an important role to play to address informality and undeclared work.

4) In the session on social dialogue, it was highlighted that both tripartite and bipartite social dialogue must be strengthened. Regional **Social Partners** referred to their Declaration on Social Dialogue (presented at the Ministerial Conference in September 2016) and underlined the role of social dialogue to promote growth and jobs, competitiveness and social progress. In the EU, countries with well-functioning social dialogue systems weathered the economic crisis best and showed the highest resilience. The Social Partners referred to the project SOLiD, an EU funded capacity-building project, and announced that they would hold their next Social Dialogue Forum in



October this year. The Forum will discuss the implementation of the Declaration on Social Dialogue and identify Social Partners' priorities for the coming years.

5) Finally, following the mandate given by Ministers at their Conference in September 2016, the **UfM Secretariat** presented the rationale and preliminary work carried out for a Regional Index for Employment Programmes. This important initiative aims at enhancing transparency and cooperation between the UfM partner countries, other stakeholders and donors in the region. The UfM Secretariat will proceed with preparations for the database. The actual data collection is scheduled to start during 2017.

### ***The Roadmap***

The UfM partner countries are committed to ensuring the follow-up to the Ministerial Declaration of 2016. The rich debate and lively exchange during the sessions of the meeting led to identifying possible ways of implementation, including through work that is already underway. Regarding the labour supply side, for instance, the ETF has been a long-standing partner on VET, skills and employability; the EU runs important bilateral assistance programmes in the region (including on VET). The GIZ project YouMatch will continue to run until spring 2018. Regarding social dialogue, the project SOLiD runs from 2016 to 2018.

To complement the ongoing work, the group showed interest in holding thematic seminars involving a number of volunteer countries with a view to peer-learning, for instance on job creation in the social economy, the participation of women in economic life and the access of refugees to the labour market. The group expressed also interest in a possible cooperation of labour inspectorates in the area of undeclared work and the transition to the formal economy. Given that the next UfM Ministerial Conference on Employment and Labour is scheduled to take place in 2019 initiatives for the implementation of the 2016 Declaration must start soon

Based on these preliminary ideas, it was agreed to finalise a **Roadmap** for the implementation of the Declaration (2017-2019) through further consultation with the participants in the coming weeks and further exploration of the possible financing of thematic seminars such as those abovementioned. Other relevant UfM work streams will be taken into account, such as the UfM Ministerial Meeting on Empowering Women (planned to take place in November 2017).

The UfM Secretariat, the Jordanian co-Presidency and the EU will facilitate the preparation of the final Roadmap and support its implementation.

The High-Level Working Group on Employment and Labour will hold its next meeting in spring 2018.