



Employers entrusted to deliver
Sustainability Growth Innovation



Social partners of the Union for the Mediterranean

JOINT STATEMENT

Fifth Ministerial Conference of the Union for the Mediterranean on employment and labour held on 17 and 18 May in Morocco

Marrakesh, 17 May 2022

Social partners of the Union for the Mediterranean (hereinafter “social partners”) welcome the 5th Ministerial Conference on Employment and Labour of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) which is being held on 18 May 2022 in Marrakesh, Morocco.

Social partners on both sides of the Mediterranean particularly appreciate the invitation to exchange views with Ministers on creating quality employment and improving employability of the most vulnerable, especially youth and women. Some of the challenges ahead of us are common, and others are different in both regions. Social dialogue should /be considered a common asset that has an important role to play in designing and implementing effective solutions to pressing labour market challenges, and to foster economic growth and decent work for all.

Current labour market challenges

Social partners note that the challenges identified at the 4th Ministerial Conference in 2019 have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemics and by the widespread socio-economic and, in certain aspects, security-related unrest in the Southern Mediterranean countries: they

have widened social and territorial inequalities in this region and increased the risk of poverty for thousands of people.

On top of this, the impact of the invasion of Ukraine is profound, on the functioning of our economies and labour markets. There is a clear risk of stagflation for the countries of Europe and the Mediterranean. Careful and responsible policy choices will be required to reduce the risk that the situation leads to a serious increase in unemployment levels, especially among young people and women.

These elements have also caused a new major refugee crisis only a few years after the one triggered by the Syrian conflict. The European countries and social partners are doing their utmost efforts to provide shelter to several millions of Ukrainian refugees, mainly women and children at this stage. The ETUC and the European employers' organisations welcomed the decision of the European Union to use the Council Directive 2001/55/EC on the temporary protection of displaced persons to develop greater solidarity between countries and facilitate migrants' integration on the labour market. But it is also important not to lose sight of the need to improve migrant workers' employment perspectives respecting the applicable rules on admission and as regards working conditions based on economic migration channels.

A key challenge today as a part of the post-Covid recovery is to foster an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises, quality job creation and increasing employment participation as well as ensure that social protection systems are tailored to the diversity of workers' needs. Securing well-functioning labour markets today means to overcome, in priority, the **serious skills and labour force shortages** that are currently acting as a growth bottleneck in many countries. To achieve this, it is important to bring to the spotlight the value of work, to make work pay notably through well-designed in-work benefits, and to secure responsible and adequate wages for financial self-sufficiency, professional development and personal fulfilment taking into account the current difficult economic context for both employers and workers.

In order to do so, **skills gaps and mismatches** need to be addressed through appropriate upskilling/reskilling opportunities to equip workers (as well as potential workers and the new generations) with skills required by the rapidly changing labour markets. Cooperation between universities, research institutions and vocational education and training (VET) programmes from both continents needs to be strengthened. Inclusive recovery shall embrace all those who can work. To this effect, tailored measures are needed for the vulnerable groups that require more support in professional (re-)integration. This support can be provided through effective active labour market policies combined with social services, long-term and sustained investment in education and training systems, as well as other supporting measures such as good quality and affordable childcare and long-term care provisions. Care provisions are especially important in supporting female employment and female entrepreneurship to help women combine work and family responsibilities. Moreover, in some UfM Member States promoting the value of female employment is an essential precondition for changing the perception of the role of women in society that currently hampers efforts by many women to take up professional activity, play an active economic and social role and contribute to regional economic growth. This is particularly relevant in Southern countries where the challenge is amplified by the weight of the informal sector and the unstable nature of the undeclared jobs available to the most vulnerable groups. Addressing informality can also help ensure the sustainability of social protection systems, which can provide better support to targeted individuals. National plans - drafted with social partner involvement – are needed for the formalisation of the informal economy, in line with the ILO Recommendation 204 (2015) on the transition from the informal to the formal economy. The **twin transition – green and digital - is a game changer**. It brings a lot of opportunities but has to be managed wisely to harness its full potential and leave no one behind. The green transition changes the paradigms

of economic growth and impacts the world of work profoundly. Different sectors of the economy are impacted in various ways and to a different extent, and the potential job losses and gains vary strongly across regions making smart policies and international collaboration even more important. The impact is significant across the board with an ongoing deep transformation of the skills needed in new jobs as well as in existing jobs. These changes require appropriate accompanying measures to help employers and workers adapt to new challenges. The green transition raises challenges for energy-intensive sectors, especially when securing the supply of energy and essential commodities has become an urgent necessity to both northern and southern Mediterranean countries in the wake of Russia's war in Ukraine. At the same time, adaptation to Covid coupled with the digital transition has made remote work a wide-spread phenomenon and accelerated digital technology adoption. These two transitions shake established technologies, business models and labour markets but also open new economic growth and employment opportunities, which can be particularly beneficial for vulnerable people. The key will be reaching out to this group, providing appropriate training and supporting their labour market integration by improved mentoring, career guidance and/or training solutions. Appropriate measures should help vulnerable groups make a transition to open labour markets, develop their employability and stabilise their career. Social partners are instrumental in this process as they understand the impacts of green and digital transitions at different levels (sectoral and company) and can contribute to designing effective solutions as well as providing technical support to workers and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises in this crucial transition.

The European and South-Mediterranean social partners see value in UfM member countries further discussing among them, involving the social partners, **how to improve economic migration policy frameworks** in the most effective way and better distribute benefits of migration flows between both regions in the future. The talent partnerships that are currently being developed by the European Commission have a particular relevance in the context of the UfM to provide a comprehensive policy framework, as well as funding support to boost mutually beneficial international mobility based on better matching labour market needs and skills between the EU and partner countries. In particular, the UfM cooperation could support the further development of qualifications frameworks in both regions to get a better understanding of how the respective country qualifications relate to each other, taking the European Qualifications Framework into account. The European Training Foundation could play a useful role in supporting this endeavour.

Supporting entrepreneurship is another important way of increasing employment, innovation and inclusion. An enabling environment for sustainable enterprises, and a significant reduction of informality are among the prerequisites to good quality employment creation and reducing inequalities. Productivity is also a key area that can contribute to this aim.

The role of social dialogue

Social partners wish to contribute actively and positively to the establishment and development of strong, independent and effective social dialogue, at the bi- and/or tripartite levels in the 41 UfM Member States. To this objective they will continue to strengthen their capacity for autonomous action and their involvement in the decision-making processes within the member countries, in the two regions, and in the context of the activities carried out at the UfM level. The Covid crisis has proven that social partner involvement is crucial in designing targeted responses and their effective implementation, and that social dialogue is an essential tool to ensure social and economic accountability. We call for timely and meaningful social dialogue at all appropriate levels and at all times.

In particular, the pilot project for the Promotion of Social Dialogue in the Southern Mediterranean Neighbourhood – SOLiD – jointly implemented by the social partners of the southern shore of the Mediterranean affiliated with the Arab Trade Union Confederation and BUSINESSMED aimed at developing the capacities of employer organisations and worker unions from three target countries (Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan) over a three-year period (2016-2019). Building on this experience, the SOLiD II project is currently under implementation, widening the scope of work to Algeria, Lebanon, and Palestine. Its objective is to create a common level of understanding of social dialogue across the six countries, that will serve as a platform for future common initiatives between the southern Mediterranean social partners, and other relevant stakeholders i.e. governments, local authorities, economic and social councils, as well as civil society organisations.

The social partners of the UfM from the northern shore welcome the 2nd edition of the SOLiD project and are convinced that it will further strengthen social dialogue - and civil dialogue, whenever appropriate - with a view to better functioning labour markets, the creation of good quality jobs and the strengthening of much expected stability and social cohesion in the respective countries.

The social partners also acknowledge the Ministerial Declaration of this 5th UfM conference. In particular, they note the following points:

- the willingness to 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;
- the willingness 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 by the International Labour Organisation;**
- the 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;
- the particular attention paid to **the monitoring process** with a view to transposing the Declarations into actions at the national level and the call for more UfM member states to join.

The way forward

Social partners acknowledge concrete actions undertaken to support employment of the most vulnerable, especially youth and women. Gender equality is a key element to promote female participation in the labour market and improve the productivity of the economies especially in the southern countries. To this objective, it would be important to consider the ILO standards, such as anti-discrimination Conventions 100 and 111 as well as Convention 189 on domestic workers and Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work. Continuing investment, supporting and promoting employment participation of the available workforce are the main priorities to ensure economic growth and attractive labour markets. Social partners especially welcome the opening of **an UfM Hub for Jobs, Trade and Investment** and **the regional Team Europe Initiative (TEI) on “Jobs through Trade and Investment”**. Both initiatives should contribute amongst other things to dynamic labour markets by creating and maintaining good-quality jobs as well as strengthening inter-regional cooperation. Social partners also welcome a gradual opening of **the European Alliance for Apprenticeship to South-Mediterranean countries**, which is crucial to improve the relevance of skills training in line with changing labour market needs, and in offering opportunities for the youth, including those “Not in Education, Employment or Training” (NEETs). This should contribute to

developing effective and quality apprenticeships in cooperation with the private sector as well as to improving work-based learning models. Social partners also insist on the need to build apprenticeship according to the outcomes of the forthcoming standard-setting ILC discussion in this field as well as the European Council Recommendation for Quality and Effective Apprenticeship.

Evidence-based policy making requires reliable and comparable data. **The ETF monitoring exercise** contributes to qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the impact of the undertaken actions, as well as to the progress of translating the Ministerial Declarations into relevant national initiatives. It is an important policy pointer that facilitates mutual learning and enables benchmarking of the most effective solutions. Social partners are following this exercise with interest and congratulate all the participating UfM Member States. Social partners believe that developing **the Communities of Practice** can be an effective tool to address labour market challenges while respecting diversity of national approaches and different social dialogue practices. Social partners are ready to contribute with their experience and specific practices at different levels.

With regard to their bipartite activities on the bi-regional level, UfM social partners intend to continue their exchanges on labour market policy issues and social dialogue in the coming years. Social partners call on the European Commission, the co-presidency and the UfM Secretariat to take the necessary steps for the organisation of a future UfM Social Dialogue Forum in the fall of 2023. The Social Dialogue Forums organised in the framework of the UfM should continue, with the objective of sharing information and good practices on the state of progress of social dialogue in the UfM countries, and of exchanging views on current and future priorities, notably with respect to capacity-building of social partner organisations.

About us

Employers organisations:

BusinessEurope

BusinessEurope is the leading advocate for growth and competitiveness at the European level, standing up for companies across the continent and campaigning on the issues that most influence their performance. A recognised social partner, we speak for all-sized enterprises in 35 European countries whose national business federations are our direct members.

Website: www.busesseurope.eu

SGI Europe

Established in 1961, SGI Europe, formerly known as CEEP (the European Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public Services and Services of general interest), gathers enterprises and authorities from across Europe, both public and private, at national, regional and local level, which are public employers or providers of services of general interest.

Website: www.sgieurope.org

SMEunited

SMEunited, formally known as UEAPME (Union Européenne de l'Artisanat et des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises) is the employers' organisation representing Crafts and SMEs in Europe, recognised as social partner. SMEunited has over 70 member organisations.

Website: www.smeunited.eu

BUSINESSMED

BUSINESSMED (the Union of Mediterranean Confederations of Enterprises) is the main representative of Mediterranean employers that reflects the interest of 24 confederations of enterprises from member states of the UfM. It is a key platform for cooperation, a promoter of foreign direct investment and a lever for Mediterranean dialogue and socio-economic integration.

Website: www.businessmed-umce.org

Trade unions organisations:

ETUC (and the liaison committee Eurocadres/CEC)

The European Trade Union Confederation was founded in 1973 to promote the interests of workers at European level, and to represent them in the EU institutions. Its membership now includes 89 national trade union confederations in 39 countries, plus 10 European trade union federations.

Website: www.etuc.org

ATUC

ATUC is a regional organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). It was founded in 2014, with a mandate to defend fundamental freedoms and trade union rights, to combat discrimination against women and migrants, and to foster the implementation of international standards in the 16 Arab countries. ATUC is made up of 20 trade union confederations in 13 countries.

Website: www.arabtradeunion.org