



## The employment of Mediterranean university graduates: Bridging the employability gap between advanced skills and markets

*Side event to the 4<sup>th</sup> UfM Ministerial Conference on Employment and Labour*

1 April 2019 Cascais, Portugal

Introductory address of Plácido Plaza, Secretary General of the CIHEAM

Distinguished Secretary General of the UfM

Distinguished Representative of the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, Dear colleagues,

I am very happy to be with you here today on the occasion of this side-event and to be able to discuss this fundamental issue of the **employment of Mediterranean university graduates** and the **reduction of the employability gap** between the skills available and those needed by our economies.

For more than fifty years, the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM) is at the **service of training and employability of Mediterranean students and officials** and has made it a priority to train them as closely as possible to **territorial needs** and **emerging challenges**.

Established in 1962, the CIHEAM is an intergovernmental organisation devoted to sustainable agriculture and fisheries, food and nutrition security and the development of rural and coastal territories in the Mediterranean.



These are **key issues for the societies and economies of our region**. We are convinced that the development and the future of the Mediterranean depend on them. The activities of the CIHEAM are based on the combination of means and instruments including education and training, capacity building, networked research, cooperation and technical assistance as well as political dialogue.

Currently composed of 13 Member States, the CIHEAM is one of the **longest established actors of multilateral cooperation, dialogue and the Euro-Mediterranean partnership**. We have 4 Institutes where Master students, young researchers and agricultural, food and rural development executives are trained. They are located in Bari (Italy), Chania (Greece), Montpellier (France) and Zaragoza (Spain).

Throughout these years, our Organisation has constantly developed its missions, its priorities and methods of intervention, particularly in the fields of training, research and capacity building to adapt to changes in the region.

As you know, the Mediterranean is a space in which the challenges of natural resource management, social development and cultural diversity conjugate and become more intense. It would be unreasonable not to address these changes at work through our training with an integrated approach.

**The professions of today and tomorrow must provide solutions to these problems. We must keep in mind that today's challenges create the jobs of tomorrow.**

At the CIHEAM, a **value chain and sustainable food systems approach** provides our students with better opportunities in professional terms and attracts new students who, during their training, acquire new skills and open up gradually to new business models.

Every year, in the CIHEAM Institutes, **nearly 400 students are trained at Master level and more than 1 000 professionals and executives receive specialised additional**. They come from the Arab world, from Africa and Europe but also from



Latin America. During their stay, they discover the common roots of Mediterranean cultures and the virtues of intercultural dialogue and diversity.

This decompartmentalisation that enriches expertise and provides new prospects is also fostered in our networked research, in our field development projects and in our doctoral platform which will be presented in the next session. **It is the foundation of our regional cooperation action.**

At the CIHEAM, we are convinced that agriculture, fisheries and the sustainable development of rural territories are all key factors for long term security and stability in the region. **Young Mediterranean graduates must play a central role in consolidating this momentum.** We want to encourage them to invest in agriculture and fisheries, to strengthen their confidence and dynamism, to support them in their desire to change habits and codes, to support them in the implementation of technological and social innovation that will lead to the set-up of businesses and job creation.

The CIHEAM will carry this message during its 12th ministerial meeting that will be held in Tunis on the 5 of November 2019 addressing the theme of **youth empowerment as a lever for agricultural and rural development.**

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear colleagues,

We must realise that, no matter in which economic sector, the employability of our young students and professionals will be a major challenge for the future of our region and we cannot afford to overlook it.

Thank you Mr Secretary General for your invitation and I thank the Portuguese authorities for the quality of their always warm hospitality.