

Report session by Yasmine Seghirate El Guerrab seghirate@ciheam.org

Side Event to the 4th UfM Ministerial Conference on Employment and Labour (1 April 2019, Cascais, Portugal)

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

The side event was organized in parallel to the 4th UfM Ministerial Conference on Employment and Labour by the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), in partnership with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT) and the CIHEAM was held in parallel to the 4th UfM Ministerial Conference on Employment and Labour in partnership.

Speakers of the Session 1 University and job markets

Moderator: Johannes Laepfle, GIZ

- Maroun El Moujabber, CIHEAM
- Wided Carpentier, HOMERe
- Nayef Z. Stetieh, Business Development Center
- Silvia Marchionne, UNIMED Project Manager

Exchange of experiences and questions from the audience

Rapporteur: Yasmine Seghirate, CIHEAM

Report of the Session 1 University and job markets

As we have seen, the challenge that brings us together today is quite complex. There are multiple solutions that can be found at different levels.

There is one certainty. Given the challenges mentioned, the efforts to be made must be unprecedented in the history of our region.

Indeed, striving towards a better match between the training system and the job market in a region of the world with one of the **highest rates of youth unemployment** is no longer an option but an obligation.

If the projects that have been presented so far differ in their operational mode, size or geographical /sectoral area that they cover, objectives converge. I have identified THREE main ones:

- 1. To provide graduate students with new skills and means to best fit in a professional environment characterised by increased openness to the world and innovation, which is increasingly complex, fast-changing and for which, adaptability, and know-how as much as soft skills are indispensable.**

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In the presentations there were discussions on creativity, innovation, willingness, the audacity to undertake and personal effectiveness. **Skills that are not innate but that may be acquired.**

These traditional training systems are often not well equipped to bring out and enhance these valuable qualities in students.

With regard to these aspects, the speakers have demonstrated the importance of coaching or even « mothering » sometimes.

Among the actions mentioned, we note the implementation of:

Training and capacity building programmes to help solve complex problems, **stimulate thought and critical analysis**, to help negotiation, evaluation and decision-making support;

- 2. The second strong idea that was raised during our discussions is the need to bring the academic/research worlds closer to the professional sphere, entrepreneurship and the needs of territories.**

The HOMERe programme that encourages and supports international mobility of Mediterranean students contributes to this objective. It allows to put students in touch with companies of the two Mediterranean shores for an experience outside their country of origin. An initiative that often helps them to find a job in the company or in their country of origin.

The set up of business clubs, the elaboration of market studies to better understand the employment situation locally or the demand of certain sectors of activity, the stimulation of start-up incubators were also mentioned as ways to reduce gaps between students and the professional sphere.

The CIHEAM stressed the need to bring researchers closer to the agricultural and rural worlds so that their study projects are more in line with the needs of the most fragile communities. It is indeed urgent to fill a major gap in research: its disconnection from the ground. **Too theoretical, too locked up in laboratories, research must be lively and confronted with reality.**

- 3. The third shared objective is to streamline or even create information channels between the various stakeholders** (students, universities, private sector, municipalities, chambers of commerce...) by particularly mobilising exchange platforms and organising meetings.

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Our discussions led us to observe that partnership synergies, networking and the multi-stakeholder approach (with companies, associations but also public authorities) undeniably allow to develop training towards a better connection with the job market needs. However, the sharing of networks and combination of expertise can sometimes seem complicated in countries where academic, economic and political actors are still working in silos and where the culture of sharing information remains insufficient.

It was recalled that students do not sufficiently see themselves as job creators or solution providers **due to the lack of information about existing devices or due to persistent social norms** (such as working in the public sector as the only factor of professional success).

These ideas can be shaken up by the dissemination of “success stories” and best practices. **From the point of view of access to information, we must all be concerned by this figure for Jordan:** 80% of students do not read newspapers and most of them read very little.

In these conditions, how could students become familiar with societal and economic issues? How do they imagine themselves in a job that could bring solutions to everyday problems? Efforts must also focus on these dimensions. Providing new streams of thought and allowing critical distance are mandatory conditions for the success of projects.

Lastly, during the questions and answers part of the session, several points that require a thorough reflection and that feed future projects were raised:

First of all there is the role of the diaspora. Many students who go to study or to do an internship outside their country decide to stay in the host country.

How can this be transformed into added value? The significance of material transfers in the country of origin was mentioned but what about **intangible transfers** (know-how, knowledge acquired abroad)? How can they participate in the development of the country or reduce the gap we are talking about today?

The speakers were also asked questions on the change of scale. How could one move from a pilot project to a larger project with greater impacts?

Regarding this point, it seems that it is up to the public authorities to establish partnerships with civil society and enterprises. This is a vast subject that will feed public policy for the next 20 years.