

Working together on the vocational training of young people in the Mediterranean area

The future of young people is a shared priority for all countries of the Mediterranean basin. General education and vocational training are at the centre of policy initiatives of all of the countries in the region, which are diverse in their method, but with a common goal: young people employability, their access to skilled jobs and their personal fulfilment.

During the 5+5 Malta Summit in October 2012, the Heads of State and Government wished to reinforce further youth policies asserting that "education and the enhancement of youth's potential is a fundamental element for the development and prosperity of the Mediterranean region. *To enhance the employability of young people, measures to develop vocational training will be encouraged.* A Euro-Mediterranean qualifications framework based on the recognition and transfer of skills and qualifications could be offered to the 10 countries".

This priority was reaffirmed during the "5+5" Lisbon Euro-Mediterranean Ministers of Foreign Affairs Conference on 22nd May 2014. It is one of the central issues being addressed by Euro-Mediterranean policy-makers, from across the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean, the European Commission and the Arab Maghreb Union.

The whole "5+5" member countries are undertaking similar initiatives with the same determination, targeting the improvement of training and the promotion of youth employment.

In France, the President of the Republic recently reaffirmed his personal commitment in this area, which is listed as a key priority in the proposals presented by the President of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Region in his report on the "Mediterranean of projects".

Today, under the Portuguese and Moroccan co-presidency of "Dialogue 5+5", Mrs Najat Vallaud Belkacem, French Minister for School Education, Higher Education and Research, invites her counterparts from the member countries to "work together on the vocational training of young people in the Mediterranean area".

To this effect, and through the dialogue and trust fostered by this forum, the objective is to build bridges and to introduce new forms of cooperation for the benefit of men and women, in compliance with national policies and frameworks.

The 5+5 countries are agreed to establish specific mechanisms for identifying common skills and knowledge requirements, with the aim of developing complementarities, synergies, North-South partnerships and of promoting concrete Mediterranean cooperation projects.

The challenges have been clearly identified. There are many different challenges which vary between countries but which are often shared: low participation and employment rates, inadequate correlation between education and employment, high school or vocational training drop-out rates, a lack of vocationally-oriented higher education, as well as a negative image of vocational education and training.

With a view to addressing these challenges, **the Ministers of Education and/or Vocational Training of "5+5" expressed their willingness to:**

- Develop vocational education and training and align them with economic and labour market demand, promoting a better match between training provision and business needs;
- Promote the social inclusion of young people;
- Improve the efficiency of vocational education and training systems;
- Propose new governance models and public practices;
- Establish avenues for a mutual recognition of qualifications of each country by all the others.

In Marseille, the ministers adopted a declaration that provided for a concrete action plan on vocational education and training. Its aim is to promote mobility and to improve the comparability of systems, by establishing a Euro-Mediterranean competence framework, which should help increase the employability of young people in the Mediterranean region.

This action plan focuses on **3 priority objectives** established by the member countries to improve the employability of young people and reduce unemployment:

1. Improve the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training with:

- School and vocational guidance assistance
- Legal access to vocational training for both girls and boys
- Young people drop-out reduction while in initial training

2. Secure and facilitate young people's training programs with:

- Links between the various components of the education and training system
- Support for the mobility of young people
- the comparability of national qualification systems, with the introduction of a common quality assurance framework
- The development of lifelong learning and validation of prior experience

3. Take better account of business needs in vocational education and training, by developing a greater dialogue between educational and economic partners.

To achieve these objectives, the ministers agreed to identify:

1) the **priority occupational sectors**:

- Automobile and aircraft maintenance,
- Mechanics and mechatronics
- The digital professions,
- Building and public works,
- Tourism, hotels and catering
- Transport
- Energy and mining industries
- Agriculture and agri-food businesses
- Environment and sustainable development
- Maritime sector

2) the **priority competence levels**:

- level 3 tradesmen
- level 4 technicians
- level 5 advance technicians

On the basis of these two priority areas, in order to enable the recognition of these standards by all of the 5+5 countries, the objective is to **define**:

- **common occupational standards of competence, facilitating the comparability of qualification systems**, that can be integrated into national vocational qualifications, where the attainment of such competence is in accordance with the training methods specific to each national vocational education and training system;

- **the methods and processes used to evaluate** the acquisition of competences.

In order to achieve these 3 objectives, Ministers adopt an **action plan with 10 priority axes**

1) **To establish a Euro-Mediterranean competence assessment framework,**

Based on these competence standards, would allow for the recognition of competencies acquired and validated in the Mediterranean geographic area, within the afore-mentioned priority occupational sectors. Recognised by the member countries, it is particularly useful in facilitating the mobility of young people (during and after training).

The aim of the project is to develop this framework by identifying, for the three priority levels, the competencies associated with the qualification certifying the successful completion of a recognised training programme or work placement and to establish the relationship between competences and qualification standards. To that end, the economic and social partners will participate in its development

The framework is a common reference tool for the description and comparison, but not the equivalence, of qualification levels in qualifications systems developed at national, international or sector based level

Such a tool should operate according to the rules of procedure, propose a trans-sector approach, be based on learning outcomes and offer a classification of qualifications through a system of levels. It should be a common referencing system, provide information on issues relating to entry, residence for study or internship purposes and employment in the States concerned in collaboration with the ministerial departments responsible for this work and, in the same way, it should provide information on the opportunities for mobility available to young people. It shall not result in the recognition of diploma equivalence.

2) To establish a **Euro-Mediterranean network of companies**, with equal North-South representation that have the potential to :

- i) get involved in formal and continuing education,
- ii) develop exchanges of good practices
- iii) provide information on their opportunities for apprentice and trainee placement.

It is a question of increasing the accountability of the economic sector in training programmes and fostering a culture that combines both work and training. The involvement of the business world will be the key to this project. The objective is to make this one of the cornerstones of the success of this vision.

3) To enhance **the training of teachers** (drawing upon the experience of the Centres of vocational training excellence): improving the quality of the training provision by encouraging an assessment of vocational training, which not only focuses on the inputs (teacher qualifications, learning paths), but also on the results of the training in terms of the employment of young graduates.

4) To develop a culture shared by member countries upon notions, concepts and developments of vocational education and training systems.

5) To share, adapt and/or **develop trade and skills description, and learning materials**, through company involvement.

6) To favour the **use of digital media** in order to facilitate access to information, training, and to career and mobility prospects, supporting initiatives like **“Euromed+”**

- 7) To create a **EURO MED PASS**, a "passport" promoting mobility, to include the user's CV, his/her acquired skills and his/her qualifications and professional experience based on the existing Euro-pass model.
- 8) **To support, develop and evaluate pilot schemes** and to highlight good practices, identified in a national framework or through bilateral or multilateral cooperation, such as:
 - Centres of vocational training excellence
 - Partnership agreements
 - Trade and skills Forum
 - Co-financed mobility programs

In order to implement these actions, the member countries are agreed to:

- Establish a monitoring group, comprised of experts from the 10 countries, responsible for implementing these recommendations. Its primary task, with UFM, UAM and EU, will be to propose a strategy, develop a **timetable**, a **method** and to identify the **resources** required to implement the action plan.
- Entrust this monitoring group with the identification and mobilisation of companies in countries on both shores of the Mediterranean to form a network closely involved in this work.
- Organise a conference in the "5+5" countries in 2015, so that the monitoring group is able to report on the progress of its activities. This conference will provide a forum for reflection, dialogue, the exchange of views and the proposal of initiatives that should serve the mutual interests of the 10 member countries.
- Hold a meeting on this subject at the next 5+5 meeting of ministers of education and vocational education and training in Mauritania in 2016.