Policy Leaders’ Forum on Public Management of Education, Training and Employment Policies in the Arab States of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean - the culture of change, the change of cultures

Marseilles, France, 6 October 2013

ORGANISED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE SIXTH EURO-MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE ON PUBLIC MANAGEMENT 7-9 OCTOBER 2013

Background

On September 25 2012, policy leaders from the field of education and employment from Arab Mediterranean countries (AMC) attended a Policy Forum¹ in Jordan to discuss how to make skills policies more effective in meeting the economic and social development needs of their countries, and citizens. Ministers from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Morocco and Tunisia met together with policy leaders from EU Member States and European Institutions to discuss how the vision for skills should change to meet the emerging needs of the region following the Arab Spring.

The Forum confirmed the new impetus for change which the Arab Spring has given to social and economic development in the region and that well-educated, and well-skilled citizens are fundamental for the region to be able to realise its full potential. But it also confirmed that progress is hampered by a combination of demographic pressure², weak economic growth, inadequate availability and creation of jobs leading to low employment rates³ especially among young people⁴ and women, low returns on education and training and limitations in public management capacity. The working-age population will increase from 125 million to 167 million by 2030. This implies that, taking into account current trends at least 40 million more jobs need to be created in the AMC by 2030.

The Arab Spring has led to profound changes in the countries of the region, which are in many cases still ongoing. The changes have increased citizens’ expectations from their leaders to deliver effective public policies. In the field of skills, the discrepancy between expectation and policy performance is rendered more difficult by the specificity of the field and long-standing weaknesses in the education and training systems as well as in labour markets in the region.

¹ The Policy Leaders’ Forum was organised by the ETF within a broader meeting with skills sector stakeholders from the region 25-27 September and in conjunction with the Fifth Mediterranean Dialogue on Public Management organised by European Group for Public Administration (EGPA)
² The so-called “youth bulge” caused by rapid demographic transition means that 61% of the population are under 30 (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division)
³ Mediterranean region countries experience the highest average rates of youth unemployment in the world with peaks above 25% despite very high rates of inactivity
⁴ it is estimated that at least 30 million young people (mostly unskilled and/or low-skilled) work in informal, poor quality jobs at subsistence wages
The results of the 2012 Torino Process\(^5\) underline the complexity and range of modern skills policies which cover education, training, employment, economic and social development policies. The breadth of skills policies requires significant policy coordination in order to ensure an integrated, holistic approach. However, the architecture of education and training sub-systems is fragmented leading to disconnection between education and training, or between education and training and labour, or both, making it difficult to provide coherent, “lifelong learning” opportunities for the skills' needs of citizens. This in turn leads to low levels of educational attainment\(^6\) for the citizens of the region compared with EU or OECD countries. Furthermore, the content of skills development provided to young and adult learners in general of limited quality and relevance to the socio-economic needs of individuals and enterprises.

The 2012 Torino Process in particular highlighted the fragmentation of institutional settings in the countries, limited public capacity, uneven resource availability and unclear coordination and quality control. This fragmentation manifests itself in the horizontal diversification of responsibilities among the different bodies of the executive and legislative functions - with many ministries and parliamentary committees having responsibilities for specific policy areas such as general education, higher education, employment, or training, or economic sector specific training and national budgets. This makes it difficult to ensure an integrated, coordinated approach to skills development which would be necessary to effectively address the scale of the challenges in the country. Similarly, there is a longitudinal fragmentation of responsibilities for the policy cycle between the executive and legislative functions. This fragmentation, which is typical for countries undergoing significant constitutional and/or institutional change, means that there is not a smooth and efficient articulation between policy formulation by the executive, policy adoption by Parliaments and policy implementation. The lack of articulation leads to limitations in policy options, delays in the policy cycle, mismatch between policy and budgets, and a gap between strategy, policy making and implementation. This in turn delays the efficient and effective provision of tangible results for the citizens in terms of visible progress toward better living conditions.

In September 2012 in Jordan, Arab Mediterranean policy leaders launched a first exchange of views on effective policy options to enhance employability of young people. The outcomes from the discussion were captured in a Statement\(^7\) which confirmed that skills are at the heart of economic development and job creation strategies; play a fundamental part of social cohesion, peace and democracy; and need effective public management. While the Statement recognised the increased openness for change, policy leaders were encouraged to continue their efforts to respond to align the national vision for skills with the future economic and social development of their countries. In parallel, policy leaders need to put in place practical policies and measures which give clear short term results in terms of economic development and employment as well as laying the basis for long term prosperity and stability. The Statement also stressed the need for enhancing consultation with stakeholder groups during the phases of the policy cycle. In this context, it welcomed the launch of the Young Mediterranean Leaders\(^8\) initiative to promote the voice of youth in education, training and employment policy making. Finally, the Statement underlined that policy leaders need to address the fragmented institutional setting and weak capacity of their administrations and work towards improving public policy management and interactive governance systems.

The 2012 Forum was considered a valuable opportunity for policy dialogue with particular appreciation of the policy learning between the evolving Arab Mediterranean context and EU on specific policy options to enhance employability among young people. It was agreed to hold a further event in October 2013 in Marseilles to help policy leaders from the Arab Mediterranean Countries address the issue of institutional fragmentation in the field of skills. In recognition of the fundamental role played by

\(^5\) The Torino Process is a biennial evidence based analysis of skills policies in partner countries carried out by ETF under the leadership of partner countries and with active participation of stakeholder groups. This conclusion derives from the ETF Torino Process, Regional Report on Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, 2012

\(^6\) Source: UIS-UNESCO.

\(^7\) See annex

\(^8\) The Young Mediterranean Leader initiative was launched by ETF with support of EGPA in September 2012. The initiative was inspired by the findings of the Torino Process that young people from Arab Mediterranean countries were not systematically consulted by policy makers in the formulation of skills policies despite the demographic context of the countries. In 2012, 16 young people from the region aged 25-40 were selected through an open process. With the support of both ETF and EGPA, these young people are being provided with opportunities to develop their awareness of public policy making especially in the field of skills, and with the chance to take part in policy making initiatives in the partner countries.
the legislative function in democratic public policy making, it is proposed to broaden the participation in the 2013 Forum to include representatives of both the executive and legislative functions. Drawing also on experiences from AMC and EU, this would provide a platform to enhance the coordination of skills policies in each function, and to improve cooperation in the policy cycle between the functions. As in 2012, the Policy Leaders’ Forum would be held in conjunction with the Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue on Public Management (MED6) organised by European Group for Public Administration (EGPA).

Objectives for the Marseilles Policy Leaders’ Forum 2013

The Policy Leaders’ Forum in 2013 is intended to give added impetus to the climate and culture of change which was noted at the Jordan Forum. In 2013, the Marseilles Arab Mediterranean Policy Leaders’ Forum will continue to address the efficiency and effectiveness of public policies in education, training and employment for better results in terms of economic prosperity and living conditions for citizens in the region.

For the Ministers, this will represent an opportunity to dialogue with their peers on progress in and lessons learned from implementing the policy options presented in 2012 in Jordan, and in strengthening the governance of the system. Here again, the analysis of the context in partner countries, and policies, tools and instruments from the EU Cooperation in VET and employment will represent a key reference for the discussion.

The innovation in the 2013 Policy Leaders’ Forum derives from the participation of representatives from the national parliaments in the region. Parliamentarians will have the opportunity for policy learning with their peers from the region and EU about the specific policies which are being adopted to address employability especially of young people. Parliamentarians will also exchange experience about how national Parliaments organizing the policy adoption processes, and the impact on efficiency and effectiveness of public policy.

Finally, the Forum will provide an opportunity for representatives of the executive and legislative powers from across the region to discuss together how to reinforce the articulation between the two functions with a view to enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the policy cycle and a greater coherence of policies in the fields of education, training and employment.

More specifically, the Forum will set out to identify:

- Progress made and lessons learned in the implementation of public policies in the fields of education, training and employment.
- Opportunities to enhance the cooperation between executive and legislative functions for a more effective articulation of the policy cycle and policy coherence
- Opportunities to deepen EU-Med cooperation in the public management of education, training and employment policies

Timing and location

The Policy Leaders’ Forum will take place in Marseilles, France on 6 October 2013 during its programme of activities as European Capital of Culture.

It will take place at the Hotel Sofitel. There will be a visit and dinner held at the Villa Méditerranée in the new Mediterranean Centre for Culture and Exchange in Marseilles.
Participants

Some 50 participants are expected to attend the exclusive Forum on 6 October 2013:

- Ministers with responsibility for education, training and/or employment from the AMC
- Representatives of the national Parliaments in AMC, with particular attention to Members of Parliament with an active role in education, training and/or employment policy adoption
- Policy leaders from EU institutions, including European Parliament, European Commission, and Member States
- Representatives of EU-Mediterranean high level policy initiatives, such as the Union for the Mediterranean
- Youth interests represented by the Young Mediterranean Leaders
- International experts, practitioners and researchers in the field of public policy from European and Mediterranean countries

Event flow

Building on the Policy Leaders’ Forum in 2012, the Marseilles meeting constitutes an exclusive dialogue just for Policy Leaders from the AMC and EU on 6 October 2013 from 13.30-19.00. Whereas the 2012 event focused only on the executive functions, the 2013 Forum will bring together both Government Ministers and Parliamentarians engaged in education, training and employment. Following a shared opening session, the representatives from the executive and legislative functions will work in separate groups to strengthen policy learning and networking. This will be followed by a plenary session which will discuss opportunities to enhance articulation in education, training and employment skills policy making between the two functions and identify opportunities for further cooperation. There will be an opportunity to continue the dialogue and networking at a dedicated dinner for participants.

Participants will also be invited to stay on and attend the Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue on Public Management (MED6) which takes place after the Forum, at the Villa Méditerranée in Marseilles on 7-10 October 2013.

Working languages

The Policy Leaders’ Forum will take place in Arabic, English and French

Annex:

Policy makers, practitioners, researchers and representatives of civil society such as social partners, and youth from ETF partner countries, the European Union and international organisations met in Jordan for a high level regional conference organised jointly by the European Training Foundation (ETF) and the European Group for Public Administration (EGPA) on 25-27 September 2012. The participants discussed the new challenges for skills development in the Arab countries of the Mediterranean (AMCs). This statement represents a summary of key messages raised in the conference.

Discussions were informed by policy analyses of vocational education and training (VET) from the 2012 Torino Process, recent research into public management, and have been inspired by cases from the EU and the international community.

The debate confirmed the new impetus which the Arab Spring has given to social and economic development in the region and that well-educated, and well-skilled citizens are fundamental for the region to be able to realise its full potential. However, progress is hampered by a combination of demographic pressure, weak economic growth, inadequate availability and creation of jobs leading to low employment rates especially among young people and women, low returns on education and training and limitations in public management capacity. Despite the difficulties, policy leaders and participants confirmed the culture of change in the region. This is bringing an increased openness to new solutions according to the specific economic and social development model chosen by each country.

These changes mean that skills:

- Are at the heart of economic development and job creation strategies;
- Are a fundamental part of social cohesion, peace and democracy; and,
- Need effective public management.
VISION

- Countries are developing visions for skills to promote their drive towards economic competitiveness and inclusive growth. Above all, VET should serve the needs and aspirations of individuals, and enterprises, and the development of societies based on respect and democratic citizenship.
- Countries recognised the need to widen access to VET and enhance its quality by bringing it closer to the demands of the labour market and the economy, and the diverse needs of learners and enterprises.
- They also recognised the imperative of establishing effective coordination mechanisms and active participation of stakeholders including businesses and civil society. In that respect, the vision for VET must be shared among actors, who should also have a common understanding of their role, benefits and obligations.
- While countries have developed relevant visions and strategies, the conference encouraged further efforts for implementation. A key message was to find synergy between strategic planning and bottom-up initiatives.

YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY

- Although many countries have recently approved short-term emergency programmes for employment, there is a need for long term measures based on demand-led principles, targeting skills needs, skills shortages supported by initiatives for job-creation in key economic sectors.
- VET plays a key role for youth employability, in meeting the needs and aspiration of young women.
- Countries are encouraged to:
  - enhance access to skills development opportunities both within and outside the formal VET system, apprenticeship or other work-based learning opportunities;
  - improve the transition from school to work, again with particular attention to young women
  - further support entrepreneurial learning, so graduates can create their jobs and manage their careers in a changing labour market;
  - Increase the attractiveness of VET by providing pathways towards different and higher levels of education and campaigns to improve the image of VET among citizens and enterprises.
- Skills development opportunities should be provided for different groups, in particular dropouts, those in the informal economy or inactive in the labour market
- ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC POLICY IN VET
- The Arab Spring has emphasised the need for effective public policies based on principles of result orientation, legitimacy and democracy, trust, respect and accountability.
- Recent developments have reinforced the trend towards the greater participation of social partners and civil society (especially youth) in policy making and implementation, leading to a win-win-win relationship with government. This should be enhanced by measures promoting interconnectivity between institutions, stakeholders and citizens at different levels. A critical success factor is building capacity for all actors who have roles and responsibilities in policy design and implementation at all levels.
Countries agreed on the importance of evidence-based policy approaches including tools and feedback loops to monitor progress and measure the effectiveness of policy. Participants highlighted the role of research in enhancing capacities to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of VET policies.

In conclusion, the conference was a timely and valuable occasion for policy leaders and all stakeholders from across the region to work together to share knowledge and build networks among themselves and with the EU and the international community. In particular, it provided an opportunity to emphasise the important role of youth as a counterpart for policy development and in this respect the participants welcomed the launch of the Young Mediterranean Leaders initiative.

The EU, through the ETF, is called upon to continue providing opportunities for policy dialogue and learning both at cross-country and country levels. Coordinated action by the international community in support of these key messages would also be welcomed.

The ETF is encouraged to arrange a further occasion for policy debate at the Torino Process conference on 7-8 May 2013 in Turin, and through a follow up event on 7-8 October 2013 in Marseille, kindly hosted by the Public Management and Territorial Governance Institute (IMPT) at Aix-Marseilles University.