EURO-MEDITERRANEAN CHARTER FOR ENTERPRISE: WHERE TALENT COUNTS!

With increasing concerns about competitiveness and employment in the Southern Mediterranean, governments and private sector have underlined the importance of strategic development of the region’s human capital. Set against the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Enterprise, particular attention has been given to entrepreneurial learning and improving skills within enterprises. Both issues have been taken up by the Working Party for Euro-Mediterranean Industrial Cooperation in its 2009-2010 work programme. This information note captures some of the key results and good practice developed as a consequence the Working Party’s effort to promote human capital in the Southern Mediterranean area.

Promoting entrepreneurship in universities and polytechnics

Entrepreneurial learning should not be confined to business studies or economics but should be available for all students in all faculties. Drawing on this EU recommendation, a regional expert group elaborated indicators specifically for third-level education. The indicators were co-developed with a number of other member countries of the Union for the Mediterranean (e.g. Turkey, Croatia). The indicators specifically address higher education policy, university-enterprise cooperation and good practice exchange. A sub-set of indicators were additionally developed to support universities and polytechnics in promoting the ‘across campus’ approach to entrepreneurial learning (strategy, staff development and links with business).

The indicators were piloted in 2009-2010 with experts from all participating countries engaged through universities that elected to participate in the project on a pilot basis. The indicator road-testing process involved a mobility of experts between all participating countries who peer-reviewed both national policies and university efforts to promote entrepreneurial learning. A final meeting of the project in November 2010, involving representatives from education, industry and economy ministries, as well as regional experts, confirmed the viability of the indicators and the assessment method.

Key outcomes and follow-up recommendations from the project were as follows:

- feasibility of indicators: the policy indicators had proved to be workable and sufficiently robust for inclusion within the wider policy indicators package of the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Enterprise;
- education-economy policy interface: while the assessment process, and the policy indicators in particular, generated a new policy dialogue between education and economy policy makers, a more reinforced dialogue and structured cooperation between the relevant ministries was required to ensure more sustainable developments in entrepreneurial learning in third-level education;
- sharing good practice: given a relatively new and developing policy area, both policy makers and the higher education community stood to benefit from a more systematic identification, quality assurance and dissemination of good practice in entrepreneurial learning;
- impact indicators: while the indicators which were essentially ‘process’ indicators (addressing how entrepreneurship promotion could be developed in higher education) a next step should be to establish ‘impact’ indicators to enable governments and universities to determine the effectiveness of across-campus entrepreneurial learning;
- entrepreneurship and innovation – higher education: the interface between research and innovation and commercialisation of opportunities, including protection of intellectual property, were potential areas where follow-up indicators could be considered;
- indicators as strategic tools: despite the pilot nature of the indicators and assessment process, there were already examples of governments (e.g. Egypt) and universities (Palestinian Technical University, Khadoorie, Université Hassan II, Casablanca) adopting the indicators for policy and institutional development purposes;
- generating awareness and reform momentum: the assessment process, and specifically the mobility of university experts between countries, proved to be highly appreciated by the universities, generating discussion and reflection across management and academic staff in particular of what across-campus entrepreneurship entails. Results from the pilot process have been disseminated in all countries and through wider regional events (e.g. World Economic Forum Round Table on Entrepreneurship Education, Marrakesh, 20 October 2010).

‘The ETF indicators for entrepreneurship education have come at the right time.’
Prof. Hamed Ben Dhia, President, University of Sfax, Tunisia
Preparing teachers for the entrepreneurship agenda

In March 2010, a number of Southern Mediterranean countries joined their counterparts from the EU pre-accession region for an exchange on the broader challenges facing the countries in bringing forward the entrepreneurial learning agenda. The issues raised, and proposals from the meeting, mirrored the concerns and recommendations made by the 27 EU countries which had additionally undergone a common reflection on the entrepreneurial learning agenda. The most prominent challenge for all countries (EU, pre-accession and Southern Mediterranean regions) was to get the teaching profession prepared for the entrepreneurial learning agenda.

In July 2011, education, industry and economy policy makers and specialists in teacher training from the Southern Mediterranean, with counterparts from the EU pre-accession region, will meet to determine the viability of a common teacher training agenda to be followed. The meeting follows a similar discussion on teacher development for entrepreneurial learning involving all EU countries, including Norway and Iceland, held in Budapest in April 2011.

Improving policy for female entrepreneurship

With renewed interest in women’s contribution to the economy, experts from Syria and Jordan joined counterparts from the EU pre-accession region in April 2010 and developed four indicators whose objective is improve the policy and wider support framework for female entrepreneurship.

Indicators cover national policies, training, access to finance and networking.

A next step for the Southern Mediterranean countries is to bring the indicators for a wider regional consultation, with options for piloting and eventual integration into a future assessment of the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Enterprise.

Skills for sustainable enterprise development

With the Working Party attention turning to concerns for more environmentally sustainable enterprises, the contribution of management and vocational skills to cleaner and greener processes will feature in a 2011 review of sustainable enterprise development in the region.

Driving the entrepreneurship agenda forward in each country

Spotlight on enterprising initiatives

While particular efforts have been made to create a regional dynamic through the Working Party’s activities, a number of initiatives have evolved at country level in response to the policy prompt of the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Enterprise. Two examples are provided here.

Building intelligence on enterprise training in Syria

Keen to establish a firmer empirical basis for policy decisions, and particularly on resource allocation for training, in 2010 the Syrian authorities and private sector elaborated a data development framework focusing particularly on six areas of importance to the national economy (agro-food, textiles, engineering, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and trade). Know-how from Morocco ensured that enterprise survey tools on skill needs analysis could be easily adapted to the Syrian economy.

‘Entrepreneurship education forms part of our development agenda’
Lamis Al Alami  
Minister for Education and Higher Education,  
Palestinian National Authority

‘Employability and competitiveness go hand-in-hand’
Dr. Salwa el-Gharib  
Secretary General,  
Supreme Council of Universities, Egypt
The outcomes of the enterprise surveys are now a key reference for the country’s education and training community for curriculum improvements, making for enhanced relevance of training to the world of enterprise.

The objective is to close the gap between skills required by the market (demand) and the efforts of the country’s training providers (supply).

Maximising system support for entrepreneurial learning in Lebanon

With an already strong entrepreneurial culture, the Lebanese authorities have drawn attention to the potential of a better engagement of the education system into the wider drive to promote a more competitive economy.

Leveraging support from international organisations (e.g. European Training Foundation (ETF), International Labour Organisation, United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, Cooperazione Italiana), the education authorities have joined up with the private sector to develop a lifelong entrepreneurial learning perspective for the country. This gives particular emphasis to ensuring that the teaching and learning process promotes the entrepreneurial ‘mindset’ of young people as they move through the education system.

Pioneering work by the national authorities, in cooperation with a local non-governmental organisation – INJAZ, focused on development of school-based entrepreneurship career guidance providing inspiration to other countries for their career guidance developments.

‘By working more directly with the public authorities we aim to get a closer fit between what skills businesses need and what the education and training system offers’

Adib Ashkar
Secretary General,
Syrian Textile and Garment Exporters’ Association

The European Training Foundation (ETF) is the European Union’s specialist agency promoting human capital developments in neighbouring regions.

ETF supports the European Commission and Euro-Mediterranean industrial cooperation with the human capital dimensions of the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Enterprise. It additionally provides customised policy support to the Southern Mediterranean countries in respect of challenges and opportunities arising from the assessment process linked to the Charter.

Directorate General for Enterprise and Industry of the European Commission coordinates industrial cooperation with Mediterranean neighbour countries with a view to spurring entrepreneurship across the Euro-Mediterranean area and helping small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to grow, trade, invest and do business together.

Activities include the implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Enterprise. Since its adoption by Industry Ministers in 2004, the Charter has become the common reference document for improving the business environment and promoting SMEs.
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