

THE CENTRE FOR EURO-MEDITERRANEAN COOPERATION PROJECT: A NETWORK OF MEDITERRANEAN
COUNTRIES FOR DEVELOPING TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT SYSTEMS

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The Centre For Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation project for the 2009-2013 period, financed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies - Directorate General for Active and Passive Labour Policies, was prompted by the desire to implement the objectives of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation for training and employment in line with the process launched with the establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean (2008).

Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia are the countries involved in the planning activities, carried out, at the request of the Ministry of Labour by ISFOL – Institute for the Development of Vocational Training for Workers – through its “Transnational Cooperation” unit.

At national level, the partners were the regional administrations who have helped to disseminate successful experiences tested in local areas as well as to encourage a comparison between local policies and Community measures on the topic of employment, development of territories and capacity building. The project is designed as an authentic system action for institutional actors, public administrations and agencies, with the ultimate aim of enabling them to initiate a capacity-building process for planning and managing human capital development policies.

The strategic role of the training system, the modernization of learning systems with an eye to a permanent, accessible and flexible supply, together with the promotion of forms of geographical and professional mobility – priorities defined in the renewed *Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs* (2008 - 2010) and reiterated in the *Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020)* – were the key topics kept in mind when designing the project.

Strengthening the links between the European Union and Middle-East and North-African countries and developing forms of cooperation from a perspective of growth and social cohesion was the main mandate of the CENTRE FOR EURO-MEDITERRANEAN COOPERATION PROJECT, specifically aimed at

making comparisons with regards to education and training and at encouraging exchanges and mutual learning processes in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

These objectives respond to the critical areas already to be found in several countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, where the training system does not fully meet market needs and where educational standards, albeit high, are not high enough to guarantee satisfactory employment outcomes. Youth unemployment and a low rate of women's employment, together with the «multidisadvantage» issues of the weaker groups, characterise the areas involved. Also limited, at institutional level, is the coordination among the different public and private actors in delivering the training supply and employment services and a better joint and integrated management of financing from international organizations is needed¹.

Despite the considerable economic and social changes in the Mediterranean area over the last two years, the modernizing of the training system launched by numerous administrations continues, with the aim of inserting the reform of education and training policies in a broader panorama of innovation. All the countries in this area agree that the performance and quality of vocational education and training systems must be improved by defining targeted strategies for employability and inclusion with a greater involvement of the interested parties.

Albeit the problems found in the single areas differ, they all share priorities for the reorganization of training systems in the Mediterranean region. These priorities include the construction, already launched in Egypt, Jordan and Morocco, of a national qualification system as a benchmark for defining qualitative standards and guidelines in training; the numerous initiatives for adjusting curricula to the countries' employment needs, to help match the actual supply of competences with the actual demands of the labour market; the investment in training and the updating of trainers and teachers, an indispensable prerequisite for delivering a quality training; and finally, the testing of mechanisms for

¹ M. PUEL, *Nei Paesi del Mediterraneo, Strategie per lo sviluppo del capitale umano nell'Ue e nei Paesi del Mediterraneo*, in *La Politica dell'Unione europea per la cooperazione nel bacino del Mediterraneo*, FOP n. 1-2 January-April 2010 – Two-monthly review of the Ministry of Labour and Social Polices .

monitoring and evaluating the training supply, the accreditation of the institutions dealing with VET and the guarantee of quality for vocational training and education systems².

This is the scenario in which the CENTRE FOR EURO-MEDITERRANEAN COOPERATION acts, after an initial, intense planning stage based on a participatory approach and then concretized in a work programme divided into different activities, such as study visits, thematic workshops, information and dissemination actions and mentoring partner countries.

Starting from 2010, after a desk survey on the employment situation and the training supply in the countries concerned, bilateral meetings were carried out on site (Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco and Israel) with the institutional interlocutors to make them aware of the objectives and opportunities for cooperation the project offers.

A cycle of study visits was organized to illustrate training systems in the countries involved, both in Italy, in the Ministry of Labour and ISFOL, and in the Ministries of Labour and Education of Israel, Tunisia and Morocco. The meetings focussed on the national frameworks and main policies – regulatory provisions, roles and functions of actors involved and services offered – with particular attention paid to the gender approach and to measures addressed to weaker individuals in the labour market.

The foreign partners' interest in some key topics of the common agenda for developing human capital led to a transnational debate on European instruments for mobility and their practical application.

The Community mobility development strategy and transparency and recognition of qualification instruments (*European Qualification Framework, European Credit System for VET, EUROPASS and European Quality Assurance for VET*) were highlighted in the events which illustrated ECVET testing in the tourism and hospitality sector carried out in Italy, with particular reference to the route followed and weaknesses and strengths discovered.

² G. Titomanlio, Politiche di istruzione e Formazione professionale (VET) nei Paesi del Mediterraneo e del Medio Oriente, in *La Politica dell'Unione europea per la cooperazione nel bacino del Mediterraneo*, FOP n. 1-2 January-April 2010 - Two-monthly review by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies

After the presentation of experiences in the Italian regional context, the foreign delegates discussed the learning-outcome recognition processes that could be set up between EU and non-EU countries, as well as the centrality of the concept of competence and the validity of training mobility; the latter in particular is strategic, not only in terms of professional enrichment, but also for defining a training supply in line with market needs.

The mentoring activity, finally, was aimed at acquiring and/or reinforcing the project beneficiaries' specific competences and knowledge. This mainly involved the Tunisian Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Tourism's support for a cooperation proposal to develop the ECVET system in Tunisia and to implement training courses for tourist guides.

To conclude the Centre's activities, the initial objective of the project could be considered, that is the creation of a stable network with the countries in the Euro-Mediterranean area and the start-up of a mutual learning process for enriching the dialogue on training and employment topics..

Although these results represent a significant success, they can also be seen as a stage along a pathway to be followed in the different territories according to their different aims. The most ambitious objective to pursue, with an incremental approach, is the promotion of inclusive education and training policies in all the contexts (formal, non formal and informal) and at all levels. So that students, workers and citizens are given qualified learning opportunities in an increasingly wide and diversified panorama of geographical and professional mobility.