

SUMMARY

ETF Skills Lab Network of Experts Regional Webinar

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PATHWAYS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE SEMED REGION

18 November 2024, 10.00 – 12.00 CET

The regional webinar of the ETF Skills Lab Network focused on vocational education pathways in higher education in the South-Eastern Mediterranean (SEMED) region, a key item in supporting youth in the region and reducing youth unemployment.

Cristiana Burzio (ETF) opened the webinar by emphasising the importance of collaborative efforts in addressing skills demand and skills anticipation. She highlighted the network's role in fostering research and exchange among its growing membership, which now exceeds 400 participants across ETF partner countries, EU countries and beyond.

Abdelaziz Jaouani (ETF) introduced the topic providing a contextual overview of how a collaborative approach to lifelong learning and education pathways can help to prepare for a rapidly changing world. He presented the key challenges in aligning vocational and higher education systems to the labour market in the South and Eastern Mediterranean region, underscoring the region's main features, such as high youth unemployment, skills mismatches, and gender disparities. Integrated lifelong learning pathways and coordinated efforts between TVET and higher education could trigger a better alignment of education with labour market needs. Jaouani voiced a call to action based on collaboration and integration. The call includes three areas of action: 1) clear pathways to allow learners to move from TVET to higher education, 2) Lifelong learning opportunities for upskilling and reskilling, and 3) a robust lifelong career guidance and counselling.

A discussion followed around the following themes: a) What are the biggest obstacles to aligning VET and HE systems in the SEMED region?; b) How can VET-HE pathways be accessible and appealing to young women and other underrepresented groups?, c) What role should Social partners play in creating effective VET-HE pathways?

Giuseppe Provenzano (Union for the Mediterranean - UfM) highlighted the interconnected challenges of youth unemployment and just transition in the Mediterranean region, emphasising the need for quality education systems to prepare students with skills aligned to green and blue economies and inclusive development. He stressed the importance of fostering collaboration between academia, governments, and the private sector through a "quintuple helix" model, integrating sustainability and civil society engagement. Provenzano outlined strategic priorities such as integrating green skills into curricula, promoting lifelong learning, and reducing skills mismatches to address regional employment issues. By aligning vocational education and higher education pathways with labour market needs, these efforts aim to unlock the region's potential for sustainable growth and economic resilience.

The third speaker, **Silvia Marchionne (UNIMED)** highlighted the importance of fostering stronger collaboration between universities, vocational training centres, and industries to improve pathways between TVET and higher education in the SEMED region. She emphasised the need for career guidance systems, green skills integration, and entrepreneurship to address skills mismatches and unemployment. Marchionne

presented findings from a [recent study involving three pilot countries](#) - Tunisia, Jordan, Italy - which recommended enhanced stakeholder engagement through a "triple helix" model, stronger networking among universities, and tailored green education initiatives. Key proposals included establishing regional incubators, promoting lifelong learning, and leveraging career guidance to support employability and sustainable growth. Additionally, she called for better articulation of public policies on higher education and vocational training.

The following discussion focused on how to bridge gaps between vocational education, higher education, and the labour market in the SEMED region. Participants emphasised the limited collaboration and communication across stakeholders, with vocational and higher education often operating in silos. Key challenges discussed included limited mutual trust among universities, governments, and industries, underfunded and unsupported career centres, and systemic governance issues. Questions also addressed the role of career guidance in smoothing transitions to the labour market and the structural barriers such as brain drain and skills mismatches. Speakers highlighted the need for robust governance frameworks, financial support for career services, and fostering trust to align the goals of all stakeholders. Practical solutions included upskilling initiatives, regional collaboration, and integrating career guidance early into education systems.

The case of Morocco was presented by speaker **Mohamed Slassi (Thematic expert, Morocco)**, who emphasised the significant disconnect between vocational training and higher education systems and the limited capacity to align effectively with labour market demands. He highlighted systemic issues, including fragmented governance, limited collaboration among sectors, and the absence of a unified national certification framework. Despite substantial growth in higher general education enrolment - only 15% of students are in professionally oriented programs - there remains a critical mismatch between education outputs and labour market needs. This disconnect has led to inefficiencies, such as a high proportion of informal sector workers (70%) and significant youth unemployment, with 2 million young people neither in employment nor education and training (NEETs). To address these challenges, Morocco has embarked on comprehensive reforms since 2015, aiming at linking education and training systems through a lifelong learning strategy, a national certification framework, and a pedagogical model focused on learning outcomes. These initiatives include creating pathways between sectors, improving governance structures, and enhancing planning and regulation to align skills development with economic and societal needs. The reforms also emphasise integrating career guidance and strengthening adaptability across education cycles to foster productivity, reduce informality, and better prepare youth for the evolving labour market.

The following discussion session highlighted key challenges in aligning vocational education and higher education in the SEMED region. Participants noted systemic issues such as fragmented governance, lack of collaboration between sectors, and insufficient career guidance strategies. Specific examples from Morocco and Tunisia revealed the absence of effective mechanisms to bridge educational pathways and align them with labour market needs. Speakers emphasised the importance of integrating career guidance services, adopting national standards for skills and certifications, and fostering collaboration between ministries, educational institutions, and industry.

Possible recommendations included creating lifelong learning frameworks, improving adaptability through marketing-based labour market analysis, and addressing sociological factors influencing graduates' decisions, such as working conditions. Speakers also advocated for tailored approaches to career guidance and collaboration, suggesting that each country should adapt strategies to its unique context while maintaining open communication across sectors to achieve alignment and sustainable growth.

Resources

All presentations and material presented at the event can be found at:

<https://openspace.etf.europa.eu/events/vocational-education-pathways-higher-education-sem-ed-region>

UfM Forum on Innovation-Employability, UfM '[Towards a Union for Mediterranean Strategy on developing new vocational pathways in Higher Education](#)'

The proposed pilot project '[Greening the South Mediterranean Region: Promoting Green Skills Through Post-Secondary Vocational Pathways](#)'

The report on '[Green Innovation and Employability in the Med through the Triple Helix](#)' | A study launched by the UfM and conducted by UNIMED'