



## CONCLUSIONS OF THE TRESMED 4 PROJECT LAUNCH CONFERENCE

The TRESMED 4 Project Launch Conference entitled “Participation by young people in the EuroMediterranean region: training, employment and social dialogue” took place on 3 and 4 October in Paris in the headquarters of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (ESEC) of France.

This Project, financed by the European Commission and backed by the Economic and Social Council of Spain, aims above all to consolidate channels for collaboration and dialogue amongst the organisations representing economic and social interests that make up the Economic and Social Councils throughout the Euro-Mediterranean region.

The basic working tools are workshops and conferences on three main themes – “Young people, training and social dialogue”, “Women and social dialogue” and “Good practices in the region and regional cooperation”.

Present and actively participating in the launch conference were representatives of the ESCs of Morocco (set up on 21 February last), Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. Also present were organisations representing civil society from Tunisia, Syria, Egypt and Palestine. The Minister of Labour from the latter, who was present at the meeting, is working with the ILO on the creation of an ESC in his country.

The meeting was structured into three working groups dealing with the following themes:

- a) The situation of young people and employment
- b) Training and young people
- c) Social dialogue and participation in it by young people
- d) These were complemented by a round table which aimed to provide a forum for young people from both side of the Mediterranean to express their opinions.

There were high levels of participation, and a wide range of ideas were aired. As a result, many varied contributions were made. We shall attempt below to summarise the main ideas and to bring them together in a series of conclusions and proposals, in line with the conference’s working structure.

### ***Working group 1. Situation of young people and employment***

Many of the participants in this working group spoke of the links between current demographic trends in the Arab Mediterranean countries and the structural problems that exist in their labour markets.

- ✓ Firstly, it was stressed that the demographic situation creates a framework that is shared throughout the area and which aggravates employment issues.
- ✓ The region has very high rates of population growth. From 2000 to 2007, the population grew by 13%, a considerable amount, especially if compared with the EU-27 rate of 2.6% over the same period. This trend of high birth rates, increased life expectancy and decreasing mortality rates<sup>1</sup> consolidates the pattern of population growth, resulting in a situation in which the labour market is incapable of absorbing the large working-age population. This structural incapacity of the system means that a large proportion of the population cannot satisfy its vital needs for employment.
- ✓ In addition, there is a stark contrast between universities and the requirements of the labour market. This aggravates the situation even further by creating an imbalance between qualifications and the real needs of the labour market. For many young people, job prospects are limited to the informal sector, with very low wage levels and working conditions that are far from decent.
- ✓ Also stressed was gender inequality in access to employment opportunities and the feminisation of the public sector which leads to women being over-represented in certain branches of economic activities in comparison with their participation in the total labour force.
- ✓ All these variables together are encouraging young people to emigrate. This desire increases as young people receive better training. They perceive that the only possible solution for using the competencies acquired during training is to be found beyond the frontiers of their own countries which, because of the situation described above, are unable to offer opportunities for career development and, consequently, for personal development.
- ✓ However, it must be stressed that it is risky to combine the problems of young people and unemployment. There are different types of young people whose circumstances may differ but who are often affected by the common denominator of unemployment for young people.

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<sup>1</sup> Data from Eurostat, Medstat programme, available in the report "Mediterranean Countries, Population and Social conditions" <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/PCBS/Documents/KS-SF-09-066-EN.pdf>

## **PROPOSALS**

Though it is true that there are certain common problems for the whole region, strategies for action must take into account the specific characteristics of each country to ensure that local solutions move towards improvements on a global level. The following are the proposals made by the participants:

✓ Need to create businesses

It is important to promote State policies for the creation of SMEs as a way of absorbing the employable population and thus reducing unemployment rates. However, it is necessary to work with the entrepreneurs in such SMEs to help them learn more about business management and administration. One of the strategies for action of the European Neighbourhood Policy should be to include the promotion of new SMEs.

✓ Importance of employment guidance services

State employment guidance services must be promoted. These can be an effective strategy for increasing employability and access to the labour market by offering knowledge and skills for both university graduates and students from vocational training.

Better knowledge of the labour market circuit is also required. It can therefore be asserted that it is essential to know market needs in order to obtain a better job. The Syrian representative stated that workers must be flexible so that they can adapt to the needs of their respective countries and consolidate their social responsibility.

There must also be greater coordination between the design of university courses and openings in the labour market.

✓ Mitigation of school failure

The fight against school failure basically requires the adoption of policies and plans of action to promote and encourage vocational training. It is also necessary to adopt initiatives to foster and place value on craft work.

Another element stressed was the relevance of programmes to support the under-30s and policies to support employment. The example given is that of the “Second Opportunity Schools”<sup>2</sup>. This is an initiative of the Luxembourg government targeting young people aged 16 to 24 who left school without completing any specific training period. It provides them with a method to gain access to the labour market, thanks to training in the form of flexible modules. This combines the acquisition of basic knowledge with practical and on-the-job training.

✓ Policies for equal opportunities

One of the Lebanese representatives described the need to promote far-reaching reforms in the private sector in order to build a series of mechanisms allowing women to continue working after marriage and childbirth.

The Luxembourg representative stressed the work being done by her country's Ministry of Opportunities through awareness campaigns on equal opportunities.

✓ Improved industrial and services policies

It was considered that the role of the State should be reviewed with respect to industrial and services policies. The State should be less pre-eminent in the production cycle, and policies for the industrial and services sectors should be revitalised to promote a market economy open to foreign countries.

A representative from Lebanon stated that that country had begun to reform certain mechanisms to open up foreign investment.

France is facing a serious problem caused by the disappearance of industrial jobs and the lack of new jobs to replace them.

✓ A stronger model for growth and governance

The Moroccan representative suggested that the growth and governance model in the region should be questioned because dealing urgently with unemployment is not sufficient to resolve the problems of growth.

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<sup>2</sup> Since 1995, the European Commission has aimed to fight economic and social exclusion. Its *White Paper on education and training – Teaching and Learning – towards the learning society* arose out of the initiative to promote Second Opportunity Schools as an essential tool for fighting the exclusion that results from low levels of schooling and the consequent high levels of unemployment.

Along the same lines, one of the Jordanian representatives stated that the role of the State needs to be reviewed. Economic policies for growth need to be adapted to involve the private sector without adopting macroeconomic positions. However, the Tunisian representative considered that this new role of the State should not lead to greater interventionism.

✓ Intensifying training

It is necessary to intensify policies aiming to promote vocational training and the use of the new information and communication technologies.

Training was also considered an important strategic action in that it can serve as a basis for subsequent developments in employment policies. Moreover, emphasis was placed on the need to step up continuing training programmes and integrated economic policies from a holistic point of view, bearing in mind the connections between the different areas of action.

**Working group 2. Training and young people**

Several participants insisted on the need to deal with the problems faced by young people in a global way. Since the problems stem from many causes, detecting these and acting on them necessarily requires a diversified approach taking into account all these factors and adopting strategies in different areas. The conference participants stressed the following problems:

- ✓ Today's societies are characterised by constant change and high levels of mechanisation. This means that all social groups, especially young people, have to react and adapt fast in order to avoid being excluded from this constantly-changing world. The competitiveness and social pressures that result from this situation are permanent features of today's societies.

This was considered the starting-point for dealing with the problems of young people in Mediterranean countries.

- ✓ It was stated that there is a problem with training amongst young people in the region. The training they have received is not sound enough and results in low levels of employability. There is therefore a gap between the supply and demand for work.
- ✓ This situation may be aggravated because some governments do not place sufficient stress on vocational training programmes and their educational plans do not promote this type of training.

- ✓ However, it was also considered that the problem is not necessarily a question of poor alignment between the demand for skills on the part of employers and the skills acquired by young people but may be a more basic problem arising within university circles. It could be considered a problem of resources, with excessive numbers of students in classes and outdated teaching methods. Trainers also need to receive training in a new context that takes into account the international and global reality on which our societies are based.
- ✓ Families also have an important role to play in socialisation. It is in the home that children acquire the first skills they will need later on. Families therefore have an essential role in promoting countries' growth. This may be a problem because families are not sufficiently well-informed on training programmes and exchanges or on methods of obtaining guidance.
- ✓ The matter of student mobility was also considered a problem. Only 1% of young people in Europe in vocational training enjoy a period in a different country. In the Arab world, as the rate of personal training increases, so does the possibility of emigrating, leading to a gradual loss of the countries' intellectual capital.
- ✓ Finally, the question of school drop-outs was considered. This is considered a very serious problem in the southern countries, as is the exclusion of young people with disabilities.

## **PROPOSALS**

- ✓ Greater investment in training

Investment in training for our young people leads to an increase in the quality of the human capital available in each of our countries. Mobility is a source of enrichment for young people. The particular needs of each of the countries have to be determined in order to adapt to them and find the most appropriate solutions for each society. Of special interest are the creation of business parks or nurseries and the adoption of policies to grant funds and develop the necessary competencies.

The variables of employment and training should be considered together because they cannot be taken in isolation. It is important to reach a midway point between these two main principles.

The European Training Foundation stressed the need to review the role of training institutions and to strengthen vocational training systems for a modern economy. When redefining vocational training, it is necessary for students to learn to work in teams and to adapt to a changing reality. Qualifications need to be combined with ICT skills in order to create greater competency for the world of work.

✓ Education in humanities

The *EuroMediterranean Parliamentary Assembly* considers that education should not only lead to the acquisition of technical skills but that these should be complemented with skills in the humanities as the priority should be on training citizens.

A representative from Morocco stressed this idea by stating that we cannot separate schooling from its basic, inherent principles and see it only as a supplier of labour for the economy. We are currently limiting training of our young people to economic aspects, disregarding the importance of education in the social and human spheres. Along these lines, Israel supported the idea that schools are places for social activities and are necessary meeting-points for citizens.

The European Training Foundation supported the proposal to teach humanities even in vocational training because they are essential for creating citizens. It also stressed that educational problems cannot be blamed only on teachers, but that all parties involved – entrepreneurs, teachers, students, etc - need to help detect problems and find solutions to them.

✓ The role of the ESCs

The European Training Foundation stressed the role of the ESCs as excellent fora for disseminating and reflecting on the purpose of vocational training and how it can be improved. In this process, there must be shared responsibility for all the parties. The role of companies is therefore also very important. To improve the situation, it is necessary for all the parties to sit at the same table and reflect together on the needs of young people.

**Working group 3. *Dialogue and social participation by young people***

- ✓ The importance of employment as an element for socialisation was stressed. It is necessary to work on training young people as active social agents. Practical tools are needed to create the circumstances in which they can be trained to be pro-active.
- ✓ When we talk about young people we are not talking about a homogeneous group but quite the opposite. The trend whereby young people the world over are considered to have the same aspirations and wishes is a simplistic one that does not take into account local factors in each region.

- ✓ On the subject of the “Arab spring”, it was suggested that one of the main reasons for this revolution was the current geostrategic situation of the world and the tendency to close borders. This has limited the possibility of emigrating and therefore of prospects for personal development for many young people. In turn this has led to a change in patterns of population mobility and therefore an increase in national unemployment rates.
- ✓ It was also considered that there is a crisis in institutional representation and that young people distrust institutions, becoming politically disaffected. However, other participants disagreed, stating we cannot talk about disaffection. Quite the opposite, there is greater interest and a higher rate of social participation in public life. Good examples can be seen in the fact that, in some highly hierarchical societies based on vertical relations, young people have shown the value and power of new technologies and of social networks as a means of participating. This changes the established order and creates horizontal relations. In recent years, there has been a rejection of certain political methods.

## **PROPOSALS**

- ✓ The need for young people to participate in institutions and the role of ESCs

It is essential to consider institutions as the place in which to deal with social matters. The Bulgarian representative affirmed that young people are included in ESCs in order to encourage them to participate in round tables and in decision-making processes as social agents.

The function of ESCs should go beyond providing information. They should serve as a place in which young people can be represented. Stress was placed on the role of ESCs as promoters of cultural programmes and of awareness of a new gender approach that reduces the current gender differences.

The Ana Lindh Foundation proposed that perhaps we should not set up special programmes for young people but rather include them in all programmes. It was also stated that there are now new types of participation and that perhaps the ESCs could become channels for disseminating this new situation.

- ✓ The role of families

The Moroccan representative stressed that families are the nucleus in which the first training is given. They are the first place for socialisation and culture and for creating citizens. This area of primary socialisation should be represented in ESCs.



In this connection, France explained the work of UNAF, an organisation with the mission to represent French and foreign families living legally within French territory. This organisation is a member of the French ESEC. Families play an essential role in the growth of France, as consumers and in the fields of demography and sustainable development. They are agents for social dialogue in that social life is not just participation through work and labour relations but covers a whole range of times and spaces.

✓ Young people as a driving force for social change

The lack of confidence in institutions on the part of many young people means that the governing elites should review their styles of government and the policies being adopted throughout the region. The Palestinian representative backed this idea, claiming that many of today's problems are the result of erroneous social and political policies, which therefore must be changed. The French representative insisted on the need for markers allowing the detection of social changes.

**Young people's round table: *Young people's opinions***

- ✓ The subject of employment should not only be covered at times of economic crisis or downturn, but should be a matter of top priority and should be on the agenda permanently.
- ✓ The current situation of young people is not caused by a problem of employability but rather by a problem of poor alignment between what entrepreneurs need and knowledge of the actual situation amongst young people. Today's young people live in a social ghetto. They are often treated as second-class citizens and are excluded from democratic representation even though they pay taxes like everyone else.
- ✓ Young people have conquered new social and political arenas but now face the difficulty of retaining what has been achieved. This is a problem because sometimes they do not have the necessary knowledge and skills to manage the political parties that have been created.
- ✓ As training increases, there is also a greater risk of unemployment because of the lack of qualified jobs. So greater training also leads to a greater probability of emigration. This implies a loss of valuable human capital which must be corrected as far as possible.
- ✓ Young people are often talked about as if they were a homogeneous group but there are many differences among them. These must be taken into account in order to establish policies in line with reality.

- ✓ If we aim to change the current situation of young people, there are three aspects that must be dealt with:
  - a. Lack of knowledge about the social transformations that have taken place and are taking place in the situation for young people.
  - b. Lack of interest in listening to what young people have to say. Young people wish to be citizens and this is a message to be passed on to the ESCs.
  - c. Low levels of participation. Young people want the political elites to adopt a different approach to politics.

## **PROPOSALS**

- ✓ There must be a better relationship between the public and private spheres so that young people can make use of all the necessary mechanisms for finding jobs. Banks have an important role to play in providing support. The Palestinian representative considered it necessary for there to be coordination between training centres and the different government departments.
- ✓ The French representative proposed the following solutions: a) reform of the educational system which should be based on research, and training prior to finding paid employment; b) social awareness, increasing the levels of autonomy for young people. For example, it would be a good idea for young people's services to be managed by young people; c) promotion of job creation, and d) participation by young people.
- ✓ On this last point, the Egyptian representative stated that young people have been behind change but have not been included in the methods of participation established for it, that is, political parties, etc. The Moroccan representative spoke of a good practice in which the ESC has encouraged about 50 young people's associations to participate in the debate on the Social Charter stressing the integration of young people through culture.
- ✓ The Egyptian representative considered the Erasmus and Erasmus Mundus programmes should be in two directions, that is, they should not only be from south to north but also from north to south. However, the Palestinian representative stated that Palestine suffers the negative effects of such mobility, with the brain drain being a problem for developing local human capital. He therefore proposed the creation of a Higher Young People's Council as a tool to correct this negative situation by encouraging young people to acquire the necessary skills and providing them with grants or loans to finance their training and education as well as mini-credits to set up small projects.