

## ***EUROMED Migration V***

### ***Peer-to-Peer Conference***

# ***Addressing the Challenges and Harnessing the Potential of the Gender and Youth Dimension of Migration through Capacity Partnerships***

***31 May – 1 June 2023***

***Brussels, Belgium***

## ***Setting the framework for a labour migration policy in the Mediterranean region: youth, gender, and education***

Dr. Giovanni Esposito

Professor of Public Policy and Administration – Université Libre de Bruxelles

Senior research associate – University of Liège

### **POLICY CONTEXT**

The Mediterranean Region has a significant proportion of young people, with 45% of its population falling between the ages of 15 and 24. However, this young population faces significant challenges in finding employment, particularly when compared to the overall population in the region. On average, the unemployment rate in the Mediterranean region is around 7.8% for the population aged 15 to 64, but it jumps to approximately 19% when focusing on the population aged 15 to 24.

There are noticeable differences between the European Union (EU) area and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) area of the Mediterranean:

- In the EU, the unemployment rate for the population aged 15 to 64 is 6%, while for the youth population, it stands at 14.3%.
- In the MENA area, the unemployment rate for the population aged 15 to 64 is 14.3%, while for the youth population, it is 25%.

Despite the variations between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, the youth population faces a problem twice as severe as that of the overall population.

Gender is also a significant factor in labor market challenges within the Mediterranean region. The proportion of working-age men employed exceeds that of women on both sides of the Mediterranean. However, there are differences between the northern and southern shores:

- In the EU, the employment rate for women (aged between 20-64) stands at 67%, compared to 78% for men, resulting in an 11-percentage point gap.

- In the MENA area, the employment rate for women (aged between 20-64) is 19%, compared to 71% for men, resulting in a 52-percentage point gap.

While the challenges of gender and age in the labor market are similar across the North and South of the Mediterranean, new elements emerge when we consider unemployment from an educational perspective.

In MENA region countries, higher educational levels (post-secondary and tertiary education) are associated with higher unemployment rates, whereas in the EU, higher unemployment rates are associated with lower educational levels (less-than-primary and primary education).

When considering this data alongside information on economic productivity in the region (which is higher in the EU than in the MENA region), we can understand the economic root causes of migration in the Mediterranean.

Economic productivity differences lead highly skilled individuals to migrate from less productive countries (MENA countries) to more productive ones (EU countries) in search of better opportunities and job positions that match their educational levels. Data suggests that as the productivity of MENA countries increases, the outflow of migrants towards EU countries decreases. If we agree that productivity is a major determinant of wages, this implies that individuals faced with the choice of low-wage jobs or unemployment in their home countries may consider migration as a viable alternative.

These economic root causes explain why the labor market in the Mediterranean region is characterized by phenomena of skill mismatch and migration. However, it is important to note that this explanation solely addresses economic factors and does not explore other root causes such as those related to political or environmental instability.

### POLICY SOLUTIONS

As for age and gender aspects of migration, governments in both host and origin countries urgently need to develop and implement strategies focused on fully engaging youth and particularly young women in the economy and society both in host and destination countries by:

- promoting gender equality,
- protecting vulnerable groups, and
- empowering young migrants

As for mismatch problems related to differences in economic productivity between the 2 regions of the Mediterranean, the situation is more articulated and policy-makers should define policy solutions adopting a place-based approach:

- Policy solutions in the Northern shore of the Mediterranean (EU) - policy-makers in countries with higher productivity (i.e. EU) may adopt policies to attract and retain highly-skilled migrants to address labor shortages and promote economic growth. In this context, already existing **MISMES** (**MI**grant **S**upport **M**easures from an **E**mployment and **S**kills perspective) supporting migrant jobseekers to move across countries in the Northern and Southern shores of the Mediterranean can be useful. MISMES policies are particularly designed to provide job-seekers with pre-, during and post-migration support.
- Policy solutions in the Southern shore of the Mediterranean (MENA) - MISMES policies alone are not enough as these can result in brain drain problems in the MENA region - i.e. a loss of skilled labor in this area that hinders socio-economic development in the sending countries. Conversely, more economically productive countries in the EU may experience brain gain as they attract skilled migrants, benefiting from their expertise and contributions to the local economy. To prevent this unbalanced situation, **Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs)** within MENA countries can be implemented to enhance local economic development, create employment opportunities, and reduce the incentives for emigration. ALMPs can be usually of 5 types:
  1. Employment incentives
  2. Direct job creation
  3. Start-up incentives
  4. Training
  5. Public employment service and administration

MISMES and ALMPs are already implemented across multiple Mediterranean countries. Nevertheless, so far no assessment of ongoing policies has been run to evaluate to which extent ongoing MISMES and ALMPs measures work well or not. This would allow to identify possible areas of improvement.

### CONCLUSION

Addressing age, gender, and economic productivity in Mediterranean migration requires a multi-faceted approach. By promoting gender equality, protecting vulnerable groups, and empowering young migrants, governments can foster inclusive societies and harness the potential of their youth population. Furthermore, adopting targeted policies based on the specific economic contexts of different regions will help address labor market imbalances and promote sustainable economic development. Continuous evaluation and improvement of existing policies are essential to ensure their effectiveness and maximize the benefits of migration for all stakeholders involved.