The Internationalisation of Higher Education in the Mediterranean

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CURRENT AND PROSPECTIVE TRENDS

Union for the Mediterranean
Union pour la Méditerranée
الاتحاد من أجل المتوسط

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List of abbreviations

AArU	Association of Arab Universities
ACE	American Council on Education
AFD	Agence Française de Développement
ALECSO	Arab League for Education, Culture and Science
ATIAH	Developing Innovative Approaches and Tools for Internationalisation at Home
AUF	Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie
CB	Capacity Building
CBHE	Capacity Building in the field of Higher Education
CIGE	Center for Internationalization and Global Engagement
CLCC	Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium
CMI	Center for the Mediterranean Integration
COIL	Collaborative Online International Learning
DG EAC	Directorate-General for Education and Culture
DIRE-MED	Dialogue Interculturel, RÉseaux et Mobilité en MÉDiterranée
EACEA	Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency
EAIE	European Association for International Education
ECA	European Consortium for Accreditation
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ENIC	European National Information Centre
ESN	European Student Network
EUA	European University Association
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
GANTT	Generalized Activity Normalization Time Table
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HOMERe	Higher Opportunity for Mediterranean Executive Recruitment
H2020	Horizon 2020
IaH	Internationalisation at Home
IAU	International Association of Universities
ICM	International Credit Mobility

IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
INDIRE	Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa
INSA	National Institute of Applied Sciences
IoHE	Internationalisation of Higher Education
IRO	International Relations Office
KA 107	Key Action
LLL	Lifelong Learning
LMD	licence-master-doctorat
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
Meric-NET	Mediterranean Network of National Information Centres on the Recognition of Qualifications
MIMI	Modernization of Institutional Management of Internationalization in South-Neighboring countries
MoEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
NA	National Agency
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centres
NASR	National Authority for Scientific Research
NEO	National Erasmus Plus Officer
NFQ	National Qualification Framework
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
QA	Quality Assurance
R&D	Research and Development
R&I	Research and Innovation
SEMSEM	Services for Employability and Mobility
SPHeRE	Structured Population and Health-services Research Education
ST	Steering Committee
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threat
TEMPUS	Trans-European Mobility Programme for University Studies
UFTAM	Université Franco-Tunisienne pour l'Afrique et la Méditerranée
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
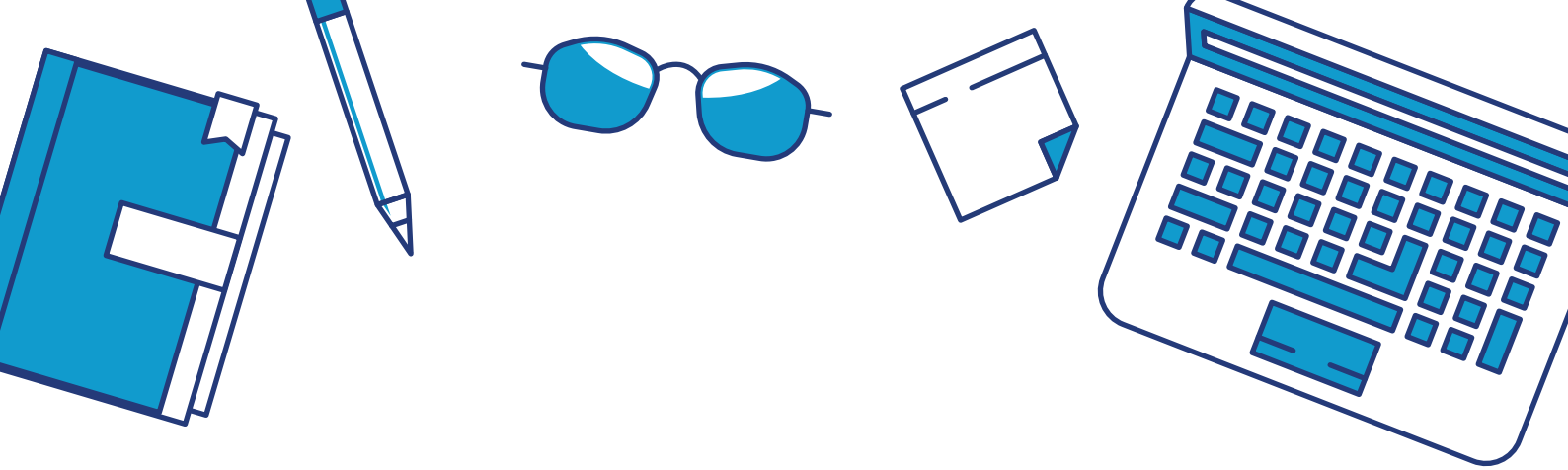
Abstract

The internationalisation of higher education is aimed at enhancing the quality and standards of teaching and research. This study addresses mobility and cross-border education trends in the Euro-Mediterranean region, with special emphasis on academic exchange, involving students, scholars and administrative staff, as well as on the strategic international partnerships across the globe. The study focuses on 10 countries: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia. It aims to investigate the internationalisation of higher education focusing especially on resources and opportunities available at the national and regional levels, to identify obstacles and challenges and to outline transferable inspiring practices and finally to make a series of recommendations for the Union for the Mediterranean to foster regional integration. As for the methodology, a survey investigating teaching and administrative staff as well as student mobility was submitted to a sample of universities representing the 10 target countries; further interviews with international and regional stakeholders were conducted, focus groups were established, involving the universities covered by the study and a thorough desk research was undertaken. As a result, the report presents a detailed context analysis with a focus on mobility flows to and from the 10 target countries, complemented by a wide range of inspiring and scalable practices, as well as an overview of the role played by regional organisations in providing opportunities, creating synergies and making resources available for the higher education institutions in the Mediterranean. Country-specific recommendations were designed in order to address national challenges. At the end of the research and consultative process, a number of common themes for the Euro-Mediterranean region were also identified, in relation to which additional recommendations were drafted, with the aim of enhancing the internationalisation of higher education in the region. We are still far from the finish line and this report has the ambitious goal to represent a building block for those willing to further explore the issue. Here follow the main findings, which are common to more than one country: Erasmus+ emerged as the programme generating the largest impact on the internationalisation strategies of higher education institutions; the need for university leadership to consider the administrative staff as a key element to support internationalisation; the high fragmentation in the procedures and systems of credit recognition and assessment of qualifications; difficulties were encountered in collecting reliable and comparable data. Obtaining visas for international mobility, especially for MENA countries to access Europe, has always been a serious obstacle to exchanges and international cooperation should focus more on human and social sciences, often neglected compared to hard sciences. Above all, the study highlights how, in most cases, internationalisation is simply identified as mobility, while a more comprehensive internationalisation strategy would be highly beneficial for institutions and staff and may increase attractiveness and participation.

Foreword

Nasser Kamel
Secretary General
Union for the Mediterranean

Knowledge knows no boundaries and thrives on exchanges across countries and cultures, contributing to create understanding, resilience, and skills. This is all too clear in many areas of the world that have seen enormous windfalls coming from decades of study exchange programmes and joint research initiatives which have created a sense of belonging to the international community, have embraced diversity as an asset, and reinforced economic integration and growth. In Europe, the positive experience of the Erasmus+ programme, for instance, is often credited for being pivotal in creating a European generation, and studies have proved that students undergoing study periods abroad are more employable in the long run.

All of this calls for stronger internationalisation of higher education systems, which goes far beyond academic mobility, as this notion entails integrating an intercultural and global dimension in the teaching methods and the institutions' governance. It is not a goal by itself, but a process aimed at enhancing the quality and standards of education and research, and at making a valuable contribution to society at large.

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) has launched a regional dialogue process on the internationalisation of higher education in the Euro-Mediterranean region, with the aim of building a common vision for the future of universities. This dialogue aims at contributing to shared knowledge and understanding on internationalisation trends and policies in the region as well as on current mobility flows and available funding schemes. It intends to facilitate continuous peer learning among the UfM countries on policies and practices addressing common challenges and priorities, fostering joint projects and initiatives.

The last Regional Meeting took place in Cairo, Egypt, in December 2019, and stressed the need to consolidate comprehensive data on the internationalisation of higher education across the UfM region. It also underlined that - in the context of a world-wide trend towards a new generation of universities - a change of scale in the support mechanisms, and an ambitious higher education initiative covering the whole UfM region are necessary. This new impulse should capitalize on the existing regional networks and collaborations and ensure a transformative impact on the higher education systems and institutions.

Answering to such regional needs, the UfM has therefore ensured a follow-up by launching the present study, carried out by the Mediterranean Universities Union, to support policy makers and other stakeholders. The findings and analyses represent a novelty in the evaluation and understanding of the importance of the internationalisation of higher education in the Mediterranean region. Such an exercise should be permanent so that we may acquire a deeper understanding of the impact of the efforts of all the actors involved, in particular the European Commission and the Union for the Mediterranean.

The present study, while adopting a comprehensive approach regarding internationalisation, presents an overview

of the current regional situation in terms of higher education cooperation, mapping key features and patterns specific to the region. Furthermore, a series of recommendations emerges from it, both at national and regional level. They were formulated taking in consideration the most relevant existing best practices and initiatives that can be replicated and upscaled in the region.

They point out proposals regarding information-sharing mechanisms, the improvement of present regional initiatives and programmes, synergies and complementarities between existing mobility schemes and programmes, and appropriate capacity-development mechanisms for Higher Education Institutions.

These recommendations are directed towards international organizations, governments, universities, and the civil society, demonstrating that only a joint effort could guarantee the strengthening of this international dimension of education. Hopefully, they will provide stimulus for further joint discussions concerning tangible initiatives and projects, and will generate operational solutions to the obstacles identified in the analysis of the current situation, opening up a roadmap for change.

The study states with clarity the importance of the financial support and tools of the Erasmus+ programme. International credit mobility and capacity building of the Erasmus+ programme represent success stories that deserve to be reinforced, supported, and enhanced. Thanks to these initiatives, a widespread network of Mediterranean Higher Education Institutions is laying the foundations for a Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education and Research Area. Indeed, it seems appropriate to reflect on the opportunity to organise without delay a UfM Ministerial meeting on Higher Education, as the last of such regional gatherings was held in Cairo in 2007. Only by investing in our future, in our youth, will we be able, as internationalisation practitioners, to guarantee a framework of sustainability and prosperity in the Mediterranean.

Foreword

Marcello Scalisi
Director
UNIMED, Mediterranean Universities Union

In 1991, Prof. Franco Rizzi, supported by a small group of courageous Euro-Mediterranean universities, founded UNIMED – Mediterranean Universities Union. In thirty years of activity, UNIMED has pursued academic dialogue as an instrument at the service of the Euro-Mediterranean cultural dialogue, as a bridge between Europe and the southern shore of the Mediterranean, and as an instrument at the service of peace and the younger generations.

The Barcelona process in 1995 laid the foundations for the consolidation of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership which has encountered - and still encounters - many obstacles and difficulties but which, extraordinarily, has found in university cooperation a concrete, real and living instrument at the service of a dialogue, which was often lacking at the political level. The European Commission, with successive programmes, has supported and continues to support projects and initiatives that have guaranteed the expression and consolidation of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership and welcomed "newcomers", such as Libya. The Union for the Mediterranean with its constant and daily action has ensured, since 2008, that this space for dialogue also finds moments of political debate.

The Union for the Mediterranean in its daily commitment to the construction of a Euro-Mediterranean political space, also plays a strategic and fundamental role to guide policy makers, to encourage a debate between stakeholders and decision makers to develop concrete proposals focused on the many priorities of the Euro-Mediterranean region. In this sense, it also supports excellent projects and initiatives by promoting a bottom-up approach to the positive reasons for Mediterranean cooperation.

The study that UfM required from UNIMED goes exactly in this direction: to analyse the state of the art of the internationalisation of university systems in the countries of the southern shore of the Mediterranean, to develop effective proposals for all the actors in the region and strengthening universities' cooperation. Our thanks go to the UfM for having, with this report, contributed to a necessary and urgent reflection on Euro-Mediterranean university cooperation. In our expectation, this report will allow the actors involved in this complex and challenging cooperation to further reflect on how to improve the impact of our work for the benefit of the Mediterranean Generation.

Carrying out a study on the internationalisation of university systems during the dramatic times of COVID19 was not easy. The whole system of our Euro-Mediterranean academic relations has been strongly challenged. I must therefore thank all the universities, academic and governmental institutions that collaborated in the drafting of this report. Their commitment reinsured us that international cooperation cannot and must not be stopped.

This study should be considered as a starting point, but a particularly exhaustive one. There is significant room for improvement once more reliable and comprehensive data will be made available to researchers and

international stakeholders, which have the duty to take advantage of the "unpacked opportunities" that are still hidden beyond the curtains of misinterpretation and stereotypes.

There are difficulties, but also opportunities, in a region, full of dynamism and thirsting for cooperation, such as the Southern Mediterranean one.

It is worth mentioning that Europe is still perceived as the main partner and the most important Higher Education arena. European countries are still the top destinations for all South Mediterranean countries' students, teachers and administrative staff. Rather than considering it as an arrival point, this should be considered as a starting point. We have to reverse the perspective and abandon our orientalist lens, strengthening the reciprocity principle, beginning a new era based on two-directions: cooperation and collaboration.

University mobility remains today both a challenge and an opportunity. An intense and even richer programme of university exchanges face-to-face, with the addition of the virtual opportunities offered by the Virtual Exchange and Virtual Mobility programmes, is the only possible answer to strengthen a young Mediterranean Erasmus generation capable of easily setting aside our differences and mistrust and to overcome them through dialogue and study as a form of solution to the common challenges faced by our societies.

While drafting the report, we started a consultation that involved over three thousand students. This reveals their growing interest and active participation in international cooperation and represents an important sign of hope for the success of our cultural policies.

I thank the Union for the Mediterranean for the pivotal role it plays for the construction of a political and dialogue space in the Mediterranean but also, in particular, for the work that Higher Education and Research Division is doing. I thank the universities of all the countries of the Mediterranean region and the UNIMED collaborators who commit themselves daily to weaving academic and scientific relationships at the service of our communities. In this sense, the role of university, regional or thematic networks takes on an even greater value in providing support and action. This role requires commitment, resources and energy. The shared and strong willingness of enhancing internationalisation of higher education systems in the Euro-Mediterranean region is undoubtedly a good sign that we are going in the right direction.

Let me say that UNIMED plays a fundamental role in this direction for the entire Mediterranean region: an independent network which works in close contact with its associated universities and with important institutional players. A role, that of UNIMED, built over time and which, thanks to the work of all our associates and collaborators and friends. A role that we renew every day.

However, the most heartfelt thanks go to those thousands and thousands of young people who ask us to do even more, even better. "Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do". It is time to start working. It is time to act.

Introduction

This study addresses the issue of incomplete information available on Euro-Mediterranean academic mobility and cross-border education trends and identifies the resources and opportunities available in the Euro-Mediterranean region that are related to the internationalisation of higher education, especially to academic mobility and transnational education arrangements. Following a thorough analysis and integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection methodologies, a set of useful recommendations for the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) were drafted, with the aim of supporting the UfM in overcoming identified obstacles and exploiting transferable good practices. The ultimate goal of this study is to improve and enhance the internationalisation of the Euro-Mediterranean higher education systems both in terms of mobility and of academic cooperation. For the purpose of this study, 10 countries were identified as targets: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia. The main objective of the research was to investigate the internationalisation of higher education, focusing especially on the resources and opportunities available at the national and regional levels.

The main topics of this study can be summarised as follows:
- Current state of the art of the internationalisation of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Euro-Mediterranean region (mobility flows and context analysis);
- Academic mobility and its impact on institutions and individuals;
- Cross-border education trends;
- North-South and South-South academic cooperation arrangements;
- Impact of European programmes on Southern Mediterranean HEIs;
- Digitalisation, virtual mobility and virtual collaboration arrangements;
- Recognition and portability of qualifications, related policies and strategies;
- Practices of internationalisation at home.

1. Methodological Note

The research team relied on a structured methodology to conduct the research and analyse the data, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. Conclusions, on every step of the way, were reached through the continuous involvement of universities, experts and stakeholders from the Euro-Mediterranean region, to validate the analysis in an ongoing process. The report is the result of a collaborative effort made by the UNIMED research team and a wide range of actors representing different interests and perspectives. Desk research, interviews and consultations were conducted in English, French, Italian and Arabic.

1.1 Participatory approach

The process of collecting, analysing and interpreting data was always supported by a wide range of stakeholders, experts, institutions, organisations, students and peers. UNIMED adopted a collaborative and participatory approach to validate results and develop recommendations, investigating challenges, opportunities, synergies, good practices, barriers and collecting inputs at each step of the research process. Several consultations were conducted, along with interviews and focus groups, to make sure researchers were on the right track, involving informal contacts, the focal points of the study, the UNIMED Board of Directors and corroborating ideas with the support of previous studies and hypotheses.

Participatory and collaborative approach [1]

Researchers provide information and services to stakeholeders

Researchers invite stakeholders involve on specific issues

Researchers and stakeholders form strong partnerships, share decision making, and create knowledge throughout the project

Inform → **Consult** → **Involve** → **Collaborate** → **Share Leadership** →

Stakeholeders provide information and feedback to researchers

Researchers and stakeholders collaborate on each aspect of the project from development to completion

Selection of and consultations with the Focal Points

In order to guarantee access to the local institutions and stakeholders, UNIMED relied on national focal points as its main references for the investigation. A focal point was identified for each country and, in some cases, based on the national higher education Ministry's indications. The role of the focal point was that of supporting activities in the country and facilitating the relations with the universities included in the sample, as well as providing relevant references for the research, so as to overcome any potential risks and to identify up-to-date opportunities. Here follows a list of Focal Points:

- Algeria - Belhakem Mostéfai, Rector of the University of Mostaganem
- Egypt - Magda Abou El Safa, Director of Quality Assurance & Continuous Improvement Department, University of Sadat City
- Israel - No focal point, the activities were coordinated directly by UNIMED

- Jordan - Anas Al-Sobeh, Associate professor and Director of the Refugees, Displaced Persons, and Forced Migration Studies Centre at Yarmouk University, in cooperation with the Director of the International Relations Office, Ghazi M. Magableh
- Lebanon - Zeinab Saad, International Relations Committee General Coordinator at the Lebanese University
- Libya - Adel Dhiayf, International Relations Office Director at the University of Tripoli
- Mauritania - Samir Abu Nassif - Vice President at the Lebanese International University and member of LIU Mauritania
- Morocco - Wail Benjelloun - Former President of Mohammed V University and honorary President of UNIMED
- Palestine - Nidal Dweikat, Vice President of Planning and Quality Assurance at An-Najah National University, in collaboration with Kherieh Rassas, Deputy President for International Development and External Affairs of An-Najah National University
- Tunisia - No focal point, the activities were coordinated directly by UNIMED

1 Source of the image: https://www.jbassoc.com/resource/importance-participatory-approaches-precision-home-visiting/ (last access February 2021)

Stakeholders Engagement

In order to gain a deeper and meaningful insight into the matter, consultations with relevant stakeholders in the field of higher education in the Euro-Mediterranean region were performed. The research team identified a large number of stakeholders in the region, drawing up a stakeholder register with more than 90 actors to be interviewed for the purpose of the analysis. UNIMED made the most of its own partnerships with international organisations in order to engage respondents in the dialogue around the internationalisation of HE in the region. The main goal of the interviews was to identify what the respondents deemed useful to boost the internationalisation of higher education, what current practices and strategies they deemed to be worth upscaling, as well as the key challenges to face.

The process of stakeholders' mapping was broken down into several steps. First, UNIMED entered the stakeholders in a register, listing all potential respondents and their affiliations. Then, based upon their role, nature and competences, the research team grouped the stakeholders into 6 main categories, making sure that each category was sufficiently represented. The categories identified are: Education Community, Research Community,

University Networks, Policy Makers, Civil Society Organisations, Business and Industry. Stakeholders were also mapped according to their level of influence, whether they had an impact at the national or international/regional level. Mapping and engaging stakeholders was a key factor in ensuring a participatory approach, gaining a deeper understanding of dynamics, processes and relations affecting the issue under examination. Stakeholders were contacted in order to conduct an interview and to gather key information about their perception, knowledge and opinion in relation to the internationalisation of HEIs in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The engagement of stakeholders provided also an opportunity to start reflecting on the recommendations: suggestions were collected, inspiring practices were discussed, opportunities were offered.

A relevant number of stakeholders were contacted and agreed to take part in the study. However, due to the current situation, in most countries (above all those hit by the COVID-19 pandemic) it was not possible to conduct all of the planned interviews. At the end of the data collection process (in February 2021), 62 respondents had been interviewed. The full Stakeholder Register is available in Annex I. Here follow the figures representing the categories and level of influence of the 62 respondents in the study.

Composition of Stakeholders

Category	Value
Education Community	30
Research Community	3
University Networks	5
Policy Makers	16
Civil Society Organizations	8
Business and Industry	0
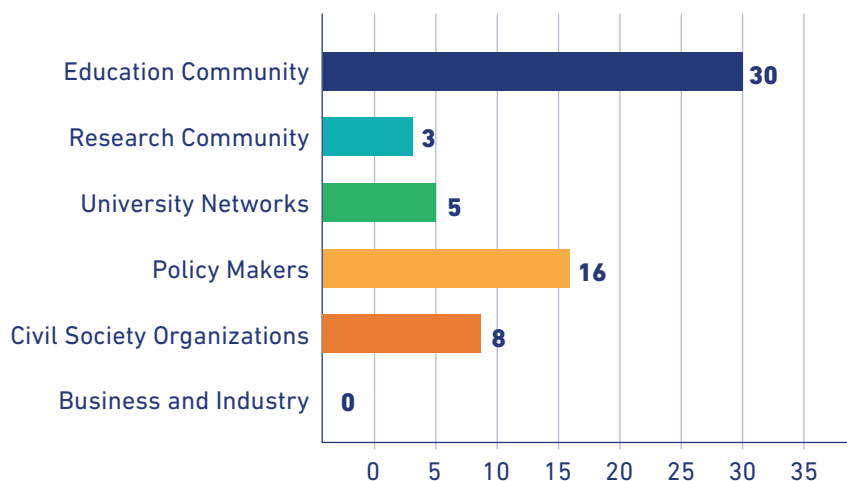
Stakeholders' Level of influence

19%

43%

- National
- International /Regional
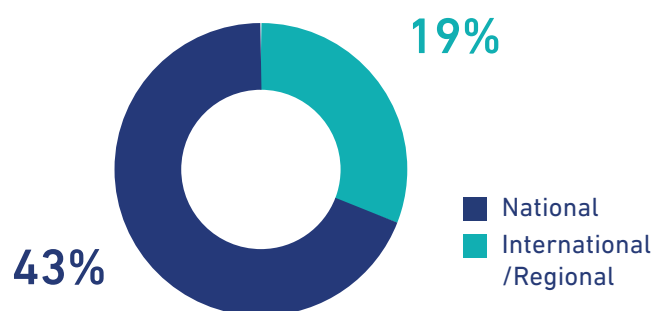
1.2 Quantitative data collection

Quantitative data were collected to investigate mobility flows, from a sample including higher education institutions representing each country covered by the study. The HEIs in the sample represent, at a national level:

- at least 50% of enrolled students;
- at least 50% of appointed teachers;[2]
- at least 50% of administrative staff.

For each country, the key features of the whole sample are compared with national ones to assess the degree of consistency of the selected institutions. To ensure variance within the sample, HEIs were selected according to a number of criteria:

- Size. The size criterion for the HEIs is defined based on the average number of students enrolled, per country. Medium-size HEIs are defined as those within one standard deviation of the number of students enrolled in the country; those below the medium size are defined as small; and those whose enrolment is higher than one standard deviation of the mean are defined as large.
- Location (urban/rural, peripheral). The

location is defined as either a larger or capital city, or a small or medium-sized city. Rural universities are considered as those located in small and medium-sized cities.

- Public/Private[3]. A main distinction to be made is the one between public and private HEIs so that both are represented in the sample. A further distinction needs to be made in those countries where private for-profit and private not-for-profit universities are considered as different categories. When this distinction is not made in the national regulations, all private institutions are considered as for-profit institutions.
- Historical/New. The average age of all HEIs in each country is estimated: HEIs older than the average age are considered historical, while those that are "younger" than the average age are considered as "new universities". When calculating the average age at the national level, "historic" universities were not taken into account.
- Type (general/specialised/religious/open). The composition of the sample of HEIs is representative of general (multi-disciplinary universities), specialised

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2 As an inclusive term for full professor, associate professor, assistant professor, lecturer, assistant lecturer, if relevant researcher, post-doc, fellowship.

3 If necessary, as in the case of Egypt and Palestine, an additional distinction in line with previous studies, will be made for the categories: not for profit / private for profit.

(focused universities), religious and open universities (universities with an open-door academic policy, with minimal or no entry requirements). The difference between research universities, teaching universities and community colleges is not taken into account for the purpose of defining the sample, firstly because the distinction between research and teaching HEIs is not applied in all the countries under analysis; second, because not all countries have community colleges.

For each country, the UNIMED network is considered as the starting point of the sample selection (to ensure data collection in a short time) and complemented with other HEIs, following the indications provided by the focal points, the National Erasmus Offices and the Ministries of higher education. If a targeted university is not available, another institution is contacted, provided that it fulfils the above-mentioned criteria. Each sample of universities is validated by the Ministry of Education of the target country, where possible and/or by the director of the National Erasmus Office, in order to provide institutional support to the selection. Only recognised universities are included in the sample. Once the sample for each country is identified, a further check is performed to ensure that the students' gender distribution is similar to the national one. The selected HEIs communicate their internal data following a guideline and then, data are processed to maintain the representativeness of the sample. The table below contains, for each country, the reference points for the sample definition: the total number of students enrolled, of teachers and of administrative staff, and the total number of universities in the country (public and private).

COUNTRY	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS	GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS	TOTAL NUMBER OF TEACHERS	TOTAL NUMBER ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF	TOTAL NUMBER HEIS
Algeria	1.730.000[4] (2017/2018)	62.5%[5] women	60.000[6] (2017/2018)	N/A	106[7]
Egypt	2.382.921[8] (2017/2018)	53.3%[9] women (2017/2018)	111.909[10] (2018/2019)	N/A	50[11]
Israel	187.500[12] (2017/2018)	59%[13] women (2017/2018)	5.426[14] (2017/2018)	N/A	9[15]
Jordan	282.403[16] (2018/2019)	54%[17] women (2018/2019)	10.922[18] (2017/2018)	25.598[19] (2017-2018)	29[20]
Lebanon	190.186[21] (2014/2015)	56%[22] women (2014/2015)	19.186[23] (2012/2013)	5.826[24] (2009-2010)	36[25]

4 Data from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Algeria (Last access August 2020).
5 Ibidem
6 Ibidem
7 Data from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Algeria. This network is composed by fifty (50) universities, thirteen (13) university centres, twenty (20) national higher schools, ten (10) higher schools, eleven (11) higher normal schools and two (02) annexes.
8 Educational report from the National centre for statistics: Egypt in Figures 2020.
9 Ibidem
10 Ibidem
11 Higher Education in Egypt in numbers between the years 2014-2017 (in Arabic).
12 This is the number of students enrolled in Israeli universities for the year 2017-2018. The total number of students enrolled in higher education institutions are 306.440 students. Data from the Council for Higher Education Report 2018/2019 (Last access August 2020).
13 Council for Higher Education Report 2018/2019 (Last access August 2020).
14 Ibidem
15 Ibidem
16 http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-jordan (Last access August 2020).
17 Ibidem
18 Statistical report from the Minister of Higher Education for the year 2017-2018.
19 Ibidem
20 http://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-jordan (Last access August 2020).
21 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_lebanon_2017.pdf (Last access August 2020)
22 Ibidem
23 https://www.bankmed.com.lb/BOMedia/subservices/categories/News/20150515170635891.pdf (Last access August 2020)
24 http://www.tlqaa.org/?q=system/files/LHE_System_v1.1.pdf (Last access August 2020)
25 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_lebanon_2017.pdf

COUNTRY	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS	GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS	TOTAL NUMBER OF TEACHERS	TOTAL NUMBER ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF	TOTAL NUMBER HEIS
Libya	342.795[26] (2018/2019)	54%[27] women (2018/2019)	13.500[28] (2018/2019)	32.830[29] (2017-2018)	31[30]
Mauritania	13.427[31]	35.04%[32] women	740[33]	1.194[34]	3[35]
Morocco	913.713[36] (2019/2020)	50.33%[37] women (2019/2020)	13.954[38] (2019/2020)	6.905[39] (2019-2020)	12[40]
Palestine	222.774[41] (2017/2018)	60.28%[42] women (2017/2018)	8.699[43] (2017/2018)	7.317[44] (2017-2018)	48[45]
Tunisia	241.084[46] (2017/2018)	65.43%[47] women (2017/2018)	22.847[48] (2017/2018)	12.981[49] (2017-2018)	13[50]

26 Data provided by the National Erasmus Office in Libya
27 Ibidem
28 Ibidem
29 Data collected within the framework of Libya Restart initiative, covering 15 public universities over the 31 national universities.
30 Data provided by the National Erasmus Office in Libya
31 Data provided by the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research in Mauritania (Last access August 2020)
32 Ibidem
33 Ibidem
34 Ibidem
35 Ministry of HE in Mauritania indicates a total of 16 HEIs. We took into consideration only 3 universities (1 public, 2 privates)
36 Statistical Report from the Ministère de l'Education Nationale, de la Formation professionnelle, de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique (2019-2020)
37 Ibidem
38 Ibidem
39 Ibidem
40 Ibidem
41 http://www.mohe.pna.ps/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=ohk4UeLPuBw%3d&tabid=138&portalid=0&mid=924 (Last access August 2020)
42 Ibidem
43 Obtained as results of the sum of different categories listed in the Ministerial report for the year 2017-2018
44 Sum of the categories listed in the Ministerial Report year 2017-2018.
45 Please consider that in this number also community and University colleges are included as per the peculiar characterization of the higher education system in this country.
46 http://www.mes.tn/image.php?id=9499 (Last access August 2020)
47 Ibidem
48 Data provided by Olfa Kacem from the Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique on January 2018.
49 http://www.mes.tn/image.php?id=9499 (Last access August 2020)
50 Data provided by Olfa Kacem. Please note that as per our studies we are only considering the recognized Public Universities (13) since the private sector of HE does not consider the university type but the so called

The final sample of universities in the study is composed of:
- 26 HEIs in Algeria
- 9 HEIs in Egypt
- 0 universities from Israel[51]
- 9 HEIs in Jordan
- 4 HEIs in Lebanon
- 6 HEIs in Libya
- 2 HEIs in Mauritania
- 7 HEIs in Morocco
- 7 HEIs in Palestine
- 6 HEIs in Tunisia

The full list of universities in the sample is reported in Annex III.

A quantitative methodology is defined in order to collect relevant data concerning mobility flows directly from higher education Institutions. Secondary sources such as the international student statistics by UNESCO, data from the OECD and the World Bank, data from the ministries of higher education and the National Erasmus+ Offices (NEO) are also used to assess and validate results on international mobility flows, as well as EACEA reports for the activities undergone within the framework of European-funded projects.

The study includes two levels of analysis:
- a macro-level in which data are collected at a national level mainly through reports produced by ministries of higher education, NEO and EACEA;
- a micro-level in which a sample of higher education institution provides detailed data. At the country level, the sample is chosen to be statistically significant in order to identify domestic national trends.

Reliable aggregated statistics and trends data are presented through clear and easy-readable graphs and a number of observations, representing both national and regional trends. Special emphasis is placed on South-South mobility, both incoming and/or outgoing, both for students and staff.

Data collection is organised in a manner that allows to analyse the mobility flows according to gender, type (credits or degree, research or teaching), direction of flows (incoming/outgoing, North-South, South-North, South-South), level of education (bachelor, master, PhD) or position (from assistant lecturer to full professor), the field of study or the working field, the mobility duration and the funding scheme. Data are requested for the last 5 academic years (from 2014-2015 to 2018-2019) and for tracking mobilities in the following countries: Albania, Algeria, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Netherlands, Palestine, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia, Turkey, United Kingdom.

Data are collected through an online survey. The investigation was structured into separate smaller nested online surveys:
- 41 surveys on students' mobility (one for each country in the study)
- 41 surveys on administrative staff mobility (one for each country in the study)
- 82 surveys on teachers' mobility (two for each country, one for the incoming mobility and one for the outgoing mobility).

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51 UNIMED contacted a number of universities in the country but none of them was available to participate in the study.

In addition to the survey intended for the universities, as the work was progressing, the research team decided to include students' voices and developed a specific survey in order to gather their experiences and expectations regarding mobility. The survey was sent to the universities included in the sample and also shared with UNIMED members in the countries targeted by the study (except in Israel and Mauritania where UNIMED does not have any associated universities). The survey was launched on December 30th, 2020, and ended on January 24th, 2021. All in all, more than 3,000 answers from 8 countries in the region were collected (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia). Despite the geographical distribution of answers being uneven, data collected represent the perspectives, experiences and suggestions of the South-Mediterranean students' community. The survey was structured with both open and closed questions and the main results are reported in the following sections of the Report.

1.3 Qualitative data collection

Desk Research

Concurrently with the collection and analysis of quantitative data on the mobility flows in the Euro-Mediterranean region, a desk research was also carried out to perform an analysis of the current situation of the Internationalisation of higher education. This allowed us to consult secondary sources and provided a more detailed definition of the dimensions related to internationalisation. Existing internationalisation practices, trends and policies at both the national and institutional level were taken into consideration. In addition, the desk research laid the foundations for a critical analysis of the context, to complement the quantitative

analysis, presenting an overview of the current regional situation in terms of higher education cooperation and mapping key features and patterns specific to the region. In this sense, the desk research allowed the team to review previous findings and gain a broader understanding of the current state in the Euro-Mediterranean region. A desk research has some limitations: among all the available secondary sources, some are not accessible, some are excluded because their existence is not known, and some are available in other languages then those spoken by the research team. The desk research was therefore performed following a round of consultations with the national focal points and selected members of the UNIMED Board of Directors. The desk research was carried out to gain a better understanding of:

- the internationalisation approach and the practices that constitute the background of the investigation;
- the national and regional environment in which mobilities and internationalisation activities take place.

The desk research had a double goal: on the one side it was important for the research team to be on the same page in fully understanding the scope of the analysis; on the other side, it was key to put quantitative and qualitative data into a well-known context.

Secondary sources were identified by means of:

- web searches
- internal consultation
- suggestions by the National Erasmus+ Offices
- suggestions by the Steering Committee members
- identification of the ones available among the resources produced by relevant regional stakeholders.

Interviews

The UNIMED research team engaged stakeholders primarily by performing semi-structured interviews, in order to collect meaningful qualitative data, explore the perspectives of insiders and practitioners and gain knowledge over both processes and strategies. The interviews were conducted following a semi-structured approach: the same set of questions was used for all respondents, with an additional number of questions asked on the spot to clarify and/or further expand certain issues. Interviews were recorded and the interviewees were provided with documentation of the results. The interviews were conducted in the interviewee's mother-tongue, either Arabic, English or French as long as this was beneficial for the results of the interview. The meetings were arranged virtually. Respondents were selected from the list of stakeholders identified by the research team, depending on their specific competence and role. The main topics addressed during the interviews were:

- Strengths and weaknesses of national and regional policies of internationalisation
- Institutional approach to internationalisation
- Internationalisation of the education provided
- Cross-border education trends, namely dual and joint degree programmes, academic exchange and cooperation programmes, virtual collaborative learning
- Mobility
- Practices of internationalisation at home
- Recognition and portability of credits, accreditation and quality assurance
- Impact of cooperation programmes, with

a focus on European funded projects
- Virtual mobility, virtual collaborative learning and online teaching
- Challenges related to HEIs internationalisation strategies in the Euro-Med region
- Main obstacles to cooperation between Southern and Northern Mediterranean HEIs as well as South-South cooperation
- Regional synergies and good practices
- Short-, medium- and long-term trends and opportunities
- Impact of international mobility on the employability of graduates.

The structured part of the semi-structured interview was based on the "Comprehensive Internationalisation Framework" defined by the Centre for Internationalisation and Global Engagement (CIGE) of the American Council on Education (ACE)[52]. Questions were adapted for each category of stakeholders, maintaining consistency in the themes addresses. Guidelines were also developed to inform respondents on the framework within which the interview is conducted, the methodology to conduct the talk, the process of validation of answers, data protection and privacy policy.

Focus Group

Focus groups discussions were also used as a qualitative tool to gain an in-depth understanding of some dimensions of the internationalisation of higher education. Due to the pandemic, the focus groups discussions (which should have taken place in the presence of the people involved in each country) took place online. For reasons of feasibility and availability, instead of two focus groups per country focusing on academic and administrative staff and

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52 ttps://www.acenet.edu/Research-Insights/Pages/Internationalization/CIGE-Model-for-Comprehensive-Internationalization.aspx (Last access February 2021)

students, only one national focus group was organised (except for Algeria, for which two separate sessions were necessary due to the high number of participants), addressing both the strategic and operational aspects. Guidelines were shared with the participants before the meeting in order to inform them on the objective of the focus group, introduce the topics of the discussion and outline practical arrangements. The aim was to gain a better understanding of four specific aspects of the internationalisation of higher education at the national level: 1) internationalisation at home and digitalisation; 2) recognition of qualifications; 3) impact of international activities (both in terms of impact on people and impact on the institutions) as perceived by institutional actors; 4) impact of cooperation programmes. The participants were also asked to share insights and reflections on the internationalisation of higher education in their national context, identify challenges and provide inputs for the development of the recommendations. Invitations were sent to the institutions and the universities themselves appointed the participants in the focus groups. The meetings took place between the 12th and 25th of January 2021. In order to help the group members to better interact with each other, a participatory online tool was used to smoothly engage participants in the discussion, by sharing questions, visualising real-time answers, animating the discussion and providing information on the subsequent analysis. The higher education institutions involved in the focus groups were selected among the universities in the sample, including other key institutions when their experience was deemed relevant for the study. The full list of institutions is reported in Annex III.

Ethical Assessment
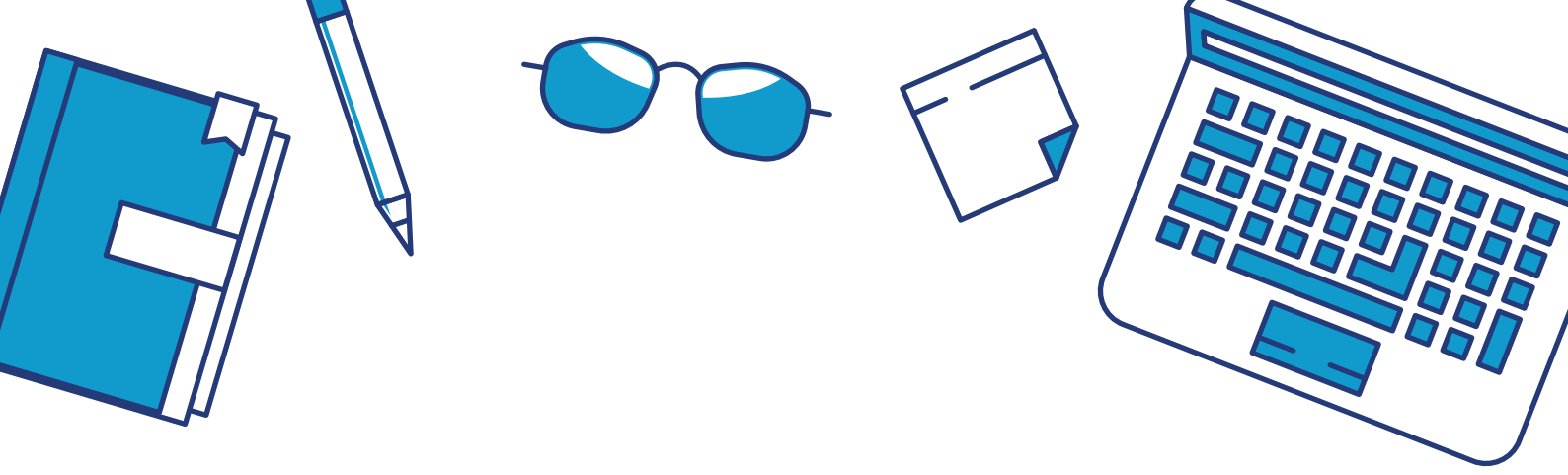
The research team conducted this study in compliance with ethical principles. Ethical issues must be considered as a fundamental part of the research process. An ethical assessment was carried out and guiding principles were defined in relation to data collection, interviews and focus groups. Researchers agreed on the following fundamental principles:

- Reliability in ensuring the quality of the research, as reflected in the design, the methodology, the analysis and the use of resources.
- Honesty in developing, undertaking, reviewing, reporting and communicating research in a transparent and fair way.
- Respect for the colleagues, research participants and organisations involved.
- Accountability in the research from the original idea to the publication, in its management and organisation, implementation, reporting, and in relation to its wider impact.

The ethical assessment focused on the following topics: 1) Issues related to data collection and interviews; 2) Informed consent; 3) Gender perspective; 4) Multi-perspective analysis; 5) Regular participatory assessments with representatives of all target groups.

Internationalisation of higher education in the Southern Mediterranean region: common features and peculiarities at the national and regional levels

2.1 Definition of the internationalisation of higher education

First of all, it is necessary to underline that the internationalisation of higher education (IoHE) should be understood in a more comprehensive manner and not only in terms of data concerning academic mobility collected by quantitative means. Internationalisation should be considered based on the approach of the International Association of Universities (IAU):

[Internationalisation of higher education is] the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society" (De Wit, H., Hunter F., Howard L., Egron-Polak E. (Eds.) (2015) "Internationalisation of higher education", European Parliament.

This definition emphasises the fact that internationalisation is a deliberate process, not a passive experience. It stresses that internationalisation is not a goal in itself, but a means to enhance the quality and standards of higher education and research. In addition, this definition points out that internationalisation needs to meet society' needs. There is no "one size fits all" model or approach for internationalisation, rather, each HEI must find its own way of internationalising. At the same time, all HEIs can benefit from the best thinking and good practices of other institutions around the world.[53]

As a complementary perspective, the approach followed for the collection of qualitative data and the analysis of various international dimensions is based on the "Comprehensive Internationalisation framework" defined by the Centre for Internationalisation and Global Engagement (CIGE) of the American Council on Education (ACE). ACE defines comprehensive internationalisation as a strategic, coordinated framework that integrates policies, programmes, initiatives, and individuals to make colleges and universities more globally oriented and internationally connected.[54] In order to foster sustainable and global engagement, the comprehensive internationalisation model embraces an organisational growth mindset. It describes internationalisation as an ongoing process, recognising that all levels of the educational community (students, faculty and staff) are central to the institution's internationalisation. This process requires a clear commitment by top-level institutional leaders, a meaningful impact on the curriculum and a broad range of partnerships. The CIGE Model for Comprehensive Internationalisation was initially split into six pillars outlining key areas that formed all together a comprehensive approach. The model was recently redesigned to represent a wheel, where all components are integrated and interrelated with each other, providing continuity and consistency to the process of institutional transformation.

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53 https://iau-aiu.net/Internationalization (last access February 2021)
54 https://www.acenet.edu/Research-Insights/Pages/Internationalization/CIGE-Model-for-Comprehensive-Internationalization.aspx (Last access February 2021)

ACE Model for Comprehensive Internationalization
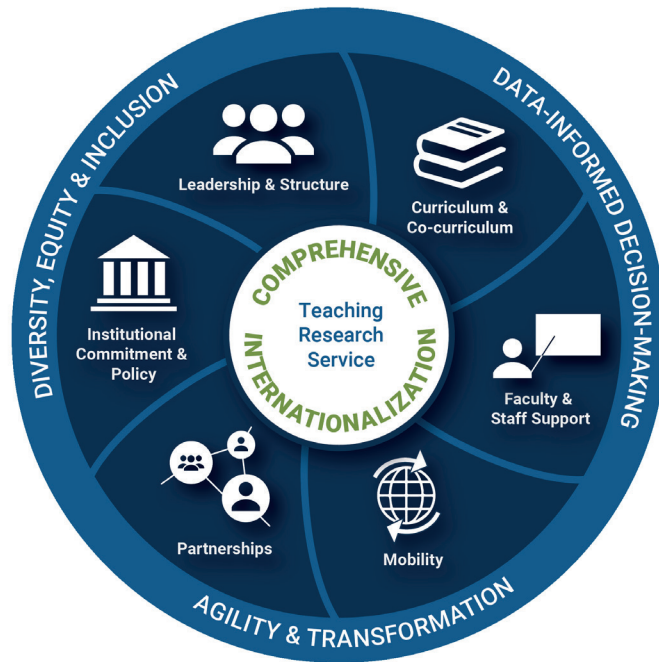
The internationalisation dimensions of the CIGE model are:

1) Institutional Commitment & Policy
Internationalisation should be a priority in an institution's strategic plan. Institutional leaders or -in the case of systems with a centralised governance-national higher education manager should explicitly commit to it.

2) Leadership & Structure
The involvement of senior leaders and the establishment of appropriate administrative and reporting structures are key for the internationalisation and institutional transformation. Such structures include the president and chief academic leaders; offices that are designated to coordinate campus-wide global engagement and international student services, as well as units that are responsible for research, institutional research, faculty development, student support services (e.g., academic advisory, counselling, career exploration), enrolment management, finance,

community and alumni relations, as well as advancement.

3) Curriculum & Co-curriculum
Being the core mission of higher education, student learning is a critical element of internationalisation. An internationalised curriculum ensures that all students are exposed to international perspectives and that they can acquire global and intercultural skills at home regardless of their study focus. Workforce-ready global skills are included in institution or system-wide learning outcomes and assessments.

4) Faculty & Staff Support
Being the primary drivers of teaching and knowledge production, faculty members play a pivotal role in learning, research, and service (to varying degrees depending on the institution's unique mission). Their commitment is vital for the success of internationalisation. Institutional policies and support mechanisms ensure that faculty members have the opportunity to acquire intercultural skills themselves and

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55 Image source:https://www.acenet.edu/Research-Insights/Pages/Internationalization/CIGE-Model-for-Comprehensive-Internationalization.aspx (last access February 2021)

are able to maximise the impact of these experiences on student learning, research and services.

   5) Mobility

Mobility refers both to the outward and inward physical movement of people (students, faculty members and staff), programmes, projects and policies to and from off-campus communities and other countries to engage in learning, research and collaboration. Technology has expanded the opportunity for mobility to include academic engagement of all learners beyond their domestic borders. This might be accomplished through collaborative online international learning (COIL) or virtual exchange; research cooperation; faculty and staff exchanges or expertise shared virtually; internships and service experiences; and virtual partnerships.

   6) Partnerships and Networks

Partnerships and networks, whether they are local or international, can generate new ideas and programmes that involve all partners. These relationships bring together different viewpoints, resources, activities, and agendas to shed light on global issues and take concrete actions. Attention is directed to articulated institutional guidelines, policies, and procedures for selecting partners, maintaining relationships over time, keeping records and reviewing the entire institutional partnership portfolio.

As a last methodological reference, the approach followed by the European Association for International Education while drafting the EAIE Barometer[56] was used to identify and select the respondents in the study, which had to be the most representative sample of all the actors involved in the internationalisation of higher education institutions (in terms of geographical scope, role, function, position in the institution, experience and skills). Moreover, the EAIE Barometer guided the analysis of the internal and external context affecting the internationalisation of higher education.

2.2 Context analysis of the internationalisation of higher education

There is a vast body of literature on the internationalisation of higher education, as the subject is of primary interest for policy-makers, educators and leaders. This is because economic performance is affected by the growing cross-border flows of knowledge, workers and students; at the same time, it reflects nations' willingness to internationalise. Although universities have been international since ancient times, globalisation has brought in new environments for the universities to operate in, and increasingly, the universities worldwide are trying to internationalise their operations and connect to each other.[57]

One of the main references when it comes to the internationalisation of higher education in the Mediterranean countries, considering the specific dimension of mobility, is the UNESCO online database Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students.[58] The UNESCO Institute for Statistics collects data on the mobility of students in order to shed light on the shifting demand for higher education, particularly in the developing world. International student mobility indicators are used to track the

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56 EAIE Barometer: Internationalisation in Europe (second edition), 2018

57 J. Vardhan, Internationalisation and the Changing Paradigm of higher education in the GCC Countries, SAGE Open. April 2015. DOI:10.1177/2158244015580377

58 It is possible to access the data here: http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow (Last access February 2021).

flows of tertiary students seeking higher education abroad. Data include figures and rates related to inbound and outbound students by regions and countries of origin, as well as host countries.[59] A report on "Internationalization in Tertiary Education in the MENA Region" was published by the CMI (Centre for Mediterranean Integration) in 2020.[60] The Report focuses on the Middle-East and North Africa and attempts to demonstrate that, being an important part of the reforms needed in education and training, the internationalisation of tertiary education has a major role to play.

This study builds on the numerous past experiences of internationalisation of researchers and practitioners, advancing progress in the development of an integrated approach based on both quantitative mobility data and a thorough context analysis. As a starting point for the analysis of the current situation in the region, we wanted to understand the context of the internationalisation of higher education in each country. Thanks to a clear overview of the current situation and of the key features and patterns specific to each national higher education system, researchers could move forward in the identification of the main obstacles to the cooperation between Southern and Northern Mediterranean higher education institutions, as well as the good practices and opportunities supporting and facilitating the Internationalisation of higher education.

At the European level, one of the most interesting studies analysing the internationalisation performances of the European higher education system was conducted in 2015, commissioned by the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education.[61] The only European system making a direct reference to the Mediterranean area is the French higher education system with its 2013 strategy "pinpointing the Mediterranean area as a target for development".[62]

French authorities (through a strong and continuous diplomatic support) have been very much in favour of the establishment of schools and universities through bilateral agreements. These include the École Supérieure de Beyrouth and the École Supérieure Algérienne des Affaires, respectively in Lebanon and Algeria. In addition, autonomous French-speaking universities with varying national status have been established in other countries such as the Galatasaray University (Istanbul, Turkey) and the Université Française d'Egypte.[63] Last but not least, the French higher education system established branch campuses abroad such as La Sorbonne Abu Dhabi, Institut Tunis-Paris Dauphine and the National Institute of Applied Sciences (INSA) in Morocco.[64] Apart from Germany, and its historical ties with Egypt, no other European country can count on the same level of cooperation in the region.

59 https://undatacatalog.org/dataset/education-international-student-mobility-tertiary-education (Last access February 2021)
60 Please note that this study is not considering Gulf countries that are, on the other side, widely included in other studies and considered as an integral part of the MENA region.
61 https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/540370/IPOL_STU(2015)540370_EN.pdf (Last access February 2021)
62 Ivi , p. 101. (Last access February 2021)
63 Ivi , p. 102. (Last access February 2021)
64 Ivi , p. 104. (Last access February 2021)

Interestingly enough, we can underline that non-European countries have been working in recent years in sending and receiving students to and from the MENA region, especially Malaysia, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. An interesting trend, as shown by growing numbers, and that was also confirmed in this study. Along with India, China, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, Malaysia is one of the most active actors in the Mediterranean area, constantly boosting its cooperation with Arabic Islamic countries and higher education institutions. These countries are becoming very active actors in the region, gradually replacing historical countries that have always been the main partners in terms of internationalisation and, more specifically, mobility. According to a Report issued in 2011 by the World Bank, there are clear differences in the destinations of students from Middle East and North African countries. France used to host over two-thirds of North African international students, but it was only the fifth largest destination for students from the Middle East. At that time, North African students were also concentrated in Canada and Germany (80% each), while students from the Middle East were more scattered, studying in the U.S. (16.5%), Jordan (14%), the U.K. (13%), Saudi Arabia (11%), and France (8%).[65]

Data show that in 2008 over 220,000 students moving around the world came from MENA countries, which in turn hosted over 134,000 international students.[66] In this scenario, we noticed that visa restriction policies applied in the last years by European countries are encouraging Mediterranean countries and consequently higher education institutions to look to other opportunities, with easier access.[67]

Generally speaking, we cannot deny that (in the effort of evaluating this shift) the lack of reliable, updated and consolidated data constitutes a major barrier. Even the data contained in the Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students of UNESCO seems to be not fully updated for the Mediterranean area as in several cases there are only estimations, data are not complete (especially for 2014) or some countries are even lacking information (e.g., Libya lacks information on the total inbound internationally mobile students).

It is also worth highlighting that the Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students of UNESCO has a different focus than this study when it comes to tracking mobility flows. We analysed short- and long-term mobility flows of students, enrolled in higher education institutions in ten target countries, as a result of cooperation activity with a number of representative institutions. Our approach is methodologically different from the definition of "international mobility student" used by UNESCO, namely: "Students who have crossed a national or territorial border for the purpose of education and are now enrolled outside their country of origin".[68] Taking into account this specific point, the Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students reports an extremely useful set of results

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65 A. Jaramillo, A. Ruby, F. Henard, H. Zaafrane, Internationalization of higher education in MENA : Policy Issues Associated with Skills Formation and Mobility, World Bank, Washington, DC. 2011, p. 3.
66 Ibidem
67 This clearly resulted from the interaction with different stakeholders when writing this report.
68 http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/international-or-internationally-mobile-students (Last access February 2021)

INDICATOR	Net flow of internationally mobile students (inbound-outbound), both sexes (numbers)[69]						
TIME	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
COUNTRY							
Algeria	(≠) −12766	−12531	−14757	−17194	(≠) −21215	..	..
Egypt	(≠) 23909	..	19679	..	..	..	..
Israel	(≠) −3609	..	..	..	..	..	..
Jordan	..	17979	22431	14734	(≠) 18318	..	..
Lebanon	(≠) 3553	6518	3432	1726	(≠) 3325	..	..
Libya	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Mauritania	..	−4309	−4217	−4279	..	..	..
Morocco	(≠) −28241	−29634	−30606	−31187	(≠) −32090	..	..
Palestine	(≠) −24505	−26372	−28111	−25013	(≠) −27384	..	..
Tunisia	..	−12431	−14440	−15975	(≠) −17695	..	..

Interestingly enough, the Maghreb system (Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia) sends more students for outcoming mobilities compared to incoming, while the Mashreq area (Lebanon and Jordan) seems to be able to attract students from other regions (especially from the rest of Asia and some African countries); the same applies to Egypt, which confirms its international historical vocation and capability of being attractive for other countries.

The case of Palestine is an exception due to the unique conditions in which the local higher education system is forced to work. No analysis is possible for both Libya and Israel, due to an evident lack of data. If we match these results with our quantitative and qualitative analysis, we can comfortably say that trends are consistent. Results are presented in details in the next paragraphs, but some interesting outcomes are anticipated below.

Due to the negative net result in the mobility flows, the HE systems in Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia in this case) are undergoing transformations, such as the profound national legislative reforms in Algeria and Morocco, in order to become more attractive for African students, with a focus on Sub-Saharan African countries. Having acknowledged the difficulties related to bridge the attractiveness gap with respect to Europe in the short-term, local higher education institutions are shifting their attention towards less developed systems to play a bridging role between these systems and Europe, as well as to strengthen their ability to act as destination countries. On the other side, the Jordanian and Lebanese HEIs have been capable of constantly being well above the average in terms of inbound student mobility. This has been confirmed also by the report "Internationalisation of Tertiary Education in the Middle East and North Africa" published by the Centre for Mediterranean Integration:

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69 Data extracted on February 2021 from UIS.Stat

"[...] north African countries attracting fewer inbound students than the world average. Nevertheless, inbound mobility is on the rise and, with the exception of Algeria and Saudi Arabia, foreign enrolment grew faster than domestic enrolment over the last decade".[70] The case of the two Levantine countries can be explained by considering the historical relations of Lebanon with several European countries and as a consequence of the Lebanese diaspora; and due to the Jordanian HE system's ability to be highly attractive in the region. At the same time, it is self-evident that the Palestinian situation is the result of the well-known difficulties related to the possibility to grant long-term visas to inbound students.

The CMI report, the Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students (on which the CMI report is consistently built upon), and several other studies, confirm the extremely poor quantity and quality of South-South mobility and internationalisation activities, fostered, in recent years, mainly by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission, which, in many cases, has brought together South-Mediterranean institutions and encouraged them to collaborate for the first time. It is worth noting that the lack of data and the related difficulties in collecting reliable information is an additional factor influencing this trend, as was also confirmed by our analysis and by our daily experience as internationalisation practitioners in the MENA region.

In the South-Eastern Mediterranean region, there is a focus on national activities and bilateral cooperation, rather than on a regional approach. This raises more than one question on how to define and redefine a "regional approach" promoted by international stakeholders, on how to match this "regional approach" with the national focus of most European countries, and on

INDICATOR	Inbound internationally mobile students from the Arab States, both sexes (number)						
TIME	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
COUNTRY							
Algeria	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Egypt	5796	..	909	..	..	..	..
Israel	196	..	..	..	..	..	..
Jordan	..	34336	40940	32891	39964	..	..
Lebanon	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Libya	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Mauritania	..	120	108	96	..	..	..
Morocco	3334	3481	3182	3805	3904	3967	..
Palestine	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Tunisia	..	2029	2105	2058	1916	..	..

70 https://www.cmimarseille.org/knowledge-library/-tertiary-education-middle-east-and-north-africa, p. 14 (Last Access February 2021)

how to structure tailored approaches for the benefit of the internationalisation processes in the MENA countries. Rather than being considered a region on the basis of a presumed common culture and language, or on the basis of the ethnic notion of "Arabs", these countries should rely on customised approaches, designed around national priorities and peculiarities. Based on these national priorities and peculiarities, we can later reflect on common actions, projects and shared initiatives to tackle regional challenges.

Even the so-called "Arab springs" have had a wide but diverse impact on these countries, allowing some of them (e.g., Jordan and Morocco) to benefit from the transitions (e.g., Tunisia) and instabilities (e.g., Libya) of the others. Trying to provide a unique interpretation of these events might be misleading. If it is true that the popularity of Egyptian tertiary education declined in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, it is also true that the population of foreign students in Jordan rose by 43% between

2012 and 2015, as a consequence of the refugee crisis. For instance, the number of Syrian students quadrupled between 2011 and 2016.[71] Lebanon case is completely different: as shown by the data provided by the Lebanese University in relation to the past years, the pressure on the local higher education institutions clearly decreased after the Syrian crisis. While it is true that there is a huge social pressure and that the Lebanese education system (primary and secondary schools) is under tremendous stress, the data provided by the main public institution in Lebanon clearly demonstrates that numbers of Syrian refugees in HE are decreasing.

Furthermore, the media portray the Mediterranean region as unstable, in crisis and (in some cases) in a constant state of war, widely contributing to depict a negative image and consequently reduce the attractiveness of the region. Obviously, the potential attractiveness of the region does not solely depend on this specific issue, but this negative image has decisively

Syrians enrolled in the Lebanese University (LU)

Source: Office of the Rector, Lebanese University, March 2014
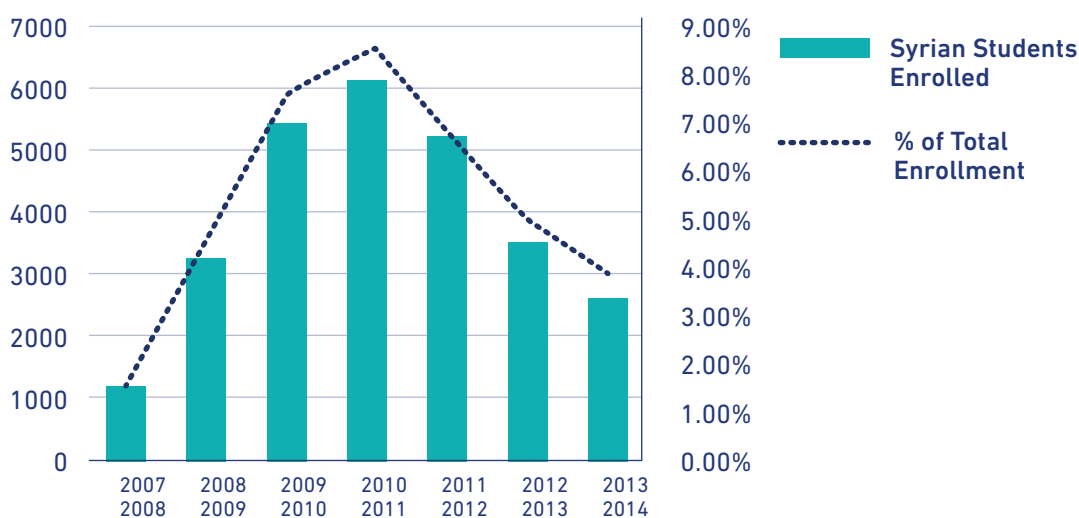
71 Ivi, p. 62 (Last Access February 2021)

contributed to strengthen a stereotyped perception of the region, of its institutions and of its inhabitants.

Almost all sources point to the low quality of research as a concrete obstacle to a comprehensive internationalisation strategy.

As stated by the World Bank in 2011, many MENA countries do not have sufficient researchers or tertiary level faculty, and some lack the financial resources to attract and retain the best academics or to provide competitive teaching and research facilities.[72] As a consequence we can identify three main risk factors: failure to attract foreign researchers, failure to attract private firms and companies and the loss of top talents. In the latter case, the risk of brain drain is an intrinsic side-effect related to mobility. Universities in the region perceive themselves as more teaching-oriented than research-oriented, and the research sector suffers from low budget allocations from governments, with the incredible exception of Israel, actually allocating 4.2% of its gross domestic production to the research sector. The tables on the right, based on the UNESCO Institute for Statistics system,[73] support our conclusions:

R&D spending as % of GDP

0,1% Algeria

0,6% Egypt

4,2% Israel

0,4% Jordan

0,7% Morocco

0,5% Palestine

0,7% Tunisia

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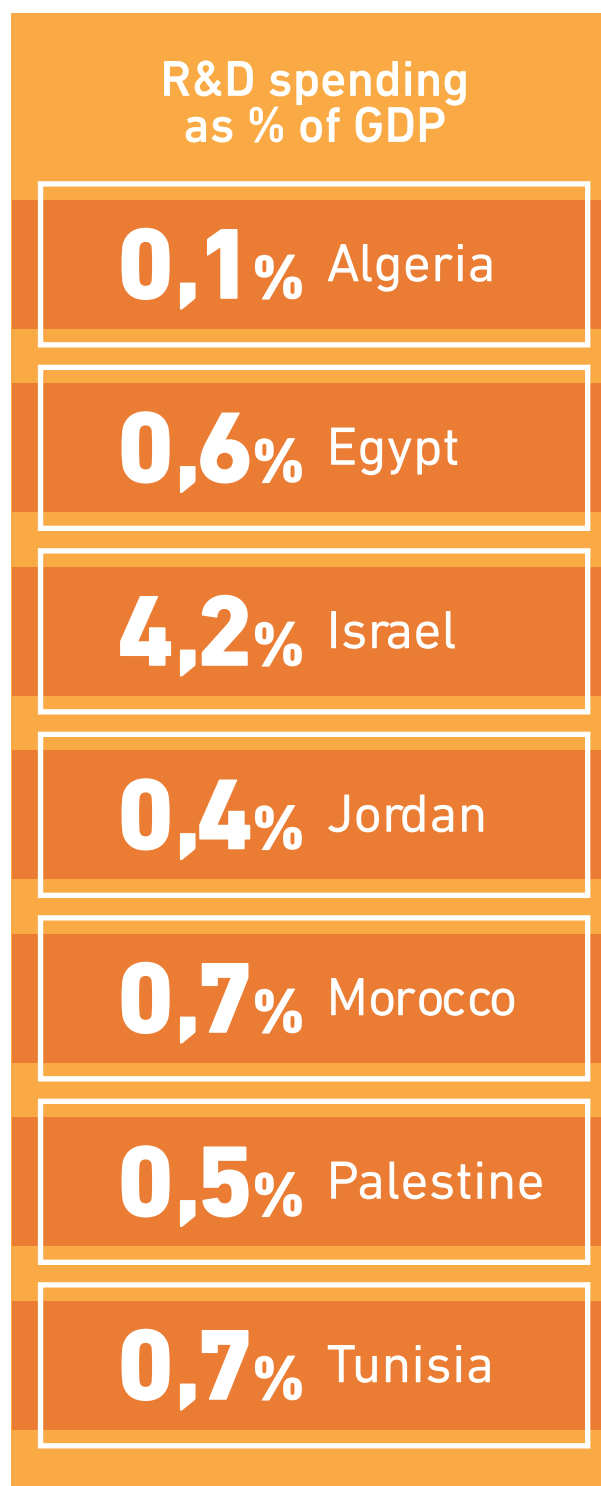
72 Jaramillo, Ruby, Henard, Zaafrane, op. cit.,p. 15
73 Please note that no data is available for Libya, Lebanon and Mauritania.

Internationalisation is on top of the agenda of higher education institutions in Africa and especially in the Middle East, as underlined by the answers to the 5th IAU Global survey conducted in 2018 (83% of respondents stated that internationalisation is of 'high' importance).[74] Despite the answer rate for the Middle East is lower compared to other regions, confirming the difficulties for international stakeholders to access reliable and consistent data, answers show a certain regional dynamism, which is usually underestimated. The true question is: what do we mean when we speak about internationalisation in the Mediterranean region? What is the perception about the meaning of this process? In most cases, there is a remarkable misunderstanding of the concept of internationalisation, which many local higher education institutions sic et simpliciter equate with mobility. That is why, even when we investigated practices and digitalisation activities related to the internationalisation at home, answers from participants were mostly related to the physical dimension of mobility. Most likely – even though this should be further investigated – more research needs to be conducted in order to understand and assess the knowledge of internationalisation and its dimensions by the Mediterranean higher education institutions. And a reflection should be made on the long-term effects of the rapid shift towards internationalisation in the South-Mediterranean countries, and whether this is truly contributing to increased inclusion, equity and fairness in higher education.

Having said that, the following boxes present an overview of the internationalisation of higher education in each target country of the study: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco, Lebanon, Libya, Jordan, Palestine and Tunisia.

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74 https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20190109100925536#:~:text=Statistics%20 show%20that%20internationalisation%20of,highly%20unequal%2C%20for%20two%20 reasons%3A&text=Only%20about%202%25%20of%20the,a%20period%20of%20study%20abroad. (Last access February 2021)

Algeria

When talking about higher education and internationalisation in Algeria, it is important to always bear in mind that Algeria is the largest African country, and around 80% of its territory is covered by the Sahara Desert. Algeria became independent in 1962, it has a population of 43.9 million inhabitants, of which 54% is under 30 years old.[75] The University of Algiers, the first one in the country, was created in 1909, and two branches were created just before the independence, in Oran and Constantine, and were intended for the elites (only 2,000 students and less than 200 teachers). After the independence in 1962, a policy for higher education was implemented focusing on the following dimensions: generalisation (or democratisation), nationalisation, Arabisation and unification of education systems.[76] Free education is a right guaranteed to all Algerians by the Constitution and basic education is compulsory until 16 years of age. In order to grasp the massification process undergone by the country, consider that the total number of students in higher education grew fivefold from 1990 to 2013.[77] Algeria inherited the French higher education system with an open sector – universities – and a selective sector made up of "écoles supérieures". In order to face the challenges posed by the massification of students, Algeria has gradually developed an important network of HEIs, nowadays composed of: 54 universities, 9 university centres, 11 high normal schools, 35 high schools.[78] This dense system also includes 1 university of continuing education, 55 institutions depending on other ministries (Health, Tourism, Culture...) and 14 private institutions, whose creation was authorised by the 1999 law. The national strategy for higher education tries to cover the whole national territory, with the majority of HEIs located in the Northern regions.[79] In 2019/2020, the total number of students reached around 1.5 million (in order to better understand such figures, consider that around 1.7 million students were enrolled in France in the same academic year), of which more than 60% are women. 90% are registered at universities, 65% enrolled in undergraduate studies, largely in social sciences and humanities, then in sciences and technology and lastly in life sciences.[80] 61,277 teachers and 69,407 staff members ensure the functioning of the university.[81] Teaching in Algeria is bilingual: Arabic is used for social sciences and humanities and French for sciences and technology.

The Algerian higher education sector includes the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (the MESRS, created

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75 https://www.algerie360.com/54-de-la-population-est-agee-de-moins-de-30-ans-lalgerie-est-toujours-jeune/% (Last access February 2021)

76 Ghouati, Professionalisation des formations supérieures et employabilité en Algérie, IREMAM-CNRS, Aix-en-Provence, Rapport de recherche, 2015.

77 Ibidem

78 'Data from the MESRS: https://www.mesrs.dz/documents/21525/96775/AGREGATS-Anglais.pdf/7a93b99a-d5ae-4ebb-9cc8-92acbe477623 (Last access February 2021)

79 https://services.mesrs.dz/Maps/CarteEtablissements/carteParWilaya_fr.html (Last access February 2021)

80 Data from the MESRS: https://www.mesrs.dz/documents/21525/96775/AGREGATS-Anglais.pdf/7a93b99a-d5ae-4ebb-9cc8-92acbe477623 (Last access February 2021)

81 Ibidem

in 1970) and the advisory bodies: the National University Conference - chaired by the Minister - and 3 regional universities conferences - West, Centre and East - chaired by one elected rector, whose mission for internationalisation is developing pathways for strengthening inter-university relations. Several reforms have been undertaken and the current legislative framework for the higher education and scientific research sector is defined by the higher education Orientation Law 99-05[82] on higher education of April 1999, which was completed by the law 08-06 of February 2008[83] (introducing the LMD system, except for medicine studies).

Algerian investments in Education and higher education are among the top five of the national budgets. The budget of the HE sector in 2020 represents the 5th budget of the country: a 2.3 billion euro budget of which more than 32% is dedicated to students' life services.

Like many other countries in the region, in order to face globalisation and to tackle the high unemployment rate, Algeria introduced the Bologna process (started in 2004 and finalised in 2010). This reform was introduced to favour a deep modernisation of programmes and new teaching practices, promote the relationship between training and employment, research and development and open higher education to the national and international environment. It also introduced and recognised the ECTS credit system. The LMD system is operational in universities and university centres (except

for medicine and medical sciences) and complements another system, designed for the so-called Écoles supérieures (2 years of preparatory classes, 3 years for the Master, and 3 additional years for the doctorate). According to university staff members interviewed during the focus group, after a necessary adaptation period, credit recognition seems to be an operational procedure, as the learning contents of mobility are defined beforehand with the approval of the head of department. The lack of fluency in the foreign language can represent a barrier and constant training and information are always welcomed, but through the learning agreement mechanism, sending universities are able to easily recognise the mobility abroad. In this sense, cooperation is facilitated beyond the bilateral scheme. At the level of the écoles supérieures, the recognition is based on the average and not on modules, as the LMD is not operational, and in this case, students can compensate for the missing part in the institution.[84] Difficulties were mentioned in relation to the specific case of students in the second year of a Master who have a dissertation to prepare (difficulty in converting modules into a dissertation).[85] The LMD introduction was part of a more structural reform initiated within the framework of the Support Programme for the Sector Policy of higher education and Scientific Research (PAPS-ESRS, 2010-2016),[86] cofounded by the European Union and Algeria and aimed at modernising the sector, in terms of performance and quality of higher education. Several steps have been taken, from the creation of

82 https://services.mesrs.dz/DEJA/fichiers_sommaire_des_textes/02%20fr.pdf (Last access February 2021)
83 Ivi, p. 8.
84 Example given by EPAU - École Polytechnique d'Architecture et d'Urbanisme during the focus group
85 http://erasmusplus.dz/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Ecosyst%C3%A8me-ICM-en-Alg%C3%A9rie-Ma-lika-KEBRI.pdf (Last access February 2021)
86 https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/aap_algerie_2009_ad2.pdf (Last access February 2021)

the CIAQES (National Commission for the Implementation of Quality Assurance in higher education) to the establishment of Quality Assurance units in universities, the definition of a national quality benchmark, self-assessment. The reform is yet an ongoing process whose end point will be the creation of a National Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation, as an independent institution.

Internationalisation of HE in Algeria was born historically in a bilateral way, since its independence, and both northward and southward. After its independence and due to a great shortage of university managers, academic supervision was ensured by technical and scientific cooperation (French "coopérants"). For historical and language reasons, exchanges and mobility with France remain among the most significant. In 2019-2020, 29,527 Algerian students were registered in France – of whom 51% were women (+39% in the last 5 years). The second destination country is Canada with around 500 students.[87]

Due to its regional vocation, Algeria has always welcomed foreign students, mainly from Sub-Saharan countries, becoming a destination country for many African students. Since 1962, Algerian universities trained 57,000 foreign students in Medical Sciences and Technology. Today, around 8,000 foreign students of 62 nationalities are registered (of whom 48% come from Palestine, Mali, Mauritania and other Sub-Saharan areas).[88] In order to host international students, procedures for the recognition of foreign diploma are managed directly by the ministry. More than 80% of them are enrolled in graduate courses. At a regional level and compared to other North African countries, there is still much room for improvement.

The internationalisation of the higher education strategy is based on both a top-down and bottom-up approach as it is led at both ministry and university levels, according to their area of competence. The Department of Cooperation and Inter-University Exchanges is responsible for ensuring the follow-up of the implementation of training and professional development plans abroad and proposing mechanisms to facilitate integration into the workplace; implementing training plans for foreign students in Algerian higher education institutions, ensuring the implementation of cooperative agreements in the different areas of the sector and proposing mechanisms allowing the contribution of the Algerian scientific community established abroad.[89] The Department is divided into four sub-directorates dedicated to the missions.[90] University openness to its external and international environment is the driver in national efforts to tackle the employability issue and ensure training for "useful professions", with the support of research and innovation. The ministry recently recalled the priority of internationalisation in its structural roadmap: the university has "to contribute to the technological management and sustainable economic development of the country as well as the openness to the

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87 https://www.campusfrance.org/fr/ressource/algerie-2019-2020 (Last access February 2021)
88 https://www.mesrs.dz/documents/21525/96775/AGREGATS-Anglais.pdf/7a93b99a-d5ae-4ebb-9cc8-92ac-be477623 (Last access February 2021)
89 https://www.mesrs.dz/en/dceiu (Last access February 2021)
90 Sub-directorates of: Training; Development Abroad and Insertion; Training of International Students; Bilateral Cooperation; Multilateral Cooperation.

international (visibility; comparability)" and one of the strategical axes is that of "refocusing of the international cooperation, in particular around the win-win partnership and the strengthening of international mobility schemes for teacher-researchers".[91]

The Ministry is the main promoter of mobility programmes defined to meet the needs of the sector and it aims to increase the number of professor-rank teachers, currently 8,473 (the number almost tripled from 2009 to 2019), representing around 14% of the overall academic staff;[92] to strengthen research activity; to improve the use of foreign languages, especially English. The shortage of professor rank teachers led, for instance, to the definition of the National Exceptional Programme (PNE, funded by the Ministry) aimed at funding scholarships for residential training programmes, dedicated to research professors and permanent researchers for the finalisation of their doctoral thesis. For the academic year 2019/2020, 883 scholarships were awarded. In 2014, another PNE was designed especially for English learning in the United Kingdom (378 beneficiaries from the beginning). Another important programme is the so-called PROFAS B+,[93] issued from the Algerian–French cooperation (initiated in 1987) dedicated to self-employed doctoral students, either in joint supervision or in joint thesis supervision. Since 2014, PROFAS B+ has enabled nearly 500 Algerian

scholarship holders to join laboratories of excellence in France.[94] Another strength of the ministerial strategy is the existence of a mobility programme for administrative staff, that shows the holistic approach of capacity building, even if short-term mobilities are not taken into consideration in career progression, or, they are taken into account informally.[95]

At HEI level, whether they are universities or high schools, all organisation charts include by decree[96] a vice-rector or deputy director for external relations demonstrating the importance attached to internationalisation at the institutional level as well. The two main missions (and services) of the vice-rectorate in charge of the promotion of scientific research, external relations and cooperation are: follow-up and enhancement of research activities and cooperation and inter-university exchanges. Universities, mainly in the Northern cities, were used to implement international activities (mobility agreements, invitation of foreign professors...) but as the strategy was not clearly defined before the latest reform, and no tools were designed for measuring the impact of internationalisation activities, these were not sufficiently visible nor fully exploited. Instead, within the framework of the current governance reform led by the Ministry, the internationalisation strategy has now to be fully integrated in the Strategic plan with indicators and monitoring tools. The composition of these services depends

91 https://www.mesrs.dz/documents/21525/96775/AGREGATS-Anglais.pdf/7a93b99a-d5ae-4ebb-9cc8-92ac-be477623 (Last access February 2021)
92 https://www.mesrs.dz/documents/21525/96775/AGREGATS-Anglais.pdf/7a93b99a-d5ae-4ebb-9cc8-92ac-be477623 (Last access February 2021)
93 https://www.if-algerie.com/actualites/appels-a-projet/programme-algero-francais-de-bourses-en-docto-rat-profas-b (Last access February 2021)
94 Ibidem
95 Focus group results
96 Decree of the 26th of September 2004, available at: https://services.mesrs.dz/DEJA/fichiers_sommaire_des_textes/55%20FR.PDF (Last access February 2021)

on the university policy. The lack of human resources is often mentioned as a barrier to the implementation of the strategy, which can be overcome when the top management is ready to focus on and assume the responsibility for internationalisation activities. Beyond the administrative structure itself, a lack of interest and understanding by a great part of the academic community is also identified as an obstacle. In order to involve, rely on and get support from more academic members in the internationalisation process, info-days and training courses are organised for the vice-deans who act as focal points for their faculty.[97] Regarding the cooperation and management of the Erasmus+ programme, Erasmus units have been created, their staff has been trained and they are now functioning in 43 universities[98] with the support of the Erasmus+ national office. Being fluent in a foreign language is an asset but not a criterion for entering in the international relations office. However, language remains a barrier at an internal level, even if administrative and academic staff can rely on the presence of the CEIL (intensive language teaching centre) in the universities in order to acquire language skills. Some key 2020 results presented here illustrate the momentum in the whole sector: twinning of Algerian and French universities for the preparation of 105 joint degrees; signature of 25 new agreements for the year 2020-2021 and 141 agreements of joint supervision of theses in progress; 131 cooperation agreements with more than 60 countries; the signing of a cooperation agreement with the mixed network of French schools within the framework of the authorisation of five vocational training courses involving professionals from the economic and social sector; and the participation of the research sector in 6 international programmes.[99]

When it comes to the participation of Algerian institutions in Erasmus+ projects, even if it has increased over the years and effects on HEI are positively perceived, some kind of frustration remains as the budget dedicated to Algerian HEIs is tight.[100] For instance, as regards ICM, the number of students and staff moving to Europe and to Algeria has notably increased from 2015 to 2019 (from 307 to 664).[101] For the academic year 2019/2020, Algeria benefited from a special allocation of 2.5 million euro[102] but the percentage of the South Med regional budget dedicated to Algeria is only 7% - equal to the Palestinian budget or half the Tunisian budget.[103] Monitoring visits organised by the NEO revealed that the number of implemented mobilities is much less than the number of contracted mobilities, which might be due to the difficulty in obtaining

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97 Interview with Professor Benoudnine, vice-rector of the University of Mostaganem and Professor Guedda, vice-rector of El Oued University.

98 NEO presentation during the ICM Cluster meeting in Algiers in February 2020: http://erasmusplus.dz/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Ecosyst%C3%A8me-ICM-en-Alg%C3%A9rie-Malika-KEBRI.pdf (Last access February 2021)

99 https://www.mesrs.dz/documents/21525/99052/Bilan+activit%C3%A9s+2020.pdf/7a54f7ba-fc31-4535-a-fe0-f3cc21743a55 (Last access February 2021)

100 Results of the focus group and interview with Arezki Saidani, Director of Cooperation and Inter-University Exchanges at the MESRS

101 https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/factsheets/neighbourhood/algeria_erasmusplus_2019.pdf (Last access February 2021)

102 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/whatsnew-icm-call-2020_1.pdf (Last access February 2021)

103 https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/factsheets/neighbourhood/algeria_erasmusplus_2019.pdf (Last access February 2021)

the invitation letter from the hosting university.[104] The top 5 destination countries are Spain, France, Portugal, Turkey and Italy. Even if the top 5 Algerian universities involved in ICM are from regional capital or major cities, the participation of universities from more peripheral or remote cities has to be underlined.[105] The 2020 ICM selection reveals also the participation for the first time of 6 Algerian universities.[106]

The ICM represents an opportunity for undergraduate and masters students, when ministerial scholarship programmes focus on the PhD level.[107] Algerian participation in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degree is modest in terms of proposals (in 2019, out of the 107 proposals received, only 6 involved Algerian partners), but success rate is quite good as out of the said 6 proposals, 5 were selected (never as full partners but as associated partners). In terms of scholarships, winners from Algeria are really few, 24 for the 2014-2019 period, on a total of 9389.[108] The participation of Algerian HEI in CBHE projects is overall stable[109] and always with 4 projects selected involving Algerian partners. For the 2015-2019 period, 24 CBHE projects have seen the participation of 107 partners. The effects of this participation are positively perceived, especially in for language reasons for all categories (student, academic and administrative staff) and for training and pedagogical reasons (curricula

development, exchange of practices) while the Ministry programmes have a greater impact on research.[110] Capacity-building seems to be another tangible effect as 3 projects have been coordinated by an Algerian partner.

As for its intra-regional neighbours, internationalisation in Algeria is mainly driven by outgoing mobility, incoming foreign scholarship programmes and participation in international projects. There are also visiting professors' programmes, 5,900 of which were recorded in 2018[111]. Due to the great number of universities, the geographic dimension and historical factors, Algerian universities have not reached yet the same level of international exposure. Membership in regional or international networks is another dimension of the internationalisation strategy. It is worth mentioning internationalisation at home, by means of two examples. The first example shows the privileged relation between Algeria and France and the creation of the ESAA[112] (Algerian High Business School), born as an Algerian public institution thanks to an intergovernmental agreement signed in 2004. French and Algerian institutions participate in the consortium and support the ESAA by participating in educational engineering and by providing academic staff. A Master in Business Administration (MBA) diploma is delivered by the pedagogical

104 Interview with Arezki Saidani and monitoring visit results by the NEO

105 http://erasmusplus.dz/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Ecosyst%C3%A8me-ICM-en-Alg%C3%A9rie-Malika-KEBRI.pdf (Last access February 2021)

106 http://erasmusplus.dz/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Newsletter-Septembre-D%C3%A9cembre-2020.pdf (Last access February 2021)

107 Focus group results

108 https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/factsheets/neighbourhood/algeria_erasmusplus_2019.pdf (Last access February 2021)

109 From 13 proposals received involving Algeria in 2015, to 16 in 2019

110 Focus group results

111 Interview with Arezki Saidani

112 https://www.esaa.dz/ (Last access February 2021)

scheme and signed by all the consortium members, like other diplomas that are delivered by the French universities. The second example of the regional African dimension of Algeria is the establishment of the Institute of water and Energy in the University of Tlemcen, as part of the Pan African University[113] (PAU) created by the African Union Commission. PAU's strategy aims at developing institutions of excellence in the fields of science, technology, innovation, social sciences and governance, in order to "enhance the attractiveness and global competitiveness of African higher education and research and establish the African University at the core of Africa's development".[114] Since the first promotional initiative in 2014, over 200 students from 31 countries across Africa have enrolled, and 73 students have successfully graduated from its programmes.[115] Algeria is opened to the establishment of foreign universities and it has a legal framework for that, as the amendment of the higher education Law in 2008 opened the door to private higher education institutions, subject beforehand "to the ratification of a bilateral agreement".[116] In this sense, several possibilities exist: a foreign university could award a foreign diploma, or it could be a branch, or a mixed university. The establishment of foreign structures is perceived as a policy of emulation, also to improve Algerian universities standards.[117]

Over the years, bilateral cooperation has been diversified and opened to other European countries and to other regions of the world. This diversification was favoured by ministerial cooperation agreements, university initiatives and participation in international projects. Today, there are scholarship programmes with several countries, such as Jordan, Tunisia, China, Hungary and Ireland. Multilateral cooperation has also been strengthened with the goal of contributing to the higher education reform and today Algeria participates in all international bodies and conferences.

According to all participants in the focus group, the major effects of mobility are the acquisition of new skills and the development of an intercultural approach and dialogue and significant life experience in general. In terms of employability, mobility is recognised also to have a great impact on the specific case of the above-mentioned scholarship programmes. The recruitment of PhD students with a joint-supervised thesis as assistant-lecturer is in most cases automatic.[118] Even if there is no systematic monitoring tool of graduates' insertion, feedback given by the students is encouraging and positive. In general, the private sector seems more interested in an experience abroad than the public one.

In terms of scientific benefits and impact of studying abroad, the Ministry underlines a major impact on PhD thesis defence (87% for PNE and 93% for PROFAS B+ programmes)[119] and international publications, the development of new career sectors and the deepening of pedagogical and scientific

113 https://www.pauwes.dz/ (Last access February 2021)
114 https://pau-au.africa/ (Last access February 2021)
115 https://pau-au.africa/institutes/pauwes (Last access February 2021)
116 Art.43 bis 3 of the Law 08-06 of February 2008
117 Interview with Arezki Saidani
118 https://www.mesrs.dz/documents/21525/96775/AGREGATS-Anglais.pdf/7a93b99a-d5ae-4eb-b-9cc8-92acbe477623 (Last access February 2021)
119 Ibidem

knowledge. The impact of international publications is also noticeable.[120] Over the 2005-2020 period, France was by far the first country in terms of co-publications with Algeria (22,614), the second country being Saudi Arabia (2,665).[121] As for the rankings, in the 2020 edition of the Shanghai global ranking of Academic subjects,[122] the University of Djillali Liabes University of Sidi Bel Abbès ranks between the 101st and 150th position in Civil Engineering. In the Times higher education World University Rankings of 2021,[123] the first Algerian university, the University of Sétif 1, ranks 501st-600th in the global ranking.[124] Even if the visibility of the institution is one of the objectives of the internationalisation strategy, institutional prestige and ranking are perceived to be among the dimensions impacted the least by the international activities performed at the university.[125]

Algeria is a partner in five H2020 projects defined as part of the Africa-Europe partnership and research mobility actions. Algeria participates also in the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) on priority themes related to food security, and since 2016 it has participated in 7 projects dedicated to innovative projects and 27 projects related to research and development.[126] Algerian researchers participate also in the Algerian-French

cooperation programme called Hubert Curien Tassili partnership[127] (PHC), which has been providing support to joint research projects and the mobility of French and Algerian researchers since 1980. Over the period of 2015/2020, the 148 selected projects and the 5 Maghreb-PHC have allowed for the registration of 25 doctorates in joint thesis supervision per year and[128] the publication of 52 articles.

As regards digitalisation and the impact of ICT on the internationalisation of HE, before the COVID-19 crisis, e-learning was not very developed despite the efforts of the ministry (decree of April 2011 establishing the national commission for e-learning) and the skills that the universities developed in e-learning, as well as the effective use of different existing platforms. COVID-19 has generated unexpected skillsand capabilities (800 online courses have been developed for the 1st year of the Degree Course) even if conservatism and resistance to change were very strong. From now on, within the framework of teacher training, new teachings regarding the management of e-learning have been introduced. E-learning was not defined by the higher education Act revised in 2008, but its current process of amendment will integrate the e-learning as a training mode. All the people interviewed agreed on the fact that in-presence training is irreplaceable (and in the current situation

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120 Ibidem

121 Ibidem

122 http://www.shanghairanking.com/shanghairanking-subject-rankings/civil-engineering.html (last access March 2021)

123 https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2021/world-ranking#!/page/0/length/25/locations/DZ/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats (Last access February 2021)

124 The second one, the University of Oran ranks 1 at 801-1000, and 8 in the top 1001 (Universities of Bejaia, Biskra, Blida 1, Constantine 1, Boumerdès, USTHB, USTO and Tlemcen.

125 Focus group results

126 http://www.h2020.dz/participation_algerienne_h2020.php (Last access February 2021)

127 https://www.campusfrance.org/fr/tassili (Last access February 2021)

128 Same initiative including the participation of one partner from Tunisia and Morocco

suffers from external challenges such as the accessibility and connectivity, especially in remote areas) but represents a viable alternative and a portion of e-learning activities could be carried out even after the pandemic. E-learning can also be a response to massification. Thanks to this technology, Algerian universities were in a way able to meet mobility expectations, by offering online courses to students who should have attended those same courses in person.[129] Algeria's geographical characteristics and the lack of maturity of some universities (especially those that have been recently created) contribute to an unequal exposure to internationalisation activity. The visa issue remains a concrete and objective barrier to mobility, as well as rigid administrative procedures for obtaining the hosting convention.

Language skills are perceived as both as an incentive (mostly for French speakers) and a barrier at different levels. For instance, students in social sciences and humanities studying in Arabic are less impacted by mobilities; mobility actions tend to benefit staff members with a technical background because of the use of a foreign language in the academic training courses; there are weaknesses in the implementation of internationalisation activities at large as foreign languages skills are necessary to manage cooperation, agreements, welcome foreign visitor. Capacity building was reported as necessary in writing proposals and project management.[130] The brain-drain effect[131] is the dark side of the moon and it has to be taken to take into consideration.

As for the attractiveness, there is a lack of appropriate infrastructures (for hosting students and allowing research); Algeria did not invest in tourism as its neighbours did and consequently the partial knowledge of the country results into the underestimation of Algeria as a destination country for European universities; teaching only in French and Arabic is also perceived as an obstacle.[132] Competition at the national and international levels is also a challenge perceived at the Ministry and HEIs level. On the basis of our relationship with the local HEI, it seems that some internal bureaucratic process and financial regulations have a negative impact on the decision-making process and involvement in international activities. Algerian diaspora is significant and has an important network of associations and part of them aim to strengthen cooperation and promote knowledge transfer. We can mention as an example a network of researchers and senior leaders in the health sector established by the Algerian American Foundation in the United States to ensure training and technical assistance services for new medical research centres in Algeria.[133] The MESRS launched a strategy to promote Algerian scientific talents living abroad through initiatives such as the participation in scientific councils of research centres or the co-supervision of doctoral theses. Incentives in this direction could also favour the internationalisation of the HE system.

129 Example given by University of Tlemcen during the focus group
130 Interview of Professor Benoudnine and focus group results
131 Focus group results
132 Ibidem
133 http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/zh/931911491398316122/pdf/111806-FRENCH-53pg-Mobili-ser-la-diaspora-MENA-Avril-2017.pdf (Last access February 2021)

Egypt

Over the last 50 years the Egyptian higher education system has developed from one governmental university (Cairo University) and one private university[134] (American University in Cairo) to 11 additional governmental universities up till the late 1980s. The number of universities in Egypt in 2018 reached 57, of whom 31 are private universities and 26 are public universities.[135] The number of students enrolled confirm that the Egyptian higher education system is one of the largest in the MENA region. Currently the students enrolled in public and private universities are about 2.4 million in total.[136]

From a structural point of view, the Egyptian higher education system has different types of institutions:[137] public universities, private universities and universities with a mixed status, which are the national non-profit universities,[138] the universities under special laws or agreements and the higher institutions. In parallel with the public education system, there is the religious education provided by the Al-Azhar University.[139] The Al-Azhar institutes are spread out in different cities and regions of the country, serving diverse groups of the population.[140]

From an institutional point of view, the higher education institutions, including universities and technical colleges, are governed by the Ministry of higher education and Scientific Research (MHESR) which is the main regulatory body for higher education in Egypt. The MHESR sets out policies, oversees their implementation, supervises and coordinates all tertiary education. The Ministry of higher education and Scientific Research is supported by three executive bodies, headed directly by the Minister of higher education, which are responsible for the implementation of higher education programmes by monitoring and verifying the outcomes for each type of institutions: the Supreme Council of Universities, the Supreme Council of Private Universities and the Supreme Council of Technical Institutes. Public universities are regulated by Law No. 49/1972[141] and governed by the Supreme Council of Universities (SCU). Private universities are regulated by Law No. 101/1992[142] and governed by the

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134 Interview with Prof. Mayada Belal, Helwan University

135 https://wenr.wes.org/2019/02/education-in-egypt-2#:~:text=Today%2C%20Egypt%20has%20the%20largest,students%2C%20according%20to%20UIS%20data (Last access February 2021)

136 'https://www.arabdevelopmentportal.com/sites/default/files/publication/egypt_figures_education.pdf (Last access February 2021)

137 On the basis of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) country fiche for Egypt (2017) here available: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_egypt_2017.pdf Last access February 2021)

138 Called Ahleya Universities

139 Founded in 970 CE

140 http://www.azhar.edu.eg/ (Last access February 2021)

141 'Arabic version available at: https://www.egypt.gov.eg/arabic/laws/download/newlaws/%D8%A7%-D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%20%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%85%2049%20%D9%84%-D8%B3%D9%86%D8%A9%201972.pdf (Last access February 2021)

142 https://openjicareport.jica.go.jp/pdf/11831153_05.pdf (Last access February 2021)

Supreme Council for Private Universities (SCPU).[143] Technical colleges and institutes are regulated by Law No 528/2003[144] and are governed by the Supreme Council for Technical Institutes (SCTI).[145] SCU develops policies for university education and scientific research and enrols high school graduates to appropriate institutions.[146] SCPU is formed by private university presidents and representatives from public organisations and the SCTC is formed by the representatives of technical institutes and civil society representatives. In addition to these councils, there is the central administration of Al-Azhar Institutes. This structure shows that the public university system is highly centralised, especially when it comes to finance: the public educational institutions are primarily funded by the state budget, while private educational institutions do not receive any public funding (direct or indirect).[147] The financing of private higher education institutions is indeed fully independent[148] and that constitutes an important difference in terms of strategy for the internationalisation to be implemented. Despite that, all the higher education institutions, whether they are public private, are independent in other aspects, like scientific research, administrative regulations and community services.

As for the policies, the Egyptian higher education system was amended several times in the past years as a result of the development that occurred in the sector in order to preserve the quality of higher education. With regard to internationalisation, two recent measures at national level are particularly important: Egypt Vision 2030[149] launched in February 2016, which reflects the state's long-term strategic plan to achieve sustainable development principles and objectives in all areas, including education, and the new education reform programme known as Education 2.0[150] (EDU 2.0, with the objective of restructuring the higher education system in accordance with the targets outlined in Vision 2030), which was followed by the publication of Law No. 162/2018[151] on the establishment and organisation of international branch campuses.

The objective of the strategy Egypt Vision 2030 is to diversify the Egyptian economy, to boost the private sector employment and entrepreneurship, as well as to foster new knowledge industries. In this context, the seventh pillar[152] of the strategy is dedicated to the "education and training system" and it has research and innovation as its foundation. Hence, the three key pillars of the 2030 education strategy have been defined as equal access, quality and competitiveness.[153]

143 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_egypt_2017.pdf Last access February 2021)
144 https://openspace.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2020-04/TRPreport_2020_Egypt_EN.pdf
145 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_egypt_2017.pdf Last access February 2021)
146 http://portal.mohesr.gov.eg/en-us/Pages/Council_Institutes.aspx (Last access February 2021)
147 Interview with Mayada Belal
148 Ibidem
149 https://mped.gov.eg/EgyptVision?lang=en (Last access February 2021)
150 https://www.rdp-egypt.com/en/home (Last access February 2021)
151 https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/International/Documents/Annexe%20A.PDF (Last access February 2021)
152 https://www.investinegypt.gov.eg/English/Pages/WhyEgypt.aspx (Last access February 2021)
153 https://www.arabdevelopmentportal.com/sites/default/files/publication/sds_egypt_vision_2030.pdf (Last access February 2021)

In this context, the international dimension has been confirmed as a priority for the entire higher education system, whereas internationalisation has traditionally been a structural element of Egyptian HEIs. Being international and being recognised at the international level has indeed been a priority for most of the HEIs in the country, with the overall purpose of becoming competitive and delivering high quality education in line with international standards. Egypt has made efforts to enhance the country's academic programmes, institutions and its research activity, by sending on the one hand students and academic staff to different countries in order to obtain qualifications, and on the other hand, by promoting a large number of collaborations with institutes all over the world.

Even though it is clear for all the HEIs that being international and being recognised at the international level is a priority and that international cooperation needs to be considered as an opportunity for advancement and modernisation of their own institution, it emerges that not all the HEIs have a clearly defined strategy for internationalisation.[154] Most of them, including the largest universities in the country, consider internationalisation very important but not all of them have a structured and formalised approach to advance in that respect. This is confirmed by the fact that plans for internationalisation have only recently become a formal structuring part of the university's strategy. This is the case for example of the Helwan University, which released in 2015 its new strategic plan including

for the first time a separate standalone initiative for internationalisation.[155] The aim of this strategic plan is to promote the international presence of the university and its faculties, through new partnerships with foreign institutions and scientific research centres.[156] The above-mentioned University Law No. 49/1972, and its following amendments, foresaw that all Egyptian faculty members can travel for both short and long-term exchanges, which can take the form of visiting professors, post-doctoral missions or longer-term leaves, as well as short-term participation in trainings, conferences and other forms of capacity building activities. Initiatives such as those of the University of Helwan are fully part of this regulatory framework, which therefore leaves a certain autonomy to the HEIs in carrying out their internationalisation activities.

In this context, a great contribution has been given by the work of the National Erasmus+ Office that supports the internationalisation process of the universities by facilitating exchanges with HEIs outside the country,[157] by implementing processes such as students' selection, by promoting mobility follow-up actions and by explaining the importance to have a more internationalised administrative staff and a more connected office for international relations. As underlined by Karim Hamdy, the main task of the National Erasmus+ Office has been therefore that of making universities aware of the importance of a well-structured office, which coordinates and promotes international relations and activities. This work is done through the organisation of

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154 Interview with Karim Hamdy, Director of the National Erasmus+ office in Egypt
155 Interview with Mayada Belal
156 Ibidem
157 Interview with Karim Hamdy

information sessions and bilateral meetings with the Egyptian universities during which the NEO informs their management on opportunities.[158] NEO's support to the universities provided consists also in organising workshops or seminars whose objective is to transfer knowledge and skills, such as the technique needed to write a project proposal. The training is organised based on a geographical scheme, as it is very difficult to provide training to each Egyptian university. In the words of the Director of the National Erasmus Office: "The efficiency of these training strategies is proved by the success rate of the people attending the initiatives organised: it often happens that the people attending the workshops are granted during the year or the following year".[159]

Against this backdrop, two important elements emerged. On the one hand, Egyptian universities benefit from a certain degree of autonomy in the definition of their strategies. The Egyptian HEIs can therefore make choices according to their training needs and pursue the objectives set in terms of internationalisation. On the other hand, it is evident that the central government wants to promote the general attractiveness of the Egyptian higher education system abroad. For this reason, in 2018 a new policy of internationalisation was adopted. The policy has the double objective of retaining more students in Egypt and, at the same time, of trying to turn the country into an education hub. The measure in question is Law No. 162/2018 on the establishment

and organisation of International Branch Campuses (IBC). The Law includes provisions that enable international universities to establish branch campuses by building their own campus, like the German International University of Applied Sciences;[160] by partnering with an Egyptian educational hub that can host different branch campuses, like the Knowledge Hub;[161] and by allowing 100% foreign and private ownership of the schools and academic autonomy.[162] The reason behind this measure is to encourage Egyptian students not to pursue their bachelor's degree abroad, by providing all the service and quality needed directly in Egypt, and to convert Egypt into an international hub for higher education.[163] There are two main objectives behind this reform. Firstly, there is the objective of ensuring that Egypt becomes a destination country for incoming mobility. In this field, the competition with the countries of the Gulf has been growing and, at present, Egypt has a relatively low incoming mobility rate compared to the Gulf countries. Secondly, the reform of branch campuses certainly aims to contain the brain-drain effect and to make the Egyptian higher education system more attractive in terms of quality of teaching.

The internationalisation initiatives undertaken in Egypt in the framework of the new strategy are developed on three distinct levels. First, the government develops and finances its own initiatives, the objective being to facilitate knowledge transfer and to increase the attractiveness of the higher education institutions. Second, the

158 Ibidem
159 Ibidem
160 https://giu-uni.de/en/about-giu/ (Last access February 2021)
161 https://tkh.edu.eg/the-knowledge-hub-universities-about/ (Last access February 2021)
162 For a detailed analysis of the International Branch Campuses (IBC), please visit: https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/International/Documents/2018%20iNote_Egypt%20IBC_final.pdf (Last access February 2021)
163 Interview with Mayada Belal

central government participates in a series of bilateral and multilateral development cooperation agreements that include aspects of tertiary education, research, and/or skills development. And finally, internationalisation initiatives are improved through partnerships between Egyptian universities and counterparts in other countries.

With regard to the involvement of the Egyptian government, it is possible to say that there is a direct implication, to a certain extent, in all scholarship activities in which government employees are involved.[164] When it comes to awards granted by foreign entities, several executive programmes have been established with foreign countries. These scholarship programmes are implemented and executed bilaterally between Egypt and the counterpart governments abroad. In 2014, there were 21 executive programmes, going from multi-year doctoral programmes to short-term language study opportunities.[165] About half of the 21 countries involved in these executive programmes were European (Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Slovenia), and half of them were not European (in particular China, India, Japan, UEA, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia). In addition, a number of new programmes

in cooperation with International fund agencies, such as the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Fulbright Commission, have been launched.[166] This is the case of German-Egyptian long-term scholarships and German-Egyptian short-term scholarships,[167] which are both co-financed by the Egyptian government and by the DAAD. For both the selection criterion is always the competitive one:[168] the best proposals are selected by a joint committee based on the priorities and needs of the country set out every year. A similar scheme has been put in place with the British Council.

As a result of all the efforts made in order to foster and support international activities, Egyptian HEIs became important players in the framework of the programme Erasmus+. In the 2015 call for International Credit Mobility by Erasmus+, Egypt ranked among the highest 20 countries benefiting from these funds, with Alexandria and Cairo Universities on the top of the list with a total of, respectively,13 mobility programmes for Alexandria and 11 mobility programmes for Cairo.[169] During the period between 2015 and 2019, the Egyptian HEIs took part in 423 ICM projects, with 3,206 students and staff moving to Europe and 1,491 students and staff moving to Egypt.[170] With regards to the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in higher education (CBHE) projects, during the same

164 The rationale for sponsoring students to undertake international study: an assessment of national student mobility scholarship programmes, DAAD – British Council 2014: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/e002_outward_mobility_study_final_v2_web.pdf (Last access February 2021)

165 The rationale for sponsoring students to undertake international study: an assessment of national student mobility scholarship programmes, DAAD – British Council 2014: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/e002_outward_mobility_study_final_v2_web.pdf (Last access February 2021)

166 Interview with Mayada Belal

167 Interview with Karim Hamdy

168 Interview with Mayada Belal

169 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_egypt_2017.pdf (Last access February 2021)

170 https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/factsheets/neighbourhood/egypt_erasmusplus_2019.pdf (Last access February 2021)

period (2015-2019), 38 CBHE projects were selected, of whom 8 were directly coordinated by Egyptian Institutions.[171] These figures are even more significant if we think that among all cooperation programmes and initiatives, Erasmus Plus has been indicated by the focus group[172] as the most impactful on the international activities in the country, in terms of funding (the European Commission is indicated as the main source of funding for mobility), in terms of opportunities for international experiences (involving in particular students, academic staff and sometimes administrative staff, especially those working at the international relations offices), and because it allowed to expand their geographic dimension.

From a geographical point of view, while historically Egypt had connections with the Gulf States (UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, etc.) and with Malaysia,[173] in recent years Europe has opened the doors to a wider range of possibilities through its programmes, increasing cooperation agreements with almost all European states, especially with Germany. Second to Erasmus+, a past programme among those funded by the European Commission, the Erasmus Mundus programme, has been pointed out, confirming Europe as one of the main stakeholders in Egypt.[174] Indeed, over 1,000 Egyptian students benefited from Erasmus Mundus scholarships from the majority of Egyptian universities.[175]

In this situation, mobility of both students and academic staff has a prominent position. In the past years, Egypt has moved from an upper limit of no more than 10% of positions available for foreign students in public universities, to placing recruitment of international students as one of the major goals of its internationalisation efforts. This is particularly true with regards to the students and academic staff mobilities, even if it is not yet the case of the administrative staff mobility. In this regard, it has been pointed out that there are several barriers that do not allow the administrative staff to participate in a mobility programme. The first barrier is the lack of a training scheme financed by the state because, in general, the funds allocated by the state are available only for the academic staff (including the assistant faculty staff).[176] The second and most relevant barrier is the lack of knowledge of foreign languages.[177] So even if sometimes there is the opportunity for administrative staff to take part in a mobility programme, such as those offered by Erasmus programmes, the administrative staff wouldn't be able to participate because of the language. In this context, the problem of the lack of knowledge of a foreign language has been stressed by the participant to the focus group as a general barrier that needs to be solved.[178] Because of that, most of the universities now are making some reforms for changing their academic programmes in order to include new programmes delivered in English. They

171 Ibidem
172 Focus group results
173 Interview with Nadia Badrawi, President of the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in higher education (ANQAHE)
174 Focus group results
175 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_egypt_2017.pdf (Last access February 2021)
176 Interview with Mayada Belal
177 Interview with Karim Hamdy
178 Focus group results

are trying to make curricular reforms in order to raise the internal level of English knowledge and at the same time to make academic programmes more appealing for international students.[179]

Within this context, HEIs in Egypt have demonstrated that internationalisation is a priority for institutional strategic planning, a development opportunity for the members of the educational community and a driving force for modernisation. However, several challenges still need to be addressed in order to make the higher education sector fully internationalised. Despite all the efforts, it has been underlined that the system needs more coordination with various sectors and a more forward-looking management at the level of the HEI. In addition, Egypt needs more flexible laws and regulations, with a particular attention to the critical point of money transfer rules. In this regard, universities are discouraged from submitting projects, because of structural problems which make it difficult for the project to be practically carried out.

In addition to this, the need to foster administrative staff training emerged, in order to give the possibility to the administrative staff to acquire language skills, computer skills and other soft skills also needed to organise activities with international stakeholders. Through training for administrative staff, it would be possible to establish a virtuous circle that would strengthen the internationalisation strategy as well as the quality of services provided by universities. From a national point of view, the need for stronger international cooperation in the fields of renewable energy, health and climate change has been underlined.

179 Ibidem

Israel

The sector of higher education in Israel plays a key role in the strategy through which the country achieves its objectives. The strategy for the higher education system in Israel aims to give full access to higher education, to train a qualified academic workforce, to achieve excellence in teaching and research, to be at the forefront of global sciences, in response to the needs of society and of the economy.[180]

The Israeli higher education system is currently composed of 61 institutions of higher education operating throughout the country. Among these, 9 are universities, more than 31 are academic colleges and 21 are academic colleges of education.[181] From a structural point of view the higher education system consists of five different types of institutions. First of all, there are the universities, engaged in teaching and advanced research for undergraduate programmes; secondly, there are the budgeted academic colleges, which offer undergraduate and Master's degree programmes, the majority of which are financed by the Ministry of Education; then, there are the non-budgeted academic colleges, which are private institutions that are not funded by the state; and finally, there are the academic teacher training colleges, which are institutions established by the Ministry of Education and offer undergraduate and Master programmes in education. In addition, the Israeli system has an additional category, which is composed only by the Open University,[182] whose specific features consist in offering an educational path through distance teaching methods such as online teaching, distance learning and others.[183] All HEIs included in these categories can offer Bachelor's and Master's degree programmes but only research universities can offer PhDs.

From an institutional point of view, all the HEIs are subject to the full academic supervision of the Council for higher education (CHE),[184] while their financial stability is monitored by the Planning and Budgeting Committee (PBC). The framework of higher education System is defined by the Council for higher education Law No. 5718/1958,[185] which established the CHE and the procedures for the accreditation of the institutions within the Israeli system. According to the law and its subsequent amendments, the CHE is composed of twenty-five members, one of whom is the Minister of higher education who acts as Chairman.[186] The members of the CHE are persons operating in the field of higher education,

180 https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/background-and-overview-of-higher-education-in-israel (Last access February 2021)
181 https://studyisrael.org.il/study-in-israel/#higher-education-in-a-glance (Last access February 2021)
182 Interview with Marissa Gross Yarm, Head of International Student Affairs at the Council for higher education in Israel
183 Interview with Kathrin Theurillat, Director National Erasmus+ Office in Israel
184 https://che.org.il/en/about-us/ (Last access February 2021)
185 Council for higher education Law 5718/1958. English version available here: http://www.knesset.gov.il/review/data/eng/law/kns3_highereducation_eng.pdf (Last access February 2021)
186 Interview with Marissa Gross Yarm

who have been recommended by the Minister of Education after consulting with recognised institutions of higher education. The vice-chair is an academic, and, by virtue of their positions, there are also members of the Council, the Chairman of the Planning and Budgeting Committee and the Chairman of the National Association of Students. The composition of the Council makes it possible to have adequate representation of all types of accredited higher education institutions, in accordance with article 4 of the Law No. 5718/1958.

The other main national institution in the field of higher education is the PBC, which monitors the financial stability of the HEIs. Established by a government decision in June 1977 to serve as an independent body between the government and higher education institutions in all matters relating to the budget for the higher education system, the PBC is a sub-committee of the Council for higher education composed of seven members (including the Chairman): four are professors (two from the social sciences and humanities and two from the exact and engineering sciences); two are representatives of the public; and one is a senior faculty member of a budgeted college.[187]

Over the past two decades, the higher education system has undergone some relevant changes, the most important of which was the increase in the number of students attending higher education institutions. In the 1990s, the system was characterised by a rapid and significant growth in the number of students. The high demand for academic studies has contributed to the opening of new higher education institutions and to the planning of a larger educational offer. In the 1990s an important legislative act[188] enabled the opening of academic colleges (general, technical, and professional), determining the transition to a new academic landscape based on three pillars:[189] diversification of the higher education institutions, privatisation and internationalisation. In contrast to the growth of the 1990s, the first decade of the 21st century was characterised by a decline in the student growth rate, primarily due to demographic reasons.[190] This has led to a further change in the governance system of the Israeli higher education sector, which moved from a general policy of expansion to one aimed at strengthening and consolidating the existing institutions. Nevertheless, the centrality of colleges in the higher education system remained: in 2016, out of 190,400 bachelor's students (excluding those enrolled in the Open University), 66% were enrolled in colleges.[191]

In recent years, policy-makers have put emphasis on new initiatives to reform the internationalisation of the entire higher education system in Israel in the sense of greater internationalisation and social inclusion. In this context, the multi-year plan for higher education launched in 2016 is

187 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_israel_2017.pdf (Last access February 2021)
188 The resolution 3964 released on September 28, 1994.
189 G. Menahem, The Transformation of higher education in Israel since the 1990s: The Role of Ideas and Policy Paradigms, Governance Journal, September 2008, pp. 509-510
190 https://che.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Press-Release-Collection-of-Data-for-Start-of-Year.pdf (Last access February 2021)
191 A. Marantz-Gal, Internationalization of the Curriculum in Israeli Colleges, International higher education, n. 87, Fall 2016, pp. 15-17

of great importance because it redesigned the regulation framework for promoting and funding the internationalisation in HE. The general objective is to make Israel an international higher education hub through four different initiatives covering four relevant areas for internationalisation: 1) attracting more international students to Israel,[192] 2) developing international skills for Israeli students, 3) improving capacity building actions between the Israeli higher education institutions, and 4) strengthening international research linkages. In this context, funds have been allocated to support the development of institutional strategies and to build new institutional capacity and infrastructures. The HE budget in 2016 stood at 2.5 billion euro.[193] During the six-years implementation of the plan, the budget should be increased to a total of 3 billion euro in 2022.

In this context, International students, in particular those pursuing advanced degrees, are considered as one of the most important programme's beneficiaries. In the additional investment of 2 billion foreseen by the Multi-Year Plan, a sum of around 75 million euro[194] should be allocated in order to increase the number of international students from 11,000 in 2017 to 25,000 in 2022. That is, more than doubling[195] the number of foreign students enrolled in the higher education institution in 2017, which were, according to the data provided by the OECD, particularly low compared to the average of the other countries (6%).[196]

In the beginning of 2019, the internationalisation strategy for HEIs received a boost through the launch of a further initiative called "New Campus Programme for Entrepreneurship and Innovation" aimed at supporting the establishment of entrepreneurship and innovation centres within the higher education institutions.[197]

All this contributes to enhancing the general attractiveness of the country. Governmental efforts to reduce the barriers to the attractiveness of the Israeli higher education system have also included a series of more detailed and incisive measures. First of all, part of the council of higher education action is aimed at streamlining academic regulations and removing obstacles facing international students and researchers coming to Israel (such as visas, work permits, etc.). Secondly, part of the internationalisation policy of the council of higher education includes provisions to make English courses compulsory. In this direction, the entire concept behind the internationalisation strategy is to bring international and local students together and not to have separate English programmes for foreign students alone. In December 2019, the council for higher education approved the new reform based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and over the following five years, academic institutions have to adopt a study programme in order to ensure that the students can have at

192 L. Maoz, Principles for International Student Policy, Council for higher education, Planning and Budgeting Committee, July 2016.
193 https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/new-multi-year-plan-for-higher-education-investment-internationali-zation-467714 (Last access February 2021)
194 Ibidem
195 https://www.eaie.org/blog/internationalisation-israel.html (Last access February 2021)
196 https://che.org.il/en/strengthening-internationalism-higher-education/ (Last access February 2021)
197 https://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-israel (Last access February 2021)

least a proficiency in English language skills.[198] According to the CHE's guidelines, all students starting undergraduate studies in the 2021/22 school year have to follow at least two courses in the English language, determined according to their level of English. This policy was been designed as a complement of the "Study in Israel" programme and should enable academic institutions to open English-taught programmes in order to attract more foreign students.[199]

Internationalisation is a structural element for Israeli HEIs. Being recognised at international level is a priority for most of the HEIs, with the overall purpose of becoming competitive with the most important universities in the world and delivering high quality education in line with international standards. In terms of structure, it is possible to state that most HEIs in Israel have an office dedicated to international affairs and well-trained staff to coordinate activities. As a result of all the efforts puts in place in order to foster international activities, the programme Erasmus+ constitutes an influential driving force for the internationalisation process held in the country. In Israel, the Erasmus+ programme is indeed the main ongoing programme at the national level that provides funding for students to study overseas.[200] In the period 2015-2019, Israel received 25% of the funds allocated

for the International Credit Mobility in the Mediterranean area which have involved a total of 6,612 students and staff moving to Europe and 4,911 students and staff moving to Israel. This figure is confirmed by the wide participation of the institutions: 84% of Israeli HEI are active in ICM.[201] Over the same period, 20 Capacity Building projects involving Israel were selected for funding, 11 of which are coordinated by Israeli Institutions. In the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degrees, 11 joint master's degrees have been selected with more than 16 Israeli institutions involved.[202]

As regards the internationalisation strategy for research, it is worth mentioning that Israel is an associated partner country of the H2020 programme since its launch. Data concerning the Israeli results in this programme showed that Israel has a strong and competitive research system considering that, during the 20 years of partnership in the programme, the overall Israeli investment reached 1.21 billion euro. Over the years, Israeli HEIs submitted more than 11,000 proposals, of which 1,479 projects[203] were approved, presenting a 13% success rate in the programme, which makes it the third out of 16 associated countries in terms of success rate.[204] With regard to Israel competitiveness, in the H2020 programme the country is especially remarkable in the European Research Council grants for innovative researchers,[205]

198 Interview with Kathrin Theurillat
199 Interview with Prof. Miri Yemini, Tel Aviv University
200 Interview with Kathrin Theurillat
201 Fact sheet January 2020 – Erasmus+ Israel: Student and Staff Mobility 2015-2019
202 https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/erasmus-plus/factsheets/neighbourhood/israel_erasmusplus_2019.pdf (Last access February 2021)
203 https://www.innovationisrael.org.il/ISERD/sites/default/files/IL_Statistics_20200921.pdf (Last access February 2021)
204 https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/dashboard/extensions/CountryProfile/CountryProfile.html?Country=Israel (Last access February 2021)
205 https://erc.europa.eu/projects-figures/statistics (Last access February 2021)

grants in the ICT and health sectors, and also in the participation in the SME Instrument, a funding tool intended to support small and medium-sized businesses with quick growth and global ambitions.[206] At the national level, the major body funding basic research in Israel, especially for scientific research, is the Israel Science Foundation (ISF),[207] which has several agreements for cooperation with similar international organisations.[208] All these agreements are based on the model of a collaborative research proposal, shared by an Israeli researcher and a foreign researcher, jointly reviewed by both foundations and an additional grant that allows mobilities.

Article 15 of the Law No. 5718/1958 guarantees that higher education institutions are autonomous in conducting their academic and administrative affairs, within the framework of their budgets and the terms of accreditation. This includes that in Israel higher education institutions have in general very strong academic freedom which allows them to determine their own teaching programmes, to develop and promote research according to their own academic needs, to conclude bilateral agreements with international institutions and substantially to develop a tailor-made internationalisation strategy. In this framework, HE institutions have developed an interdisciplinary approach that allows them to cooperate in different fields with different stakeholders, such as the National Natural Sciences Foundation of China and the National Research Foundation in Singapore. The natural consequence of this

approach is the fact that there are no priority themes or priority geographical areas with which to develop scientific cooperation. The generally recognised goal is to cooperate with the best institutions in terms of quality recognition and to attract the best students and academic staff from all over the world.[209] This was confirmed by Marissa Gross Yarm who pointed out that all the agreements are made and concluded at the institutional level among universities, and that there are no joint agreements at the national level. Similarly, a lack of centralisation in favour of a complete institutional freedom is reflected in the fact that there is no national policy about credit recognition: it is up to the institutions to define their own recognition rules and process by means of the learning agreement to be concluded each time with foreign institutions.[210]

As regards the geographical reference areas, although no national priorities have been set, there is a focus on cooperation with North America, India and China, both because these are also the countries sending students to Israel and because India and China are in general the top destinations in the world. As mentioned before, Europe is obviously a very strong partner thanks to the Erasmus+ programme and collaboration through the European Research frameworks. On the other hand, it emerged that cooperation with the Mediterranean area is not particularly developed.

The strategy of internationalisation of the Council of higher education goes in the same direction. It signed a series of bilateral

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206 https://innovationisrael.org.il/ISERD/sites/default/files/inline-files/SME%20Instrument%20-%20introduc-tory%20presentation%20-%20updated%202019.pdf (Last access February 2021)
207 https://www.isf.org.il/#/specialPrograms (Last access February 2021)
208 Interview with Miri Yemini
209 Interview with Marissa Gross Yarm
210 Ibidem

agreements with the objective to provide scholarships for foreign students and post-doctoral researchers. Among these, it is worth mentioning an agreement[211] with the China Scholarship Council signed in 2015 and renewed in 2017.[212] The agreement has the objective to provide scholarships for Chinese students to attend Master's Degree Courses or short-term summer programmes in Israel. Another agreement worth mentioning is the one signed in 2015 by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Italian Ministry of Education aimed at providing scholarships for Israeli and Italian researchers to undertake specific research projects (in particular Artificial intelligence and High Tech technology).[213] In addition, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs has entered cultural agreements with a number of countries through which scholarships are provided for foreign students and post-doctoral researchers to study in Israel.[214] Cultural agreements have been signed with countries from different geographical areas such as Central Europe, the Balkans, Central and South America. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also reached specific scholarship arrangements offering the possibility to spend one academic year for Master's degree, Post-Doctoral or research studies and to attend summer language courses. The following countries have already signed scholarship arrangements: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, India, Great Britain, Finland, France, Luxembourg, Japan, Norway, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Russia. Last but not least, in 1956 the governments of the United States and Israel established The United States–Israel Educational Foundation (USIEF),[215] which is responsible for the administration of Israel participation in the American Fulbright Academic Programme. Within the framework of this programme, more than 1,200 U.S. citizens and more than 1,500 Israeli citizens have taken part in the planned exchange programmes.

211 https://che.org.il/en/china-and-israel-promote-cooperation-in-higher-education/ (Last access February 2021)
212 http://il.china-embassy.org/eng/sgxw/t1430945.htm (Last access February 2021)
213 On the Israeli side, the agreement is implemented within the framework of the Israeli Centres of Research Excellence (I-CORE) programme, and on the Italian side it is implemented by Italian universities and research centres.
214 http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFA-Archive/2003/Pages/Scholarships%20offered%20by%20the%20Israeli%20go-vernment%20to.aspx
215 http://www.usief.org.in/About-USIEF.aspx (Last access February 2021)

Jordan

Higher education in Jordan plays a key role in the process of a comprehensive development of the country. During the last two decades, the sector in Jordan has witnessed a significant development and progress, as shown by the increasing number of higher education institutions, enrolled students, faculty members, administrative and academic staff members, as well as the size of the expenditure. In spite of the limited financial resources in the kingdom, higher education is among the priorities of the country because of the role it plays in promoting the economic, social and cultural level of Jordanian citizens.[216]

University education in Jordan began with the establishment of the University of Jordan in 1962, followed by the establishment of Al-Ahliyya Amman University in 1989 as the first private university in Jordan.[217] In 1991, Princess Sumaya University for Technology (PSUT) was founded as the first and only private and non-profit university in Jordan. Now, there are four types of HEIs in Jordan, for a total of 31 universities in the country, of whom 10 are public, 19 are private, and 2 are regional institutions (The World Islamic Science & Education University and the Arab Open University) and 44 are Community colleges.[218] Among these, private universities in the kingdom accommodate about one-fourth of the student population in

the country. The total number of students in the higher education sector is over 280,000, 54% of which are women.[219] The number of women (between 20 and 39 years of age) graduating from university almost tripled from 2000 to 2017, surpassing the number of male graduates in the same period.[220]

Both public and private universities in Jordan must meet the requirements for institutional accreditation, and their programmes, curricula, and study plans must comply with the prevailing regulations enforced by the higher education Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (HEAC) as well as with national legislations set out by the Ministry of higher education and Scientific Research. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR) is responsible for implementing the higher education policy developed by the Council of higher education, ensuring the coordination among HEIs, conducting agreements with other countries, recognising the universities and the degrees from other countries, assisting the Council of higher education in the process of approval for the establishment of higher education institutions in Jordan, in the allocation of funding and in supervising universities to ensure the achievement of their objectives and the fulfilment of their duties.[221]

216 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_jordan_2017.pdf (Last access February 2021)

217 http://www.mohe.gov.jo/en/pages/BriefMohe1.aspx (Last access February 2021)

218 http://rce.mohe.gov.jo/StudyInJordan/en/#hei (Last access February 2021)

219 www.supporthere.org/page/higher-education-jordan (Last access February 2021)

220 http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_542358.pdf (Last access February 2021)

221 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_jordan_2017.pdf (Last access February 2021)

The laws that govern the higher education system have been revised several times in the past years as a result of the development that occurred in the sector and in order to maintain the quality of higher education, starting with the new laws issued in 2009, the Law No. 23/2009[222] and Law No. 20/2009[223] until the most recent amendment to the legislation (Law No. 17) of 2018.[224] Due to the changes in the regulatory framework, Jordanian universities have become more and more autonomous in their institutional management, in terms of administrative as well as financial matters. The main goal behind the last reform is instead to highlight the role of governance in higher education and the importance of quality in education, as well as enhancing the international competitiveness of higher education institutions through the development of capacities of their academic and administrative staff members. In terms of national legislations, Jordan has been always encouraging internationalisation: there are several clauses in the law that encourage internationalisation and international recognition, as well as joint degrees between Jordanian universities and universities in other countries.[225] As for the policy, there is a strong support to internationalisation, the government follows up closely the advancements of the higher education sector to see where universities stand in this respect and in international rankings.[226] The international dimension

of universities was confirmed as a priority of the sector also by the most recently appointed Head of internationalisation at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh, by the Vice-President at the University of Jordan[227] and written in the recently developed National Strategy for Human Resource Development 2016-2025,[228] where a chapter is dedicated to the higher education sector, in order to advance in meeting the highest international standards and implementing the best practices.[229]

Universities in Jordan aim to be among the world-class universities, providing students with quality education and learning experience, adopting research programmes, producing and disseminating knowledge and integrating a lifelong learning approach to contribute to the quality of local, regional and international communities.[230] Being international and being recognised at the international level has indeed been a priority for most of the HEIs in the country, with the overall purpose of becoming competitive and delivering high quality education in line with international standards. Jordanian universities have increased their attractiveness in the region, due to the process of modernisation undergone in the last years. They have also improved their reputation in Europe, in Africa and Asia. Doubts arise on whether international rankings are perceived as a

222 http://mohe.gov.jo/en/GovPapers/law%20of%20higher%20education%20and%20scientific%20research%201.pdf (Last access February 2021)
223 http://mohe.gov.jo/en/GovPapers/the%20jordanian%20universities%20law%20no%2020.pdf   (Last access February 2021)
224 http://mohe.gov.jo/ar/GovPapers/17-2018.pdf (Last access February 2021)
225 Interview with Prof. Ahmad Abu-El-Haija, Director of the National Erasmus+ Office in Jordan
226 Ibidem
227 Interview with Hadeel Yaseen, University of Jordan
228 www.mohe.gov.jo/en/Documents/National-HRD-Strategy.pdf (Last access February 2021)
229 Ibidem
230 Interview with Hadeel Yaseen

goal per se or as a means to increase the quality of higher education. After more than a decade of cooperation projects and capacity building actions, Jordanian higher education institutions are now considered as well-experienced and reliable actors. It is not by chance that the University of Jordan and the Jordan University of Science and Technology are considered among the best institutions in the Arab world.[231] In the South-Mediterranean region, Jordan is now a preferred destination, due to the quality and attractiveness of the higher education sector but also thanks to the stability of the country over the years compared to other MENA countries. A special focus has been given now to the internationalisation of research, which might provide a new window for Jordanian universities, through the development of joint research programmes and joint degrees with international counterparts, as well as more doctoral programmes. It is not by chance that the European Commission recognises Jordan as one of the most promising actors in the Arab countries for research, and that Jordanian institutions are recently engaging in cooperation with India, China, Malaysia, up-and-coming countries in the global scenario.

Internationalisation is a basic pillar of the mission and strategic planning of Jordanian HEIs, as it is also reflected in the number of foreign students at the Jordanian universities, which rose to more than 40,000 students from around the world, including students from 22 Arab countries.[232] This is the intrinsic result of two factors: first, most of the professors have been graduates of Western universities in Europe and the United States, so basically, the higher education sector in Jordan is internationalised by nature because of its professors (a feature common to many Arab countries); second, the language. Although the Constitution of Jordan states that Arabic is the official language of teaching and learning, in reality in most universities teaching happens in English and universities follow the American system of education.[233] In this regard, it is worth saying that, if most universities in Jordan offer many programmes in English, these are mostly in the domain of the hard sciences, while more programmes in English for social sciences should be made available, giving relevance to humanities in international cooperation. Another limit to the internationalisation of higher education in Jordan is represented by the dependence on external funding (funds mostly come from the European Commission). In a context where funds are limited but the national policy has always been supporting, the commitment of universities has been the real driving factor. Universities have shown a great commitment to establishing international relations, to collaborating more with institutes all over the world, to sending and receiving students and staff, to engaging in cooperation projects and so on. In the words of the Director of the National Erasmus+ Office: "In Jordan we have real enthusiasm and interest from both sides, the government on one side, and the universities themselves on the other side".[234]

231 https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/arab-region-university-rankings/2019 (Last access February 2021)
232 http://rce.mohe.gov.jo/StudyInJordan/en/#hei (Last access February 2021)
233 Interview with Prof. Abdullah Al-Zoubi, Princess Sumaya University for Technology
234 Interview with Ahmad Abu-El-Haija

A great contribution in this sense has been given by the ongoing work of the Jordan National Erasmus+ Office in supporting the internationalisation process: universities needed to establish very good offices of international relations, to facilitate exchanges with HEIs outside the country, implementing processes such as students' selection, follow-up of the mobilities, recognition of courses, management of cooperation projects, etc. The main task of the Office has therefore been to encourage universities, convincing the administrators of the importance of a well-structured office to coordinate and manage international relations, helping such offices to establish all the necessary elements for internationalisation (procedures, guidelines, communications).[235] "When we started five, six years ago, there was only one good office at the University of Jordan, that we visited at that time. Now, we can comfortably state that there are offices at almost all public universities, and many of the private, even the smaller private universities in Jordan. And the staff of these offices have received very good training through Erasmus+, through our office, and so forth. And finally, they were helping each other, learning from each other's experiences, sharing experiences with their European colleagues".[236] As a good practice for the country, and as an example for the purpose of the current analysis, the experience of the University of Jordan is described in relation to the management of international activities by the so-called International Affairs Unit. The main function of the International Affairs Unit is to expand and to strengthen ties with leading universities worldwide, to establish exchange programmes and joint master's degree programmes in specific strategic fields, and to develop research partnerships.[237] The office looks after the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), exchange mobilities and cooperation projects. The International Affairs Unit has three departments: one for International Relations, which manages university agreements and endowments, academic exchange, study-abroad programmes, scholarships and international students, and scholars' services. It also organises international events. The second department is called the Externally-Funded Projects department, it manages non-research projects, such as the Erasmus+ Capacity Building project. Its mission is to manage the project lifecycle, as well as provide financial reports, help in the preparation of proposals, reporting, administrative issues and the submission. The third department is the Sponsored-Students and Staff department, which supports students and staff while in mobility and manages mobilities financed by the University of Jordan itself.[238] Along with having a strong and reliable office to manage international relations and appointing a Vice-President for internationalisation, universities were also recommended to have their university website available in English, with a section dedicated to international affairs (acting as a sort of "Virtual International Office", providing all relevant information and instructions to students and staff interested in or involved in international activities), and to allocate part of the university budget to the international dimension of the university's

235 Ibidem
236 Ibidem
237 Interview with Hadeel Yaseen
238 Ibidem

core mission.[239] However, attention must still be paid to improving the ability of the leaders of HEIs to translate their vision of internationalisation into an efficient management structure, complemented by tailored services, capable and trained human resources and a distribution of funds covering the costs of international activities in all possible forms (not only mobility and Erasmus+ cooperation projects, but also joint degrees, transnational education and COIL, international campuses, engagement of international students, etc.).

As a result of the efforts made for a reliable and structured framework to support international activities, Jordanian HEIs took part in 53 projects funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission, from 2015 to 2020, compared to the 210 projects funded for the whole South-Mediterranean region.[240] Jordan is the coordinator of 16 out 53 projects of this type, which is an outstanding outcome compared to the neighbouring countries. Indeed, in 2020, Jordan was the partner country taking part in the highest number of submissions in the last call for proposal of the E+ programme (98 proposals, of which 28 as an applicant, 8 were approved projects, 3 were coordinated by Jordanian HEIs).[241] These figures are even more significant if we think that among all cooperation programmes and initiatives, Erasmus+ has been indicated as the most impactful on the international activities in the country[242] in terms of: a) funding, the European Commission is indicated as the main source of funding for mobility;[243] b) opportunities for international exposure, involving students, academic staff but also administrative staff, especially those working at the international relations offices;[244] c) because it allowed to expand the geographic scope of international cooperation, as it also emerged from the data on the mobility flows collected and reported in the following section of this Report. While historically Jordan had connections mainly with the United States and with the United Kingdom, in recent years Europe has opened the doors to a wider range of possibilities through its programmes, increasing cooperation agreements with almost all European states,[245] especially with Germany, Spain and Italy.[246] Interestingly enough, the EU-funded projects have also allowed Jordanian HEIs to engage with each other and with their counterparts in North-Africa and in the Middle-East, in particular with Palestine, Egypt and Lebanon (where the use of the English language facilitates cooperation, compared to French-speaking countries such as in the Maghreb).[247] Turkey is a special case, since it finances a dedicated exchange programme called MEVLANA,[248] making Turkey the top destination for outgoing mobility of students and academic staff. Second to Erasmus+, a past programme among those funded by the European Commission has been pointed out,

239 A. Al-Zoubi, Elaboration of Internationalisation Strategy in Jordanian Universities, Journal of Education and Human Development, September 2019, Vol. 8, n. 3, pp. 143-154
240 Interview with Ahmad Abu-El-Haija
241 Ibidem
242 Focus group results
243 Based on primary data on the mobility flows collected for the purpose of the current study
244 Interview with Hadeel Yaseen
245 Interview with Abdullah Al-Zoubi
246 Based on primary data on the mobility flows collected for the purpose of the current study
247 Interview with Ahmad Abu-El-Haija
248 https://mevlana.yok.gov.tr/en/general-information (Last access February 2021)

confirming Europe as the main stakeholder in the Jordan: Erasmus Mundus is mentioned as the one with the most positive impact. In the words of a participant "It was a fantastic programme because it allowed not only for a short mobility but also for degree mobility, it was the most tailored programme for the staff".[249] A challenge for the future of the Jordanian higher education system is now to make sure all institutions benefit from the opportunities to internationalise: despite the high number of cooperation projects, smaller and younger universities are still less involved (and less skilled). For example, it was only in 2020 that, for the first time, the Irbid National University participated in a project and the Hashemite University led a capacity building project.

Jordan has also been among the top countries that favoured the Erasmus+ Virtual Mobility, with 955 active participants in the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange platform in 2018-2019.[250] Jordan achieved very good figures compared to other Arab countries, and the NEO also encouraged universities to continue with some forms of hybrid mobility, meaning implementing virtual mobility as a preparation activity for physical mobility. This is reflected in the recent attempts made by the government to provide clear guidance to e-learning in the country and to support virtual collaborative learning with foreign institutions.[251] However, virtual mobility is still suffering from a cultural resistance, and the disparity over the national territory in terms of infrastructures and digital skills, is likely to generate a gap between more experienced and prepared universities and less prepared ones, when it comes to virtual collaborations and the capacity of institutions to cope with recent challenges (above all COVID-19).

Among the main motivations to further boost internationalisation, it is worth mentioning the need to strengthen the relations with higher education institutions all over the world, and to promote an institutional culture that values diversity by making significant efforts to fully integrate international staff and students in the life of the campus.[252] However, it seems that no clear policies are being developed by institutions to hire foreign staff, leaving the process in the hands of local professors inviting foreign teachers based on personal connections.[253] On the other hand, Jordanian HEIs also host a considerable number of foreign students, among which a major part is made up of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. The issue of inclusion deserves attention, in order to release the pressure on local communities as well as to include the several underprivileged areas in Jordan. More funds need to be made available for vulnerable students and scholars to allow them to join higher education properly, raising the standards for the more vulnerable and allow them to participate and to compete for opportunities, and allow Jordan to benefit from the richness related to refugees' inclusion. In a different but complementary direction, efforts have been made to provide universities with welcoming and guidance services to host international students and internationalise the campuses. For example, some universities have

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249 Focus group results

250 Interview with Ahmad Abu-El-Haija

251 http://erasmus-plus.org.jo/Portals/0/%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20%20 2020_1.pdf (Last access February 2021)

252 Interview with Hadeel Yaseen

253 Ibidem

students' organisations or alumni clubs that greatly support incoming and outgoing students (sharing mutual experiences).[254] It is worth mentioning the JUST ISN[255] is the first International Student Network in Jordan. However, resources are still limited and no strategic planning is dedicated to the so-called internationalisation at home, which is not perceived as a priority.[256] A gender gap is also evident when it comes to mobilities, more severe for academic and administrative staff while for students the distribution is quite equal both for incoming and outgoing flows.[257] This may be due to the conservative nature of the Jordanian society.

On the other hand, universities are used to include international contents in the education provided, using textbooks in line with the most prestigious international universities.[258] In that regard, it has been of great importance the establishment in Jordan of the higher education Accreditation Commission, a national agency for Quality Assurance (the first among the South-Mediterranean countries) working to make sure programmes and courses are modernised and up-to-date with international standards, and supporting the process of international accreditation for Jordanian HEIs – which in turn greatly facilitated the establishment of agreements and exchanges.[259] As for joint degrees, to date, only few programmes are available, involving 3 over the many higher education institutions in the country: Yarmouk

University has two joint programmes, with the University of Sunderland and the University of Dublin; Al-Balqa Applied University has two joint programmes with the University of Huddersfield and DePaul University; the University of Jordan has two joint programmes, with the University of Ohio and with Hamburg University.[260]

On the other hand, the Jordan's Ministry of higher education is hesitant to give accreditation to international universities to operate in the country, especially those which are completely foreign-funded and supported. Overseas universities have the right to operate in Jordan only if they do so in partnership with a Jordanian university, and are subject to an agreement made with the higher education Council.[261] This is the case of the well-known German Jordanian University or of the recently established American University of Madaba. Jordan capital also hosts the Association of Arab Universities.

At the turn of the century and with rising figures related to international mobility to and from Jordan, the issue of credit recognition also arose as a sensitive element affecting international cooperation. Indeed, most of the Jordanian universities use the American system of credits, instead of the ECTS system used in European universities through the practices of the Bologna process. This had in turn a quite relevant impact on the establishment

254 Interview with Ahmad Abu-El-Haija
255 https://www.facebook.com/JUSTIRO/posts/just-isn-the-first-international-student-network-in-jordan-started-from-just-and/2351965401743250/ (Last access February 2021)
256 Focus group held online on 12/02/2021
257 Based on primary data on the mobility flows collected for the purpose of the current study
258 Interview with Abdullah Al-Zoubi
259 Ibidem
260 http://rce.mohe.gov.jo/StudyInJordan/en/#hei (Last access February 2021)
261 https://www.mei.edu/publications/internationalization-higher-education-jordan (Last access February 2021)

of joint degrees between Jordanian and international universities, which are facilitated with Anglo-Saxon institutions and somehow hindered with European institutions. Exchanges with universities in Europe are regulated by a bilateral agreement among the sending and the hosting institution, which sets out guidelines for the equivalence and the recognition of the skills acquired during the mobility abroad.[262] It is not by chance that Jordanian universities tend to engage in exchanges of students only with international HEIs accredited and recognised by the Ministry of higher education and Scientific Research (the full list of institutions is available on the Ministry's website),[263] because mobility is regulated.[264] The purpose of the list is to make sure international cooperation happens only with quality institutions around the world, which are accredited and internationally recognised, so that recognition of students' qualifications is easier. In fact, even when universities have more freedom to engage with non-accredited institutions, as in the case of academic mobility based on specific collaborations, this is in truth very unlikely to happen. Respondents in the focus group also highlighted that in most cases the staff at the university is not sufficiently prepared to cope with the different practices of the different systems and with the complexity related to credit recognition, neither entitled to assess their validity.[265] A national qualification framework is still being developed. In the future, this may facilitate the cooperation between Jordan and foreign institutions, reducing the load on the staff

responsible for the recognition process and providing both national and international universities with a clear guidance when engaging in exchanges.

It goes with out saying that internationalisation has a great impact on higher education. However, despite an international experience is highly appreciated, it is not directly affecting the career advancements of the staff at Jordanian universities, both for academic and administrative staff. It is considered a strength when a candidate has an international experience, but it is not a formal criterion when it comes to professional development.[266] In addition, there is a need to strengthen the language skills of administrative staff to strengthen the institutional capacity. When asked to indicate which aspects of the institutional life are more influenced by the international activities performed, career advancement was not an option. Jordanian participants in the focus group pointed to the intercultural dimension of the university (providing a new set of opportunities for students on campus, generating a wide impact especially for those who cannot participate in mobility programmes), to the institutional prestige and ranking, which in turn strengthen the institution's reputation, and to the acquisition of new skills improving graduates' employability and ability to adapt to the job market.[267] According to an OECD report of 2018, Jordan has a well-qualified young population connected to the global community, however innovation performance

262 Interview with Hadeel Yaseen
263 http://rce.mohe.gov.jo/en/RecognizedUniversities (Last access February 2021)
264 A specific regulation was adopted for this purpose (Regulation of Scholarships and Grants for Delegates 61/2010, as quoted in https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_jordan_2017.pdf (Last access February 2021)
265 Focus group results
266 Interview with Hadeel Yaseen
267 Focus group results

has not been up to its potential and the unemployment rate among university graduates is around 21%.[268] Universities need to leverage on the partnership and collaboration with the private sector, to increase the possibilities for graduates in the local economy and reduce the number of bright minds that leave the country (and are attracted by the new opportunities offered by the rich Gulf). Good practices in this sense can be identified in the German Jordan University, which has developed a dedicated strategy and a full set of services to link the university with the industry; and the Queen Rania Centre for Entrepreneurship which is part of the Princess Sumaya University for Technology and plays the role of a national Centre of excellence for entrepreneurship.

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268 https://www.oecd.org/mena/competitiveness/Compact-for-Governance-Stocktaking-Report-Jordan-2018-EN.pdf (Last access February 2021)

Lebanon

The Lebanese higher education sector is probably among the most diversified in the Middle-East with an international openness from the very beginning: the first two higher education providers in the country date back to 1866, when foreign missionaries established the American University of Beirut, and 1875, when the Jesuits established the University of Saint Joseph. It was not until the 1950s that the Lebanese government established the only national public university in the country, the Lebanese University,[269] governed by its own law, decrees and bylaws under the tutorship of the Ministry of Education and higher education.[270] The remaining HEIs in the country are private, in the form of technical and vocational institutes, university colleges, and full universities. Nowadays, Lebanon has 42 higher education institutions, most of which were legalised in the 1990s, when the education system in the country rapidly expanded following 15 years of civil war (1975-1990). Lebanon's higher education system's freedom and independence are enshrined in the constitution, every religious community has the right to have its own schools or universities. The system operates under the supervision of the Directorate General for higher education, which is responsible for licencing and validating the degrees and disciplines offered by the institutions,[271] and private HEIs do not receive any direct support from the state. The main source of funding for the private sector comes from tuition fees and different types of resources and donations which for the most part come from foreign governments and/or religious foundations. It is not by chance that private HEIs are financially autonomous and they are only accountable to their respective founding bodies and organisations.[272] Still, higher education in Lebanon is relatively expensive and funding raises a crucial issue for higher education, especially in the recent economic and banking crisis. Lebanon is the only Middle Eastern country where the students enrolled in the private sector are more numerous than those enrolled in the public sector (more than 60% of the total students enrolled in HE).[273] This is due to the fact that all education institutions had been established by either local religious orders or foreign religious missions and the government was a latecomer in providing public education.[274] The private sector had been governed by a law which dated back to the 60s, and recently a new law was issued (Law 285/2014) for private higher education and it is now in the implementation phase.[275]

269 A. N. Bou Diab, T. Abir Riad, The influence of globalization on Higher Education and the potentials of Lebanon, RUDN Journal of Economics, TOM25, n.2, 2017, pp. 178-188

270 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_lebanon_2017.pdf (Last access February 2021)

271 https://www.bankmed.com.lb/BOMedia/subservices/categories/News/20150515170635891.pdf (Last access February 2021)

272 Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) country fiche Lebanon (2017)

273 http://www.cas.gov.lb/images/PDFs/SIF/CAS_Education_In_Lebanon_SIF3.pdf (Last access February 2021)

274 M. Maroun, Internationalisation in Lebanese Universities; Rationales, Indicators, and Strategies, 2012, Unpublished

275 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_lebanon_2017.pdf (Last access February 2021)

The Strategic Framework for higher education in Lebanon dates back to 2007: a number of national priorities were defined, including internationalisation, ensuring quality standards in higher education, and the development of new missions for HEIs to promote both scientific research and adequacy to the knowledge economy.[276] After 10 years from the formulation of the plan, and no major changes implemented, a number of consultations were conducted in the country to rethink the higher education sector and benefit from the collaboration and dialogue with various national stakeholders (social parties, the higher education Reform Experts working group, the National Erasmus+ Office) and international organisations operating in Lebanon (Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie-AUF, World Bank, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation-UNESCO, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia-ESCWA, the German Academic Exchange Service-DAAD, just to mention some). Consultations took place in 2017 ("Rethinking Lebanese higher education reform agenda: towards strategic needs and priorities"), in 2018 ("National consultation on relating skills to education in Lebanon") and a conference on internationalisation of HE was planned for 2019 but it could not take place due to the beginning of the social unrests in the country.[277] However, despite the consultations, the recent institutional crisis and the paralysis in the institutional process have stalled the process of reform of the higher education

sector. Even the proposal to restructure the Directorate General for higher education (which includes the creation of a dedicated unit for internationalisation) has not been implemented yet, posing an additional challenge to the system.[278] The Lebanese state mostly played a passive role in the process of development of HE: starting with the principles of non-interference, decentralisation and autonomy, it lately resulted in a weak legislation, the lack of guidance and strategic planning for the sector.[279] Freedom in Lebanon has two faces: on the one side, universities have full autonomy to design their programmes, choose the language of instruction and engage in international partnerships; on the other side, the HE sector is left without guidelines, the national strategy for higher education stays on paper and universities are working within a fragmented and highly disconnected national framework.[280]

Internationalisation of HE in Lebanon is a historical process and a natural evolution,[281] and has been mostly the result of initiatives of individual higher education institutions, together with the support of foreign governments, supranational organisations and international policies, rather than the consequence of national legislation (such as it happened in other South-Mediterranean countries). Furthermore, the Lebanese diaspora has resulted in a multinational composition of the Lebanese people at home and abroad, and international cooperation has been regarded as a means to bring Lebanese emigrants back to their roots.[282]

276 Interview with Ahmad Jammal, Former General Director for Higher Education at the MEHE
277 Ibidem
278 Interview with Prof. Sobhi Abou Chahine, Dean of Students affairs, Beirut Arab University
279 Interview with Aref Al-Soufi, Director of the National Erasmus+ Office in Lebanon
280 Ibidem
281 Ibidem
282 E. Verdeil, B. Dewailly, International Migration and the Lebanese Diaspora, Presses de l'Ifpo, 2019. Available at: https://books.openedition.org/ifpo/13224?lang=en (Last access February 2021)

The diverse and open cultural background and the high degree of autonomy that universities in Lebanon enjoy have attracted over the decades many foreign providers and many foreign students.[283] Foreign countries have been increasingly interested in establishing universities in Lebanon for three main reasons: they had the freedom to spread their culture, language and education in the Middle-East, it was a convenient and profitable opportunity, and at the same time they could strengthen their relations with the Arab world. On the downside, such a highly diversified development process, together with the Lebanese state playing a minor passive role, have generated a HE sector that appears fragmented, somehow muddled, influenced by foreign countries and supranational organisations, strongly depending on the individual strategy of each HEIs.[284] Being so dependent on historical ties and foreign funding, Lebanese universities suffer from the changes of policies and regional preferences of foreign actors.

In this context, HEIs play a major role in reinforcing and strengthening their international dimension to become regional players. The majority of universities in Lebanon have a strategic plan, which includes internationalisation as a core element: universities aim to open to the world (University of Saint Joseph), to strengthen academic cooperation with international organisations, enhancing networking and international mobility (Beirut Arab University), to integrate internationalisation into all activities in the broader sense and recognising diversity as

a fundamental academic value (Antonine University), to develop an international environment and to promote diversity on campus (Holy Spirit University of Kaslik), to exchange expertise and cultures in various fields of higher education with local, Arab and international universities (Lebanese University) and to allow students to gain a global perspective (American University of Beirut).[285]

The strategic commitment is translated in most cases into the appointment of a Vice-Rector for international affairs, the creation of an International Relation Office (IRO) to coordinate institutional activities and eventually the involvement of different academic and administrative staff in each faculty in one or another initiative and as an additional reference for internationalisation.[286] The staff working at the IROs is usually very well-trained, thanks to the participation in capacity building projects (at least 5 projects have been implemented in Lebanon with a focus on internationalisation in the framework of the past TEMPUS programme and the recent Erasmus+ programme) and because they are often involved in information sessions organised by the National Erasmus+ Office. Moreover, almost all administrative staff members involved in international activities have engaged in a mobility experience, within the framework of the International Credit Mobility action or cooperation projects.[287] Having a reliable and efficient office coordinating international activities is generally recognised as an added value for the institution (indeed, a number of IROs

283 Maroun, op. cit.
284 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_lebanon_2017.pdf (Last access February 2021)
285 Quotes from the strategic plans available on institutions' websites (Last access February 2021)
286 Interview with Carla Edde, Director of the International Relation Office, University of Saint-Joseph
287 Interview with Aref Al-Soufi

have been established in Lebanon through European funded project, as it is the case of the Beirut Arab University, and a guide of good practices for the management of International Relations Office has been elaborated through European funding and in collaboration with European universities).[288] However, attention should be paid to increasing the participation of students and faculty members in cooperation initiatives: it is important to share the ownership of projects well beyond the IRO, to engage students and academics in the implementation of activities, increasing the impact of scientific collaborations and exchanges, leaving to the office the task of managing institutional participation and monitoring proper execution.[289]

When it comes to the internationalisation of the education promoted by Lebanese HEIs, many factors must be considered. First and foremost, the curriculum of Lebanese universities has two very international features: a) the language of teaching, which is in 90% of the cases English or French, other than Arabic,[290] and sometimes (as in the case of the Lebanese University) both languages are used to deliver courses, so that the HE system basically works in 3 languages; b) the studies structure, which follows global development and reforms due to the affiliation of most universities with foreign counterparts. As a good practice for

the internationalisation of the curriculum, it is worth mentioning the agreement between University of Saint-Joseph (USJ, a francophone institutions) and an American University for an assessment of the English proficiency of BA undergraduate students, which cannot obtain their diploma without the English certificate.[291] Another good practice has been implemented by the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, "being the first private higher education institution in Lebanon to commit itself to staff professional development initiatives and faculty development programmes, mostly in cooperation with UK and US universities, thus playing a key role in training highly-qualified academic staff in a trans-national environment".[292] As for the research, Lebanese universities have participated in different European FP6 and FP7 projects[293] and also to some H2020 projects, as well as numerous USAID projects.[294] However, participation was limited, research programmes are considered too competitive for less experienced institutions[295] and most PhD holders go abroad to conclude the studies. The Lebanese-French CEDRE programme is the most famous programme for mobility of researchers, operating since 1996 and supporting research cooperation between Lebanon and France.[296]

Most universities receive professors and teaching material from their sister

288 Interview with Sobhi Abou Chahine.
289 Interview with Prof. Georges Yahchouchy, President, American University of the Middle East
290 Interview with Aref Al-Soufi
291 Interview with Carla Edde
292 http://www.meric-net.eu/files/fileusers/3760_Lebanon_National%20Report_MERIC-Net.pdf (Last access February 2021)
293 Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development, respectively 6th and 7th edition
294 http://www.meric-net.eu/files/fileusers/3760_Lebanon_National%20Report_MERIC-Net.pdf (Last access February 2021)
295 Focus group results
296 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_lebanon_2017.pdf (Last access Febrary 2021)

institutions in foreign countries, and many faculty members have double nationalities since they completed either graduate or post graduate studies abroad, and this in turn supports the implementation of joint programmes (this is particularly the case with France)[297] enhancing the international dimension of the sector. However, universities do not actively seek international personnel in their recruitment process. This may be due to the lack of serious incentives to motivate international faculty members to engage in Lebanon over the long-term.[298] It seems that in most cases no specific procedures have been set out for hiring foreign staff, even though no clear obstacles have been identified either. Foreign academics are invited to deliver workshops or courses, and possibly share best practices, but on an occasional basis (except in the case of double diplomas or joint programmes).[299] This is the case of the Lebanese University where procedures to hire foreign staff are quite complex and international staff is in mobility rather than under contact, within the framework of short-term agreements or exchanges.[300]

On the other hand, Lebanese academic staff often travels abroad, be it for research or teaching activities, even though international experience is not always formally considered a plus in terms of career advancement. The same applies to administrative staff, for which mobility (and the training opportunities which are often related to mobility) has become an incentive, making it easier to get a promotion or a higher salary. In this sense, internationalisation is an opportunity despite the limited support (in terms of funding) offered by institutions to administrative staff compared to academic staff.[301]

Most exchanges are carried out within the framework of bilateral agreements signed at each institution level.[302] In general, universities are very proactive in signing agreements with foreign partners, which offer assistance in the development of curricula and in the establishment of joint programmes:[303] joint degrees are quite common with European Institutions (especially with France and the United Kingdom), both for the Lebanese University and for private universities, especially at the Master and post-doctoral levels.[304] Bilateral cooperation plays a major role in the country and provides valuable resources to universities, even though doubts arise on the quality of the relations and on the sustainability of the numerous partnerships, which risk to merely stay on paper. Bilateral cooperation involves foreign universities as well as a wide range of international organisations, with a great diversification of funds and cooperation arrangements in the country.[305] It is not by chance that the majority of the mobilities performed by both students, academic and administrative staff is financed in the framework of bilateral

297 Ibidem
298 Maroun, op. cit.
299 Interview with Sobhi Abou Chahine.
300 Interview with Naim Ouaini, Advisor to the Minister of Education and Higher Education
301 Interview with Carla Edde
302 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_lebanon_2017.pdf (Last access Febrary 2021)
303 Maroun, op. cit.
304 Interview with Ahmad Jammal
305 Focus group results

agreements with the private sector and with international actors,[306] such as the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie or the World Bank. In this sense, the ICM programme of the European Union had a different impact depending on the cases: ICM is a significant resource for undergraduate mobility, while it has a more limited impact on staff mobility; some universities are more dependent on the ICM and Erasmus+ for funds and opportunities, others (such as USJ or AUB, for example) have many other resources and a long history of cooperation with international partners, leaving ICM to represent not more than 40% of their mobility programmes.[307]

When it comes to student's mobility, it is worth mentioning that Lebanon used to be a more popular destination for students in the past, while recently the numbers have considerably decreased due to the civil war and the recent country instability.[308] Historically a considerable portion of foreign students was composed by Syrian that were (and are) enrolled in universities as international students. Because of the war in the country and due to the difficulties in the recognition process related to the refugee status,[309] after 2011 this number has significantly decreased, reducing the pressure on the higher education system, and resulting in a decreased number of foreign students in Lebanese higher education institutions.

When it comes to the role of HEIs in the country, a more comprehensive strategy for internationalisation should be developed within each institution, meaning that universities should not only focus on mobility and agreements, but also to internationalisation at home (for example, for those students who cannot afford to travel abroad), inclusion of vulnerable students, cultural integration, language policy, international community engagement and a more balanced distribution of opportunities.[310] A reflection should be made on the link between internationalisation and the universities' social responsibility, in Lebanon as well as in the other countries with which Lebanon engages in relations, especially because the high fragmentation of the HE system may undermine the ability of universities to generate a tangible impact in the country. For example, most of the universities have information available in English or French in their websites but only few specifically address foreign students. Again, this may depend on the fact that most institutions are international by nature, having multicultural and global campuses, even without making additional efforts in this sense. A challenge for the future will be to attract international students and scholars, competing with neighbouring countries guided by an increasing interest and attention towards internationalisation against the relatively stagnant position of Lebanon. Lebanon should benefit from its long experience of internationalisation at home, student mobility and cultural diversity to become a provider of education across the borders, serving the near regions.[311] In this direction, some Lebanese institutions are

306 Focus group results
307 Interview with Aref Al-Soufi
308 Bou Diab, Abir Riad, op. cit.
309 https://www.unhcr.org/lb/protection (Last access February 2021)
310 Interview with Carla Edde
311 Bou Diab, Abir Riad, op. cit.

opening branches in the Gulf[312] or in other African countries, such as the Lebanese International University in Mauritania.

On the other hand, outgoing mobility figures are growing with time, facilitated by the language skills of Lebanese students and the Lebanese presence all over the world (granting support to the Lebanese abroad).[313] No gender gap is evident in the mobilities tracked, with a slightly higher number of female students over the past 5 academic years and a slightly higher number of male teachers over the same period.[314] Mobilities are mostly directed towards Europe and the United States, renewing the historical relations that the country has developed over the centuries. In addition, the Lebanese diaspora has a quite relevant role in reinforcing the relations of the country also with Sub-Saharan countries. Looking at the mobility data collected in the framework of the present study, the preferred destinations are confirmed to be France, Italy, Belgium, Germany and the United Kingdom.[315] However, it is also very clear that the Erasmus+ programme has played an important role in diversifying the destination of the mobilities and partnerships, including cooperation with Sweden, Austria, Romania, Greece, Poland, Spain and Portugal.[316] It is also worth mentioning another side-effect of the programme. For the first time, there were many projects involving Lebanese universities and universities from Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine,

and even Lebanese universities started working with each other. For the first time, there were projects involving the American University of Beirut and USJ, where one is anglophone and the other is francophone, or the American University of Beirut and the Lebanese American University, which was quite a novelty in the cooperation field.[317] There are also ongoing exchanges with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.[318] When it comes to cooperation in the region, two sensitive elements emerge: on the one side, cooperation in the South is deeply affected by the political dimension of the region, and by the availability of funds;[319] on the other side, cooperation with the North is mostly seen as an opportunity to advance in a number of scientific fields for which more experienced academics, labs and PhD programmes are available, in Europe rather than in the neighbouring countries. An opportunity for South-South cooperation may be provided by the collaboration in Humanities (in fields such as archaeology, history, arts, etc).[320]

Regarding virtual mobility and online teaching (including virtual collaborative learning and the use of foreign online contents), Lebanese universities face two main challenges: there is a sort of resistance and dislike to perform virtual activities, which are not valued as relevant opportunities; on the other hand, there is no legislation regulating e-learning and virtual activities, leaving these to a very

312 http://www.meric-net.eu/files/fileusers/3760_Lebanon_National%20Report_MERIC-Net.pdf (Last access February 2021)
313 Maroun, op. cit.
314 Based on primary data on the mobility flows collected for the purpose of the current study
315 Ibidem
316 Interview with Aref Al-Soufi
317 Ibidem
318 Interview with Ahmad Jammal
319 Interview with Carla Edde
320 Interview with Georges Yahchouchy

marginal role in HE. A temporary decree was approved in 2020 about online learning, because of the COVID-19 emergency, but apparently it does not apply to the following years,[321] leaving HEIs in Lebanon with no clear guidance. Universities are promoting virtual exchanges as a complementary activity for the physical mobility, they are implementing forms of hybrid and blended learning, using open educational resources and inviting foreign professors to give online courses to comply with their institutional internationalisation goals,[322] but all efforts risk to generate very little impact until further regulations are issued at the national level. Additionally, universities have pointed out a number of limits to the digitalisation in the country: the lack of infrastructures, especially for students; the poor internet connection (which is anyway quite costly) and unfortunately strictly interrelated with the frequent power cuts; the lack of training on digitalisation and how to exploit the possibilities offered by ICT in learning.[323]

Accreditation is now emerging as an additional driving factor for Lebanese HEIs, which increasingly look abroad for international accreditation (for both institutions and programmes) to increase their visibility, to provide education at the highest international standards and to cope with the absence of a National Agency dealing with accreditation and quality assurance.[324] Many Lebanese universities have already established their internal

quality process, in most cases with the help of EU Tempus and Erasmus+ projects. The rationale was to develop institutional skills and create a pool of expertise to support the subsequent developments at the national level. However, the law for the creation of a National Agency has been stuck in Parliament for ratification since 2012,[325] and that is why universities address European agencies or American agencies for international accreditation. Another element deeply affecting international cooperation is the recognition of qualifications. The need to establish a national qualifications framework in Lebanon has been felt by many stakeholders since 2008, mainly among those participating in the process of reforming the HE.[326] Again, many Tempus projects helped to raise awareness about this issue and a recent Erasmus+ project, MERIC-NET, has attempted to generate a change. However, a decision by the Ministry to start the process of establishing a Lebanese National Qualification Framework (LNQF) was taken in 2010 only and has not been ratified yet, despite the creation at the Ministry of a Recognition and Equivalence committee.[327] There are a lot of differences in the Lebanese HE systems, with two main systems, i.e., the American Credit system and the ECTS, depending on whether universities are affiliated with European or Anglo-Saxons sister institutions. For example, most of the faculties at the Lebanese University are now applying the LMD 3-cycle system together with the ECTS.[328]

321 Interview with Aref Al-Soufi
322 Interview with Sobhi Abou Chahine
323 Focus group results
324 Interview with Aref Al-Soufi
325 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_lebanon_2017.pdf (Last access Febrary 2021)
326 Ibidem
327 Focus group results
328 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_lebanon_2017.pdf (Last access Febrary 2021)

However, exchanges are regulated in most cases through bilateral agreements. All recognition, monitoring and compensation issues related to mobilities are regulated by the conventions through which these exchanges are implemented.[329] The credit recognition system in Lebanon generates a number of obstacles to international cooperation: finding an agreement when it comes to multilateral collaboration is difficult; recognition requires transparency and coherence between courses and between different systems; the lack of the Ministry's commitment and accountability in the matter; the lack of skills and capabilities among the university staff in managing recognition procedures and assessing foreign qualifications.[330]

329 Ibidem
330 Focus group results

Libya

The higher education system in Libya is composed of 24 public universities located all over the country and 8 accredited private universities, as well as technical and vocational schools, which are also managed by the Ministry of Education through a dedicated board. In the years 2016-2018, the number of universities consistently increased, causing a serious problem of quality in the education provided due to a risk of massification in the teaching. In many cases, the new universities were branches of already existing ones that became autonomous. Higher education in Libya is free for Libyan students, except for private institutions and for some specific Master's Degrees in public universities where (affordable) fees are required. In accordance with the Ministry of Education's regulations, foreign students have to pay fees for studying in Libya.

The law regulating the higher education system in Libya is decision 501.[331] The international dimension of the system is mainly related and referred to postgraduate studies and it is, in all its dimensions, strictly posed under the control of the state. This centralised control is clearly evident in article 215: "It is not permissible for a teaching staff member to accept any scholarship from any university, body, institution, government, or any foreign body without the approval of the Secretary of the General People's Committee for Education and Scientific Research, in the event of a violation, the teaching staff member is referred to the Disciplinary Council by a decision of the Secretary of the University People's Committee, and if this is proven, he is punished by terminating the contract" and also in the comma G of article 109, where it is clearly stated that one of the objectives of postgraduate studies is: "consolidating cooperation and communication with scientific and research institutions on a domestic and international level". Decision 501 needs to be reviewed and updated, as well as a national strategy for reforming higher education should be put in place. Only when a reform process will be in place "then the EU will be able to step in and support further the internationalisation of Libyan institutions through bilateral assistance".[332]

Among the most significant experiences in Libya, it is worth mentioning the cooperation within the framework of existing EU funded programmes such as the past TEMPUS programme and especially Erasmus+ KA2 Capacity Building. In the past 5 years, starting with the experience of the several funded projects, there has been a tangible improvement in the management of Erasmus+ tools and rules by the Libyan universities and staff, with a constant advancement in their performance in the programme. The positive impact and role played by EU programmes has been clearly recognised by the EU Delegation in Libya: "as European Union, within the neighbourhood area, we see very positively this prospect of cooperation and we very much encourage the Libyan higher

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331 Al-Jamahiriyya al-'Arabiyya al- Libiyya al-Sha'biyya al-Ishtirakiyya al-'Athma, Qarar al-Lajna al-Sha'biyya al-'Amma - Raqm 501 li-l-sana 1378 (2010 masihi)
332 Interview with Antonis Tsamoulis, Cooperation Officer at the European Union Delegation to Libya

education institutions to actually participate in EU programmes that encourage mobility and exchange of expertise. I think this has been reflected by last year's decision to support the appointment of NEO in Libya, as well as the recent successful results in the capacity building programme Erasmus+. So practically speaking, we are very supportive of this prospect".[333] Not only for the purpose of capacity building, but also within the framework of the Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility (KA107) programme, the universities of Misurata and Zawia signed an agreement for student's mobility towards Spain and Turkey, as well as agreements with Germany and the United Kingdom to develop bilateral mobility schemes for academics.

Libyan universities mentioned during several meetings with UNIMED and reiterated on different occasions that the universities participating in Erasmus+ had significantly improved their skills and that the programme activities had provided a decisive boost to internationalisation. They also underlined that Erasmus+ must be considered as a turning point with regard to the previous programmes. This is mainly due to the exposure to international experiences for their staff (in terms of short mobilities, such as field visits and training activities) as well as in terms of the equipment provided: "The equipment provided within the framework of European funded projects is certainly useful for the institution, especially if well integrated in the structure of the requesting institution".[334]

In any case, all of the stakeholders interviewed during the focus group, recognise that there is still huge room for further improvement in terms of: guaranteeing access to funds to rural, smaller and more peripheral universities, specifically equipping universities with the aim of raising the quality of teaching, carrying out specific activities aimed at raising the quality of research and consequently raising their attractiveness, and enhancing the (rare) international exposure of teaching staff by reducing constraints to mobility opportunities for academics and students.

Last but not least, the current political instability, conflicts and war-like situation in recent years, deeply affected universities' performance and the society at large. It is worth mentioning that mobility development is highly affected by restrictions imposed by the country's reality and regulations. This is particularly true when we look at the (few) Embassies operative in Tripoli accepting visa applications for Libyan citizens,[335] if we consider the financial requirements which are demanded for visa applications, as well as the actual facilities available for travellers.

Apart from Erasmus+, Libyan universities and other higher education institutions have contacts and cooperate with many Arab, African and Western institutions. In addition, the Ministry of Education regularly sends the best students to study abroad with full scholarships to obtain Master and PhD degrees. According to the last report published in September 2016, more than 15 246 students are studying abroad in more

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333 Ibidem
334 Focus group results
335 At this very moment (February 2021) the only fully operating embassy in Tripoli is the Italian Foreign Diplomatic Mission

than 30 countries, in fields, such as medicine, engineering, basic sciences, social sciences, economics and many other specialisations.[336] Despite those efforts, Libyan universities recently raised concerns regarding the effectiveness of the programme. In fact, regarding national programmes, focus group participants pointed out that currently these programmes are not working as well as they worked in the past as they need to be reviewed. Most recent data provided by the Ministry of Education, indicated that a total of 6 204 students enrolled in public universities are currently studying abroad (in the form of internships, traineeships, etc.). Numbers vary from 2 to 1,591 units per institution.[337] According to article 17 of decision No. 43/2005, students who benefit from a national scholarship have to work, once back home, at least double the time spent abroad studying, in order to pay back for their experience, thus benefiting the local system. This is a clear strategy theoretically aimed at avoiding brain-drain and also allows the system to benefit from the internationalisation experience.

Despite all the challenges and difficulties, the university is considered as a hub for social and economic reconstruction, and international cooperation and mobility are key points for the country's developing process, allowing for knowledge transfer, skills improvement, exchange of good practices and human resources development (both for academics and administrative staff). Consequently, universities' exposure at the international

level may have an impact on research activities as well as on graduates' employability, enhancing the capacity of universities to produce a change in society. This is a tremendous strength in the Libyan scenario especially if regionally compared. Universities (both in the east and west part of the country) are considered by citizens as one of the most (if not the most) reliable institutions in the country. As recognised by UNIMED: "University may become the starting point for reconstructing the country, through the definition of a cooperation scheme between national authorities, HEIs and socio-economic stakeholders for sustainable development, a fruitful use of resources and to avoid duplication of efforts".[338]

In any case, it is worth mentioning that there are still universities that have very little international exposure, intrinsic cultural barriers (especially in terms of conservative agendas), limiting their possibilities of improving through cooperation. According to Antonis Tsamoulis, from the EU Delegation for Libya, "in this case there is very little knowledge of international opportunities, because of the heritage of the previous regime. In addition to that the 10 year conflict excluded the universities and they didn't really know how and where to search for opportunities: there's no systematic way".[339] In addition to the lack of a systematic way to cooperate, it is worth mentioning the lack of English-language skills and the related cultural resistance by universities: this is leading towards a limitation of access

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336 Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), International Project Management Office - OGPI - University of Alicante , Higher Education in Libya, September, 2016, p. 7

337 Please have a look at the data contained in the Libya Restart study performed in 2019-2020: https://www.uni-med.net/libya-restart-a-journey-analysis/ (Last access February 2021)

338 This is a quote from the UNIMED speech during the December 2020 Ministerial Higher Education conference hosted, online, by Sebha University.

339 Interview with Antonis Tsamoulis

for less skilled people when it comes to internationalisation opportunities, as well as towards a centralisation of the internationalisation process always in the same hands.

The above-mentioned barriers must be taken into account together with other three dimensions that are considerably affecting the international attractiveness of the Libyan higher education system: the scarce autonomy of the system, the complex financial scheme and the low quality of research performances.[340] There are no Libyan universities listed in the QS world university ranking in 2018, nor among the first 4,000 universities within other international superior rankings. This issue has been clearly stated and recognised in recent studies, such as Science, Technology, Innovation, and Development in the Arab Countries by Omar Bizri,[341] recognising that the level of research output in Libya is relatively low, mainly because of four reasons:
1 – Limited funding for research activities
2 – Lack of research infrastructures and technical inadequacies of administrative staff
3 – Limited amount of time and limited skills of academic staff to perform and supervise research activities
4 – Brain drain effect
Research and innovation actions can be defined, as Bizri said, as embryonic, and several international organisations recognised, in the Libya Restart study, the need to move forward towards a more mature phase for the research and innovation environment in the country. Apart from being identified from international

stakeholders, these dimensions are widely recognised as internal problems by the Libyan system. As an example, the improvement of the research capacities of Libyan research centres has been clearly expressed as a priority during several meetings with Libyan universities and can be considered as a "natural development" of the training that Libyan universities are receiving in the framework of EU funded projects, by providing them with new skills and capacities. Having considered that, strengthening scientific research in higher education institutions is one of the key priorities even in terms of access to research international funds. Furthermore, to our knowledge and through our contacts with the Libyan universities, we are aware of only one H2020 research project that has been carried out in Libya since the opening up of the programme to MENA countries. In general, research is government funded by a very high percentage. The National Authority for Scientific Research (NASR) through various research centres, supervises scientific research in Libya. Despite that, some activities suffer from a lack of management and some research centres are not properly activated.

EU Member States are considered key players for Libyan universities and the support of the European Union in the short and medium term seems to be vital, allowing to take capacity building actions and increasing the possibilities for Libyan institutions to network at the regional and international levels and to learn from the exchange with more experienced institutions. In this sense, and according to responses collected by Libyans, HEIs staff

340 Ibidem
341 O. Bizri, Science, technology, innovation, and development in the Arab countries, Amsterdam, Academic Press, 2018.

often point out the difficulties faced in the management and access to international projects opportunities as well as accessing information on funding opportunities, due to the lack of expertise and qualified human resources on both levels: academic and administrative staff.

Moreover, Libyan universities underlined the general problem related to the recognition of qualifications at all levels, again due to different interrelated reasons: the lack of expertise and qualified human resources, the presence of different systems, the lack of a clear regulation. Recognition of qualification is governed by the National agency for Quality Assurance, but the process is considered long and complex, despite no objections arising on its importance. Efforts should be directed towards the definition of a set of guidelines to ease the process, complemented by increasing the capacity of the staff entitled to recognise foreign qualifications and credit both at national and institutional levels.[342]

International Relation Offices are the main actors inside the university for the promotion, planning, management and follow-up of all kinds of international activities. All have an International Relation Office that, as previously mentioned, depends on the Vice-president for Academic Affairs. The director is appointed by the University President based on criteria like experience, competences and English language skills. The composition of these offices depends on the university: it can be made up of a director, a vice-director and several agents, or by only one director and one assistant.[343] IROs directors created a permanent group of IROs (including both Eastern and Western universities) and meet every 2 or 3 months to share experiences and information. This is additional proof that cooperation in the country continues despite political instability and that academic cooperation is not fully involved in the country tensions.[344]

In widening the outreach of Libyan universities, one crucial dimension that is hugely affecting universities' performances is the country infrastructure, which has not been renovated, in particular with regards to the internet service. There is only one source of the internet and that creates a critical situation. In addition, there is a general lack of expertise in the field of digitalisation and a lack of technology experts. This caused a slow and contradictory answer to the 2020 pandemic crisis by basically forcing the Ministry to stop all the teaching activities due to the impossibility to offer online courses. In addition to the lack of infrastructure and human skills, lack of clear legislation is one of the main barriers preventing this process to become structural at both institutional and national level. All the involved universities, clearly expressed the need to reform the regulation. As a matter of fact, despite the fact that article 9 of Decision 501, recognises the possibility to enrol "distance students, who are students that participate in open e-learning programmes", it also states that "procedures and requirements of this system are defined by a special regulation issued by a decree of the General People's Committee for Education and Scientific Research". As a consequence, Libyan universities perceive laws and legislation in Libya as restrictive with regard to the use

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342 Focus group results
343 Please have a look at the data contained in the Libya Restart study performed in 2019-2020: https://www.uni-med.net/libya-restart-a-journey-analysis/ (Last access February 2021)
344 Ibidem

of e-learning in addition to the limitation of financial and technical capabilities.

Despite all the above-mentioned problems, barriers and challenges, the dynamism of the country and of the region remains a strength: "it is a very young region with a young population, much more than the EU. So really, there is thirst for training, for education".[345] In this sense, improving internationalisation capacities and performances will need the support of EU top institutions as the ones involved in order to break the isolation of which Libyan Institutions are suffering nowadays due to the perceived unsafety and instability of the country and to promote the international dimension. Mutual cooperation between the EU and this country will help in defining better infrastructures and develop new markets providing benefit to the society at large.

This is the reason why UNIMED already included in its Libya Restart study specific recommendations aimed at strengthening universities' exposure and performance at the international level. Allowing Libya to lift the cultural siege and enforce both international cooperation and mobility are key steps in the country's developing process, allowing for knowledge transfer, skills improvement, exchange of good practices and human resources development (both for academics and administrative staff). In this regard, it was concluded that it would be beneficial for Libya to engage in mobility programmes and/or dedicated funds for Libya (i.e., a special window within the E+ programme for mobility, as it was done for Tunisia and Algeria).[346]

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345 Interview with German Bernal Rios, Policy Officer - Southern Mediterranean countries, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
346 Refer to the data contained in the Libya Restart study of 2019-2020: https://www.uni-med.net/libya-restart-a-journey-analysis/ (Last access February 2021)

Mauritania

Because of its geographical position, the country constitutes a contact area between North and Sub-Saharan Africa. The country is mostly covered by the desert and according to the UN classification, it is considered as one of the least developed countries.[347] Although its territory is mainly classified as part of the Sahel region by international stakeholders, Mauritania participates in the 5+5 dialogue.[348]

Mauritania became independent in 1960 and the Mauritanian education system has seen different sectoral reforms from 1959 to 2006. The 3 latest reforms (1973, 1999 and 2006) are the ones that most impacted the HE sector. Higher education in Mauritania is relatively young as the first public university was created on the basis of a decree issued in 1981. To date, the network of HEIs includes 14 institutions (of which only one is a public university) offering LMD diplomas, high schools and institutes (including 5 private ones). The Ministry dedicated to higher education and Scientific Research (MHESR) was established in 2014. Mauritania inherited the French system organised around the university and around selective classes, especially for engineering schools. It is also worth mentioning that there are highly-successful specific preparatory institutes for foreign High Schools (mainly in France, e.g., Polytechnique), access to which is granted to 25 students per year in order to train high-level executives.

From 2014, several deep structural reforms have been implemented to modernise and improve the quality of higher education and make it one of the main levers of the country's development. This was accomplished based on four structural axes: 1) strengthening the institutional management and governance of the system; 2) improving the relevance, quality of training and the employability of diplomas; 3) improving access to higher education training; 4) promoting scientific research based on major development issues of the country. Teaching is held in a bilingual fashion, both in Arabic and French, although the use of dialect is spreading more and more and the attractiveness of the French language has considerably decreased lately.[349] Among the main achievements it is worth mentioning the establishment of the National Ministry of higher education and Scientific Research and the definition of monitoring parameters and indicators for higher education and scientific research; the establishment of the Preparatory High Schools for Engineers; the creation of a unit responsible for education and Scientific Research evaluation; the definition of a general framework for education and of standardised conditions for obtaining national diplomas in the LMD as well as the establishment of employment prerequisites and parameters for teachers.[350]

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347 https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/least-developed-country-category-mauritania.html (Last access February 2021)
348 A sub-regional forum for dialogue between ten Western Mediterranean countries and it promotes cooperation in science, technology and higher education: http://www.fiveplusfiverihe.org/about-us
349 Interview with Sidi Ould Salem, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Focus group results
350 https://www.mesrstic.gov.mr/fr/bilan-des-realisations-du-mesrstic/ (Last access February 2021)

Those decisions illustrate all efforts made for the modernisation of the higher education system with the aim to better tackle the challenges meet by the country. In 2018, the MHESR, together with the United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and International Institute for Educational Planning (IIPE Pole de Dakar) made an important diagnosis[351] of the sector and give a clear picture of the evolution of HEIs in the country.

The Lebanese international University (LIU) is an interesting example of private HEIs in the country. It has been operating since 2008 as a branch of the Lebanese International University of Beirut for engineering, business, arts and sciences.[352] A peculiarity of the LIU is that of including some compulsory courses in English.

Higher education in Mauritania is characterised by a very small number of students, only 19 844 students were enrolled in 2017-2018 in the whole public and private higher education institutions (some of which under the authority of the MHESR). By way of comparison, the total population was estimated at 4.4 million in 2018.[353] Women represent around 35% of the total number and students under 27 years of age represent 74% of the total number of students (with an increase of 8% compared to the academic year 2015/2016). 65% of students are enrolled in the University of Nouakchott Alasriya,[354] the only public university. With a ratio of 600 students per 100,000 inhabitants, Mauritania is the country least covered by higher education in the sub-region.[355] The transition rate from secondary to higher education is 30%. The distribution among the different fields is the following: 37% of students were enrolled in social sciences, commerce, and law, followed by 24.5% enrolled in Letter and arts. For the academic year 2017/2018, 740 permanent teachers including 51 women were responsible of the teachings in the public institutions. Associate professors represent more than 40% of the teachers. The teachers/students ratio in the public sector reaches 25.6% which is very close to the UNESCO norm of 25 students per teacher. Furthermore, higher education is characterised by almost free access to studies and a significant allocation of scholarships to students.[356]

Bilateral, long-standing cooperation relationships have been formed with Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria and Senegal, particularly in the field of Medical Sciences, both for outgoing and incoming students. For historical reasons, mobility and cooperation with France remains significant. For the Mauritanian interlocutors who met within the focus group, bilateral cooperation is much more effective than any other cooperation programme, both at the governance level and in terms of training skills, as the former can better assess and address the needs of the institutions assessed.

351 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000265448/PDF/265448fre.pdf.multi (Last access February 2021)

352 http://mr.liu.edu.lb/MauritaniaFrench/universite/introduction.php (Last access February 2021)

353 https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=MRT (Last access February 2021)

354 http://www.una.mr/ (Last access February 2021)

355 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000265448/PDF/265448fre.pdf.multi (Last access February 2021)

356 https://www.mesrstic.gov.mr/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/TB-EN-18.pdf (Last access February 2021)

Internationalisation is a priority for the ministry, which underlines a lack of resources, because the majority of international donors invest mainly in basic education and because national resources do not cover all needs. At the ministerial level, the first step is to define an internationalisation strategy and a dedicated budget, and to encourage the ownership of internationalisation by the whole community. Long term planning is not so evident in Mauritania but important efforts have been made for the accreditation of courses at international level, for foreign languages training and development of co-diplomas, to improve the attractiveness of the HE system in specific fields.

The MHESR is a great promoter of long-term mobility (in the Mauritanian case this term mainly refers to the international funded mobility of Mauritanian students) as it finances a major outgoing scholarship programme for students of medicine and engineering in Morocco (around 300 students), Tunisia (around 200) and in Senegal. Mauritania developed also short term mobilities, e.g., for doctoral students in joint supervision, with France, Spain and Morocco and also for students in the last year of the High Polytechnic School. As no credit system has been adopted yet, rules for recognition of all short term mobilities (very limited number) are set out in specific cooperation agreements. In 2017/2018, Mauritania financed around 1,200 scholarships for students (mainly in sciences, medicine and social safety) and hosted around 250 foreign students (mainly from Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Mali and Gambia). According to the Ministry dashboard,[357]

the top five destinations for Mauritanian students are Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Algeria and France. It is worth mentioning that Mauritania received medicine students from Tunisia and Morocco as the access in their own country is very selective and limited by a restricted admission policy. The MHESR also finances incoming mobilities for the benefit of Yemenis. Mauritania welcomes regular short-term teaching missions and, in the framework of the preparatory class,[358] 15 permanent Tunisian teachers are on-site to train local associate professors. There are also 17 permanent English teachers as in 2016 Mauritania created an English Institute[359] in order to tackle the English skills issue. Outgoing and incoming mobilities are well perceived and appreciated since they ensure acquisition of new competences at the personal and institutional level and since they allow to enrich and update programmes and curricula.[360] The lack of English skills is still a barrier. Mobility is not considered an asset for career advancement but the value of such an experience is tangible at publication and research level.

E-learning has not been regulated yet and curricula are defined by classic pedagogical standards. Even more than in other countries, COVID-19 has highlighted the digital divide (but also revealed some strengths). The case of the Lebanese International University is interesting because at LIU, in Nouakchott, being a branch of LIU in Beirut, some courses were held online using an e-learning regime, with courses held by teachers from Lebanon and others countries. At the government level, the ICT portfolio is also managed by the MHESR which is embodied

357 http://uis.unesco.org/fr/uis-student-flow (Last access February 2021)
358 Classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles
359 Interview with Sidi Ould Salem
360 Focus group results

by a designated director at the ministry office. E-learning implementation presents several challenges, such as: the resistance to change, both from teachers and students; connectivity issues (the university is now directly connected on European networks); access to the internet (internet is free at the University of Nouakchott Alasriya campus but it still remains difficult to access from home) and its the affordability (the Arab League for Education, Culture and Science [ALESCO] distributed 2 000 iPads and laptops to students), and the need for trained staff (and need to overcome the resistance to change mentality). As regards the specific issue of training, even if there is still a long way to go, it is worth mentioning the previous experience gained thanks to the African Virtual University and the existence of a distance training and exchange centre (CFED). Both at the ministerial and university level, e-learning is perceived as a tool for the future,[361] a means to boost the national economy - if the equipment is adequate in terms of quantity- and quality. It represents also an alternative ablet to overcome some geographical obstacles for students from the innermost part of the country and some societal biases (a preconceived resistance towards girls attending HEIs).

A very interesting platform has been funded by the European Union and operated by the International Organisation for Migrations since 2017. Such platform aims at identifying high-level qualified Mauritanians living abroad in order to engage them in activities that are beneficial for the country and its development.[362] As an additional incentive, the ministry also reformed the public administration in order to welcome members of the diaspora who would be interested in participating in national efforts but were not able to do so due to age limits or access regulation restrictions.[363]

Education and higher education in general still face challenges on the specific dimension of internationalisation, this area is not well established and, consequently, cannot fully grasp and welcome many of the opportunities for internationalisation available. Skills need to be strengthened and effective governance is needed in the field of scientific research and so is funding (from national and international stakeholders). In addition, there is a need for raising awareness on internationalisation at the national level as the education system is not mature enough and there are dysfunctions that can create blockages. On top of this, linguistic issues and patchy, uneven internet access create further problems. Student and staff mobility needs to be strengthened and structured, since those two categories can greatly contribute to HE development. Despite all those constraints, structural reforms have been made and the willingness to modernise and internationalise the HE system was declared by the Ministry and by the two universities contacted for this study. The strong bilateral cooperation relationship Mauritania has formed with some European, African and Maghreb partner countries should be further developed and leveraged to upscale mobility and cooperation schemes towards the cross-regional dimension.

361 Interview with Sidi Ould Salem and result of the Focus group
362 https://www.diaspora.mr/ (Last access February 2021)
363 Interview with Sidi Ould Salem

Morocco

The higher education system in Morocco has experienced different phases of development over the course of its history, closely linked to its different economic and sociocultural environments. Prior to the 20th century, the higher education system was primarily religious.[364] During its process of development, university education focused on the national and regional socio-economic needs with the establishment of institutes aiming at tackling Morocco's development challenges. For this reason, Moroccan higher education, which operates as a public domain under the responsibility of the state, in 1975 passed a law on higher education, governed directly by the Ministry of higher education.[365] This law spells out the purpose of public universities, establishment procedures, their history in Morocco, as well as the procedures for recruiting professors and staff. It also stipulates procedures for curriculum development and student evaluation.

During the first decade of the 21st century, Moroccan education system reached a turning point thanks to the National Education and Training Charter, which set out a series of reforms that transformed and contributed to the development of the Moroccan education system at the regional and national level and which aimed to establish the educational, administrative and financial autonomy of higher education centres.[366]

The higher education system in Morocco has different types of higher education establishments according to the nature of the course, academic or professional. Since 2003, Morocco has adopted the LMD system (Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate), organised in semesters made up of disciplinary and compulsory course units.

The Moroccan higher education system is made up of three main sectors:[367] public higher education, higher education as part of partnership, and private higher education. Public higher education includes universities. These are public establishments under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education, Vocational Training, higher education and Scientific Research. The Kingdom of Morocco currently has 12 public universities (with 126 establishments) and a public university with private management spread over the different regions of the country. As part of the partnership[368] there are other public higher education institutions not affiliated to universities and they are specialised higher-education establishments. EENSPU currently has 71 establishments. Finally, private higher education, namely universities and institutions created within the framework of a public-private partnership (PPP), are non-profit foundations created with the objective of internationalising Moroccan higher education. They benefit from different

364 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_morocco_2017.pdf (Last access 2021)
365 Ibidem
366 Ibidem
367 https://www.enssup.gov.ma/fr.html (Last access February 2021)
368 Etablissements d'Enseignement Supérieur ne Relevant pas des Universités (EENSNPU)

sources of funding, yet they remain under the academic authority of the Ministry of higher education.

In the 2018/2019 academic year there were 876,000 students attending public universities (corresponding to 95%), 49,280 enrolled in private institutions and 35,450 attending management-training organisations.[369] Among those students attending public universities, around 424,260 were studying law, economics and social sciences, which remain the most popular fields. Remarkably, around 180,570 students study subjects related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics.[370]

Higher education in Morocco is regulated by Law No. 01/2000,[371] under the responsibility of the state. This law provides for the planning, organisation, development, regulation and guidance of the system and reinforces the educational, administrative and financial autonomy of universities. Moreover, Law No. 01/2000 established a National Coordination Committee for higher education and a National Evaluation Authority responsible of evaluating the higher education system, ensuring the quality, competitiveness and diversity of training programmes, as well as promoting scientific research and for adapting training to market requirements.

Moreover, the National strategic vision 2015-2030 for education, training and scientific research reform initiated by the Moroccan Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research, expressly states that "school should be the object of the greatest attention as a national priority, of the state and local authorities, education, training and scientific research, trade unions, the private sector, families, civil society, intellectuals, artists and the media".[372]

As regards policies, there is a strong support to internationalisation and the international dimension of universities, with the passage of time, has become a pillar of the mission and strategic planning of the Ministry and of Moroccan HEIs as it is perceived as a mean for improving the quality of education and as an opening to be more attractive. Within the Ministry, a Directorate of Cooperation and Partnership was created. It is responsible for promoting, strengthening, monitoring and evaluating, in coordination with ministry structures and institutions, bilateral and multilateral cooperation programmes in all areas relating to responsibilities of the ministry.[373] Currently, the Ministry Plan aims at developing international cooperation strategies aimed at strengthening current cooperation programmes with foreign countries, establishing new partnerships in the fields of higher education and scientific research, consolidating the cooperation with other entities in the region within the framework of South-South cooperation as well as strengthening the mobility of Moroccan students and professors.

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369 https://www.enssup.gov.ma/sites/default/files/STATISTIQUES/5341/brochure_2018-2019.pdf (Last access February 2021)
370 https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/steady-progress-demand-private-schooling-continues-grow-parliament-approves-highly-anticipated-new (Last access February 2021)
371 http://www.umi.ac.ma/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/loi-n-01-00-portant-organisation-de-lenseignement-sup%C3%A9rieur.pdf (Last access February 2021)
372 https://www.men.gov.ma/Fr/Documents/Vision_strateg_CSEF16004fr.pdf (Last access February 2021)
373 Moroccan Decree 2-14-280 of June 18, 201, available at: http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/SERIAL/98090/116577/F-1402084207/MAR-98090.pdf (Last access February 2021)

Attractiveness is a key factor for internationalisation and, for this reason, according to Morocco's Minister of National Education Saaid Amzazi,[374] Moroccan universities are set to implement the Bachelor Anglophone system in September 2021 introducing, based on this system, a fourth year to strengthen skills and abilities needed to access the labour market more easily. This will facilitate the international mobility of Moroccan students and will make Moroccan universities more attractive to foreign students. This shift is perceived as a great opportunity to improve the employability of Moroccan students by focusing on foreign languages, soft skills, civic and professional development and as an opening for Moroccan higher education institutions to international opportunities.

As for internationalisation, all organisation charts include a vice-rector or deputy director for external relations and cooperation activities. Even when there is no structure dedicated to internationalisation within the institutions, there is still a person who takes care of these aspects.[375] As far as structure is concerned, there should be more internationalisation offices. For example, in smaller institutions, the research and development department or the career centre have to manage Erasmus+ and internationalisation programmes, due to a lack of units specifically dedicated to internationalisation.[376] As a result, the lack of a dedicated structure within the institution represents an obstacle because it is not easy to know, both internally and externally, which person to contact.[377] Thanks to our experience on the field, we identified, the main reasons for this issue, which are mainly linked to a lack of human resources, funds and training for staff.[378]

Even if there is not a consolidated and common supportive structure yet, the need for an international strategy is strongly perceived by universities. For this reason, the strategic axis[379] higher education in its regional, national and international environment plans to increase the number of courses in English and Spanish, particularly at the level of Master's degrees, with a view to strengthen the attractiveness of the degree courses for foreign students and to increase the incoming mobility. Objectives, include the facilitation of mobility for students at international level, ensuring the mobility of Moroccan researchers internationally, a call for familiarisation with good practices, successful international experiences and international standards, the development of partnerships and international cooperation and strengthening Morocco's positioning in the international system. The internationalisation dimension is also included in the development plan that a dean, running for head of the university, needs to prepare. The development plan should include the university activities, on

374 During the conference held in Casablanca, on February 29, 2020, on the theme «Les Soft Skills: Un Levier Novateur du BACHELOR et des Compétences Incontournables pour l'Employabilité des Etudiants»
375 As underlined by Sanaa Zebakh (Deputy Director in charge of cooperation at the Agronomic and Veterinary Institute Hassan II) they have established a Deputy Directorate for Cooperation, Partnership and Development in order to deal with aspects related to international cooperation.
376 Such is the case of ESITH– Ecole Supérieure des Industries du Textile et de l'Habillement.
377 Interview with Latifa Daadaoui National Coordinator, National Erasmus+ Office in Morocco
378 Focus group results
379 http://www.um5.ac.ma/um5/sites/default/files/Resume_Projet_Etab-UM5R.pdf (Last access February 2021)

all levels, for at least four years, including internationalisation, cooperation and partnerships initiatives.[380]

As for research, the National Research System is the coordinated set of bodies and structures belonging to the public and private sector whose actions and interactions make it possible to design and implement national research policies. Morocco has defined an ambitious strategy aimed at promoting science and technology with a view to ensuring its economic and social development. In this context, the promotion of international bilateral and multilateral cooperation allows Moroccan research teams to share their experiences with other partners, to access scientific centres of excellence at the international level and to benefit from international funding of research.[381] Morocco co-signs nearly 50% of its indexed publications with foreign researchers, compared to 30% at the start of the 90s. The country is trying today to stimulate and support the evolution towards internationalisation both at the level of institutions and research agendas, and it seeks to articulate such internationalisation around regional or global issues.[382] Moreover, the establishment of ad hoc committees by the Permanent Inter-ministerial Committee for Scientific Research and Technological Development

should enhance the coordination and synergies between the actions taken by institutions in the area of international cooperation.[383]

However, internationalisation has to meet some challenges. Firstly, it is vital to develop national standards, official procedures that will allow universities to facilitate mobility actions. Secondly, among the main challenges to be faced, particular attention is paid to the language of instruction and research, the evaluation system, the non-internationalisation of the curricula (an internship abroad or studies abroad are not included in the curriculum-despite the fact that they are allowed),[384] the absence of infrastructure and the financial management of funds.[385]

Even though international experience is valued and appreciated in Moroccan HEIs,[386] it does not have a direct impact on career advancements of the staff, both for academic and administrative staff members. A candidate's international experience is considered as a strength, but it is not a formal criterion when it comes to professional advancement.[387] Classes are conducted in Arabic and/or French and the nature of the curricula, represent a real difficulty for the approach to internationalisation, as well as the low number of training programmes in English.[388]

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380 Interview with Anass Bennani, Director of Cooperation and Partnership of the Moroccan Ministry of National Education, Vocational Training, Higher Education & Scientific Research
381 https://www.enssup.gov.ma/fr.html (Last access February 2021)
382 R. Chroqui, C. Okar, K. Saoudi, Internationalisation de l'Enseignement Supérieur au Maroc : vers une marchandisation, 2017, Unpublished.
383 Interview with Sanaa Zebakh.
384 Interview with Najib Hamouti, Head Career Center, Erasmus+ Coordinator at ESITH- Ecole Supérieure des Industries du Textile et de l'Habillement
385 Focus group results
386 Ibidem
387 Interview with Najib Hamouti
388 For example, at the University of Mohamed V de Rabat, out of 263 training programs, only 11 are in English, about 60 in Arabic and all the rest in French.

Nevertheless, the Ministry has met this need by passing a new framework law[389] that authorises the use of foreign languages in training programmes, with a new orientation and a focus on alternating languages, with an investment in plurilingualism education and with a view to diversifying the languages of education, in addition to the two official languages of the State by teaching certain subjects, in particular scientific and technical subjects, or certain contents or modules, in one or more foreign languages; by diversifying language choices in the fields, specialties, training and research of higher education, as well as by opening new pathways allowing the pursuit of studies in Arabic, French, English and Spanish, within the limits of universities' autonomy and according to their training and research needs, as well as taking into account the resources available.

Teaching methods and the partial use of the new technologies, methods of assessment and evaluation do not support effectively international students. This adds up to a lack of infrastructure, especially of university dormitories and offices for the management incoming mobility. Indeed, it could be useful to improve the management of the arrival of foreign students in terms of infrastructures and also in their involvement, making them active actors in the life of the institutions. Getting in touch with students even before they arrive in Morocco is a key factor to put students at ease.[390]
In addition, Morocco has not yet adopted the

European credit system (ECTS) and therefore it is hard to harmonise international mobility[391] towards Europe and to apply the transfer of credits. It was mentioned that the establishments engaging more in outgoing mobility are engineering schools, which are very well integrated with engineering schools all over the world and therefore they have understood very quickly the problem of credits and adapted to a system of international recognition in order to facilitate mobility.[392] With the aim of fixing this problem, in the learning agreement, Moroccan universities ask foreign students which modules they will follow and these modules are validated by the head of the department and therefore, once they go back, the students will have no problem obtaining their diploma.[393]

Although Morocco has made progress in the field of e-learning, also thanks to its participation in some CBHE projects and the launch of key MOOCs,[394] distance learning has posed a problem during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

Indeed, some teachers have never had the opportunity to be trained to teach remotely and in some regions of Morocco there is no internet connectivity, so students cannot download lessons or participate in online classes. Thanks to the actions taken by the Ministry and the ANRT (Agence National de Réglementation de Télécommunication), universities can offer free online courses to the students. However, this system cannot

389 Law 51/17 Available at: http://www.sgg.gov.ma/Portals/0/BO/2020/BO_6944_ Fr.pdf?ver=2020-12-24-133647-943 (Last access February 2021)
390 Interview with Wail Benjelloun, former President of Mohammed V University and UNIMED Honorary President
391 Interview with Najib Hamouti
392 Focus group results
393 Ibidem
394 https://openmedproject.eu/oer-morocco-declaration/ (Last access February 2021)

work for a large number of students at the same time, thus compromising the success of those classes and forcing teachers to upload lessons in platforms like YouTube. This is a difficulty that does not encourage students to participate in all the courses. As for the documents, students can download them for free. In order to solve the connection problem, over 20 000 educational resources have been developed and it is possible to download them even if students do not have a stable internet connection. The ministry is working with each university to develop their own course and all types of modalities are considered. However, it is necessary to make investments to improve access to the Internet.[395]

Like in many other countries, in Morocco, at the moment, teaching is hybrid. However, in Morocco there is not yet a regulation for distance learning but it is allowed to give a part of module online. A new learning reform, which is being drafted, should allow to teach entire modules online. Based on the experience gained in this pandemic period, the best solution could be that of mixing distance learning and face-to-face teaching. For example, it has been specifically asked by students with reduced mobility to maintain online courses once the pandemic crisis will be over, in order to tackle travel difficulties.[396]

The obstacles encountered by the internationalisation strategy could be attributed to the difficulty of taking some actions due to a lack of funding, coordination or qualified human resources and, at the national level, some encouragement is needed in order to boost joint coordination among the technical departments and the ministry responsible for higher education and research.

All Moroccan universities work within a context of networking and partnerships.[397] Morocco's cooperation efforts in the field of higher education and scientific research are historically and largely focused on Europe. Due to the historical link between the two areas, many collaboration projects have been implemented by Moroccan and French universities, within the context of several programmes. France supported the training and mobility of Moroccan students and staff. More than half of Morocco's bilateral cooperation programmes have been concluded with France. Its second partner is Spain, followed by Italy. Nonetheless, Morocco has established cooperation relationships with other countries, implementing cooperation actions involving Germany, Belgium and Portugal. There is also a gradual opening towards other geographical areas, such as Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, Asia and Latin America. Several bilateral cooperation agreements have been made with countries across the five continents in relation to higher education and student exchanges.

For a long time, Morocco has also been a destination country for students. Morocco has hosted around 20,000 students from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Moroccan Ministry has created scholarships to support these students. As for Moroccan students, around 70,000 of them are currently abroad and the Ministry has made available about 40 programme grants, bilateral and multilateral, for students

395 Focus group results
396 Ibidem
397 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_morocco_2017.pdf (Last access 2021)
398 Interview with Wail Benjelloun

abroad.[398] As regards the percentages, 70% of foreign students come from Africa, 21% from the Middle East and only 3% from Europe.[399]

Furthermore, South-South cooperation with other MENA countries also supports mobility between Morocco and all the Mediterranean countries involved in international exchanges, mainly at the master's and doctoral level, especially the countries that are particularly active in the exchanges involving Morocco. Morocco has graduated exactly 343 students from 10 Mediterranean countries;[400] therefore 343 students from those countries are enrolled in the 2019-2020 academic year in public higher education institutions in Morocco. In addition, between 2015 and 2020, almost 1,600 Mediterranean students were enrolled in universities, especially in public universities. In the years 2019-2020, exchanges were in place with 8 Mediterranean countries.[401] Between 2015 and 2019, the number of agreements increased from 100 mobility agreements to more than 850 and the number of exchanges with European partners increased from 80 to 300.[402]

Morocco has made considerable efforts in terms of organisation and investment to improve cooperation with international bodies and Moroccan universities are particularly active in the European Tempus and Erasmus Mundus higher education programmes and, more recently, the Erasmus+ programme. Indeed, the Erasmus+ office has a great impact in Morocco's internationalisation process,

operating very important dynamic actions for European programmes. The Erasmus+ programme has helped to take dynamic actions for the internationalisation of cooperation and allowed to have greater visibility and attractiveness. It has also allowed to promote exchanges between Moroccan universities and towards Moroccan universities. Data concerning the Erasmus+ programme for the period 2014-2020 show that Morocco registered or approved 7,404 mobilities, including 2,809 outgoing mobilities and 1,951 incoming mobilities. More than 800 mobility agreements were concluded, 47 merit scholarships awarded under the Erasmus+ Joint Masters, and 37 Erasmus+ capacity building projects were established. In addition, 6 Jean Monnet projects were developed during this period. With the new Erasmus + 2021-2027 programme, the aim of Morocco is to strengthen its participation in mobility programmes in the future, through the acquisition of the status of Programme Country, which will also allow to receive additional funding for the implementation of international activities. Finally, the Director of Cooperation and Partnership of the Moroccan Ministry of National Education, Vocational Training, Higher Education & Scientific Research pays particular attention to student mobility in all its forms and to the main challenge linked to its development action.[403]

Moreover, Morocco is the 1st partner of the ICM mobility programme in Africa, the 2nd in the South Mediterranean region and the 8th worldwide, out of a total of 135 partner countries from the five continents.[404]

399 Focus group results
400 Algeria, Egypt, France, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey
401 Egypt, France, Spain, Greece, Italy, Jordan, Tunisia and Turkey
402 Intervention of Anass Bennani during the Dire-Med project Final Conference held on October 13th 2020
403 Ibidem
404 https://erasmusplus.ma/icm/ (Last access February 2021)

Morocco is also highly involved in CBHE projects, building on the success of previous programmes (Tempus in particular). Nevertheless, Morocco's participation in CBHE has decreased. Today, Morocco is the second partner on CBHE projects in the south Mediterranean region with 37 projects covering a wide range of themes. 33 Moroccan HEIs are involved in 37 (CBHE) projects with 11 non-academic partners. During the implementation period, these projects enabled the exchange of expertise between 33 Moroccan institutions and 142 institutions in 23 European countries, 85 institutions in 8 countries in the Southern Mediterranean region[405] and 10 institutions from 4 countries[406] in sub-Saharan Africa.[407]

405 Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Libya, Syria, Palestine
406 Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina-Faso, Democratic Republic of the Congo
407 https://erasmusplus.ma/erasmus-uploads/2019/10/Dossier-VF-Erasmus.pdf (Last access January 2021)

Palestine

As recognised by the SPHERE project[408] and by several reports, higher education in Palestine[409] is divided into two sectors:

- Education in Community and Technical Colleges: students study for a period of two years, and receive a diploma certificate.
- University education: students study for 4 to 6 years to receive a bachelor's degree in science, education, humanities, engineering, and medicine.

The majority of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Palestine are public and the whole system is regulated by law 11/1998,[410] that recognises different types of institutions: governmental, public, established by non-governmental organisations and private institutions. The council on higher education is responsible for drafting and enacting the rules that all HEIs must adopt. The Ministry also provides partial support and funding to the non-governmental HEIs. The HEIs are mostly independent but they have to comply with the above-mentioned law and regulations issued by the ministry and the council on higher education.

Currently, the local education system (particularly higher education) is suffering from the recent massive fiscal crisis, started in 2019. As a result, there has been a massive shortage of fiscal instruments. Clearly this affected higher education, like any other sector. In addition, local authorities, as consequence of the crisis, are prioritising sectors like health and primary or secondary education. So higher education has been gravely affected, especially in the Gaza Strip.

The topic of internationalisation has been firstly introduced in a systematic way and consequently consolidated into the Palestinian HE system through the Tempus Programme and currently through the Erasmus+ programme of the European Commission. As recognised by the National Erasmus+ Officer, "Erasmus+ programme has a high profile in Palestine as it is playing an important and leading role in the development and internationalisation of the Palestinian higher education Sector [...] and has remarkably contributed on staff development through the mobility programme and internationalisation of education [...] with a strong effect on the internationalisation of faculties".[411]

The Palestinian HEIs have been involved in Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility projects since 2015 with mobilities (outgoing and incoming) for students and staff, indeed almost all Palestinian HEIs have ICM exchange agreements with different EU countries based on their teaching programmes. Arabic is the official language of Palestine, and English is clearly the second language in status.

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408 https://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-palestine (Last access January 2021)
409 To be intended in line with the European Union definition: Occupied Palestinian Territory, West Bank and Gaza Strip and in any case not as a political recognition of the State of Palestine
410 Arabic version here available: http://www.mohe.pna.ps/Resources/Docs/HELaw.pdf (Last access January 2021)
411 Sentences contained in a PowerPoint presentation provided by the National Erasmus+ office in Palestine and provided by Nedal Jayyousi

As recognised by Muhamad Hasan Amara based on Tushyeh studies, "English is taught at the Palestinian universities for several reasons. English is a required subject for all first-year university students. English is also a Faculty of Arts requirement at these universities when students take courses in English language and literature. Furthermore, English is the medium of instruction in the sciences and mathematics at all universities and in some disciplines, such as nursing, business, political sciences and cultural studies, at some Palestinian universities".[412]

Currently Palestine has a high number of Capacity building projects directly coordinated by Palestinian universities. At the moment, they lead 24 projects as a coordinator in cooperation with European and Arab partners. According to the National Erasmus Office: "The main strengths of our internationalisation strategy are in particular the highest number of coordinated CBHE projects and the fact that all the university staff know about Erasmus+, as well a high level of participation by university institutions and by the Ministry of higher education and by the Prime Minister office".[413] In this sense, a strong institutional support, not perceived as invasive by the higher education practitioners, is provided by local institutions to the local higher education system. In addition to that, a multilevel approach seems to involve different and various levels of the educational community of the higher education system in internationalisation, recognising the

National Erasmus+ Office as a coordination role: "We do have a good relationship with university's leaders. Rectors are indeed involved in key activities for decisions, such as information days, institutional evaluation, etc. We do also contact directly a professor/dean/vice-rector and do have a direct relationship with students' networks. Finally, we can also affirm that we have a good relationship with the EU and with the Ministry of higher education. So, we have good relations with all levels from the President to the Grant's office, from the professors to the students".[414] This last point is of specific interest, as it seems that cooperation with students represents a crucial aspect for the National Erasmus office internationalisation activities: Our NEO office organises regular meetings (as an example, 6 meetings were arranged in 2020) among students outgoing and those who came back to Palestine after their mobility period abroad. In these meetings we focus on bottlenecks such as visas, especially for the Gaza Strip, cultural issues in relationship with gender, accreditation problem and recognition, issue of language, etc. Our office tries to involve students also in other important occasions such as in the information days and in project field monitoring".[415]

The Ministry of Education and higher education[416] has not defined yet a proper national strategy on internationalisation. According to confidential sources, the new 2020-2023 strategic plan should include (even if not directly mentioned) a concrete internationalisation dimension. In this

412 M. Amara, Recent foreign language education policies in Palestine, Language Problems & Language Planningm, Vol. 27, n.3, October 2003, pp. 217-232, p. 221
413 Interview with Nedal Jayyousi, National Erasmus+ Coordinator in Palestine
414 Ibidem
415 Ibidem
416 http://www.moehe.gov.ps/ (Last access January 2021).

regard, it seems that the initiative is in the first place in the hands of the single universities and then eventually supported by state institutions. This has been also indirectly confirmed by Kherieh Rassas, when the process of establishing the International Relations Office at An-Najah University: "When in 2005 I was Dean of the Faculty of Optometry at An-Najah University, I found out that there was no International Relations Office at our premises. We were the largest university in Palestine and we were without that office. So then, I discussed it with our university leadership and administration and we started the process for establishing it. When I established the international office, I was appointed as Vice President for international affairs in order to properly follow up its activities".[417]

Generally speaking, 16 universities in Palestine currently have joint agreements for partnerships and cooperation with universities in the Arab world, Europe, USA, Australia, China, Japan, Canada and other countries in the region. Large numbers of students are benefiting from this cooperation. In fact, most of the university staff have benefited from this cooperation. This has a positive impact on education standards and has increased the number of PhD holders in Palestine.[418] A paper published by Birzeit University reports that several programmes have been established as joint efforts by local universities and several international universities within the framework of EU projects. Examples are a master programme in Sustainable Engineering at Birzeit and Najah University

in Palestine and at Swedish, German and Slovenian universities. Another example is a master programme in Electrical Engineering jointly by Birzeit, Hebron Polytechnic and Kadoorie Universities in Palestine and universities in the UK, France, Romania and Bulgaria. At the undergraduate level, the Computer Science Department offers a minor in "serious games" in collaboration with universities in Palestine, Tunisia, Germany and Sweden.[419] One of the most effective programmes in attracting international students is the PAS programme from Birzeit University. PAS is a comprehensive programme that not only teaches Arabic, but it also comprises social science courses. PAS is a cultural transmitter that aspires to educate and empower students of various nationalities and backgrounds through learning the Arabic language and the Palestinian culture at home.[420]

The fact that the system is relatively young is probably one of the main reasons behind the absence of a proper regulatory framework regarding internationalisation. Recently, the MoEHE has been working on developing regulations trying to overcome barriers within the framework of joint master programmes and credits mobility in Europe and elsewhere. This said, the variety of system and practices (e.g., the starting of the semester is different in respect to the European institutions, the adaptation of the Bologna process in the European institutions and the use of the US system in Palestine etc.) is perceived as the main obstacles affecting the recognition of

417 UNIMED interview with Prof. Kherieh Rassas, Deputy President for. International Development and External Affairs at An-Najah National University
418 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_palestine_2017.pdf (Last access January 2021)
419 A. H. Yahya, Tools for Internationalizing Higher Education in Developing Countries, available at https://fada.birzeit.edu/bitstream/20.500.11889/4379/1/QSPaperFinalAsSubmitted.pdf
420 https://pas.birzeit.edu/news-events/why-pas-program (Last access January 2021)

qualification and, consequently, mobility. Despite all these difficulties, there still is a high interest in mobility amongst students, who spend a long time (over one year in some cases) just waiting to get access to travel to Europe as the EU area and member states are perceived as strong, reliable and less politicised partners with respect to others.

Apart from these regulatory issues, the peculiar situation in Palestinian territories is widely affecting students, teachers and administrative staff mobility, both incoming and outgoing: all of them are experiencing serious obstacles that prevent them from studying abroad, like the long process of getting visas.[421] With specific regard to the Gaza Strip, local universities reported economic barriers and additional problems in terms of freedom of movement. As widely recognised, Palestinian students are hampered to go studying abroad, especially students from Gaza Strip, as they have to undergo hard and complex procedures that don't always achieve a positive outcome, rather the opposite. This problem also concerns incoming international students and coming from all over the world. According to Adnan Yahya from Birzeit University, "Student diversity is minimal: there are practically no foreign students, not even Palestinian expats despite the fact that the majority (8 million) of Palestinians live in the diaspora".[422] It is worth mentioning that restriction of movement is affecting not only Palestinians' mobilities towards Europe, but also the opposite. In this last case, we cannot underestimate European

students and staff perceived concerns about safety conditions in the country. In addition, and even if it considered only as a minor issue, one of the main challenges in terms of internationalisation is related to cultural local traditions, because some Palestinian parents are very conservative and they are afraid of the different culture in a foreign country especially for girls.[423]

As for restrictions to movement, visa refusals and the problems related, it is worth noting that the COVID-19 pandemic crisis represented (also, but obviously not only) an opportunity. According to Kherieih Rassas, "joint academic programmes proved to be a very successful initiative and COVID-19 has posed a new challenge, with restrictions to travels and to the freedom of movement, exchanges, mobilities, and so forth. On the other hand, it has also provided an opportunity to be more connected by forcing us to develop our digital skills. This reasoning can also be applied to research and especially to joint research (through online labs). As you can imagine, there has been a brain drain issue and we lack faculty members and expertise. With online education, we could probably cooperate more by exchanging faculty members in certain disciplines where we lack expertise and where we lack academics."[424] This is the reason why Palestinian universities generally agreed that, in this specific sense, it is necessary to take advantage of the COVID-19 crisis and to continue developing online courses even after the pandemic.

421 See as title of example: C. Harker, Student im/mobility in Birzeit, Palestine, Mobilities, Vol. 4, n.1, 2009, pp. 11-35 as well as the contents of the Overview of the Higher Education System produced in 2017 by the European Commission: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_palestine_2017.pdf (Last access January 2021)
422 Yahya, op. cit., p. 4
423 Interview with Nedal Jayyousi
424 Interview with Khereieh Rassas

According to Naim Daour, Hebron University will keep offering 30% of its courses online as "only" 63% students asked to return to face to face activities.[425] Similarly, some universities (such as the Arab American University) are working to introduce new tools such as the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) model and it seems that the absolute majority of them agreed to adopt in the near future blended programmes that represent a good compromise. This approach clearly demonstrates the maturity of the higher education system in Palestine. In any case, according to the selected universities in the sample, virtual mobility still lacks regulation while the MoEHE has only recently begun working on the qualification of online courses.

It is worth mentioning that Palestinian institutions are focusing on Social and Cooperation Sciences as a consequence of institutional commitment and clear indications coming from universities' leadership: "Society must realise that it is not a "waste" of valuable time to study philosophy, politics, and engage with literary, artistic, or social issues. I may add that we should also sensitise the academic staff who teach IT, medicine, and engineering to the value and importance of the humanities in addressing the major ethical, social, and political issues of our day".[426] This specific approach is also reflected in the results of the mobility data collected for the current study.

Despite the good quality of the higher education system, Palestinian graduates are suffering from increasing unemployability rates and in this regard, it seems that internationalisation through Erasmus Capacity Building projects, positively contributed in creating meaningful dynamics. As recognised by Nedal Jayyousi, the capacity building action strengthened national and international relations amongst HEIs and also fostered industry-specific qualifications frameworks. In particular, Palestinian institutions (namely Ministries and universities) found of benefit the introduction of the so-called "knowledge triangle" for innovation especially because it aimed at reinforcing links between education, research and business. In this sense, it can be affirmed that a concrete and continuous exposure of the local higher education system to international dynamics (such as those represented by the Erasmus+ Capacity Building action) seems to positively affect the labour market. This is a vital challenge (and at the same time an opportunity) for the whole system. As recognised by the European Commission in 2017: "The unemployment rate amongst recently graduated students exceeds 75%. It is a very high rate and it is mainly due to the fact that universities teach and present courses without taking into consideration the real market needs. The graduates do not meet the labour-market requirements with their newly-acquired skills".[427]

According to the Palestinian universities involved, the impact of ongoing internationalisation strategies on employability is still perceived to be low but, on the other hand, they all agreed on the need for students to acquire new skills

425 Focus group results
426 Prof. Dr. Abdullatif Abuhijleh Palestine, President of Birzeit University. Quote from his speech at the UNIMED General Assembly 2019
427 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_palestine_2017.pdf (Last access January 2021)

during an international experience in order to be more ready for the job market needs. According to respondents, acquiring new language skills means having more job opportunities and should increase employability but then the issue seems to be two-faced.

If this statement is indisputably true, it is also true that in the majority of the cases the local labour market seems not to be ready to recognise these skills as added values: business owners are highly critical of the extent to which academic programmes are preparing students to enter the job market.[428] Therefore, action is probably required on several levels: continuing to guarantee access to new skills through international experiences (e.g., mobilities), guaranteeing universities' exposure to education, research and business triangle international experiences, but also contributing to determine a cultural shift in the local labour market to ensure that graduates can access the jobs that are created. Moreover, specific requests for improving students' performances were also directed towards the possibilities (as universities) to share international experiences on how to obtain more "competences" instead of "skills", in order to be more successful when looking for a job and generate a cultural shift.

Interestingly, the COVID-19 crisis is perceived as an opportunity, since it positively affects both youth employability and international exposure. The growing technological capacities of institutions in the Gaza Strip has recently grown faster "thanks" to the pandemic. This is particularly true for two aspects: the first one being a pedagogical approach for developing online teaching, and the second "virtual mobility". Past studies already demonstrated that ongoing activities in both fields[429] and international organisations (such as the World Bank)[430] have been constantly supporting in the past years the IT sector with the aim of fostering IT service firms in the West Bank and Gaza. With specific regards to both issues, Palestinian universities (both in West Bank and Gaza) have clearly identified their priorities:

• This is the right time to assess the online teaching experience by implementing different models such as technology acceptance models and or other models, with a peculiar attention to both students (encouraging them to use the online learning and teaching) and, at the same time, to lectures and their challenges. There is a huge willingness to pedagogically adapt courses in different sectors in order to enable the Palestinian higher education system to be ready to develop a reliable online system, especially when it comes to the teaching quality.

• Virtual mobility should work alongside and support physical mobility and in no case should it replace physical mobility. Only physical mobility will provide the students with a real international experience, especially when it comes to travelling, dealing with others and

428 http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_624855.pdf (Last access January 2021)
429 Cf. G. Fassetta, M. G. Imperiale, K. Frimberger, M. Attia & N. Al-Masri, Online Teacher Training in a Context of Forced Immobility: The Case of Gaza, Palestine, European Education, Vol. 49, n. 2-3, 2017 pp. 133-150, DOI: 10.1080/10564934.2017.1315538 and also the recently published Multilingual Online Academic Collaborations as Resistance edited in 2020 by Giovanna Fassetta, Nazmi Al-Masri and Alison Phipps
430 https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/loans-credits/2020/06/12/west-bank-and-gaza-technology-for-youth-and-jobs-project (Last access February 2021)

interacting with international cultures. In this sense, Palestinian universities (both in the West Bank and Gaza) consider virtual mobility a useful tool for intercultural exchange.

Both online teaching and virtual mobility are considered two main elements to encourage internationalisation at home and digitalisation that become in this way structural processes in the HE system and in the country.

With regards to this issue, the main barriers identified by Palestinian universities are physical ones (e.g., "Israeli occupation" and "visa restrictions").[431] These are still perceived as the main barriers to be overcome, even when discussing virtual mobility or digitalisation at home as tools and instruments to mitigate difficulties and barriers to full internationalisation. Interestingly enough, problems of the physical dimension, such as restrictions to movement, also seem to generally affect virtual processes and appear to be strictly interrelated.

Tunisia

The higher education sector in Tunisia has played a crucial role in developing human capital able to meet to the changing needs of a developing nation, especially after the independence of the country. In 1956, the higher education system was limited, there were only three institutions: The Agronomic Institute of Tunis (1913), the Pasteur Institute of Tunis (1893) and the University of Ez-Zitouna.[432] As a direct consequence, during the '60s and '70s, many faculties were founded in the capital.[433] University institutions were thus created later than these schools and faculties, by the introduction of law 86-60 of August 9th 1986.[434] The Universities of Tunis, Sfax and Monastir have been founded by the same law, followed by the Universities of Gabès and Jendouba in 2003/2004.[435]

Recently (since the year 2000), universities in Tunisia have experienced a strengthening of their educational, administrative and financial prerogatives thanks to a gradual decentralisation. Tunisia started the reform process of its higher education system by adopting and implementing the Bologna Process in 2006, followed by the adoption of the new Law on higher education in 2008.[436] This law formally introduced the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), the three-cycle system of study and the diploma supplement. The 2008 law also paved the way for greater autonomy for universities improving financial resources, through the establishment of public-private partnerships. The public higher education system in Tunisia nowadays remains open to all students regularly holding a Baccalaureate[437] and it is very affordable in terms of fees. It even widely caters for deprived students' needs through scholarships, grants, meals- and rents-subsidies (1/3 of the enrolled students are net beneficiaries of subsidies of any sort). A national orientation system regulates the number of students oriented in the 1st year according to performance criteria. University enrolment rates have boomed over the last two decades (passing from 8% of the late '90s to 32% nowadays), along with employment rates of university staff, which reached a total of 22,561 teaching staff, 54% of which hold a PhD,[438] even if the

432 Ez-Zitouna University was first established in 737 CE as a madrasa and subsequently as university in 1956
433 The Faculty of Medicine of Tunis (1960), the Faculty of Sciences of Tunis (1964), the Faculty of Economic Sciences (1964), the Faculty of Human Sciences and Social (1963), the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences (1964) and the National School of Engineers of Tunis (1968)
434 Avalable at Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne, 129° année n. 44, vendredi 8-mardi 12 aout 1986
435 The public sector of higher education includes today 13 universities (including the Virtual University) and a network of 25 higher institutes of technological studies under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education (General Direction of Technological Studies DGET). Each university is organised in faculties, schools and higher institutes. All universities award, through their components (faculties, schools or higher institutes), academic diplomas as well as applied diplomas. The higher technological studies institutes deliver only applied and professional diplomas.
436 http://www.meric-net.eu/files/fileusers/National_Report_template_MERIC-NET_Tunisia_French.pdf (Last access February 2021)
437 In Arabic, al-Bakaluria, translated as high school certificate
438 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_tunisia_2017.pdf (Last access February 2021)

number of teachers in corps A is still low.

Tunisia has been among the forerunners in the introduction and full implementation of the LMD system in higher education, together with the adoption of the EU-inspired LLL and ECTS frameworks since 2008, a strong bet on the internationalisation process[439] and an engagement in boosting quality assurance procedures, thanks to the establishment of the first national agency – the National Evaluation, Quality Assurance and Accreditation Authority – NEQAA[440] in 2009.[441] Based on decree 1719/2012,[442] the NEQAA is in charge of ensuring the quality of higher education and research as well as the compliance of the education system with internationally recognised standards. The 2014 Constitution reinstated the principle of the fundamental importance of compulsory national education up to 16 years old but also gave a great emphasis on the introduction of higher standards in the third cycle of education. Tunisian universities are now adopting a standard LMD cycle structure (3+2+3 years), except for a few faculties self-ruled by their own rules, mostly in the medical domain.

Before 2010, the government had mainly focused on integrating a high number of students in higher education. Since 2010, the high decrease[443] in the number of students led to a change in the strategy of policy makers. The focus has been shifted to quality and competitiveness at the national and international levels. The most recent national reform project considers students at the centre of the higher education system which has been prioritising accreditation and internationalisation. In this context, the consolidation of students' mobility is one of the specific objectives of the national university strategy. Different schemes provide international mobility opportunities for students and staff be it the national fund of the Ministry of higher education or the international support offered by European and bilateral projects. As recognised by the results of SPHERE[444] project and underlined by Malek Kochlef,[445] international cooperation is one of the main priorities of higher education policy in Tunisia. The international activities are at the heart of the activities of the Minister of higher education and scientific research in Tunisia.[446] The priorities mentioned in its last National Strategic Plan[447] are improving the quality of university training and the employability of graduates; the promotion of Research and Innovation; promotion of good governance and optimisation of the management of resources; the revision of the university distribution within the

439 44 bilateral agreements with partner universities of 4 continents

440 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/countryfiches_tunisia_2017.pdf (Last access February 2021)

441 L'internationalisation de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche scientifique, Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

442 As reported by the consortium SPHERE, on the basis of the decree 1719-2012.

443 Among the causes, the low-effect employability policy, the lack pf perspectives after the graduation and the strong emigration of Tunisian students abroad through the many scholarship offers.

444 https://supporthere.org/page/higher-education-tunisia (Last access January 2021)

445 Interview with Malek Kochlef, General Director of the International Cooperation of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

446 Ibidem

447 Plan stratégique de la réforme de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche scientifique 2015-2025. Version du 05/01/2015, available at http://www.utm.rnu.tn/utm/documents/plan_strategique.pdf (Last access January 2021)

Country to ensure a better regional balance and the promotion of pedagogical training of teachers.[448] In particular,[449] it is stated very clearly that one of the specific objectives is to build the capacity of Tunisian HEIs in project management and to reinforce the participation of universities in international projects, as well as the visibility of universities at the international level. Indeed, the national internationalisation strategy mainly focuses on three main pillars: ensuring a harmonisation with international standards criteria, increasing visibility and attractiveness of Tunisian curricula, and improving networking and partnership.[450]

Another element in the national strategic plan 2015-2025 concerns the digitalisation of the educational system. Tunisia committed to the institutionalisation of ICT in all aspects of the economy and has played a leading role in this area. In order to introduce and sustain the integration of ICT in higher education, Tunisia has implemented a multi-dimensional strategy based on modernising its infrastructure. Thanks to huge investments of the World Bank and the commitment of other international stakeholders such as UNICEF, Tunisia is developing professional training of teachers and administrators to reform the education system in the country, still considered to be too much focused on the quantitative

approach instead of the qualitative one.[451]

Geographically speaking, the closest cooperation partners in mobility projects are Maghreb countries, especially involving Morocco, with which Tunisia has a well-grounded students' exchange programme.[452] Starting from the year 2002, Tunisia has officially joined the "Tempus programme" and took part in the former Erasmus Mundus programme. From 2007 to 2013, Tunisia benefited from 17 Erasmus Mundus projects and about 1 026 scholarships were granted to the Tunisian students and staff. Following the results of the 2019-2020 Erasmus+ calls for proposals, the number of capacity building projects in which Tunisia participates is 15 (5 Structural Measures projects and 10 Joint projects)[453] with a total budget of almost 13 million euro. A total of 94 "International Credit Mobility"[454] projects were selected, leading to the implementation of a total of 1,311 mobilities. With regards to the ICM projects in the period 2015-2019, Tunisia was involved in 6,048 mobilities, mainly carried out by the Universities of Carthage, Sfax and Tunis El Manar.[455] As far as the mobility of students is concerned, which represented within the same period 63% of all mobilities,[456] some Universities stated that among the problems met during the mobility period, students reported being unable to pass the exams included in the Learning Agreement.[457] As far

448 Ibidem
449 Ibidem
450 Ibidem
451 Interview with Laurent Le Danois, Attaché de Coopération Santé, Education, Enseignement supérieur, Delegation of the European Union to Tunisia - European External Action Service (EEAS)
452 The so-called "Ibn Khaldun" programme
453 Structural projects provide tailor-made technical support for institutional, administrative and growth-enhancing reforms process at national level, from preparation and design to their implementation. Joint projects consist of activities performed within a consortium by members coming from different countries.
454 As acronym, ICM KA107 Programme
455 https://ue-tunisie.org/projet-192-7-241_erasmus-creating-opportunities-for-tunisia-across-europe.html (Last access February 2021)
456 Ibidem
457 Focus groups results

as the gender gap in mobility is concerned, in Tunisia there is a downtrend. Indeed, around 2 out of 3 students are female. The same tendency is registered in the participation of ICM projects.[458] However, despite the enrolment rate of Tunisian women in higher education is higher than that of men, their unemployment rate is more than twice.[459]

Universities in Tunisia enjoy partial financial autonomy about the management of their own expenses and about donors and external grants' funding. They support themselves mainly by State transfers, fees and research grants, and enjoy a wide freedom of choice in the design of new curricula upon preliminary authorisation by the Ministry of higher education and the approval of the Council of Universities. Universities have indeed the opportunity to choose their key partners under the legal supervision of the Ministry thanks to the collaboration of the Directorate General of International Cooperation. For instance, the Ministry supports the universities in legal issues related to the drafting of Inter-Institutional Agreements. At the same time, the Ministry boosts the mobilities at university level by designing the relevant programmes, by disseminating them and making them reaching out to other institutions. This active collaboration

between the Ministry and the universities is a concrete demonstration of the presence of both top-down and bottom-up approaches. Despite this commitment at national level to increase the attractiveness of the system at the international level, these actions do not translate into a real formal recognition[460] for the local staff that took part in an international project abroad or a mobility in the framework of the ICM.[461] At the academic level, the staff involved in international activities can at least benefit from a professional reward in terms of prestigious publications and attendance to international projects.

Tunisia is a key partner of the Erasmus+ programme (especially within the framework of Capacity Building actions) also due to the 20 million euro of extra budget[462] guaranteed between the years 2017 and 2020 in order to further boost cooperation with the country.[463] In addition to Erasmus, one of the best practices performed so far and worth mentioning, is the initiative called "MobiDoc",[464] which is one of the flagship activities of the PASRI programme (Project to Support the Research and Innovation System) and managed by the Tunisian public organisation ANPR (National Agency for Promoting Scientific Research) under the supervision

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458 Interview with Prof. Hedi Belhadjsalah, President of the University of Monastir

459 https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20201201123459402#:~:text=The%20 participation%20rate%20of%20Tunisian,high%2C%20according%20to%20official%20figures.&text=In%20 Tunisia%2C%20two%20out%20of,girls%2C%E2%80%9D%20Khalbous%20pointed%20out (Last access February 2021)

460 Focus groups results

461 Although there is a document certifying the activities carried out abroad, this does not lead to direct benefits for the staff who have carried out a mobility abroad, for example there is no career advancement involved for the staff who took part in an international project in the EU

462 This extra amount of funds originates from the need to support Tunisia in the Research and Innovation sector.

463 Interview with Laurent Le Danois

464 This program is financed by the EU in order to improve the economic performance in Tunisia, which is partly doomed by the structural weak partnership between the industry and the university, in Research and Innovation.

of the Ministry of higher education and Scientific Research.[465] The main aim of "MobiDoc" is to set up a mobility mechanism for medical researchers likely to conduct research in pharmaceutical labs and companies.[466] Thanks to the involvement of private enterprises, students get the chance to face the needs of the job market and to find solutions to industrial challenges. Therefore, the European Union's strategy is focused on boosting the Tunisian job market: by investing more funds on academic activities, mobilities and staff training, the EU seeks to reinforce the flexibility of the Tunisian system in this domain. Despite the progress made so far, however, in the last decade the results achieved are still insufficient in terms of employability rates of graduates because of the rigidity of the job market,[467] more precisely the mismatch between university education and the job market. Improving the quality of the educational system, and the performance of the Research and Innovation sector are key elements to meet this challenge. It is within this framework that the priority axes of a new EU support programme for education, mobility, research and innovation (EMORI)[468] were established.[469] Even though Tunisia is committed on Research and Innovation to trigger its economic system,[470] the latter is facing a huge unprecedented crisis, nowhere to be found in the history of the country.

Geographically speaking, even if the first destination country for Tunisian students going abroad is still France (there are around 15,000 yearly registered students), lately it has been followed by new destinations such as Canada (3,000 students), Germany (4,000 students), the United States (for example with the Fulbright programme), Japan and China that are recently boosting their bilateral cooperation with Tunisia.[471] This shows the Tunisian HE Ministry's will to diversify its connections in terms of partnerships for University Cooperation, but also to widen up Tunisian students' linguistic skills to new scenarios.[472]

An additional core asset for Tunisian development is the African continent. Tunisia is becoming a "destination country" in the North African region for the Sub-Saharan continent despite the fact that the country has been facing various challenges in the last decade. In recent years, Tunisian authorities are supporting cooperation in the higher education sector with Africa in order to export Tunisian experience and expertise.[473] Specifically, with African partners, Tunisia is enhancing mobility opportunities for students, teachers and administrative staff both incoming and outgoing, in order to become a hub for higher education in the African Continent.[474] Nowadays, around 40 African countries benefit from scholarships to come and study in Tunisia and around

465 Interview with Laurent Le Danois
466 Ibidem
467 Ibidem
468 This program aims at curbing poverty by improving access to a quality education system and socioeconomic integration, the performance of the educational sector, by stimulating youth employability and entrepreneurship through the promotion of mobility and the evaluation of applied Research and Innovation.
469 Interview with Laurent Le Danois
470 Ibidem
471 Interview with Malek Kochlef
472 Ibidem
473 https://www.businessnews.com.tn/article,520,74350,3 (Last access February 2021)
474 Interview with Malek Kochlef

1,300 incoming international students every year go to study in Tunisia.[475] Tunisia aims to become the first destination for incoming students in the African continent and to reach this goal, a new Agency named Agence D'Accompagnement des Étudiants vers la Tunisie (AAET)[476] has been set up with the objective to support international students for the visa process, logistics but also with the mission of promoting the country abroad. Among the initiatives put in place by Tunisia in this regard, there is the recently[477] established Franco-Tunisian University for Africa and the Mediterranean (UFTAM),[478] that aim to design a regional higher education hub to train future generations of entrepreneurs and senior managers from Africa and the Mediterranean. The high attractiveness of the initiative comes from the fact that at the end of their course, students will be able to obtain 3 diplomas, a Tunisian diploma, a French diploma and a Franco-Tunisian diploma labelled UFTAM. Furthermore, the diplomas issued by UFTAM have international recognition. In this policy frame enlargement, the collaboration with Gulf countries is also included. Tunisia and Qatar moved closer together after 2011, and between 2011 and 2013, cooperation between these two countries increased in several sectors: economy, social and political development, military, and security.[479] Several teachers and professors from Tunisia are hosted by

Gulf universities and important exchanges of PhD students[480] take place regularly from Tunisia to the Gulf, with a concrete risk of "brain drain".[481] In terms of challenges and perspectives, the interviewed universities have expressed interest in developing mobility projects resulting in Double-Degrees with other international universities. However, their constant need to have more financial and human resources to carry out more mobility activities abroad is also regularly highlighted. Indeed, except for the Erasmus+ programme and some ministerial programmes, which mostly concern engineering schools, there are not many instruments of this kind. As for the impact of the EU cooperation with Tunisia, H2020 and Erasmus+ remain key pillars and the new generations seem to be more aware of and open to the benefits of these new international opportunities.

As regards Research and Innovation, Tunisia has been the first country in the Southern Mediterranean to sign a Scientific and Technological agreement with the EU.[482] Currently, since 2016, it is the only African and the only Arab country associated with H2020.[483] Tunisia benefited also from the Policy Support Facility (PSF) Specific Support[484] under H2020. Tunisia also plays an active role in the two Euro-Mediterranean initiatives, the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area

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475 Ibidem. The number used to be higher (around 1 500 students) before the pandemic.
476 Ibidem
477 This University was set up in 2019; it is a consortium of 4 French universities, Aix Marseille University, Côte d'Azur University, Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne University and Paris Saclay University as well as 3 Tunisian universities namely the University of Tunis, the University of Carthage and the University of Tunis El Manar.
478 More info at: https://uftam.net (Last access February 2021)
479 https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/67703 (Last access February 2021)
480 https://m.gulf-times.com/content/pdf/Dailynewspaper/Main2020_11_16425031.PDF (Last access February 2021)
481 Interview with Malek Kochlef
482 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:L:2004:037:TOC (Last access February 2021)
483 https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/international-cooperation/tunisia_en (Last access February 2021)
484 https://rio.jrc.ec.europa.eu/policy-support-facility/specific-support-tunisia (Last access February 2021)

(PRIMA)[485] and Research and Innovation for blue jobs and growth in the Mediterranean Area (BLUEMED)[486]. With regards to H2020, the country can rely on an outstanding group of Tunisian researchers with first-rate know-how to manage the scientific projects already financed by this programme.[487]

However, H2020 seems to be inaccessible for the majority of Tunisian universities because of the low success rate and the high competitiveness.[488]

Despite new competing universities in the cooperation sector and despite the visa restrictions[489] that discourages exchanges and mobility in South-North cooperation, European universities remain the priority destination for Tunisian universities. Furthermore, today we are witnessing an enlargement of the participation of small Tunisian universities in European programmes, such as the Universities of Gabès, Gafsa and Ezzitouna.[490] The Erasmus+ programme remains the priority and most accessible instrument for cooperation, not only at international but also at national level among the universities of the country.[491] Through Erasmus+ projects a large number of Tunisian universities,[492] and in some cases even all Tunisian universities,[493] have been involved in solving structural problems through ad hoc actions focused on improving attractiveness and employment skills, governance and the quality of the university system. This same effort was also made by the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research through recent funding from the World Bank, which appears to be a key stakeholder for the country.[494] Despite this, an imbalance in incoming and outgoing mobility flows persists to the detriment of Tunisian universities,[495] especially for exchanges for study purposes. There is still a long way to go in order to meet the International standards for HE Tunisian Institutions. However, the strong commitment of the Ministry of higher education and Scientific Research in improving recognition and international standards in the field, as proven by its Strategic Plan's priorities, by the adoption of the Bologna Process since the 2008, and the establishment of National Evaluation, Quality Assurance & Accreditation Authority, seemed to boost the internationalisation process in the last decade. Furthermore, because of the visa constraints, the current economic crisis and the political situation characterised by frequent changes in the government and affecting long term strategies, academics are pushed to move abroad and not to come back and the international attractiveness of the country also seems to be suffering from the recent events.

485 https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/research-area/environment/prima_en (Last access February 2021)
486 www.bluemed-initiative.eu (Last access February 2021)
487 Interview with Laurent Le Danois
488 Focus groups results
489 Ibidem
490 Interviews with Hmaid Ben Aziza, Former President of the University of Tunis and UNIMED Secretary General and with Hedi Belhadjsalah
491 Interview with Hedi Belhadjsalah
492 http://www.tuned-project.eu/ (Last access February 2021)
493 SAGESSE project coordinated by UNIMED and involving all Tunisian Universities http://www.sagesseproject.eu/en (Last access February 2021)
494 http://www.anpr.tn/projet-de-modernisation-de-lenseignement-superieur-en-soutien-a-lemployabilite-promesse-tn-programme-dappui-a-la-qualite/ (Last access February 2021)
495 Focus group results

2.3 Mobility flows in the Mediterranean region

In order to investigate mobility flows, data were collected and mobility flows were analysed focusing on gender, type (credit or degree, research or teaching), direction of flows (incoming/outgoing, North-South, South-North, South-South), level of education (bachelor, master, PhD) or academic position (from assistant lecturer to full professor), the field of study or the working field, the duration of the mobility and the funding schemes. Data were collected for the last 5 academic years (from 2014-2015 to 2018-2019) and among 42 countries of the region. Data are presented for each country, highlighting the main national trends and the most interesting results on how mobility flows relate to each national context. In the framework of the current study, it was not possible to collect mobility data on Israel.

Algeria

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the related constraints, data collection for mobility flows in Algeria has been particularly valuable thanks to the high commitment of all participating universities and their previous experience in mobility data collection. The universities involved in the sample filled out the survey, with the information available at the time of the collection. Some common trends for the 3 categories have been identified in the following areas: the main source of mobility funding is by far the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MESRS); France remains the main destination country but it no longer holds the monopoly; the number of people involved in mobility (in both directions) increased over the 5 academic years but incoming flows are significantly lower than outgoing flows.

Students' mobility flows

Outgoing students' mobility has recorded a doubling of numbers between 2014/2015 and 2016/2017. Even though mainly focused on France (although data remain stable along the 5 academic years concerned), mobility to other European countries, such as Spain and Italy, increased and shows a punctual strategy for geographical diversification. Outgoing mobility is mostly female mobility and for credits, while incoming mobility is mostly male mobility and almost entirely for a degree.

Students' outgoing mobility
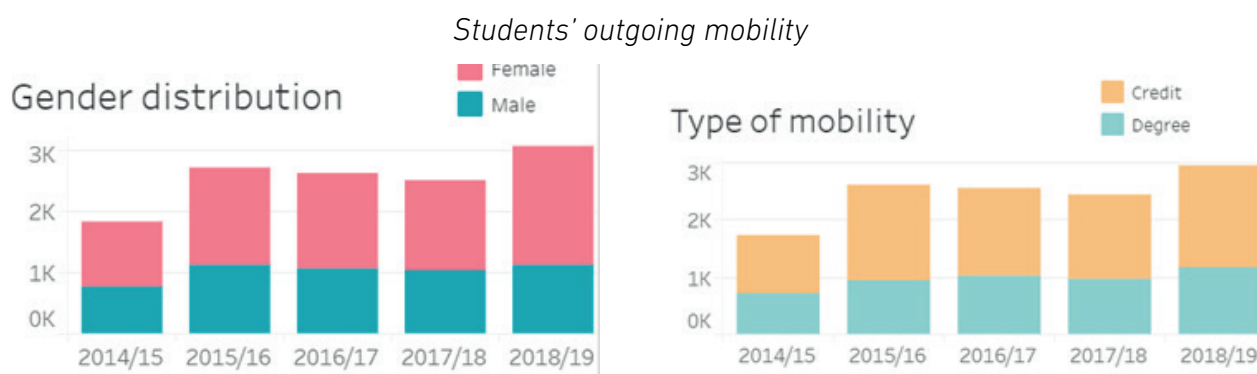
The scientific field is a common trend between incoming and outgoing mobility: students are mostly involved in science, engineering and manufacturing. PhD students are by far the most engaged in outgoing mobility, due to the existence of specific scholarship programmes for thesis finalisation in many Algerian HEIs.

Incoming and outgoing students mobility common trends

Students distribution

Teachers' mobility flows

The main destination country for teachers is still France, but South-South mobility is raising and reflects a national trend, boosted bilateral scholarships programmes with Tunisia and Jordan, among others. It is worth noting that, over the five years, mobility towards Turkey has tripled. This evolution was confirmed by the qualitative analysis, as the visa issue was mentioned as an interpretation key (visa is not needed to enter Turkey). Outgoing mobility is almost exclusively for research activities, including thesis finalisation support for lower academic positions through specific scholarship programmes and concerns all teachers' categories.

Teachers' outgoing mobility
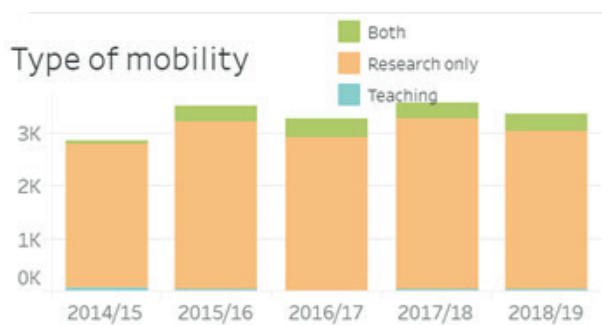
When it comes to the teaching area, trends between incoming and outgoing mobility are common as shown by the following graphs. However, differences are detected in relation to destinations: while science represents the main scientific field for the mobility to France, social sciences are the main scientific fields for the exchanges with Turkey. The number of females is always lower than that of males, but it has increased over the last years.

Incoming and outgoing teachers' mobility common trends
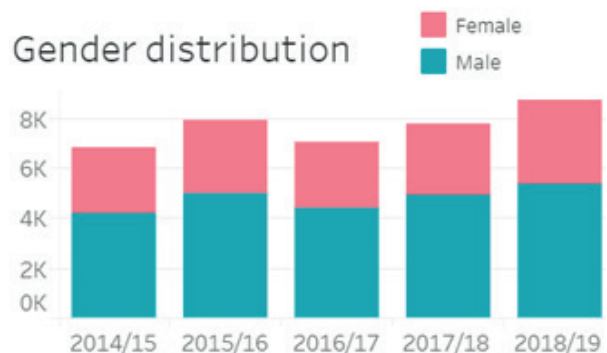
Administrative staff mobility flows

Administrative outgoing mobility has particularly increased over the years. The male/female ratio remains almost constant and outgoing mobility is very well balanced. The exchanges mainly last less than two weeks and are mostly financed by the Ministry of higher education and Scientific Research.

Administrative' outgoing mobility
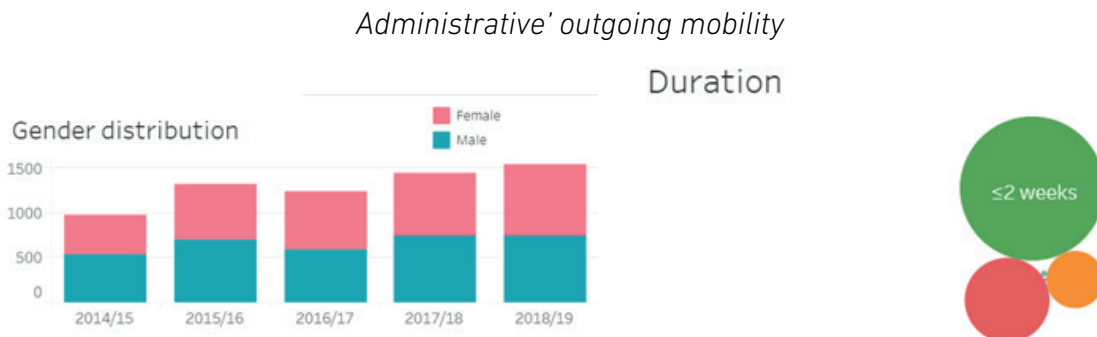
For both incoming and outgoing mobility, the working area is linked to the financial and administration area. The outgoing mobility of administrative staff is towards France and the Southern Mediterranean countries such as Tunisia, Turkey, and Morocco. On the other hand, the country of origin of almost all incoming administrative staff is France.

Incoming and outgoing administrative mobility common trends
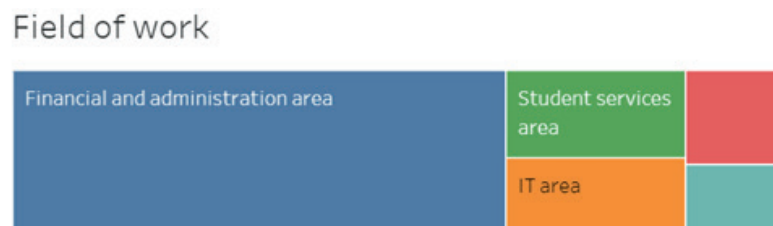
Egypt

Data collection in Egypt allowed us to have a general and comprehensive overview of the mobility flows involving Egyptian HEIs. Despite the fact that not all the universities included in the sample have been able to provide data on mobility flows, mainly because of the lack of authorisation from the Ministry of higher education, the information collected confirmed that Egypt still has an attractive higher education system, especially for the students coming from neighbouring countries. The analysis also proved that mobility of both students and academic staff has a prominent position, if compared with the mobility of administrative staff.

Students' mobility flows

Egypt has robust South-South mobility flows, in particular with regard to incoming students. The first three countries most involved in students' mobility in the period 2014-2019 are Palestine, Algeria and Tunisia. The European country with the largest students' mobility flow involving Egypt in the same period is the United Kingdom, followed by Belgium and France. Students are mostly undergraduates who move for a degree. This explains the duration of mobilities, which mostly last more than two years.

Students' incoming and outgoing mobility common trends
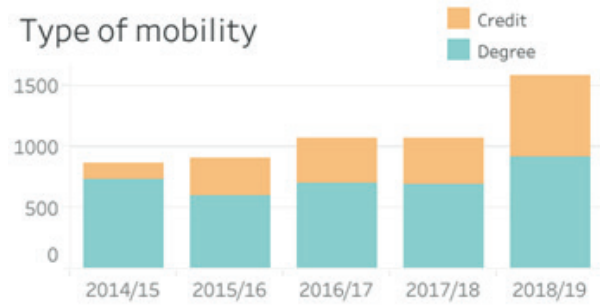
Data concerning the field of study of students' mobility are of particularly interesting: three of the four main fields of study are in the humanities and social sciences. In terms of gender balance, there is an increase in female mobilities which in 2018/2019 constituted more than the half of students' mobilities, especially for outgoing flows.

Students' incoming and outgoing mobility common trends
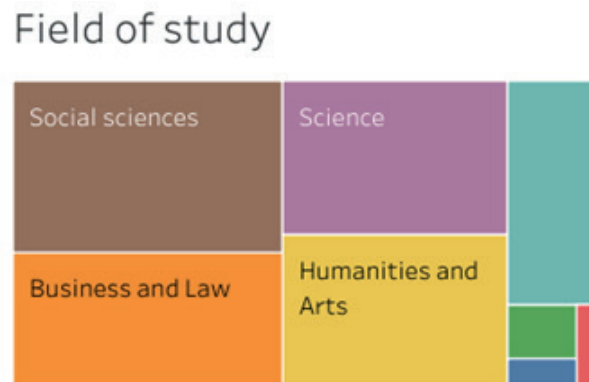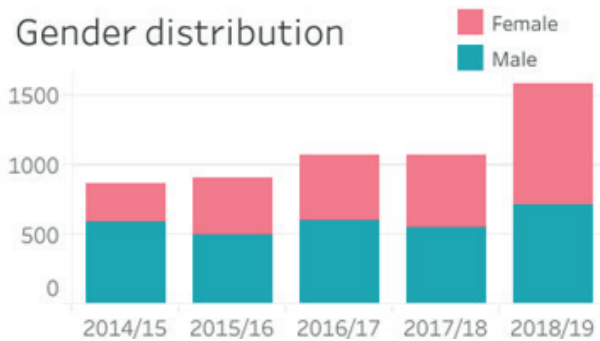
Teachers' mobility flows

Data shows that South-North mobility is more developed, in both directions, than South-South mobility. The countries most involved in teachers' mobility are Germany, Italy, France, Spain and Belgium. The number of teachers involved during the period 2015-2019 in the South-South exchanges is higher for incoming mobility than for outgoing mobility. In terms of numbers, the flows related to research remained constant, while mobility for teaching have fluctuated over the years.

Teachers' incoming and outgoing mobility common trends

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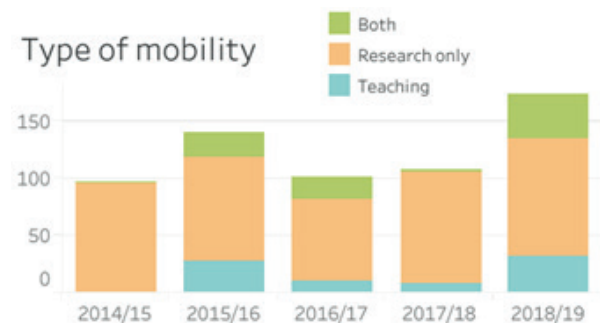
Both for incoming and outgoing flows, mobilities in hard sciences are predominant. In particular, most of the exchanges are in science studies, engineering and health. However, it is worth stressing that mobilities in humanities, arts, and social sciences represent a good portion of exchanges.

The main source of funding for outgoing mobility is the Ministry of Education, while the remaining outgoing mobilities are funded by other programmes than those offered by the European Commission and/or bilateral cooperation. With regards to incoming mobility, the main source of funds are again other programmes.

Teachers' outgoing mobility
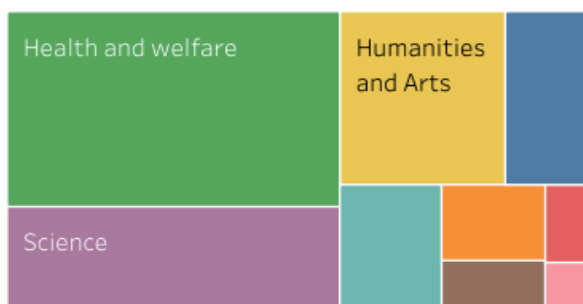
Administrative mobility flows

With regard to administrative staff mobility, data reveal that during the period 2014-2019 almost all incoming mobilities came from European countries, in particular from Italy, France and Spain. This means that there is a majority of North-South mobilities with the only exception of mobility flows from Jordan. The same trends are confirmed also for the outgoing mobilities, whose most common destination countries are Italy, Spain, France and Lebanon. In terms of gender distribution, only one third of the administrative staff involved in mobility are women. The duration of administrative staff exchanges is usually less than one week.

Administrative incoming mobility
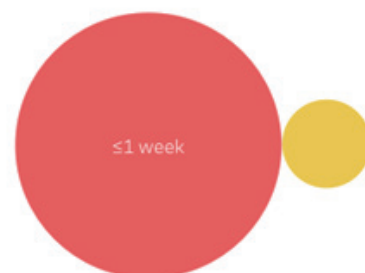
Jordan

The data collection process in Jordan has been smooth and supported by all actors involved. Overall, data highlight an increase in the exchanges from 2014/2015 to 2018/2019 and the importance of the European Commission in contributing to mobility in terms of financing and geographical destinations.

Students' mobility flows

Students' mobility flows show similar characteristics in terms of numbers, students' distribution and gender distribution, for what concerns both incoming and outgoing mobility. Mobilities in and from Jordan are mostly performed by undergraduate students, with a significant increase (especially for outgoing students) from 2014/2015 to 2018/2019. While in 2014/2015 most of the students on the move were male, in 2018/2019 most of them were female, with a significant increase over the years.

Incoming and outgoing students' mobility common trends
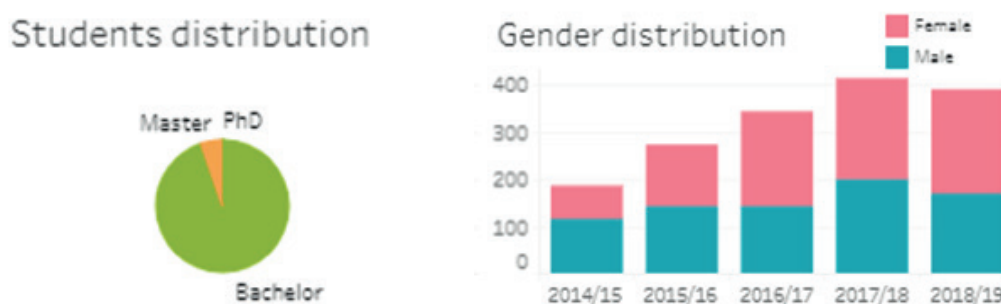
Incoming mobility is mostly for a degree, with a duration of an average of 2 years. On the contrary, outgoing mobility is mostly for credits, with a duration of about 6 months.

Incoming students' mobility   *Outgoing students' mobility*
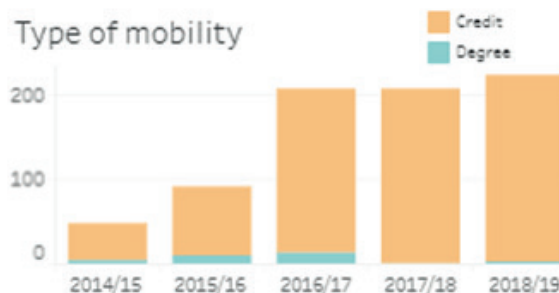
Incoming students moving to Jordan are mainly from Palestine, and then from Belgium, Germany and Italy. Outgoing students travel mostly to Europe (Belgium, Spain, Germany, United Kingdom and Italy) and to Turkey, which is rising as a destination country in the region.

Teachers' mobility flows

Most of the mobilities of the academic staff, both incoming and outgoing, are funded primarily by the European Commission, and last less than two weeks in the majority of cases. Overall, numbers grew over the years, showing the same trend as for students in terms of increasing international exposure. The rise of mobility is also consistent with the

higher number of European funded projects involving Jordan over the years. In terms of gender distribution of academics, data show a clear majority of male academics involved in mobility. Although the percentage of women increased in 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 both in incoming and outgoing mobility, there is still a gender gap, with a significantly higher number of males.

Incoming and outgoing teachers' mobility common trends

As regards the distribution of roles, data show that incoming mobility is mostly performed by lecturers, while outgoing mobility is performed in almost the total of flows by Jordanian assistant professors, associate professors and full professors. It is worth noting that mobility data confirm the role Jordan plays in the region. Incoming academics come from Europe with a very wide geographical distribution, and from neighbouring countries such as Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt and Turkey. Similarly, outgoing teachers move towards several European countries (with a slight majority towards Spain, Portugal, Italy and Germany) and towards Egypt, Lebanon and with outstanding numbers to Turkey, which is rising as a destination country. Both incoming and outgoing mobility flows are mainly related to cooperation in hard sciences, namely Science and Engineering, with an increase of exchanges related to Business and Law, Health and Welfare.

Incoming teachers' mobility | *Outgoing teachers'' mobility*
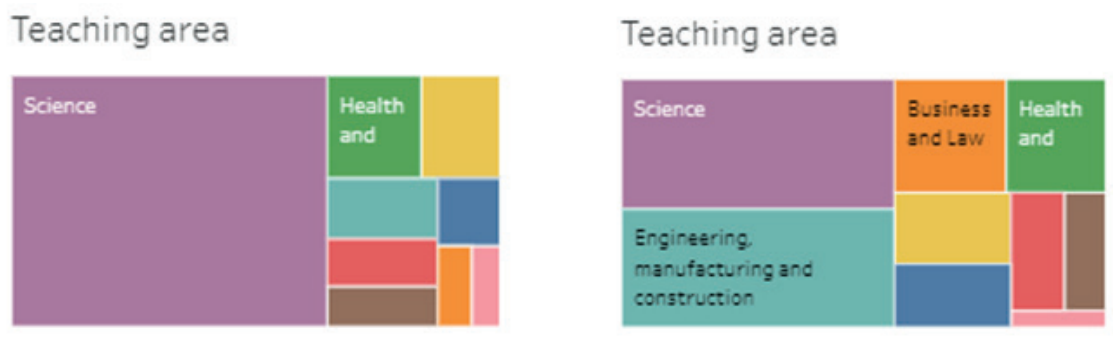
Administrative mobility flows

As regards administrative mobility, trends are consistent with students' and teachers' mobility flows. Both incoming and outgoing mobility are financed almost totally by the European Commission (administrative staff mostly perform mobilities in the framework of Erasmus+ projects), the duration is of about a week (short exchanges) and the main areas of interest are finance and administration as well as student services. The gender distribution of administrative staff on the move is relatively even, showing a good percentage of females engaged in administrative work which had the opportunity to have a mobility

experience. Administrative staff exchanges occur with Europe but also with Turkey and other neighbouring countries, i.e., Lebanon, Algeria and Palestine.

Incoming and outgoing administrative mobility common trends
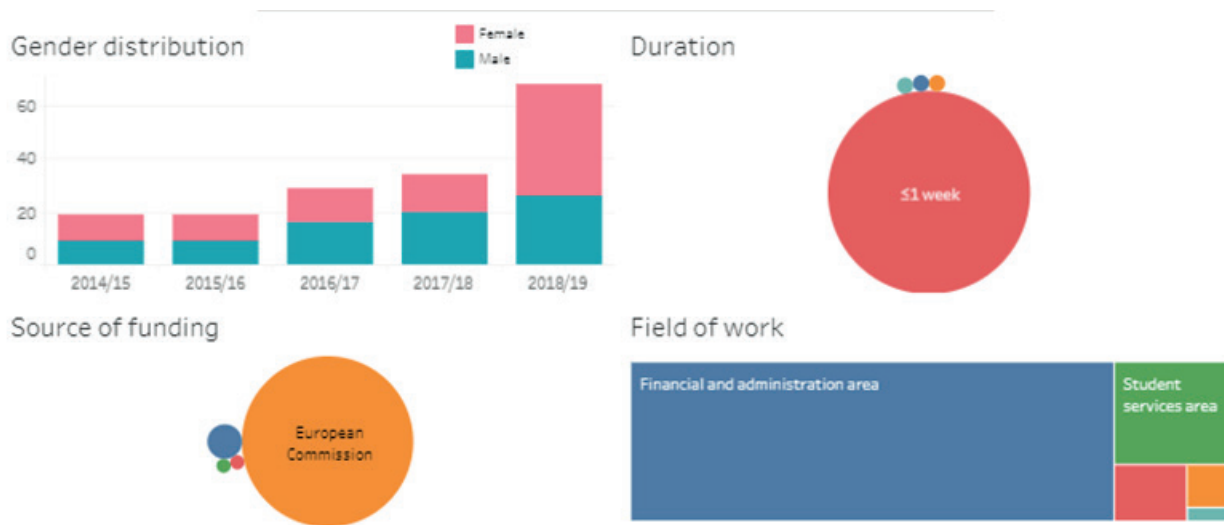
Lebanon

Data collection for mobility flows in Lebanon was particularly challenging, despite the commitment shown by the participating universities and the strategies put in place to support the partners. The country has been severely affected by a number of factors: the lockdown for the COVID-19 virus, the blast in the Lebanese harbour which has deeply affected the functioning of some institutions, and the scarce information available for the whole period of the investigation. Moreover, additional factors influenced the analysis: the high diversification in the higher education sector makes it more difficult to generalise trends at the national level; the analysis does not involve countries outside of Europe, thus underrepresenting other cooperation arrangements, such as those with the USA. Having said that, data collected still show very interesting trends for the country, especially in relation to the last academic years 2017/2018 and 2018/2019.

Students' mobility flows

Students' mobility trends show similar elements in relation to both incoming and outgoing mobility: exchanges occur mostly for credits (with a duration of about six months) but there is also a significant number of mobilities for a degree (with an average duration of one year) which is consistent with the delivery of double diplomas with European institutions. Mobility is financed mostly within the framework of bilateral cooperation agreements, secondly by international organisations, private foundations and the European Commission. It is noteworthy that the gender distribution of students on the move is balanced, with both male and female students engaged in mobility over the years.

Incoming and outgoing students' mobility common trends
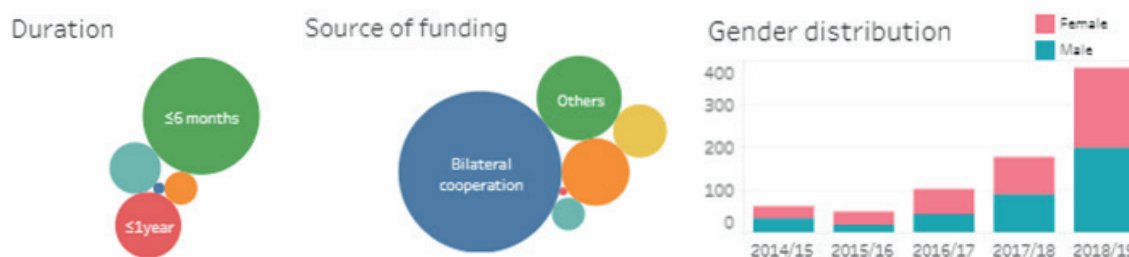
Students involved in incoming mobility are mostly at the bachelor and masters level. Students involved in outgoing mobility are mostly at the masters level, with a significant number of PhD students engaged in exchanges. Due to historical ties, France is the with the highest mobility rate, both incoming and outgoing. Other countries with which exchanges are frequent are Belgium, Italy and Germany, in line with the consolidated relations of Lebanon with some European countries.

Teachers' mobility flows

Teachers' mobility flows show some similarities between incoming and outgoing trends: the duration of exchanges is in the majority of cases of about a month, and main financing sources of exchanges are private foundations and other bodies such as international organisations or regional actors. In terms of academic mobility, European funded projects seem to have a limited impact. In terms of gender distribution, an imbalance towards male academics is shown for both incoming and outgoing mobility, despite the number of females involved slowly increasing over the years.

Incoming and outgoing teachers' mobility common trends

Teachers involved in incoming mobility come mostly from France, Italy, Belgium, Germany and Spain. Among the neighbouring countries, mobilities have been tracked from Jordan and Tunisia. As far as outgoing mobility is concerned, France emerges again as the preferred destination, followed again by Italy, Belgium, Germany and Spain. Interestingly enough, a number of exchanges have been tracked with Austria, the Netherlands and Sweden, confirming the geographical diversification related to the participation into cooperation projects in the framework of European funded projects. In terms of South–South cooperation, outgoing mobilities exists with Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco and with Turkey. Another element worth mentioning is that outgoing academic mobility occurred in the past 5 years in quite a wide range of fields, which seems to be in line with the different priorities of each higher education institution.

Teaching area

Administrative mobility flows

Regarding administrative mobility from and to Lebanon, we must start by saying that administrative mobility data showed that numbers are significantly low in comparison with students and teachers mobilities. This is in line with the qualitative analysis which highlighted how administrative mobility is less facilitated by institutions. The majority of exchanges, both incoming and outgoing, lasted on average either a month or a week, were funded by private foundations, the European Commission and other organisations and were related mostly to internationalisation.

Incoming administrative mobility
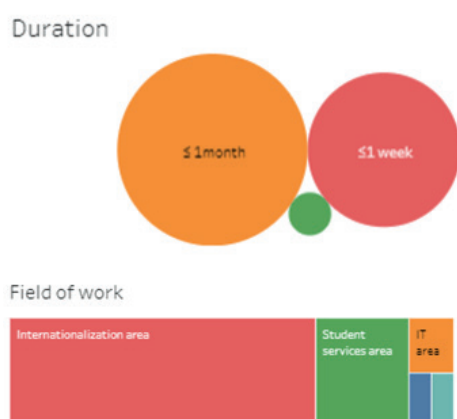
Outgoing administrative mobility
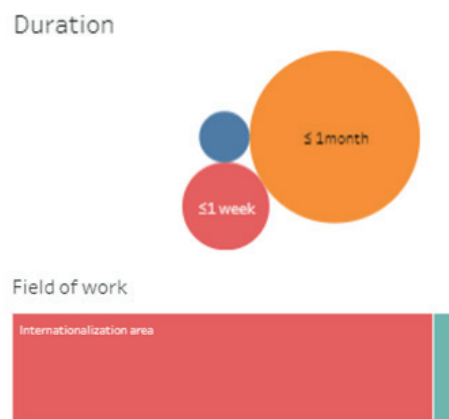
In terms of geographical distribution, it is worth noting that outgoing mobility of administrative staff is directed, to Europe (e.g., France, Italy, Spain, UK, Germany) but also to neighbouring counties, such as Turkey, Tunisia and Jordan.

Libya

When it comes to the quantitative analysis of the Libyan case, it is worth mentioning that the data collected reflect the challenges that we faced on a daily basis during the implementation of Erasmus+ project activities in the country. Despite the fact that all the selected universities actively participated and contributed to the analysis, structural problems should be taken into account when it comes to the data analysis. Electricity cuts and a feeble internet connection both affected Libyan universities contribution. Similarly, since no digitalisation process was put in place in order to record mobility data, these are lacking for the first academic years of the analysis (2014/2015 and 2015/2016). COVID-19 has also widely affected the reactiveness of Libyan universities, considering that since

March 2020 institutional activities have slowed down and teaching activities practically stopped due to a decision of the Ministry of Education.

Students' mobility flows

Both outgoing and incoming mobility of students were widely affected by the armed clashes that broke out in the country in 2016, making it hard to apply for and obtain a visa, and negatively affecting the security situation in the country, thus reducing mobilities to and from Libya.

Incoming and outgoing students' mobility common trends
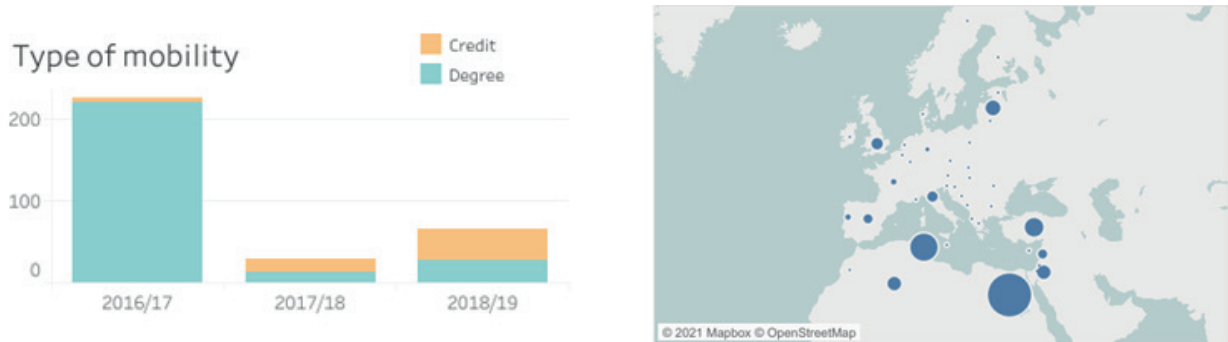
The decrease in the number of mobilities is dramatically clear, as well as the fact that exchanges were mainly with neighbouring countries (Egypt and Tunisia) or towards countries not requiring a visa for access (e.g., Turkey). Unlike the other countries in the region, mobility appears to occur mainly for degrees, with a huge support by the Ministry of Education. This is also confirmed by the duration of exchanges reported: in the majority of cases, mobilities last longer than 2 years and are related to the bachelor level of education.

Incoming and outgoing students' mobility common trends

Teachers' mobility flows

Teachers' outgoing mobility
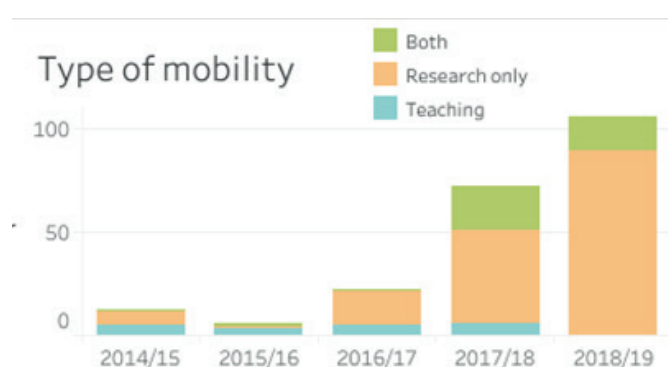
Unlike what emerged for students' flows, teachers' outgoing mobility constantly increased in the past years, probably due to the fact that mobility of academic staff has been favoured by the many Erasmus+ involving a large number of Libyan HEIs. This is particularly relevant because it confirms that Erasmus+ played a decisive role in guaranteeing short-term mobilities (the absolute majority for more than 2 weeks) in addition to the constant role played by the Ministry of Education in supporting international exchanges. We can comfortably say that Erasmus+ has been crucial in providing additional international opportunities for teachers, generating an impact above all on younger professors (associate professors, assistant professors and even lecturers): most likely, due to a better knowledge of the English language compared to older colleagues, they have proven to be ready to fully exploit international opportunities.

Teachers' outgoing mobility
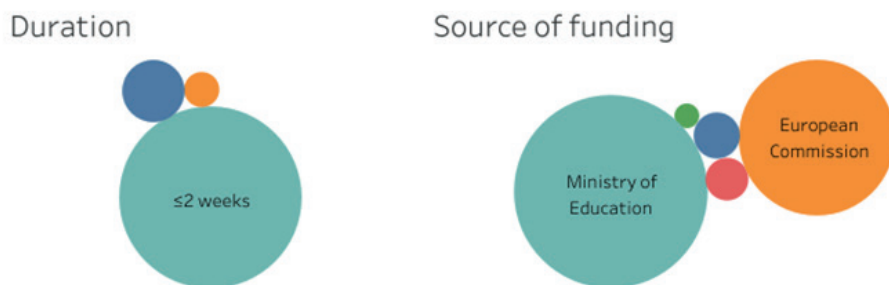
Teachers' mobility

Administrative mobility flows

The issue of language skills and lack thereof, is strictly interrelated with administrative staff mobilities, significantly affecting the total number of mobilities, extremely low compared to teacher and student mobility. Moreover, there is an evident gender gap resulting in only few female administrative staff members accessing internationalisation opportunities.

Gender distribution
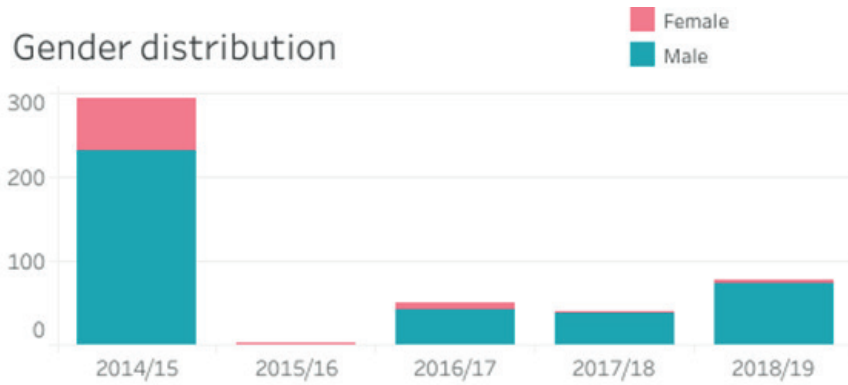
Interestingly enough, bilateral cooperation seems to play a decisive role in guaranteeing opportunities for administrative staff mobility, if compared with the impact of the Erasmus+ programme or the Ministry of Education (as it was the case for students and teachers). The universities interviewed stated that, for the academic year 2014/2015, specific bilateral cooperation arrangements with Jordanian HEIs targeted specifically administrative exchanges, while cooperation with Spain, Italy and Portugal was pursued mostly through the Erasmus+ programme

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Source of funding
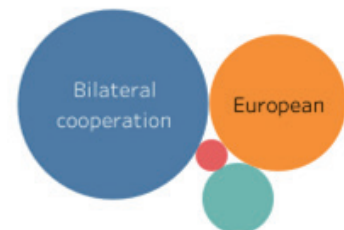
Mauritania

Mauritania has a particular profile in the study. Due to the characteristics of its higher education system, for the sake of representativeness, 2 universities have been involved in the sample for data collection. Out of these 2 universities, the private one has not yet implemented any mobility, neither outgoing nor incoming. Even if the trends presented below represent a partial picture of the situation of the mobility to and from Mauritania (due to incomplete information available at the time of data collection), the emerging trends correspond to the main information collected during the interviews and the desk research. Regarding the last five academic years, teachers' mobility is twice as much as students' and still remains very modest. The main source of funding is the Ministry of higher education, but when it comes to teachers, bilateral cooperation is another important sponsor of mobility. The results do not allow any possible statistic for the administrative staff category.

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Students' mobility flows

As shown in the qualitative analysis, the main destination countries are France, Morocco and Tunisia, due to the historical bilateral cooperation that Mauritania had with them.

Students' outgoing mobility

Mobility mainly involves master students in science. Although the number of students involved remains constant over time, gender distribution fluctuates without a clear trend.

Students' mobility
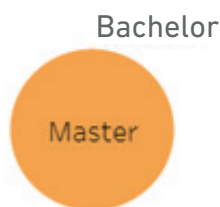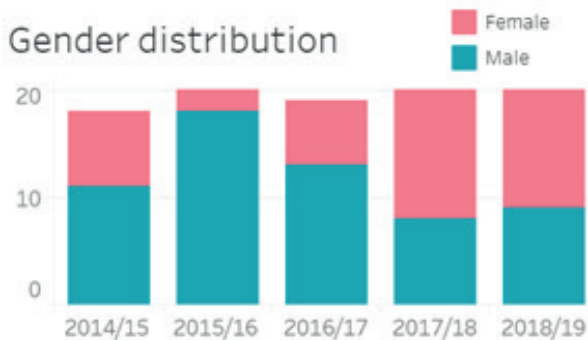
Teachers' mobility flows

As it is for students' mobility, the main destination countries for teachers' mobility are Tunisia, France, Morocco and Algeria, confirming the specific existing relationships with the Maghreb countries.

Teachers' outgoing mobility

The two mobility directions are well balanced, and exchanges engage teachers mainly from the Southern Mediterranean area and, in a few cases, teachers from Spain and France. In 2018/2019, the number of teachers moving to Mauritania doubled compared to the previous years. In both directions, teachers' mobility concerns the fields of science and health and welfare, confirming interviews' results.

Teachers' incoming and outgoing mobility common trends
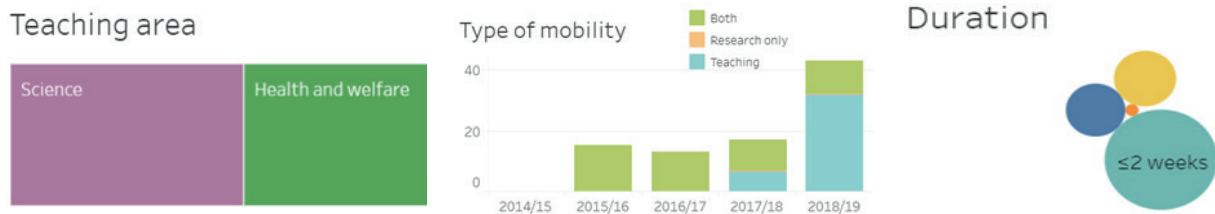
The main purpose of mobility is teaching. Although the majority of mobilities last less than two weeks, there are also many long-term exchanges (between three and six months and more than a year). In general, mobility records a robust gender unbalance with a higher number of males. More females are recorded in incoming exchanges.

Teachers' incoming and outgoing mobility common trends
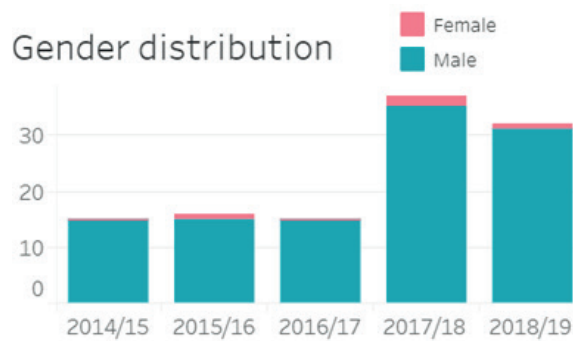
Morocco

In order to interpret Morocco's data on mobility flows, the many factors influencing their collection should be taken into account. Because of those factors, data only partially reflect the mobility flows of the country. Firstly, not all universities involved were able to provide the necessary information to carry out the analysis and others filled the survey only partially. The main reason was the current situation in relation to the COVID-19 crisis, which affected universities organisation and activities; another reason was the poor digitalisation process of mobility data. Having said that, the mobility flows recorded still highlight interesting trends, first of all that mobilities to and from Morocco from 2014/2015 to 2018/2019 kept increasing. Half of the overall exchanges involved students, followed by teachers and, to a lesser extent, by the administrative staff.

Students' mobility flows
Students moving to Morocco come mainly from Spain, France and Italy. This figure has remained constant throughout the five years, even though numbers have grown in volume. Compared to 2014/2015, in 2018/2019 the number of students more than doubled.

Students' incoming mobility

© 2021 Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

Incoming exchanges are for credits only. This is directly linked to the duration, with all mobilities lasting between six months and a year, a trend that has remained steady over the years. South-South mobility mainly involves PhD students. Mobilities received funding by the European Commission or through bilateral cooperation programmes.

Students' incoming mobility
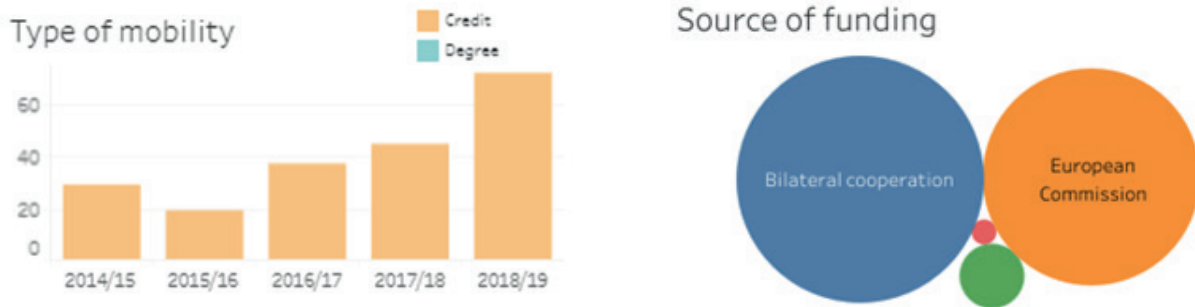
Teachers' mobility flows

The number of teachers in incoming mobility increased significantly from 2014/2015 to 2018/2019 and data show that teachers come mainly from Belgium, Germany, France and Turkey. The number of outgoing exchanges increased over the period under review. Still, the ratio between researchers and teachers remained constant.

Teachers' outgoing mobility

© 2021 Mapbox © OpenStreetMap
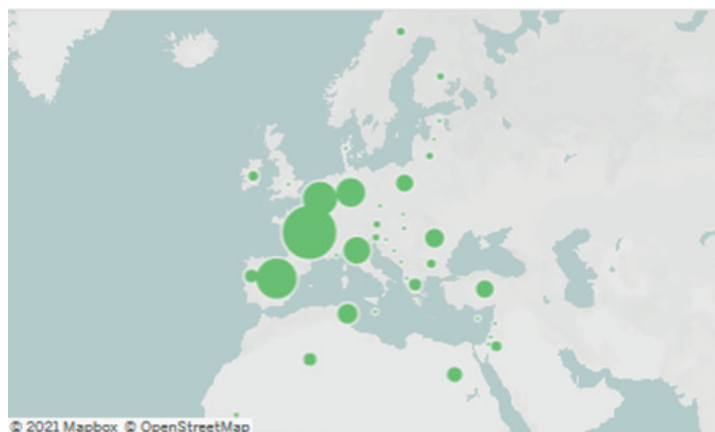
A breakdown of data related to incoming teachers shows a preponderance of full professors. Moroccan teachers mainly move to Europe, especially to Germany, France and Spain.

Teachers' incoming mobility

Teachers distribution

lecturer assistant lecturer

associate professor   assistant professor

full professor
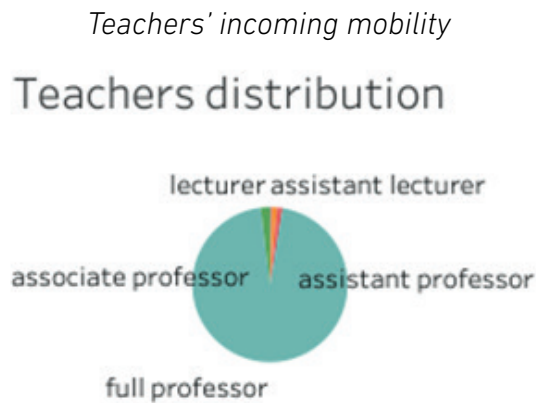
Almost all mobilities were very short and lasted less than two weeks. Bilateral Cooperation and the European Commission are the primary sources of funding.

Teachers' incoming mobility

Duration   Source of funding

≤2 weeks

Bilateral cooperation   European Commission
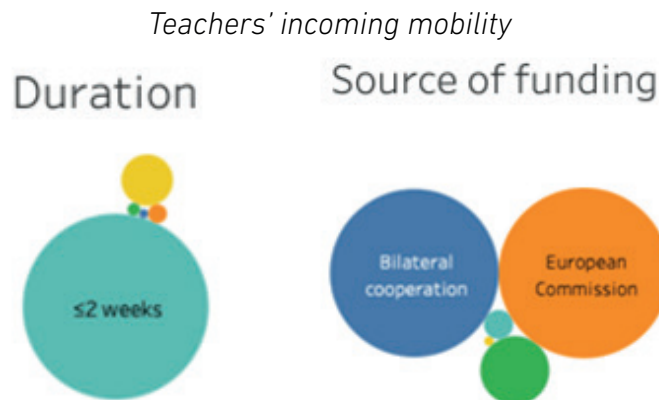
Administrative mobility flows

With regard to administrative staff mobilities, the number increased significantly from 2014/2015 to 2016/2017; then the number remained constant. Data reveal that incoming administrative staff come mainly from European countries such as Spain, France, Poland, Romania and the United Kingdom. There are a few South–South mobilities that involve Algeria, Jordan and Tunisia, in an almost homogeneous way.

Administrative mobility

© 2021 Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

The countries to which administrative staff move are mainly European countries such as Spain, Poland, Italy, and Romania. Almost all outgoing mobilities have a short duration (less than one week) and are financed by the European Commission.

Outgoing administrative mobility
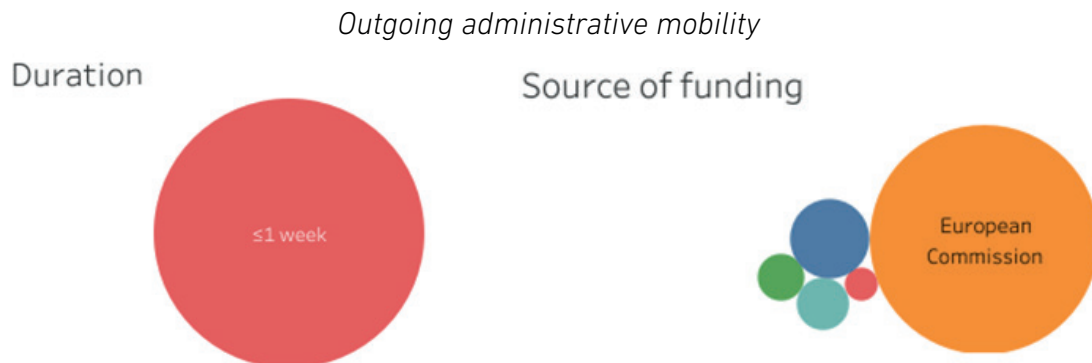
Palestine

Palestinian institutions have actively participated in the data collection process, despite the COVID-19 crisis forced all of them to quickly rearrange their workload distribution. In spite of the satisfactory number of participants from both the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the pandemic condition did not allow all of the universities to timely reply to the survey or to be available for interviews. Tensions with Israel, mobilities' restrictions, the isolation of HEIs in Gaza, all such conditions must be taken into account when interpreting and analysing the Palestinian quantitative data. Based on the sample and the scope of this study, the strong relationship with the Gulf and the USA remains evident, just like the influence of international UN agencies on the local HE systems. In addition, most of the Palestinian universities confirmed the difficulty in finding non-digitalised data relating to 2014/2015 and 2015/2016.

Students' mobility flows

Exchanges with Western Europe are predominant when it comes to students' mobility, as it was also confirmed during the interviews, and most likely due to the poor relationships with Eastern European countries. United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy and Spain emerge as the top destination countries for Palestinian students.

Students' mobility
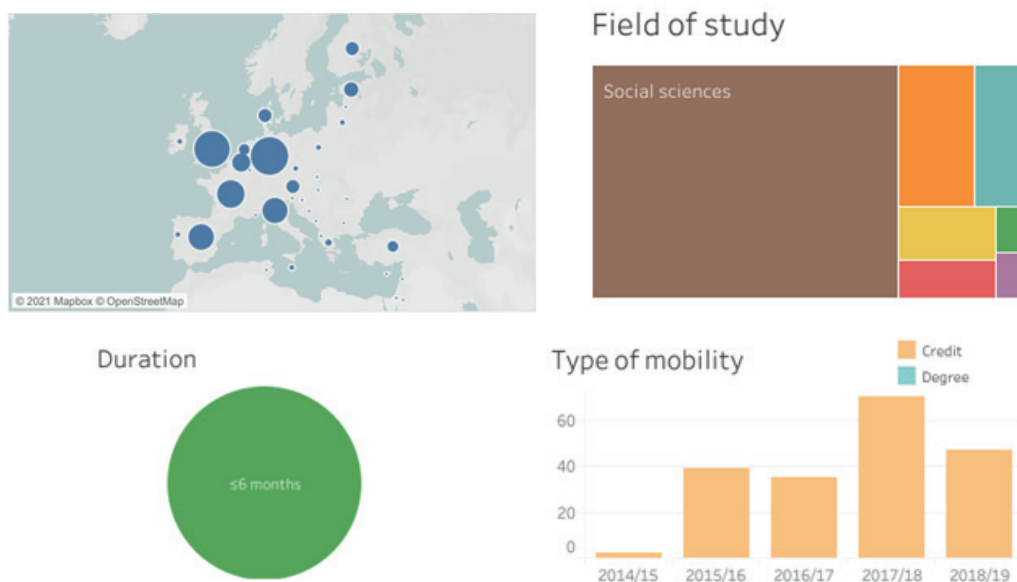
Interestingly enough, both teachers and students engaged in mobility work and study in the field of social sciences, confirming the predominance of the humanities in cooperation, considered as a priority in the HE system.

Incoming mobility data reflect the difficulties in obtaining long-term visas for incoming students. The absolute majority stayed in Palestine for a period of less than 6 months and all mobilities occurred for credit purposes, as it was stated.

Teachers' mobility flows
Teachers' mobility flows are consistent with students' mobility results, if we consider that for all categories there is a clear lack of data regarding 2014/2015 and 2015/2016. The privileged teaching areas are social sciences, followed by business and law and only in third position engineering. Incoming mobility is affected by the same difficulties in obtaining long-term permissions for teaching or performing joint research activities: 2 weeks is the maximum period of exchanges.

Teachers' incoming mobility
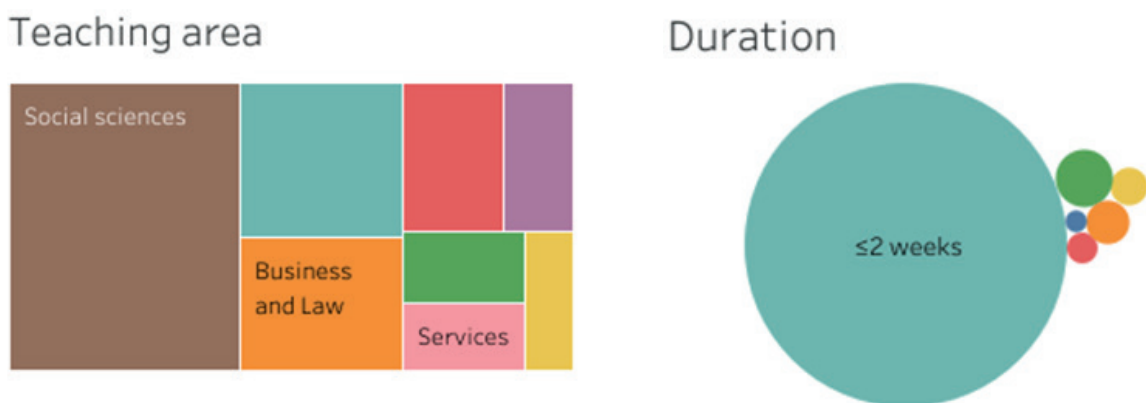
A slight difference can be found in the geographical distribution: in addition to Western Europe, several Northern European countries as well as Turkey are mentioned as destination countries for outgoing mobility.

Teachers' outgoing mobility
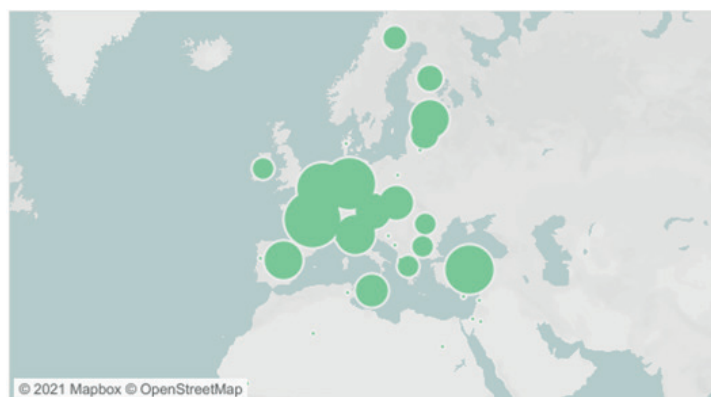
Administrative mobility flows

The analysis of administrative mobility confirms that there is a clear lack of data for 2014/2015 and 2015/2016. In relation to administrative mobility, it is worth mentioning that there is a more balanced distribution in terms of gender.

Administrative mobility
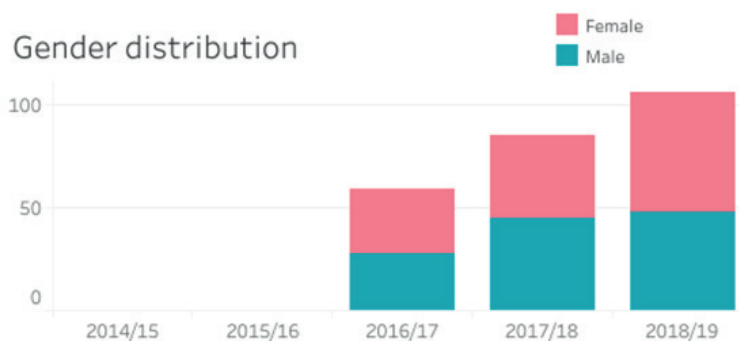
While for students and teachers it was possible to find bilateral cooperation agreements, with the Ministry and the European Commission acting as funding bodies for mobility, when it comes to administrative staff only the European Commission is recognised as funding body, with exchanges lasting only for a short period of time. This reflects the participation of administrative staff in Erasmus+ projects and their participation in CBHE activities in the form of short-training activities abroad. In this sense, there seems to be a greater interest in research and financial and administration areas.

Administrative mobility
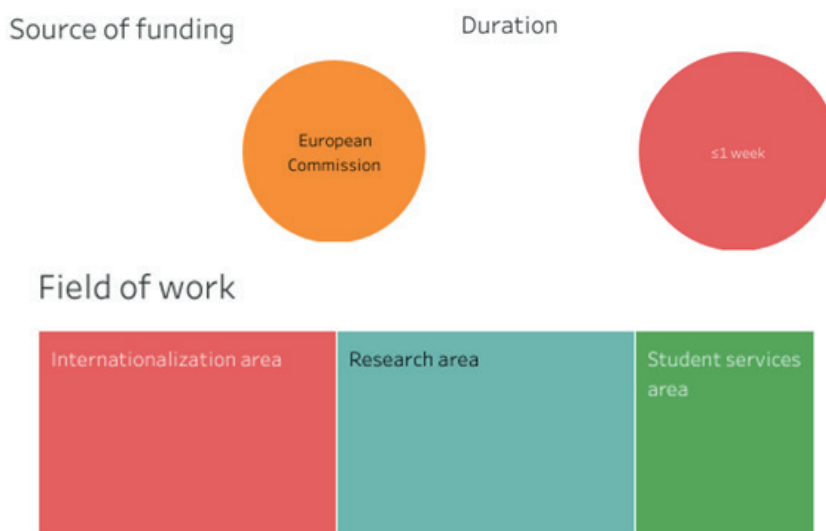
Tunisia

When interpreting Tunisia's mobility flows, it must be taken into account that their collection was influenced by several factors, leading to a partial perception of the global trends in the country. First, not all Tunisian public universities agreed to participate in the survey. Second, like all other target countries, Tunisia was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and this hindered data collection activities. Moreover, universities had difficulties in gathering data for the first years of the analysis (due to a lack of digitalisation of mobility information), and for the last academic year under examination (2018/2019), probably because data were still being processed.

Students' mobility flows

Students' mobility
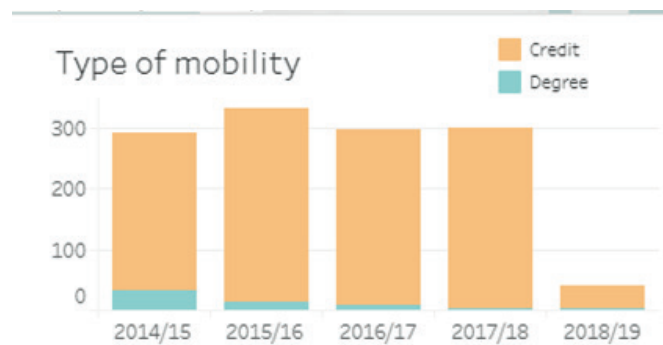
From the academic year 2014/2015 to the academic year 2018/2019, there was a progressive reduction in mobilities for degrees, and a rise in mobilities for credits. While the number of exchanges for credits remains substantially stable, there is a sharp decrease in mobility for degrees, down to zero in the last academic year (2018/2019), when a reduction in exchanges in general has been detected. The gap between mobility for credit and for degree purposes can be explained by the fact that among the most important sources of funding, respondents pointed to the Ministry of Education and the Erasmus+ Programme KA107, both financing short-term mobilities, from 3 up to 12 months.

Students' mobility
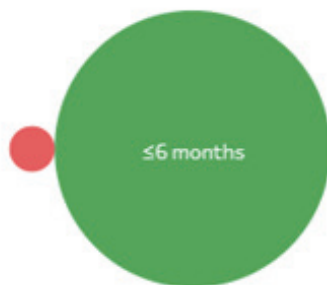
Teachers' mobility flows

Teachers' mobility
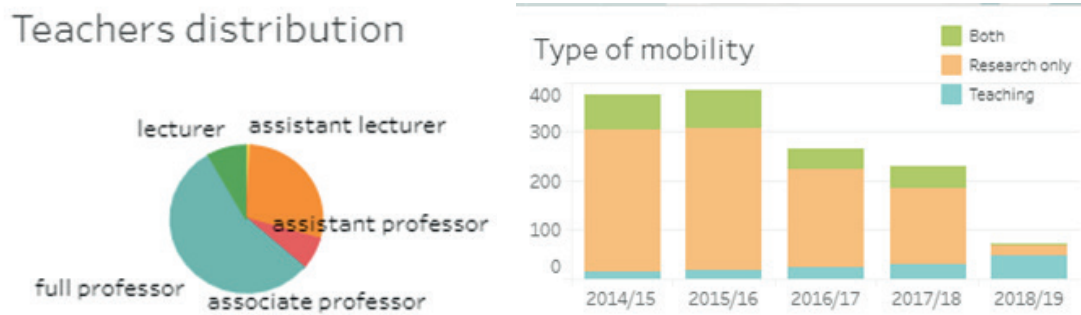
The graph shows an overwhelming majority of full professors participating in international activities, which constitute more than half of the mobility. This obviously happens at the expense of the other grades of academics (associate professors, assistant professors, lectures), which have more trouble accessing international mobility and networking. The phenomenon is also linked to the type of activity that academics carry out abroad, mainly focused on research rather than on teaching. Therefore, we can assume that research abroad is still mainly a prerogative of full professors.

Administrative mobility flows

Administrative mobility

It is worth mentioning that in the academic years examined, the mobility of the administrative staff abroad is more concentrated in the financial and administration area, followed by students' services and internationalisation. The trend underlines the training needs and priorities of the Tunisian higher education system in terms of financial management and administration services capacity. On the other hand, the research area is the least popular field of work, probably because it remains a prerogative of academics, which are also allowed, within the Erasmus+ programme, to engage in mobility for training.

"Open your mind and get out of your comfort zone: travel adds value to humans"

The students mobility experience

The survey addressed to students of our target countries allowed to gather 3,280 answers, of which 523 came from students who engaged in mobility during the last academic years. 64% of the students involved in the survey were female. The following tables indicate the country of origin of the respondents and the mobility destination country.

Country of origin

Destination Country
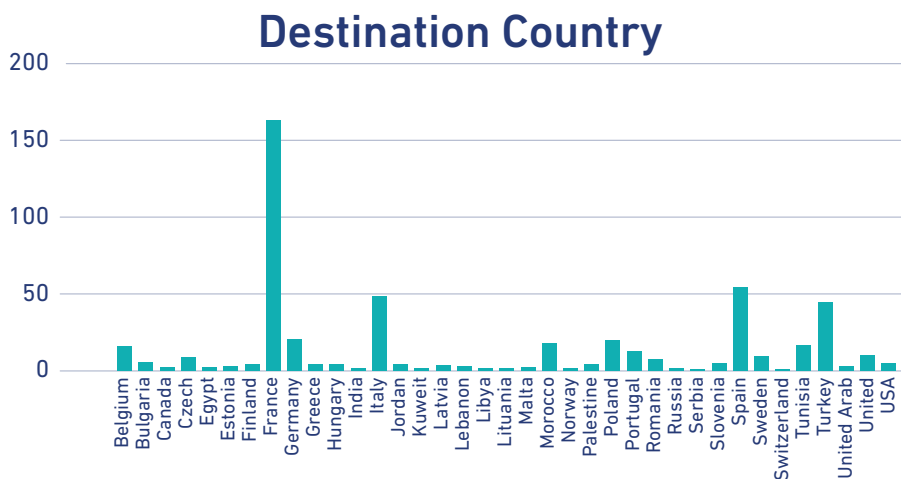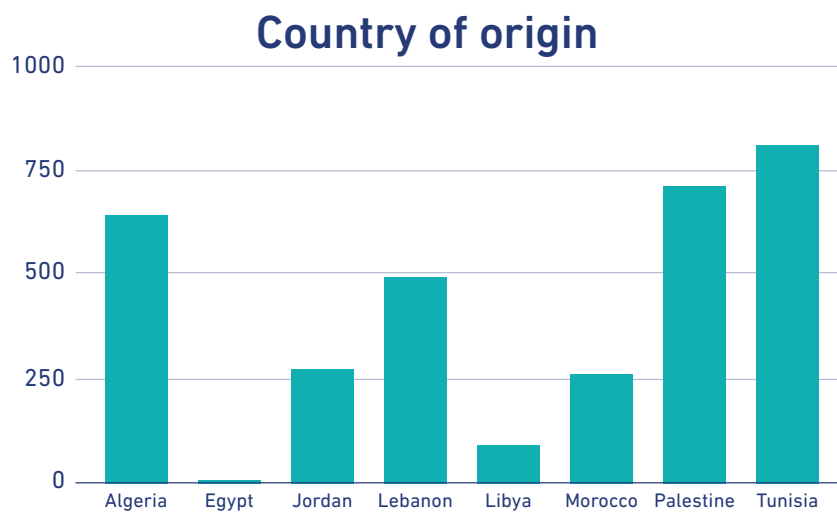
As for the data provided by the partner universities, France is the first destination country, followed by Spain, Italy and Turkey. The majority of those who engaged in mobility programmes did it for credit, followed by degree and lastly for shorter mobilities, like summer schools. Half of the mobilities had a duration lower to 6 months. The destination country has been chosen mainly because of previous existing collaborations between the 2 universities, followed by personal interests. Some students would have preferred another destination country but that was not possible.

When asked whether they would repeat and recommend the mobility experience, the vast majority of students said yes. European countries seem to remain the most attractive ones, even if a smaller number of students declared to be interested in mobility irrespective the country. South-South mobility suffers from a lack of interest.
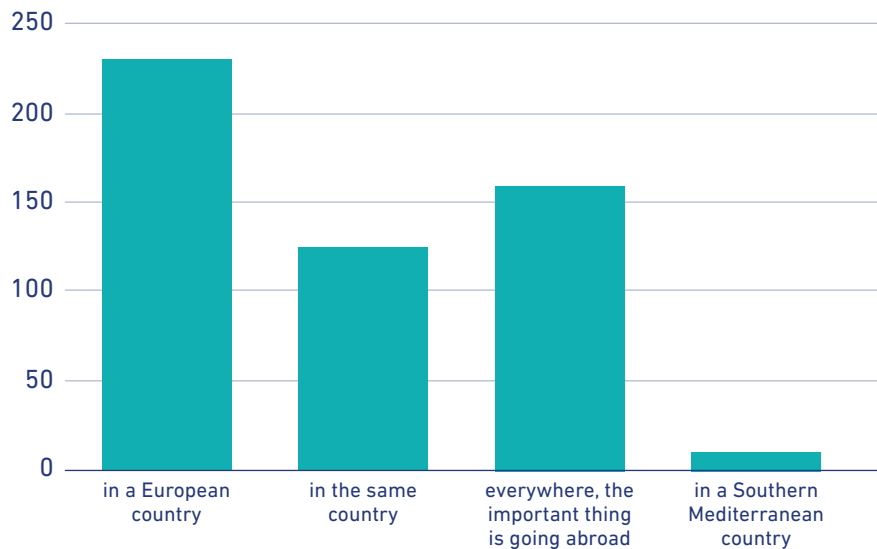
We asked the students to evaluate on a scale from 1 to 5, four different aspects of their mobility: 1) improvement of a foreign language, 2) improvement of intercultural competences, 3) impact on employability and 4) added value on their curriculum. Answers are represented below. The added-value on the curriculum and the improvement of intercultural competences are the dimensions most positively impacted by mobility.

Improvement of a foreign language
On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 is the less positive and 5 is the more positive

Improvement of your intercultural competencies
On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the negative and 5 being the positive

Impact on employability
On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the negative and 5 being the positive

Added value on your curriculum
On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the negative and 5 being the positive

Students have been asked to identity the obstacles to mobility that they have experienced. Students who did not encounter any particular difficulty arrive in second position after those mentioning the visa procedure difficulty, and the specific case of receiving the invitation letter from the hosting university. This aspect has been shared by a lot of university representatives (at least for Maghreb region) during the focus groups and consultations. The burden of administrative procedures, the lack of information and guidance from both origin and destination universities, as well as the difficulty of defining the learning agreement have also been reported by students. The lack of resources and the accommodation issue have been frequently highlighted too.

Regarding the obstacles met during mobility, language issues are the first reported by students, as an obstacle for the academic and social life. It is worth highlighting that this issue not only concerned students' skills but also staff members of the hosting university, who did not speak other languages. Then, COVID-19 pandemic was the second most cited difficulty, having caused an intense feeling of isolation, having made it hard to attend the courses and, as a result, to complete the foreseen mobility plan. Several students revealed that they have been victims of racism and/or discriminatory acts. Most of them did not encounter any difficulty at the end of the mobility, but a significant part has mentioned difficulties in the process of recognition of credits, even when a learning agreement had been validated before the mobility.

Among the recommendations made by the students to improve mobility, the following are worth mentioning: facilitating the entire administrative process, facilitating the visa delivery and strengthening financial support; providing more information/guidance before the mobility and improving credit recognition; encouraging their university to implement more cooperation agreements in order to provide more mobility opportunities (in particular for PhD students and researchers); creating a digital platform for the exchange of research results. Other recommendations that came up frequently are the need to improve English language skills and to define the training plan in as much detail as possible. Both universities' responsibility of favouring and ensuring quality monitoring has also been recalled.

BOX 1

Recognition of qualifications and portability of credits

The portability of credits and the recognition of qualifications are among the major challenges and key drivers of change in higher education worldwide. Two decades have passed since the beginning of the Bologna process and only some of the countries analysed in this study have fully adopted the European system of LMD and ECTS. Most of them, except for Algeria and Tunisia, face problems in credit recognition. HEIs in the latter countries do not seem to experience huge criticalities thanks to their efforts displayed to harmonise the credit recognition system. In addition, those countries put in place both internal and external quality assurance systems and accreditation measures and provided HEIs with a set of guidelines.

Although in different ways, all South-Mediterranean HEIs are developing a more transparent and easy recognition process, thanks to their major involvement in International Credit Mobility and in Capacity Building projects, in multilateral cooperation agreements, but there is still a long way to go before the Bologna process is fully implemented. Therefore, the issue of improving and simplifying recognition practices should be integrated into a wider internationalisation strategy.

In particular, the majority of Egyptian HE Institutions have implemented the American education system and it is very diverse. This means that they do not have a national framework for recognition of international credits and diplomas, which should be done in an institutional manner. The same applies to Jordan. In Lebanon, as well as in Palestine, credit recognition is a huge challenge because systems are not homogeneous, there are no national guidelines to be followed and the context is fragmented. Finally, in Mauritania and in Libya the internationalisation process and -as a consequence- recognition procedures are both still at an early stage. In Morocco, there is a shift towards a hybrid system, which includes elements of the Bologna process and elements of the Anglo-Saxon system, potentially increasing internationalisation opportunities but also making procedures more complex. Against this backdrop, some obstacles need to be addressed and further actions are required to support the higher education systems in the South-Mediterranean region and improve their capacities, their national regulations and the practices related to the recognition of qualifications.

International references:
- UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education;[496]
- The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area[497]

496 https://en.unesco.org/themes/higher-education/recognition-qualifications/global-convention (Last access February 2021)
497 https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/higher-education/bologna-process-and-european-higher-education-area_en (Last access February 2021)

Internationalisation at home: an opportunity during the COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 crisis dramatically forced HEIs to change their internationalisation strategies and speed up the digitalisation process. The silver lining of the pandemic is that it helped HEIs to move faster towards digitalisation and the use of ICT tools in education, to compensate for the restrictions of movement and in-presence life. At the same time, international activities stopped, since it was impossible to perform mobilities and organise international symposiums and events, as well as training and project activities. In this sense, Internationalisation at home may be considered as a response to the limitations caused by modern crises, such as the COVID-19 one.

Internationalisation at home (IaH) is the integration of international components, in the curricula, in the campus, in the faculty, promoting intercultural dialogue and the development of a global mindset without the necessity for the student or the staff to leave the home University. In this sense, it complements the other internationalisation dimensions and grants to higher education Institutions to have additional tools to create a modern, fair, international, inclusive environment. In the countries of the study, it seems there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of the practices on Internationalisation at home, which in turns generates resistance: most of the universities stated that in their respective country IaH is not considered a priority, a strategic issue, and therefore there are not dedicated resources to the development of these practices. Instead, it requires that faculty members and administrators work collaboratively to design deliberate and meaningful spaces of integration, thereby creating international, intercultural, and global learning experiences for all students, and framing Internationalisation at home as a pillar of the strategic plan.

A cultural shift is needed, and it may take some time, to fully implement Internationalisation at home practices, since most universities in the study mentioned the reduced attractiveness of activities that do not imply physical mobility (such as the virtual exchange). Along with that, major investments in infrastructures should also be made to ensure a greater access to opportunities. With the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to turn most university activities into virtual ones, the importance of digitalisation and the opportunities that HEIs can offer to their educational communities have become evident, leading to a new understanding of internationalisation beyond pure mobility. It is worth mentioning a few cases pointing in that direction: Jordan has been the first South-Mediterranean country in terms of participation in the European Virtual Exchange programme; Palestine is developing the COIL model-Collaborative Online International Learning, that can lead professors to design their online courses, after delivering them in different parts of the world. On the other hand, in Egypt, Algeria and Mauritania, the lack of linguistic skills -especially English- may become a barrier to the internationalisation process.

BOX 3

Impact of cooperation programmes in the Mediterranean region, as perceived by practitioners

In order to assess the impact generated by cooperation programmes on the internationalisation of higher education as perceived by practitioners, a specific question was asked during the Focus Groups exercise. The interlocutors were asked to rate the impact of five programmes or classes of programmes, namely Erasmus+, H2020, National Ministries' programmes, University/industries cooperation and Other programmes including past programmes. In all cases, Erasmus+ is considered by far the programme which has had the highest impact on the internationalisation of HE in the Mediterranean countries, both in terms of cooperation projects and of mobility of students and staff. The reasons for this are mainly the fact that it is a very powerful tool especially designed for the purpose of supporting the internationalisation of HEIs in non-EU countries; it is considered rather "user-friendly" and priorities are negotiated and defined through bilateral consultations. Furthermore, in most of the target countries, the National Erasmus Offices are very active and very positively perceived by the operators as they provide effective and technical support to the participation of local HEIs in the programme and very much facilitated the modernisation process of the HE sector.

The perception of the H2020 in terms of impact is totally different and it ranks much lower. Indeed, statistics of participation are much less significant than in the previous case, although there are clear differences among countries, with some countries performing rather well compared to the average (such as Israel). In this case, the main problems perceived are the fierce competition, the limited knowledge of the programme and of its mechanisms, and the fact that -with very few exceptions- the calls for proposals are not designed specifically for Southern Mediterranean countries. Much work needs to be done to improve the situation and fully leverage the status of associate country in the future Horizon Europe programme.

Results regarding the impact of National Programmes run by local Ministries are patchy and heterogeneous: they vary a lot from country to country, depending on the HE system's structure, the level of investments, the level of autonomy of HEIs, the country' s situation in terms of social peace and so on.
Similarly, University-Industry cooperation's impact varies from country to country, , mainly due to the different levels of industrial development in the different countries and to the presence or strength of bilateral cooperation programmes with individual EU countries, where historical links are still active and generate useful cooperation.

Last but not least, the "other programmes" include: a) previous programmes such as Tempus (the predecessor of Erasmus+), and the Erasmus Mundus, which has been valued by many as one of the most tailored and effective programmes promoted by the European Commission; b) cooperation arrangements offered by international stakeholders, such as the AUF for French speaking countries. Once again, the perception varies from country to country but the general feeling is that all these programmes have had a positive impact, again both in terms of mobility and of cooperation projects.

How to make

regional cooperation more effective: challenges to face and inspiring practices

3.1 Insights from regional organisations

Over the course of the research process, the research team interviewed representatives of regional and international organisations dealing with HEIs in the Euro-Mediterranean area. These organisations differ in nature, scope and goals, but in some ways they all contribute to the internationalisation of HE. This said, most respondents pointed out that these organisations significantly support the international dimension of universities. We deemed it appropriate to give visibility in our findings to international and regional actors by sharing their reflections on the internationalisation of higher education in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The following organisations were interviewed:

- Agence Française de Développement (AFD)
- Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF)
- Association of Arab Universities (AArU)
- Campus France
- Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI)
- Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC)
- European Association for International Education (EAIE)
- Erasmus Student Network (ESN)
- European University Association (EUA)
- Expertise France
- HOMERe
- International Association of Universities (IAU)
- Istituto Nazionale di Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa (INDIRE)
- Téthys Network
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Lack of attractiveness: a dangerous paradigm

> "
> *These countries are our neighbours. If we don't take care of them, somebody else will do*
>
> **Michael Gaebel EUA**

Attractiveness (or, to be more accurate, the lack of attractiveness) has been the core topic of several international organisations' comments on the target countries' higher education systems. In the words of the UNESCO representative in Beirut, one of the main challenges is how Southern universities are able to receive and host students, researchers and administrative representatives from the North. It is indeed very important to reflect on how Southern universities could be attractive enough to attract and receive students from other universities in terms of quality, good curriculum, reliable infrastructures and so on. Nowadays, it is common to consider mostly one-way mobility from the South to the North. The absence of reciprocity is a crucial and negative aspect in the perception of Southern Mediterranean university practitioners.

According to the National Italian Agency in charge of the KA107 Action in the framework of the Erasmus+ Programme, the Southern Mediterranean countries are the most funded in the International Credit Mobility scheme, financing mainly master's degree students. According to the European students who took part in the ICM programme, travelling to a partner country might have

the same difficulties as travelling within the EU itself. The only barrier they found is related to the management of activities from the partner institutions. More bureaucracy and less transparency than in the European universities are two of the main barriers affecting the international attractiveness of local HEIs in a non-EU country.

When we explicitly asked why the Southern Mediterranean system is less attractive compared to other regions of the world, especially when it comes to the offer of double degrees or joint degrees, all respondents pointed in the same direction. According to the representative from EUA, it is a mix of security issues, lack of preparation and research quality. By quoting him "[...] occasionally, you will also hear that in some countries they might not want to work with the Islamic world. I mean, it may come partly from the institutions. But it also comes from some governments that we know already. I think it is partly also a cultural barrier. But it becomes a very concrete problem that it is not only the South-Med, but in some countries, if you have a scholar from Pakistan, you will have a hard time getting a visa for him or her". He also stated: "Generally speaking, the Arab world is, with a few exceptions, less attractive as a partner region than South America or parts of Asia are. The change that we have seen over the past 20 years is that the so-called emerging countries become more attractive for university partnerships: I think this is something that we have clearly seen. So there has been a reorientation, but there is certainly more to be done in particular with these countries in our direct neighbourhood."

Giorgio Marinoni from IAU added that: "Instability at the political and social level does not help certain countries, and two of

the major challenges for internationalisation in the Mediterranean area, and for mobility from Southern Mediterranean countries towards Europe and vice versa, are visas and the perception of instability in the region. This is causing low interest from students and staff in Europe for a mobility period in Southern Mediterranean countries. This lack of reciprocity is probably the main problem for internationalisation in the Mediterranean region."

Some Southern Mediterranean countries have to deal with a real problem, which is instability (political, economic and social instability) and we cannot agree more with the AUF, as all these instabilities affect the internationalisation strategy in the region. Like all the other stakeholders, we also share the EAIE's view, as stated by Laura Howard: "The Mediterranean is not a priority, and especially for European countries, despite we are very close, at least geographically. And we have a common history. And very often we face similar challenges, despite we might not recognise that, but we still are in the process of understanding why the Mediterranean is not felt as a priority".

Internationalisation of research: one step backward to take two steps forward

> **"**
>
> *Research should be a priority, linked to societal developments and bringing innovation in the region*
> **Anas Bouhlal, UNESCO**

When we talk about the attractiveness of the universities in the region, we have to talk about research as well. Most of the higher education institutions in the South-Med are predominantly teaching universities. They often only offer bachelor and master degrees, causing another issue, namely the limited availability of doctoral studies.

AArU is currently working to face these challenges deemed most relevant in the Arab world today, working on two initiatives. Firstly, AArU is working to give more visibility to Arab publications and authors, through the Arab impact factor project, dealing with the publication in Arabic of research outcomes. In most Arab countries, scientific disciplines are taught in English; in other countries like Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania, they are taught in French. The language diversity becomes an issue when we talk about humanities and social subjects: we need to work so that the Arabic language is not an obstacle for research. The idea is to create an Arab journals platform, which is an open electronic network of scholarly journals that will help raise awareness of the strong academic research and publishing being done throughout the Arab world. As a second project, AArU is advocating for an "Arab Fund for Scientific Research" for mobilising resources for scientific research projects in Arab universities, valorising the well qualified researchers and universities in the Arab world.

This is also the reason why institutions such as Campus France insist on the importance of the co-supervision of theses (co-supervised Doctorate) and research development, to cope with the real demand coming from neighbouring countries at the research level.

In conclusion, all organisations recognised

the need to take one step back in Capacity Building projects with a specific focus on research, to allow for greater advancements.

Widening access for vulnerable groups: internationalisation through inclusion

> 66
> *In terms of higher education, the commitment to the situation in and around Syria remains visible and of high priority, especially in terms of willingness of donors to respond to higher education needs*
> **UNHCR**

Diversity is a core element of internationalisation, as it relates to inclusion and cultural dialogue. Vulnerable students should be seen as a resource for higher education. However, as stated by the International Organisation for Migration, students with a migrant background face a number of obstacles in higher education affecting their learning and development, and in turn their successful participation in the academic community from admission until graduation. Within the framework of IOM actions, students often reported that high levels of bureaucracy and requirements represent an obstacle affecting different aspects of their access and participation.

IOM actions are in line with the work carried on by the UNHCR: "Our commitment is to work towards a greater inclusion of refugees

in national education systems, including higher education, whether that be college and university or technical and vocational education and training. The increased participation of refugees in those systems and academic communities' campus, off campus, etc., enriches the global dialogue and enriches the quality of education for all". To better understand the UNHCR action in the region it is necessary to consider it within the framework of the "UNHCR Education Strategy, which aims to achieve 15% enrolment of refugees in higher education by the year 2030. UNHCR higher education scholarship programme is, and it has been for a long time, the core programme on promoting internationalisation for refugees, refugee communities, hosting communities and home communities, should those individuals return home, at the tertiary education level". Inclusion should be a tassel of regional cooperation resulting in cultural dialogue, mutual understanding and a reduction of social tensions. In this sense, a strategic action is the DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) scholarship programme: "The UNHCR scholarship programme really hinges on the argument that greater diversity in the higher education student body is the benefit to everyone and the DAFI programme aims exactly at overcoming the barriers that keep refugees from participating in higher education and academic life". Widening access may become a way to widen opportunities and enhance universities' global environment.

Another initiative worth mentioning is the UNESCO Qualifications Passport, drawing from the experiences and methodology of the European Qualifications Passport (EQP) initiative taken by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) and the Council of Europe. Establishing a UNESCO

Qualifications Passport (UQP) emphasises the need to implement a comprehensive refugee response, strengthening global governance of migration. A Qualifications Passport under the auspices of UNESCO could become a modern universal tool to facilitate the mobility for refugees with qualifications, and may even be used at a later stage, as a mobility tool for migrants around the globe.

Quality, quality, quality. A mantra for Southern Mediterranean universities

> "
>
> *The region has to commit itself as a region – all can't be done at the national level.*
>
> **Blanca Moreno Dodson, CMI**

When interacting with international stakeholders and regional organisations, we noticed that the disparity between North and South mainly resides a disparity in quality, as confirmed also by the CMI representative. North can act as the catalyst for the South at the educational level, and should enhance the notion of quality in cooperation.

In terms of teaching quality and internationalisation processes, there is an issue (raised by UNESCO, but shared by almost all the interviewed stakeholders) concerning the language: few universities in the South are offering complete degrees in English, generally they offer only some courses in English. HEIs in the northern parts

of Mediterranean are more developed and they offer more courses and even degrees in foreign languages; this generates a disparity and mismatch related to the quality and the variety of the courses offered in higher education. The issue of language is clearly named as a barrier also by the respondent from the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture: "Regarding the weakness of local systems, I believe that actually the scarce knowledge of foreign languages is critical. For mobility purposes you need foreign languages that's for sure".

A better knowledge of foreign languages may also increase the quality of the research at Southern institutions, by widening the scope and the standard of cooperation that is, at this very moment, affected by the lack of quality in collaborations, especially in social science. Again, in the words of the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture: "We see a lot of projects when it comes to engineering science. [...] We would like to see more social sciences, law, economics, this kind of more humanitarian disciplines, political science, we also would like to see more Jean Monnet activities in place, more cultural activities: speaking about law, about human rights, about how the economy should be developed or planned".

Enhancing the quality of curricula, systems and exchanges, has been at the core of AArU's activities: the recently launched Arab Qualification Framework initiative in cooperation with the Arab League for Education, Culture and Science (ALECSO) and the League of Arab States, goes exactly in this direction. The rationale is to strengthen confidence and credibility in the Arab qualifications, developing a regional approach for accreditation and setting up of a framework to achieve comparison

and harmonisation of Arab qualifications with international qualifications, and at facilitating special procedures for the recognition of university degrees", thus increasing the quality of higher education in the Arab world and the ability of HEIs to attract foreign students and staff.

When we talk about the challenges for Southern higher education sectors, along with the lack of knowledge of foreign languages, another element comes to mind: the limited international exposure of the administrative staff, usually less involved in the mobility schemes. Indeed, increasing the skills of administrative staff is crucial. In the worlds of the respondent from EUA: "It would be useful for administrative staff from both EU and the South-Med to increase their international experience in particular, but not only, for those who work in internationalisation but also for other parts of the institution: it enhances the tolerance, understanding, and also ability to put yourself in the shoes of others. And it also helps to open up your mindset".

It would be beneficial for our partners in the South-Mediterranean region to upscale ongoing initiatives, such as the one mentioned by Laura Rumbley from the EAIE: "There is an initiative called SUCTI, which aims at empowering the backbone of institutions: its administrative staff. As a direct consequence, the SUCTI Academia has now been founded, a project exactly built on SUCTI, a three-year initiative (2016-2019) approved for funding under the European Commission's Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic Partnerships for higher education that focuses on the internationalisation of administrative staff".

Digitalisation processes: going virtual in order to boost physical activities

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> *We will continue supporting physical mobility, and our budget will continue to be allocated to physical mobility. That is what the universities want. That is what the young people want. And that's what gives greater benefits.*
>
> **German Bernal Rios, DG EAC**

As recognised by the IOM, by supporting innovative forms of interaction with partners and beneficiaries, the new challenge posed by digitalisation and virtual exchange has turned into an opportunity, opening new creative scenarios and enhancing innovation, especially relying on the ability of youth to involve their peers and create alternative dynamics of interaction and remote sharing. International partners, such as the UNHCR, underlined how huge was the amount of exchanges revolving around digitalisation and virtual mobility during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, the UNHCR quoted the Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium (CLCC), which received many requests for technical support and advice. Through the CLCC, the UNHCR also collaborated with the Carey Institute for Global Good and pursued different projects focused on fostering access, inclusion and academic success of higher education learners, refugees, and other

forcibly displaced people through high-quality faculty professional development. This shift was so quick and rapid that the UNHCR admitted that just "One year ago, we probably wouldn't consider it as vital in terms of the scholarship programme, in terms of access to education. We were very involved and invested in connected and blended learning for higher education but in terms of the scholarship programme, no, we underestimated its value".

On the other hand, we noticed that international organisations, despite the worldwide enthusiasm about "going virtual" in 2020 due to the impact of the pandemic, have been also very aware since the beginning of the potential cons or, at least, of the inevitable risks related to the virtual dimension. "It is necessary for us to approach the issue holistically, not only from the technological point of view, i.e., availability of internet, but also in terms of universities' capacities to provide quality education during this time. At the beginning of the crisis, 95% of the vocational schools in the region were closed. The reason being they could not handle the challenge of shifting to digital. We do have countries with a low connectivity context, but again it is a combination of factors not only the technology or connectivity itself." The UNHCR long quotation allows us to understand the cultural, infrastructural and technological barriers that are hampering the digitalisation process from becoming structural in the region and it underlines the necessity to have a holistic approach in order to be successful and sufficiently impactful.
The representative of DG EAC clearly expressed his view on the digital divide: "If we have the best digital projects, but actually universities are not well connected, the students cannot study from home because there is no internet at home, we are a little

bit trapped in a situation where only the elite has access to the internet. In any case, despite this huge digital divide, definitely digital is going to be one of the key aspects of the new programme and we are going to foster digital cooperation".

Regarding virtual mobility, it is important to recognise the unspoken fear that it might actually replace physical mobility. The representative of the Italian institute INDIRE stated: "face-to-face mobilities are more attractive than virtual ones". Quoting EUA, mobility is composed of several different aspects: "this is something that changes you once you have been abroad, not for a short visit, but rather once you have spent some time there. I think that the important thing is not just the visit, when you have a few lectures or so, but to have, for example, the opportunity for job shadowing and sharing tasks with others in order to get a better understanding of how the other universities work and how other systems look like". DG EAC representative clearly confirmed this: "When we talk to the universities and to the students, I see very little interest in virtual mobility alone. Despite that, we have our digital education action plan and Europe has an international digital dimension". Blended mobility might be the answer, as confirmed by our respondent from IAU: "About virtual mobility, I would say it is an interesting tool that allows reaching thousands of students who will never be mobile, even if I believe it cannot completely replace the experience given by physical mobility. I think in the future the two types of mobility should and will coexist".

Recognising shared cultural roots, deconstructing stereotypes, increasing mutual knowledge

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> *This is the elephant in the room that sometimes Europeans do not want to see.*
>
> **Giorgio Marinoni, IAU**

One of the barriers to internationalisation in the South-Med region cited the most, in the words of the representative to the representative of DG EAC, is the lack of mutual knowledge. Interestingly enough, he added, "I might say the difficulties, the barriers are not located in the Maghreb, or Muslim countries or in countries in the south Mediterranean, but in the European countries. They have to see this mutual cooperation as an opportunity: that it is important to cooperate with the neighbouring countries. Not just the Mediterranean countries, but also beyond. Mutual knowledge has to be increased and intercultural learning is also very important in this regard".

The distrust, the problem, the elephant in the room, to quote Giorgio Marinoni from IAU: "has historical roots and depends on the attitude that Europeans still have, unfortunately, towards Southern Mediterranean countries: sometimes there is still a colonial approach. It is interesting for European countries to attract students from the South, but it is

not interesting to send their students there. This kind of Western-centric approach is still a barrier. Unfortunately, universities in Europe are still too often asking themselves questions such as: what is the interest for our students to go there? This attitude must change. This is the elephant in the room that sometimes Europeans do not want to see. This is valid for the Southern Mediterranean, but also for many other regions of the world such as, for instance, Sub-Saharan Africa".

In the last few years, the tightening of visa restrictions also contributed to the negative perception of the Arab world and negatively affected mobility flows. According to the representative of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture: "It is difficult to get to know each other if you cannot jump on a plane and get to know somebody, [...] with Erasmus+, we also tackle this aspect through staff mobility, which is very important [...] also to give birth to student mobility and to capacity-building projects. These short mobilities are really an important tool".

Even non-educational stakeholders, such as the IOM, have, over the years, have been focusing on, universities "recognising their key role as strategic hubs for sharing ideas and promoting dialogue among youth, with a view to offer a youth-led approach to foster inclusion and social cohesion. Through ad hoc tools and capacity-building activities, they support universities in their efforts to facilitate the inclusion of those students within the student community, thus contributing to building more cohesive academic societies. If more efficient services are offered to international students, and the access process is made smoother, mobility is definitely encouraged."

During our discussion, the representative of DG EAC stressed again the importance of mutual knowledge, in order to overcome misperceptions: "The strength of the region, I would say, is the dynamism, because it is a very young region that has a really young population much more than the EU. So really, there is thirst for training, for education. I think the dynamics of the region is its strength. Even Israel, which is a little bit different, has, I believe, a much younger population than the EU. We see cooperation in the field of education as a really fundamental issue. Mediterranean countries are very active compared to other regions in the world".

In this sense, it is worth mentioning an initiative launched by the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), whose objective is to increase dialogue and cultural understanding. The MOOC developed and launched by the AUF has been designed to address the challenges of breaking the social bond and conflict by addressing issues related to dialogue, communication, and the resolution or transformation of conflicts. The success of this initiative, which had about 4,000 registrations, shows the need for these type of actions to re-connect the Euro-Mediterranean region to its common cultural roots.

Abandoning silo mentality in favour of clustering: the role of regional organisations

> 66
> *Euro-Mediterranean international organisations represent an antidote to national selfishness and sovereigntist policies for an open and inclusive Mediterranean region.*
> **Marcello Scalisi, UNIMED**

In the majority of our interviews with international stakeholders, we observed a concrete and tangible willingness to avoid silo mentality and have instead "All international and regional organisations acting to work together, not separately: it is a loss of energy and effort and resources. By working together, we can get a strong voice and convince the universities to work together through very well-developed policies for their needs. We need to identify innovative cooperation initiatives, to be able to understand the differences and to use these differences as a richness not as an obstacle." (UNESCO MENA). A concrete call for regional and multilateral cooperation among countries, but also among international players.

The Agence Internationale de la Francophonie (AUF) launched an interesting initiative in the Middle East area. The regional management set up CONFREMO, a regional conference of university presidents who meet and discuss their priorities, looking for similarities and leveraging on synergies. Within the framework of the consultation body, there are sub think-tanks, including a group concerned with internationalisation, specifically working on internationalisation quality criteria, and professionalising international relations services, boosting their ability to set up and manage international collaborations and projects. Similar efforts have been made by the AUF Maghreb, supporting university governance.

Only with a synergic approach is it possible to reach higher goals such as developing a new scheme or programme for Arab mobility of students and staff amongst Arab universities and institutions of higher education, and with universities from all over the globe, in addition to the mobilities

financed by European funded programmes, reported as a priority and a strategic action by our interviewee from AArU.

It is worth mentioning the clear recommendation made by INDIRE regarding the role of the local NEO: "National Erasmus+ Officers (NEOs) should play a major role in order to implement networking activities among institutions". In the same direction goes the Téthys network, demonstrating the need to build networks and connections between all the actors involved. Activities should pursue the wider objective of strengthening synergies, in particular with regard to North to South cooperation. It is also the network's responsibility to lobby for more balanced mobility flows (improving the one from North to South), to build bridges and promote a change in perspectives.

According to UNIMED director Marcello Scalisi, regional networks can play a decisive role in further promoting the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Barcelona process, which have so far guaranteed a unique regional cooperation framework for the Mediterranean university, but have failed to solve many problems in the region. The time has come to make room for the Mediterranean Generation, for it to express its potential beyond national borders and cultural barriers and forge a new idea of Mediterranean.

3.2 Inspiring practices

While conducting the desk research, the research team identified the "practices" that may be upscaled and adapted to the national contexts taken into consideration. Among those practices, a selection has been made to identify inspiring practices at the regional level, which may serve as inspiring practices for practitioners, university leaders and in general for all the actors involved in the international dimension of universities. Best practices are not presented in absolute terms: for the specific purpose of the current study and the current analysis, the term best is used to indicate the practices which better suit the purpose of strengthening internationalisation in the Euro-Mediterranean region. As a starting point, researchers agreed on a definition of best practice, built upon different available definitions:

A procedure that has been shown by research and experience to produce optimal results and that is established or proposed as a standard suitable for widespread adoption. A good/best practice is characterised by a measurable impact, the capacity to propose innovative approaches, its sustainability, its transferability, replicability, adaptability, and ultimately for its added value. A best practice is to be intended as a highly successful practice, which represents leading-edge experience, though not necessarily ideal or unproblematic.

The stakeholders engaged in the interviews and the universities, with whom we interact on a regular basis, were asked to contribute to the identification of the practices that have a potential to be replicated and upscaled in the region. Secondary sources were also consulted, such as: the secondary sources consulted during the desk research

(which will be reported in the bibliography), the websites of the National Erasmus Office of the countries involved in the study, the websites of several international organisations and networks, European funded projects websites and records. To complete the process, an additional consultation was conducted during the focus groups to validate the practices selected and add more relevant inspiring examples if missing. It is fundamental to say that the proposed practices do not represent in any case an exhaustive list, instead they are inspiring examples that may provide some opportunities.

Among all the practices identified, a selection has been made so that the inspiring examples could represent the widest possible set of initiatives, addressing the most comprehensive range of internationalisation dimensions. The criteria for the selection of practices are listed and explained below:

- impactful: able to generate a change in the context, with an emphasis on quality over quantity.
- transferable/replicable: able to be transferred or replicated to other contexts/countries/institutions and still generate a positive similar impact.
- sustainable: able to rely on existing resources and survive over time.
- adaptable: able to be adapted to other contexts and still generate a positive impact.
- innovative: exhibiting innovative elements with respect to the status quo.
- added value: able to build on and improve processes and results, overall being capable of becoming a learning experience for others.

In addition to these criteria, practices were selected that could highlight a range of

issues considered relevant to the region and this particular study:

- diverse cooperation arrangements (North-South, South-North, South-South)
- practices framed in the institutional strategy
- stand-alone cases which stand out for their innovative characteristics
- top-down approaches (framed within existing policies)
- bottom-up approaches (able to generate a change in the decision-making process)
- a wide range of internationalisation aspects (i.e., inclusion, internationalisation at home, employability, mobility, joint educational arrangements, partnerships, etc.).

The focus of the selected practices, in terms of geographical coverage, was the whole Euro-Mediterranean region. This decision seemed appropriate for the study, since the overall goal was to identify inspiring cases with broad appeal and applicability: practices should exploit their full potential, building on the peculiarities of each context and maximising their impact in a new shape. However, a few initiatives from other regions of the world are also mentioned, in order to highlight successful experiences which may be reproduced in the Mediterranean.

The inspiring practices selected have been grouped into three main categories: 1) international projects, 2) guidelines and tools to improve the internationalisation of higher education, 3) strategic initiatives. Special importance was attached to the lesson that can be learnt from each experience. The practice itself is the source of inspiration, with its strengths, as well as its capacity of being a learning experience for others. The evaluation process was translated into an appealing, graphical star system. This should

not be interpreted as a ranking system, but as the outcome of a simplification exercise, with the aim of helping the readers perceive the value and strengths of each case.

List of the selected inspiring practices

International projects
- ATIAH, Developing Innovative Approaches and Tools for Internationalisation at Home, coordinated by Newcastle University, United Kingdom
- DIRE-MED, Dialogue Interculturel, RÉseaux et Mobilité en MÉDiterranée, coordinated by UNIMED, Mediterranean Universities Union, Italy
- MIMI, Modernisation of Institutional Management of Internationalisation in South-Neighbouring countries, coordinated by University of Barcelona, Spain
- MERIC-Net, Mediterranean Network of National Information Centres on the Recognition of Qualifications, coordinated by Université de Nice Sophia Antipolis, France
- TUNING MEDA, Tuning Middle East and North Africa, coordinated by the University of Deusto, Spain

Guidelines and tools
- Guidelines for Good Practice for Awarding Joint Degrees, ECA, European Consortium for Accreditation
- Guidelines for international partnership agreements, Södertörn University, Sweden
- Transnational education toolkit, higher education Academy, United Kingdom

Strategic initiatives
- Arab Master in Democracy and Human Rights, ARMA, coordinated by the

University of Saint-Joseph, Beirut

- Diaspora.mr, a platform dedicated to the Mauritanian Diaspora
- Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI), Slovenia
- Euro-Mediterranean University of Fes (UEMF), public interest institution labelled by the Union for the Mediterranean
- International student welcome week at La Sapienza University, Italy
- Safir, Youth in Action
- SEMSEM, Services for Employability and Mobility in the form of Company Internships for Maghreb/ Mashreq Students
- Toward Empowered Migrant Youth in Southern Europe – TandEM, International Organisation for Migration

Each inspiring practice is described and assessed in the following tables. A similar but different template is used to maintain coherence in the analysis, but adapting to the different nature of the practice (international projects, guidelines and tools, strategic initiatives). In a few cases some information was missing.

Developing Innovative Approaches and Tools for Internationalisation at Home, project ATIAH

Start and End dates: 01/09/2016 - 30/09/2018
Countries involved: United Kingdom, Belgium, Italy
Partners: Newcastle University, KU Leuven, Università di Bologna
Contact: Sue Robson, Newcastle University, UK

Type of initiative
Practices framed in the institutional strategy

Lessons Learnt
Dialogue around Internationalisation at Home (IaH) is gathering momentum as the values, purposes, and means of HE internationalisation are being re-examined. The rationale behind the project is that the benefits of an internationalised university experience should not be limited to the internationally-mobile minority. For universities seeking to graduate interculturally competent global citizens, IaH can purposefully integrate the international and intercultural dimensions into a formal and non-formal curriculum for all students (domestic and international and/or exchange). Students can learn foreign languages, interact with staff with international experience, benefit from learning with peers from other countries and cultures, and engage in virtual mobilities via online learning. This will help to develop the knowledge, skills, and competences necessary to operate successfully in a globally integrated economic environment. The research project foregrounds not only the academic, but also the social, intercultural and global learning benefits of an internationalised university experience. The consortium has developed a set of innovative resources for Internationalisation at Home: 1) a self-audit tool for universities seeking to benchmark their IaH practices; 2) a curriculum framework for "internationalising your university experience"; 3) an evidence framework for evidencing and communicating advances in IaH. The additional added value of the ATIAH project approach lies in the possibility to find out whether and to what extent HEIs enact Internationalisation at Home practices, whilst fostering awareness of internationalisation principles, strategies and practices. IaH implies commitment on behalf of the institution to dedicate resources (both HR and funds) towards an international campus and towards the delivery of international education. In this sense, implementing actions of IaH is cost-effective and sustainable over time because framed in the institutional strategy.

Keywords
Internationalisation at Home, intercultural competences, virtual mobility, global mindset

Reference
www.research.ncl.ac.uk/atiah

Evaluation Criteria value from 1 to 3 stars (low-medium-high)

impactful	transferable or replicable	sustainable	adaptable	innovative	added value
★★★	★★	★★	★★★	★	★★

Dialogue Interculturel, RÉseaux et Mobilité en MÉDiterranée-DIRE-MED

Start and End dates: 15/10/2016-15/10/2020
Countries involved: Italy, Spain, France, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia
Partners: Mediterranean Universities Union-UNIMED, University of Catania, University of Paris 1 Pantheon Sorbonne, Regional Council of Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur, Estudios Universitarios y Superiores de Andalucía S.L.U., International Consulting and Mobility Agency S.L., University Abdelmalek Essaâdi, Hassan II Agronomic and Veterinary Institute, University Mohamed Lamine Debaghine of Sétif 2, University of Alger 1, University of Tunis El Manar, University of Tunis Carthage
Contact: Mediterranean Universities Union-UNIMED, Rome, Italy

Type of initiative
Intercultural dialogue project

Lessons Learnt
DIRE-MED project's main objectives were to strengthen the capacities of the International Relations Offices (IROs) of the partner HE institutions and to promote the intercultural dialogue in the region. After collecting the good practices implemented by the partners to manage international mobility at each step (before, during and after), and in parallel with capacity building activities (namely training-of-trainers activities), partners have defined and implemented: 1) an innovative cooperation framework for academic and non-academic cooperation in the Mediterranean basin, 2) an action plan addressed to universities and institutional and local stakeholders in order to promote the cooperation in the Region. Thanks to this framework, the partners implemented around 70 mobilities (South-South, South-North, North-South) involving students, academic staff and non-academic staff, for short-term mobilities, in several scientific and administrative fields. Another important result of DIRE-MED was the organisation of two intercultural dialogue events, an opportunity to discuss and share views with local, national and international organisations on the Mediterranean and where students presented their projects. The first event took place in Tangier and the second one in the whole region, as it was organised online due to the COVID- 19 pandemic. Finally, the experience gained during the 4 years of the project allowed the partners to make recommendations at the national and regional levels to strengthen Mediterranean cooperation. Among the main lessons learnt during the project life span, we can highlight the following: the crucial role of the IRO service for the identification, promotion and management of the international opportunities as well as the needed commitment and involvement of academic and other administrative staff; the importance of mobility as a tool for mutual knowledge and understanding; the relevance of South-South mobility as a tool for mutual understanding and favouring regional integration; the need to encourage more North-South mobility in order to improve the reciprocal knowledge and fight against prejudice; the usefulness of virtual mobility tool as a facilitator before a mobility and an alternative in case of pandemic; the need to create more spaces of dialogue between the university and its local environment.

Keywords
Intercultural Dialogue, International Relations Offices, South-South cooperation

Reference
https://www.diremedproject.eu/en/

Evaluation Criteria value from 1 to 3 stars (low-medium-high)

impactful	transferable or replicable	sustainable	adaptable	innovative	added value
★★	★★	★★	★★	★★★	★★

Modernisation of Institutional Management of Internationalisation in South Neighbouring Countries-MIMI

Start and End dates: 15/09/2013-15/09/2016
Countries involved: Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Spain, France, Austria, Germany, Italy, Poland, Netherlands
Partners: Princess Sumaya University for Technology; Yarmouk University; Ministry of higher education and Scientific Research; Association of Arab Universities; Lebanese University; Modern University of Business and Science; Ministry of Education and higher education; Abdelmalek Essaâdi University; Ibn Tofail University; Ministry of higher education, Scientific Research and Profession; University of Barcelona; Campus France; Carinthia University of Applied Sciences; Centre for higher education Development Consult (CHE Consult); National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain; Sapienza Università di Roma; Université de Montpellier 1; Warsaw University of Technology; The EAIE

Type of initiative
Practices framed in the institutional strategy

Lessons Learnt
The goal of the project was to assess the degree of internationalisation in participating universities in the Southern neighbouring area, followed by the development of an internationalisation management model in partner institutions. The model provided appropriate knowledge and means to improve internationalisation actions and activities in the involved universities, and contributed to the development of strategic plans granting the sustainability of their international dimension over time. The project has been defined as a turning point in the internationalisation process of the involved HEIs, because it supported the process of improvement of institutional management of internationalisation, establishing governance procedures and engaging the universities leaderships, building their capacity, empowering them and aligning institutions to EU practices. The model was based on analyses of needs and capacities in partner HEIs and the experiences and best practices from EU partner institutions. This led to producing a set of principles, priorities, guidelines and procedures to support HEIs to improve management of the internationalisation processes at the institutional level. The project increased the knowledge and skills related to internationalisation, improved governance procedures and quality assurance measures, increased knowledge and skills on the use of virtual tools to enhance internationalisation, and set-up of collaborations that are still ongoing. The project highlights the importance of framing internationalisation into the wider institutional strategic planning and the necessity to dedicate resources to this continuous process of development.

Keywords
Internationalisation Management, Sustainability, Strategic planning on internationalisation

Reference
http://www.mimiproject.org/

Evaluation Criteria value from 1 to 3 stars (low-medium-high)

impactful	transferable or replicable	sustainable	adaptable	innovative	added value
★★★	★★	★★	★★	★	★★

Mediterranean Network of National Information Centres on the Recognition of Qualifications, MERIC-Net

Start and End dates: 15/10/2016-14/01/2020
Countries involved: France, Norway, Italy, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon
Partners: Centre international d'études pédagogique (coordinator), Associazione CIMEA, The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, NOKUT, University of Oslo (UiO), Palermo University, Mediterranean Universities Union-UNIMED, Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur-MESRS Algeria, Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur-DAJEC Morocco, Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur-DGES Tunisia, Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur-DGHE, Lebanon
Algiers University 1, Université Aboubekr Belkaïd Tlemcen, Cadi Ayyad University, University Mohammed V of Rabat, University of Tunis El Manar, University of Monastir, Université Antonin, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik
Contact: Université Nice Sophia Antipolis, project coordinator info@meric-net.eu

Type of initiative
Bottom-up approach, able to generate a change in the decision-making process

Lessons Learnt
The MERIC-Net objective was to revitalise the MERIC network (Mediterranean Recognition Information Centres) to favour and increase the recognition of qualifications within the Mediterranean region and to raise the quality of vertical and horizontal mobility in the higher education systems of the involved countries. Partner institutions contributed to capacity building actions aimed at developing competences and skills related to credit recognition and the portability of qualifications, and moved on defining guidelines for the recognition of qualifications of refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation; and a report on recognition procedures and mobility flows. The project built on the experience of the European higher education institutions and practices adopted by the ENIC-NARIC centres and involved the Ministry of higher education in the four Partners countries. The project had the potential to change the regulatory framework in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Lebanon, and complemented the efforts in place in these countries for the implementation of the Bologna process. It is a reference and possibly a starting point for future cooperation on the matter, and raised awareness (at various levels) on the vital importance of smoothing recognition procedures of qualifications in the Mediterranean area.

Keywords
Modernisation, Bologna process, Credit recognition

Reference
http://www.meric-net.eu/en/index.aspx

Evaluation Criteria value from 1 to 3 stars (low-medium-high)

impactful	transferable or replicable	sustainable	adaptable	innovative	added value
★★	★★	★★	★★	★★	★★

Tuning Middle East and North Africa-Tuning MEDA

Start and End dates: 01/12/2013-30/11/2016
Countries involved: Spain, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Greece, France, Italy, Malta, Cyprus, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Jordan, Tunisia, Lebanon, Libya
Partners: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, University of Omar Almukhtar, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Université d'Angers, Università degli Studi di Padova, University of Malta, University of Cyprus, Université Mouloud Mammeri de Tizi Ouzou, Université d'Alger 1, University Mohammed First, Université Moulay Ismail, Cairo University, Suez Canal University, Palestine Ahliya University College in Bethlehem, Islamic University of Gaza, International University for Science and Technology, Arab International University, The Syrian Consulting Bureau for Development and Investment, Yarmouk University, Jordan University of Science and Technology, Hashemite University, Association of Arab Universities, University of Monastir, University of Jendouba, University of Tunis, Modern University for Business and Science, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, University of Balamand, Beirut Arab University, Directorate General Of higher education in Lebanon, The Libyan International Medical University, London School of Economics and Political Sciences
Contact: Universidad de Deusto, Deusto, Spain

Type of initiative
Design and deliver joint degree programmes

Lessons Learnt
The Tuning MEDA project results from the previous Tuning project, enlarging the experience from Europe to the MENA region. It aimed at implementing the Bologna tools in Southern Neighbouring Area universities by building a framework of comparable, compatible and transparent programmes of studies. In order to achieve this, four specific objectives have been identified: to apply the Tuning methodology in universities of Southern Neighbouring Area in four subjects (law and good governance including human rights; healthcare and nursing; construction trades, engineering and architecture; tourism); to develop Tuning Reference Points; to develop, implement, monitor and improve degree programmes for the first cycle; and to promote regional and international cooperation between the Southern neighbouring area and EU universities.

The project was designed to facilitate the modernisation of higher education in the Southern neighbouring area and focused on the development of degree programmes in partner universities with particular attention to: curricula design and delivery, employability of graduates, recognition of degree programmes, quality of higher education, and staff training. The consortium has developed a set of resources to build a comprehensive programme of studies through the implementation of the Bologna tools: 1) a series of tools for the assessment of specific competences in the different fields of architecture, law, nursing and tourism; 2) a series of questionnaires to be used in order to enhance mutual understanding of degrees across the Southern neighbouring area and European Union. The Tuning methodology and the resources developed may support additional universities in designing, delivering and structuring degree programmes. The tools are highly adaptable to allow for tailored solutions, making the project outputs transferable and replicable Resources are available in English, French and Arabic, which is an additional value. Moreover, the project gathered a very high number of universities from many countries, demonstrating that South-Mediterranean countries and their European counterparts have the capacity (and will) to tackle common challenges together. It is not by chance that the Tuning scheme has been adopted in Europe first, then in MENA countries and later in India.

Keywords
Internationalisation at Home, intercultural competences, virtual mobility, global mindset

Reference
www.research.ncl.ac.uk/atiah

Evaluation Criteria value from 1 to 3 stars (low-medium-high)

impactful	transferable or replicable	sustainable	adaptable	innovative	added value
★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★	★★

Guidelines for Good Practice for Awarding Joint Degrees

Institution: European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education
Authors: Axel Aerden & Hanna Reczulska

Type of publication
Support to educational arrangements

Presentation
The Guidelines for Good Practice for Awarding Joint Degrees aim to address two main elements. First, there is a lack of transparent and full information provision through the documents such as degrees, transcript and/or diploma supplement, that recognition information centres, institutional credential evaluators and employers receive. Second, the relevant legal frameworks do not necessarily accommodate the way in which joint programmes are organised. In the light of this, the Guidelines want to provide higher education institutions, and their joint programmes, with examples of good practices by providing the perspective of ENIC-NARICs recognition centres. The main objective of these guidelines is therefore to facilitate and improve the full recognition of joint degrees by clarifying the expectations of ENIC-NARICs regarding the design and content of the degree and the Diploma Supplement. The Guidelines for Good Practice provide explanations on how to award a joint degree in such a way that it is recognisable and indeed recognised, on how the design of the joint degree and the Diploma Supplement can facilitate access to the labour-market, and when a joint degree is regarded as an official degree in other countries.

Keywords
Joint programmes, Recognition of joint degrees, Degree evaluation, Recognition centres

Reference
http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/Guidelines_for_Good_Practice_for_Awarding_Joint_Degrees

Evaluation Criteria value from 1 to 3 stars (low-medium-high)

impactful	transferable or replicable	sustainable	adaptable	innovative	added value
★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★	★★

Guidelines for international partnership agreements

Institution: Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden
Authors: Advisory Board for Internationalisation, Södertörn University

Type of publication
Development of international partnerships

Presentation
The Guidelines drafted by Södertörn University provide a comprehensive overview of the procedure for concluding international partnerships with higher education institutions (HEIs) and organisations in other countries, in the following areas: mobility for students, lecturers and other staff; recruitment of programme students from other countries; internationalisation at home (IaH); international networks and research partnerships. Many of these types of partnerships require the university to enter a written agreement to regulate liability and ensure mutual support. The majority of university agreements on international partnerships are signed at the university level, but there are also agreements that are signed by academic schools. This document provides a description of the university's various forms of agreement, what the university or school commits to, and a checklist for preparing and following up agreements, primarily mobility agreements.

Keywords
International Partnership agreement, Agreement of Cooperation, Mobility agreements

Reference
Guidelines for international partnership agreements-ENG.pdf

Evaluation Criteria value from 1 to 3 stars (low-medium-high)

impactful	transferable or replicable	sustainable	adaptable	innovative	added value
★★	★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★

Transnational Education toolkit

Institution: University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, United Kingdom
Authors: Karen Smith

Type of publication
Practical guide to transnational education

Presentation
This toolkit focuses specifically on UK transnational education. The quality assurance procedures and the enhancement activities described are based on and geared toward the UK context. Elements of the guide will certainly be of use to people operating in different jurisdictions. While the principal focus of the toolkit is on flying faculty teachers (most apparent in the section on the logistics of transnational education), the toolkit nevertheless contains material useful to those who have other roles in transnational education such as staff at international branch campuses, transnational education partners, faculties that need to develop relationships with their students. The transnational education toolkit gathers existing resources, in particular those developed by the higher education Academy (HEA) and the guidance from the Teaching International Students (TIS) project, published research, and links to other institutional resources. Summaries and extracts from the existing resources and research are supplemented by reflective questions, prompts, checklists, templates and tips from experienced transnational education teachers, which all aim to foster critical reflection on professional practice.
The transnational education toolkit is focused specifically on quality assurance and enhancement; the logistics of transnational education teaching; learning, teaching, and assessment; and finally, on the ability to build relationships when providing transnational education.

Keywords
Transnational education, Quality assurance, Learning and teaching assessment

Reference
Transnational Education toolkit.pdf

Evaluation Criteria value from 1 to 3 stars (low-medium-high)

impactful	transferable or replicable	sustainable	adaptable	innovative	added value
★★	★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★

Arab Master in Democracy and Human Rights, ARMA

Coordinator: University of Saint-Joseph, Lebanon
Countries involved: Lebanon, Palestine, Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Egypt, Italy, Denmark
Contact: University of Saint-Joseph, arma@usj.edu.lb

Type of initiative
South-South cooperation

Abstract

The Arab Master in Democracy and Human Rights is a unique programme designed to meet the needs of students, professionals and experts who want to deepen their knowledge and develop their skills in the field of democratic governance and human rights in the Middle East and North Africa. Established in 2015, it is the youngest of the Global Campus' regional masters. The programme was coordinated by the European Inter-University Centre during its first three editions, in collaboration with the Ca' Foscari University in Venice. It moved to Beirut in 2017 and is now coordinated by the Saint Joseph University. The Arab Master in Democracy and Human Rights is supported by a growing network of partner universities from the region: Saint Joseph University (Lebanon), Birzeit University (Palestine), International University of Rabat (Morocco), University of Carthage (Tunisia). Professors from the University of Jordan (Jordan) and the University of Cairo (Egypt) are also engaged in the programme. The partnership is also open to institutions beyond the region such as: the European Inter-University Centre (Italy), the Danish Institute for Human Rights, the University of Southern Denmark. The Arab Master in Democracy and Human Rights aims to support the next generation of experts, academics and practitioners and to give them the practical experience needed for building up their professional career and academic activities. It offers cross-regional mobility, with one semester in Beirut (Lebanon) and another in one of the following universities: Birzeit University (Palestine), the International University of Rabat (Morocco), the University of Carthage (Tunisia) or the University of Jordan (Jordan).

Keywords
Regional cooperation, Joint Master, Regional mobility, Democratic governance

Reference
https://arma-isp.usj.edu.lb/

Evaluation Criteria value from 1 to 3 stars (low-medium-high)

impactful	transferable or replicable	sustainable	adaptable	innovative	added value
★★★	★★	★★	★★	★★★	★★★

DIASPORA.MR

Countries involved: Mauritania
Contact: diasporamesrs@gmail.com

Type of initiative
Reconnecting academics to their home country

Abstract
The DIASPORA.MR project is a partnership of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Technology Information and Communication, and the IOM. The main objective of the website is to encourage people from the diaspora to become more involved in the development of Mauritania. Established in 2007, the IOM Mission in Mauritania collaborates with the Government of Mauritania and other partners in an effort to strengthen national migration management-capacity and increase support to migrants in the country. The academic diaspora portal has been launched in Mauritania in a bid to address the loss of local scholars and expertise in a country marked by serious brain drain. It aims to translate the Mauritanian brain drain into brain gain and brain circulation by accessing the knowledge held by Mauritanian experts from all fields and utilising such knowledge in the interests of the country and its higher education system. The portal is managed and updated by officials of the Ministry of Higher Education in Mauritania and seeks to strengthen relationships and enhance cooperation between the foreign higher education institutions, where Mauritanian academics are based, and local universities.

Keywords
Diaspora, Brain drain, Brain gain, Higher education, Migration

Reference
https://www.diaspora.mr/

Evaluation Criteria value from 1 to 3 stars (low-medium-high)

impactful	transferable or replicable	sustainable	adaptable	innovative	added value
★★	★★	★★	★★	★★	★★

Euro-Mediterranean University, EMUNI

Countries involved: the Euro-Mediterranean region
Contact: info@emuni.si

Type of initiative
Euro-Mediterranean cooperation network

Abstract
In June 2008, the Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI) was inaugurated in Slovenia. Shortly thereafter, EMUNI was endorsed by the heads of states at the Paris Summit for the Mediterranean, identifying EMUNI in their declaration as one of the priority areas of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). EMUNI was entrusted with the mission of contributing to knowledge amongst people in the region by establishing and fostering a Euro-Mediterranean higher education and research area. EMUNI, with its vast network of more than 130 universities from over 30 Euro-Mediterranean States, is more than just a conventional university. It is a university that operates through true partnership with other universities. It is a resilient network of collaborating higher education institutions from across the Mediterranean and it is also a platform for inter-cultural dialogue and science diplomacy. Established as an international organisation, EMUNI acts as a powerful force to bridge the shores of the Mediterranean. As such, EMUNI seeks to become:

- A reference university, conducting quality study programmes and state-of-the-art research in fields of high relevance, serving Euro-Mediterranean interests and challenges;
- A committed and dynamic network of diverse Euro-Mediterranean higher education and research institutions;
- An inclusive platform for intercultural dialogue and science diplomacy in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Keywords
Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, Inclusive platform, Higher education, Research, Science diplomacy

Reference
https://emuni.si/

Evaluation Criteria value from 1 to 3 stars (low-medium-high)

impactful	transferable or replicable	sustainable	adaptable	innovative	added value
★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★	★★

Euromed University of Fes, UEMF

Countries: Morocco
Contact: contact@ueuromed.org

Type of initiative
Regional integration promoting cooperation in Africa

Abstract

The Euromed University of Fez (UEMF) is a non-profit, public interest institution labelled by the Union for the Mediterranean with the support of its 43 member countries. Its diplomas are recognised by the Moroccan State, and several of its courses are in double graduation with the best universities in the Euro-Mediterranean area. The creation of the UEMF had the objective to create in Fez a framework for higher education and research-based on intercultural dialogue, exchange, and cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean and with a natural extension towards Sub-Saharan Africa, while offering education of excellence and conducting scientific research of very high level in close connection with the socio-economic world. UEMF contributes, from an academic and cultural point of view, to the development of regional integration in the Europe-Mediterranean-Africa area, promoting intercultural dialogue, exchange and academic and cultural partnerships. UEMF aims to be a research university that gives great importance to the three cycles of university education. Its educational programmes are designed to provide graduates with strong employability and/or entrepreneurial potential. It also conducts high-level research that meets the needs of society, working to design an enabling environment for innovation, knowledge and technology creation and transfer. Finally, UEMF aims to be one of the essential engines of development in the Fès-Meknès region. Ultimately, UEMF is gradually becoming one of the leaders in digital transformation and also as a major centre for innovation and entrepreneurship. UEMF has also the ambition to become a centre of cultural diversity, collaboration and exchange in the Euro-Mediterranean-African space, raise as the 1st University in Africa for education in targeted fields and the 1st University in Morocco for research capacity and entrepreneurship driver.

Keywords
Regional integration, Euro-Mediterranean-Africa space, research, exchange, entrepreneurship

Reference
https://ueuromed.org/en

Evaluation Criteria value from 1 to 3 stars (low-medium-high)

impactful	transferable or replicable	sustainable	adaptable	innovative	added value
★★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★	★★★

International Student Welcome Week at La Sapienza University

Contact: La Sapienza University of Rome, International Office, Italy

Type of initiative
Welcome and orientation services

Abstract
Studying in Europe's largest university, learning a new language, living in a European capital in a foreign country and meeting other students is a fantastic opportunity, but it can also be hard! The International Student Welcome Week is an event dedicated to welcome and orientation activities for foreign students arriving in Rome. In 2021, the Welcome Week is in its 7th edition. Each faculty organises welcome days, information on all the associations operating at and with the university is provided, plus key references are made available in terms of hospitality, housing, residence permit, health services and transportation. On the webpage dedicated to the event, the university also provides international students with an international student guide, practical pieces of information and a section dedicated to scholarships.

Keywords
Guidance, Orientation, Students' services

Reference
https://www.uniroma1.it/en/pagina/international-student-welcome-week (2021 edition)

Evaluation Criteria value from 1 to 3 stars (low-medium-high)

impactful	transferable or replicable	sustainable	adaptable	innovative	added value
★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★	★★★

Safir, youth in action

Partners: French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Institut Français, CFI Media Development, Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie, Arab NGO Network for development, Laboratoire de l'Économie Sociale et Solidaire, Pitchworthy, co-financed by the European Union
Countries involved: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia.

Type of initiative
Regional cooperation for social entrepreneurship

Abstract
Safir is an ambitious project supporting youth and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 9 countries across Northern Africa and the Middle East. It supports more than 1,000 young project leaders involved in entrepreneurial projects with social, cultural and environmental impact, the development of a regional network of organisations supporting social entrepreneurship, and the creation of spaces for dialogue between youth and governmental authorities. The projects involve civil society organisations, incubators, young leaders and universities to generate synergies and promote: 1) advocacy training and skill-building sessions; 2) creation of a network of incubators in Northern Africa and the Middle East and create a regional toolkit to support innovative entrepreneurship; 3) 1,000 young people, giving them the opportunity to participate in social transformation by supporting their associative and entrepreneurial projects.

Keywords
Regional cooperation, Social entrepreneurship, Youth, dialogue

Reference
https://www.safir-eu.com/index-en.html

Evaluation Criteria value from 1 to 3 stars (low-medium-high)

impactful	transferable or replicable	sustainable	adaptable	innovative	added value
★★★	★★	★★	★★	★★	★★★

SEMSEM, Employability and mobility services in the form of company internships for Maghreb/Mashreq students

Coordinator: University of Montpellier, France
Countries involved: Germany, France, Spain, Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Algeria
Contact: SEMSEM-Internship Consortium, supportsemsem@univ-montp2.fr

Type of initiative
Measure to boost employability of young graduates

Abstract

The acronym SEMSEM refers to the old Arabic tale of "The Thousand and One Nights". It designates in Arabic the word "Sesame" which is a magical word that can, in the tale, open the door of the treasure. The SEMSEM project is a regional structural programme which aims at optimising the employability and pace of professional integration of young graduates in the Maghreb, Mashreq and Europe. It is a single interface that brings together students, universities and businesses. The project took place between December 2013 and December 2016. The members of the SEMSEM project consortium belong to 7 countries (Germany, France, Spain, Morocco, Lebanon, Tunisia and Algeria). The objectives of the SEMSEM project were: 1) implementing a multiservice digital platform, designed to facilitate the research, finalisation, support and monitoring of transnational internships in companies bringing together three audience groups: students, universities and companies; 2) providing internship supervision training, through the organisation of quality workshops that bring together industrial internship managers and academic tutors. The project idea offers solutions to students in terms of internship and mobility opportunities both at the national and regional level. Likewise, it promotes coordination between school supervisors and professionals in order to ensure effective internships' management. Moreover, the initiative strengthens collaborations in many directions: between the private sector and higher education institutions, between Southern and northern universities, and among Southern universities themselves.

Keywords
Employability, Professional integration, University-industry Collaboration

Reference
https://www.enp.edu.dz/storage/2020/10/projet-SEMSEM.pdf

Evaluation Criteria value from 1 to 3 stars (low-medium-high)

impactful	transferable or replicable	sustainable	adaptable	innovative	added value
★★★	★★	★★★	★★	★★	★★★

Toward Empowered Migrant Youth in Southern Europe-TandEM

Start and End dates: 01/01/2018-15/12/2020
Countries involved: Spain, Italy, Malta, Greece, Croatia and Cyprus
Partners: International Organisation for Migration (IOM), European University Association (EUA), the Comunità Religiosa Islamica Italiana (COREIS)

Type of initiative
Social inclusion

Abstract

The TandEM Project-Toward Empowered Migrant Youth in Southern Europe aimed to build a bridge between migrants and local youth to promote dialogue, mutual understanding and cohesion in Spain, Italy, Malta, Greece, Croatia and Cyprus. The project was grounded in a network of universities, as the places of socialisation and integration for an increasing number of foreign students in Southern Europe, the ideal places to design a youth-led response to discriminatory and toxic narratives on migration. The project had the objective to encourage young Southern Europeans' active participation in the integration of young migrants in their countries, while allowing young people to speak up and define their identities. The project had four main objectives: enhancing education, promoting inter-cultural dialogue and understanding among students and young people, encouraging communication through the launch of a dedicated social media campaign and supporting integration through the development of a student mentorship programmes. A series of tools are available on the website of the project. In particular, in the framework of the project a regional study conducted by the EUA (European University Association) has been developed and published. The study explores foreign students' needs and barriers to access higher education, maps challenges to integration in Southern European universities and develops recommendations for national governments, universities, international organisations and students themselves.

Keywords
Integration of young migrants, Intercultural dialogue, Social cohesion

Reference
https://iomintandem.com/project/

Evaluation Criteria value from 1 to 3 stars (low-medium-high)

impactful	transferable or replicable	sustainable	adaptable	innovative	added value
★★	★★	★★	★★	★★	★★

Practices from other regions of the world

ARROW, improvement of research and innovation skills in Mongolian universities, coordinated by Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain.

The aim of the project is to improve the scientific quality of publications in Mongolian universities by developing the writing skills and increasing the number of publications of scientific papers in those faculties with low or very low publication rates. The project groups 4 European universities (from Portugal, Poland, Spain) and 11 Mongolian partners. Mongolian researchers learnt how to improve the quality of their scientific productions, and engage in a "mentor scientist" platform, where prestigious scientists around the world altruistically help improving the manuscripts of scientists in developing countries. A focus was set on English skills for scientific purposes, plagiarism, writing skills, statistics and online scientific databases. The training material, developed in English, is available for all researchers worldwide and can benefit many more than the sole project partners.

More information: www.arrow.ulpgc.es

ASAF, African students and alumni forum
It is a platform of African students, alumni and professionals who have benefited from international mobility scholarships funded by the European Union and the African Union that offers opportunities for exchange, collaboration and capacity building. ASAF is organised by its members who work on a volunteer basis. It is funded by the European Union and managed by the European Union in close cooperation with the African Union. The rationale is to contribute to improving the quality and integration of higher education

in Africa. ASAF's vision is to become an inclusive and transcultural platform that contributes to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), of the objectives of the African Union's Agenda 2063 ("The Africa We Want") and of the partnership between Africa and the European Union. ASAF's overall objective is to enhance learning mobility, innovation and competitiveness in Africa by supporting young people's employability, career perspectives and entrepreneurship by strengthening their participatory and leadership skills. More specifically, ASAF wants to help improve the quality and harmonisation process of higher education, increase transparency and recognition of learning outcomes in Africa, and raise awareness of EU-funded international mobility programmes.

More information: https://www.asaf.africa/

OPT-IN, intercultural transnational operators project Coordinated by the University of Bologna (Italy) involving Ecuador, Colombia, Italy, France and Spain. OPT-IN is an initiative aimed at establishing an academic programme that addresses two fundamental issues: the protection of nature and the construction of Peace. The participating universities make it a unique transnational project, since 8 universities of the Andean Community and the European Union participate in it. The OPT-IN project created a new master's degree (in Ecuador) and updated existing post-graduate courses (in Colombia) on the defence of the rights of nature and intercultural justice in Ecuador and Colombia. The goal is to highlight the interrelations between socio-environmental conflicts and justice from an intercultural perspective, which recognises nature as a subject of rights and the collective rights of peoples whose relationship with nature has

always been based on the protection of it. As a result, all the universities involved have developed an academic offer that is more in line with the actual needs of the respective national societies. The impact on national politics of both States and international cooperation between the states has been strong and effective.

More information: http://naturalezaypaz-optin.net/

PONCHO, internationalisation of Latin American peripheral universities through sustainable integration and inclusive implementation of International Relations Offices, coordinated by the Universidad de las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain.

The project was aimed at encouraging the internationalisation of Latin American partner universities, especially those working in peripheral regions. At the institutional level, internationalisation strategies have been improved and International Relations Offices have been created or consolidated and included in HEIs' structures. In order to encourage the internationalisation of Latin American partner universities, an online platform was created to increase networking and the international reach of partners. The PONCHO consortium grouped together 4 European universities (from Spain, France, Portugal and Poland) and 21 universities from 8 Latin American countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay). The peculiarity and novelty of PONCHO lie in the fact that it is mainly composed of small universities, geographically located in peripheral areas and with no, or little, experience in EU and capacity building projects.

More information: http://poncho.ulpgc.es/

3.3 Complementarities and synergies in the Mediterranean

It is nowadays widely recognised that it makes little sense to talk about a homogeneous "Mediterranean region" as such, just because of the huge differences between its countries in term of culture, language, historical background and more. It is time to acknowledge that the "others" have the same complexities that characterise our European scenario. Our common roots, common culture and common heritage can no longer be ignored, or simplified, and generalised approaches ("The Arabs", "The Islamic World", and so on) should no longer exist. The differences and complexities that do exist should be considered as a richness, as an added value leading to tailored strategic actions.

An innovative approach in this sense will not neglect or deny that the countries of the region present many differences, as well as it does not exclude common problems, challenges, and opportunities that affect the internationalisation process in more than one country. In the following section we have listed the common issues emerged in the majority of the target countries of the study, upon which we formulated the recommendations on how to improve the level and scope of internationalisation of South-Mediterranean HEIs. Recommendations are addressed to all the actors involved in the process, namely the universities themselves, national and international policy-makers, regional organisations and practitioners. The recommendations are the final result of the participatory method applied throughout the whole study.

- **The impact of the Erasmus+ programme.**
Erasmus+ is the programme that has generated the largest and most positive impact on the strategies of the target countries in terms of internationalisation. The availability of funds, the geographical diversification and the possibility to implement capacity building actions in different fields have generated opportunities of internationalisation in many directions, of mobility actions and in general opportunities of growth for the HE systems.

- **Administrative staff competences.**
The study shed light on an issue shared by most countries involved in the study: the administrative staff's failure to tap into international activities and to support HEIs in the management, participation and access to opportunities of cooperation. Therefore, the top management should commit to consider T the administrative staff as a key element in the process of internationalisation.

- **Recognition of credits and qualifications systems.**
The analysis showed a fragmented reality in terms of credit recognition and assessment of qualifications, a barrier that negatively impacts on the internationalisation actions implemented by the HEIs, in terms of accessibility and in general reducing the appeal of South-Mediterranean HE systems. There is a clear need to adopt national and regional reforms aimed at designing a framework for the recognition of credits and qualifications, through the simplification of the national framework or the creation of new ones, either at a national or regional level.

- **Regional and national structural problems in gathering information on international activities and mobility.**
The research highlights clear difficulties in collecting reliable and comparable data, due to difficulties in accessing sources and the differences in data collection methods. This makes it difficult to compare information across countries and it underlines the need to improve the accessibility of data, and to make the data collection process more coherent, reliable and homogeneous, thanks to a more coordinated involvement of the academic community and the university management.

- **Low attractiveness of local HE systems.**
MENA countries' institutions aim at being modern, competitive, consistent with international standards to become attractive systems, looking at Europe and at other regions of the world. Most of the countries in the study want to become more attractive and play the role of destination countries for international students, in particular coming from neighbouring regions (e.g., Sub-Saharan region). In addition to that, they need to have efficient Quality Assurance systems, improve the knowledge of foreign languages and advance in the process of digitalisation of the internal procedures and in the delivery of online teaching within the context of formal learning.

- **Visa problems.**
Obtaining visas for international mobility, especially from MENA countries to Europe, has always been a serious obstacle to mobility. It mostly depends on the political and social contexts of both MENA and EU countries. The research results suggest that efforts should be made to increase the communications on the visa procedures within all actors involved in order to improve the participation in mobility and in

cross-borders collaboration arrangements, including the Erasmus+ programme, by students and staff. This will also strengthen the participation of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, and reduce the loss of attractiveness of Europe in favour of other non-EU realities, redirecting flows far from Europe where access is made easier.

- **International cooperation in human and social sciences.**

This study has shown that the international cooperation in human and social is less developed than cooperation in hard sciences, which maintains a high level of attractiveness and participation. An increased cooperation in the human sciences would favour mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue, and would pave the way to new possibilities for development and funding that have not yet been explored.

- **Knowledge of all the dimensions of internationalisation.**

In most cases, internationalisation is basically identified solely with mobility. Raising awareness on all the dimensions related to internationalisation would increase the number of possible collaborations and improve the quality standards of HEIs, thanks to a more comprehensive and responsible internationalisation process.

- **Simplification and harmonisation of bureaucratic procedures.**

High levels of bureaucracy in the HE systems are a common feature in most of the target countries involved in the study, representing an obstacle to the implementation of institutional internationalisation strategies. Complex and lengthy procedures generate difficulties in accessing information, limit participation, reduce efficiency, and hinder transnational cooperation and mobility.

- **Bilateral cooperation.**

Bilateral cooperation fosters forms of collaboration mainly because it facilitates overcoming contextual obstacles and barriers to internationalisation, such as the criticalities related to credit recognition or language limitations. Cooperation through bilateral agreements is a common practice for many institutions in the region. Nevertheless, even if it favours mutual understanding, the study reveals that bilateral cooperation may also increase the fragmentation and exclusiveness of international relations.

- **Internationalisation of research.**

It is widely recognised that the internationalisation of research is implemented at very different levels across the target countries. Cooperation can be encouraged by enhancing Capacity Building actions for South-Mediterranean researchers on research methodology, by improving publication policies and by boosting investments in technology and equipment, in order to raise the level and accessibility of the research produced in the South.
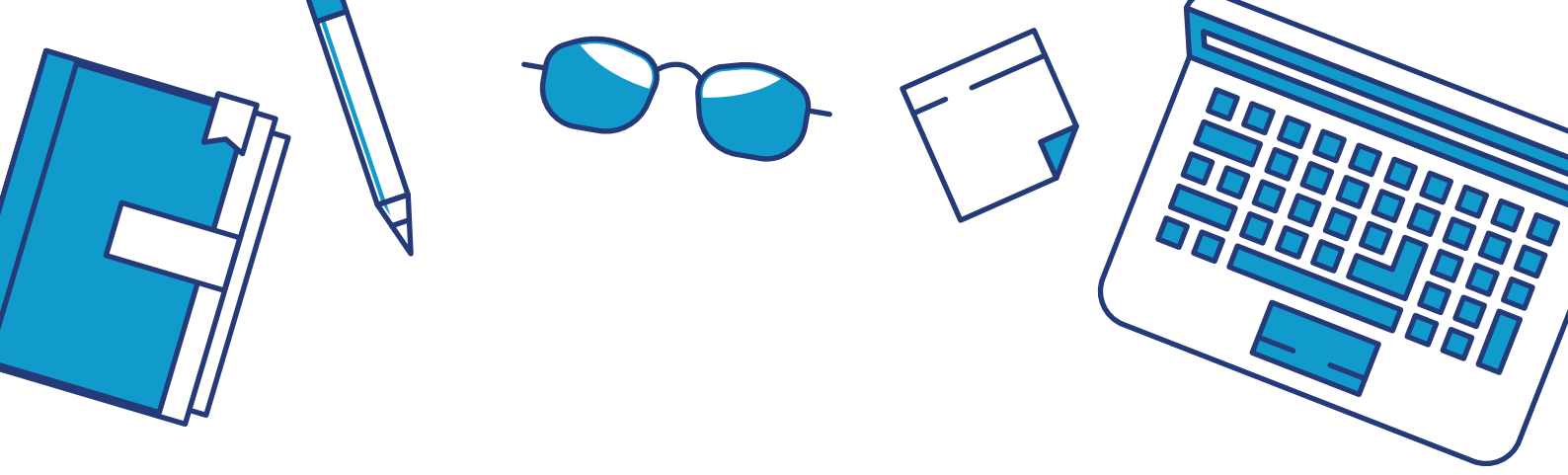
Enhancing internationalisation of higher education in the Mediterranean
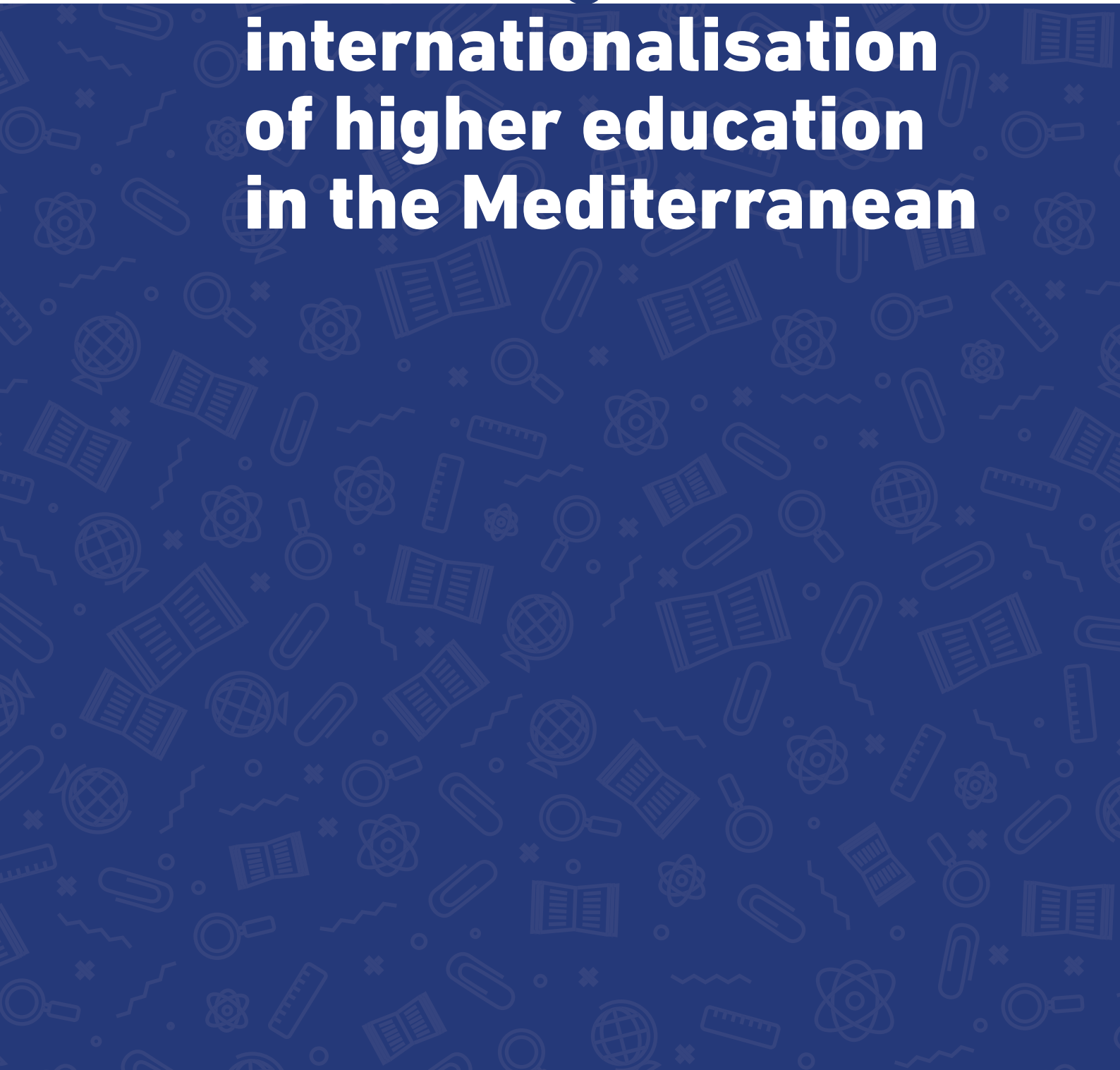
4.1 Country-specific recommendations and roadmaps

After the comprehensive collection and elaboration of both qualitative and quantitative data, ongoing consultations and a continuous validation process, the UNIMED research team was able to conduct a SWOT analysis for each HE system, in order to highlight challenges and opportunities for internationalisation of higher education in each country of the study. Once the analysis was completed, the results were used to define a set of actions and recommendations, highlighting internal and external factors which are positively or negatively impacting higher education (and in turn the national context). The SWOT analysis was used as the basis to reflect on long-term changes and resources. The recommendations and the theme-based roadmaps are intended to support the UfM Secretariat in its mandate for regional integration and cooperation promotion within the UfM strategic area of higher education, through the involvement and capacity building of all the stakeholders involved. Beyond the national context, regional recommendations were also made, for the challenges and opportunities common to several countries.

Algeria

Internal factors (strengths and weaknesses): Higher Education sector, HEIs and the Ministry of HE and SR
External factors (opportunities and threats): the national, regional and international context

Strengths

- Ministry has an internationalisation strategy and a holistic strategy for mobility of all categories (academic and administrative staff, students)
- In each HEI, presence of dedicated delegates for external relations and cooperation service
- International students considered as national ones (equal access)
- HE system is a destination country for Sub-Saharan and Arab countries
- Strong bilateral cooperation with France
- Diversified international cooperation in geographical terms
- Promotion of the outgoing mobility for PHD and research students
- Presence of original format of international HEI (ex: Pan African University, ESAA)
- High impact of internationalisation activities for the internationalisation of research
- Adoption of ECTS facilitates international exchanges

Weaknesses

- Limited autonomy in the final decision making
- Lack of English language knowledge
- Need to reinforce staff capabilities in less internationalised HEIs
- Cultural resistance to undertake mobility
- Reduced access to ICM
- Lack of international cooperation in humanities and social sciences even if it's the greatest part of registered students
- Brain drain effect
- Cultural resistance of the academic staff to on-line teaching in spite of ongoing efforts by HEIs and ministry to promote it
- Digital divide in rural areas
- PHD Mobility is almost completely outgoing and very little incoming

Opportunities

- Significant internal funds for higher education
- Favourable geographical position
- The national system looks at Africa as the reference market
- Strong bilateral cooperation with France
- ICM special window for Algeria
- Reinforce multilateral cooperation

Threats

- Bureaucratic process limiting the decisional process
- Inequal coverage of multilateral cooperation
- Prejudices from EU partners affecting the international perception of Algeria as a destination country
- Not a destination country at tourism level, therefore the country is not well known at the international level
- Visa needed to enter the country
- Financial regulations slow down payment procedures
- Low quality of internet connection
- Geographical conformation

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1 Moving forward in the ongoing governance reform process regarding quality assurance and university strategic plans, in order to make universities more autonomous and inclusive in the definition of their internationalisation actions.

R2 Widening the outreach of Algerian universities by involving the less involved HEIs, in order to allow a coherent growth of the HE system and diversifying the internationalisation process by capitalising on internal resources, expertise and opportunities.

R3 Increasing the attractiveness of the Algerian HE system by leveraging the country's geographical position in the Mediterranean and its role in Africa.

R4 Strengthening the investment of resources in scientific research to foster international exposure and recognition of Algerian HEIs in the international arena.

THEME-BASED ROADMAP

- Identifying and training focal points at faculty level (departments, libraries, communication services…) for a more effective dissemination of internationalisation opportunities.

- Implementing and monitoring the internationalisation strategy at institutional level upon shared indicators for the whole HE sector.

- Organising cluster meetings at a regional level in order to share best practices acquired through multi- o bilateral cooperation agreements, especially with the more remote and less involved universities in the country. Virtual platforms and tools can be fully exploited in this sense to widen access and participation.

- Increasing the availability of updated and wide-ranging information on university resources, offers, opportunities, international activities.

- Exploring privileged bilateral cooperation arrangements in order to develop more joint activities, relying on international staff and students in mobility as ambassadors and testimonials.

- Improving the knowledge of foreign languages among all the categories involved in international activities (students, academic staff and administrative staff) in order to increase the international exposure of the Algerian universities. Special attention should be paid to social sciences and humanities in cooperation.

- Accelerating the modernisation of infrastructures for hosting people involved in mobility and dedicated to research.

Egypt

Internal factors (strengths and weaknesses): Higher Education sector, HEIs and the Ministry of HE and SR
External factors (opportunities and threats): the national, regional and international context

Strengths

- Green economy and climate change have been declared as priorities by HEI system
- Financial support by the government for mobilities (international exchanges)
- Scholarships are co-financed in bilateral agreements with EU countries
- Presence of international branches of foreign universities
- Desire of diversifying the geographical distribution of international cooperation
- High Participation EU projects during the last 5 years
- Egypt has a strategy to become a destination country

Weaknesses

- Legislation for financial management is very restrictive
- Bureaucratic procedures affect internationalisation of HEIs
- Mobility only for students and academic staff not for admin staff
- Language is a barrier for admin staff
- Missing solid framework for recognition of international credits and diplomas
- Difficulty of peripheral HEIs to access EU programmes due to scarce staff knowledge and capabilities of the same
- Credit recognition systems diversification and use of the American education system in most HEIs make it difficult to implement joint degrees and hinders some forms of cooperation

Opportunities

- Great attractiveness of country in EU and Mediterranean countries for historical and cultural reasons
- New emerging financial and cooperation partners beyond the EU (International Branch Campuses program)
- Bilateral cooperation ongoing with other funding bodies (e.g. DAAD, high cooperation with Germany)

Threats

- Decision process is highly centralised, limited autonomy by HEIs
- Significant digital divide prevents access to online teaching
- Brain drain

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1 The international dimension has traditionally been a structural element of Egyptian HEIs, making Egypt a traditional destination country for international mobility. Nevertheless, the increasing competitiveness with neighbouring countries makes it necessary to invest in new infrastructures and in research and innovation in order to raise the quality and the attractiveness of the Egyptian higher education system.

R2 Lack of comprehensive information on the recognition procedures, as well as a lack of knowledge about the distribution of responsibilities among the various actors involved in the recognition process, constitutes one of the most important barriers for internationalisation. In this regard, Egypt should provide a general national framework for credit recognition and assessment of qualifications.

R3 Simplification of national rules is needed in order to strengthen universities' participation and performance in international activities and programmes.

R4 Improve the knowledge of foreign languages among all the categories involved in international activities (students, academic staff and administrative staff) in order to increase the international exposure of the universities.

THEME-BASED ROADMAP

- The Egyptian higher education system benefits from a certain degree of autonomy in the definition of the internationalisation strategies. Nevertheless, the national governance structure reveals that the system is highly centralised, especially with regard to decision-making processes. In the light of this, Egypt should increase the level of decisional autonomy of HEIs in order to make the system more dynamic and more attractive.

- Reform of the credit recognition system in order to expand the spectrum of international relations and to forty the universities' international cooperation, complemented by a capacity building action to train the staff entitled to manage the recognition process.

- Ministries should simplify laws and regulations related to the university's functioning especially concerning financial administration.

- Universities should define a clear strategy around internationalisation in line with national internationalisation targets and international standards.

- Accelerating the modernisation of infrastructures and improve the digitalisation process in order to reinforce the internal capacity of academic and administrative staff on research and innovation.

- Improving national and institutional policies aimed at strengthening administrative staff skills in order to make the universities' actions and the international relations offices' performance more impactful.

- Increasing collaboration with the private sector in order to make international cooperation stronger and more attractive in particular with regard to crucial areas such as renewable energies, healthcare and climate change. Involving private sector stakeholders in the institutional life and in the definition of curricula.

Israel

Internal factors (strengths and weaknesses): Higher Education sector, HEIs and the Ministry of HE and SR
External factors (opportunities and threats): the national, regional and international context

Strengths

- Council of HE implements a strategy for internationalisation
- State provides funds to support the development of internationalisation strategies
- Knowledge triangle is very strong to increase the systems attractiveness
- High level of interaction of the HEI system with central Europe and the most advanced countries (USA, Japan, China, etc.) HEIs
- NEO has a specific strategy to increase Erasmus impact on students
- Strong and competitive research system
- HEI have large autonomy

Weaknesses

- The HEI system does not interact with other Mediterranean countries' HEI systems
- Lack of accessibility to data and statistics on HEI system (mainly in Hebrew)
- Courses are taught in the Hebrew language

Opportunities

- Usage of Erasmus+ for international mobility
- General attractiveness of country, especially in the field of tech, research and innovation
- Bilateral cooperation opportunities are well exploited
- Israel has been an associated country of the Horizon Program since the creation of the program

Threats

- Political relationships with neighbouring countries do not facilitate regional cooperation
- Restrictions on the granting of visas

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1 Higher education institutions play a major role in Israel. Despite the high level of internationalisation, Israel should further increase the attractiveness of Israeli HEIs by diversifying the educational offer currently mainly in Hebrew. This would make it possible to achieve excellence in teaching and research, one of the main objectives of the Israeli higher education system.

R2 Increasing students' English language knowledge to allow them to take more international opportunities and to improve their internationalisation exposure.

R3 Given that most of the data available are in Hebrew, there is a need to increase the accessibility to the data concerning the higher education system through publication in English. This would ease access to important information and increase opportunities for collaboration with international stakeholders.

R4 Widening the scope of the internationalisation of the Israeli higher education system through the use of new channels of cooperation.

THEME-BASED ROADMAP

- Improving national and institutional policies aimed at strengthening administrative staff skills (with specific attention on language) in order to make the universities' actions and the international relations offices' performance more impactful.

- Increasing the number of courses taught in English in order to make the whole system more attractive.

- Updating the main public databases with data and documents available in foreign languages on the Israeli HE sector.

- Strengthening and promoting science diplomacy actions aimed at increasing academic collaborations and at paving the way for scientific cooperation, on the basis of past initiatives that proved to be successful, such as SESAME (Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East).

Jordan

Internal factors (strengths and weaknesses): Higher Education sector, HEIs and the Ministry of HE and SR
External factors (opportunities and threats): the national, regional and international context

Strengths

- Rapid modernization of the HEI sector and its quality has made it a strategic pillar for the development of the country
- Legislative reform indicates internationalisation as an asset and a priority
- The HE system is mature enough to be further improved
- English teaching and syllabus coherent with international standards, English version of institutional websites available
- Good cooperation in Hard Sciences and research on the top agenda of internationalization for universities
- A QA policy and agency exists for HEIs, which contributed to quality of education and improved universities' international ranking, perceived as a means of promoting international research
- The Ministry of HE and SR is perceived by HEIs as a reliable actor to support their internationalisation activities
- Policy reform for online learning and digitalization in place
- Some Universities have students' organizations or alumni clubs which greatly support incoming and outgoing students' mobility

Weaknesses

- Insufficient knowledge of HEIs of the whole set of activities to be implemented to fully promote their internationalisation
- Most of English courses are in Hard Sciences while Humanities are mostly taught in Arabic, reducing international cooperation in Social Sciences
- Scarce knowledge of the English language in smaller and peripheral HEIs
- Scarce participation in EU programmes of smaller and peripheral HEIs
- Gender gap in travels, especially for students
- Quick shift to online learning and digitalization creates a gap between most prepared HEIs and HEIs which are not ready to react (readiness and preparedness), risking the increase the digital divide
- Credit recognitions systems diversification and the use of the American education system in most HEIs makes it difficult to implement joint degrees and hinders some forms of cooperation
- Lack of sufficient joint programs and doctoral studies

Opportunities

- Diversification of cooperation opportunities with other countries: Turkey, Saudi Arabia, India, China, Malaysia
- Bilateral cooperation ongoing with other funding bodies (e.g., DAAD, high cooperation with Germany)
- The country's stability compared to the other countries in the region is an asset
- Jordan has a high attractiveness in the region

Threats

- High presence of refugees putting pressure on the HE system
- Lack of national funding for internationalization
- Internet infrastructure is weak

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1   Jordanian universities are considered to be among the major actors for the development of the country. Universities should play a wider role through the reinforcement of internationalisation at home practices and their social responsibility dimension; and strengthening the entrepreneurial mindset and the capacity to dialogue with the private sector, to reduce brain drain, especially towards the Gulf countries.

R2   Jordanian HEIs should capitalise on previous experiences and acquired skills, considering a strategic shift for which internationalisation is no longer the objective but the means to reaching higher goals. Internationalisation should increase the attractiveness of the higher education system in Jordan, as a destination country for international students and scholars, and a reliable actor for international organisations.

R3   Jordan should invest in research and innovation, raising the quality and the number of post-graduate studies, reinforcing the offer of joint degrees in collaboration with more experienced institutions and leveraging on the high-quality human capital to soar in international research collaborations.

THEME-BASED ROADMAP

- Creating a national agency providing orientation and guidance to international students and scholars, enhancing the potential of attractiveness of the higher education sector. The National Agency would provide information and references, support on mobility and hospitality, promote cultural dialogue, and increase the visibility of university activities and programmes. To complement, universities should dedicate resources to track all the activities implemented and make the most of the information available on their institutional websites.

- Strengthening relevant internationalisation at home and inclusion measures, such as: the organisation of events of intercultural dialogue; organising extra-curricular activities engaging social actors and civil society organisations providing spaces for integration and valorisation of diversity; inviting international organisations and experts to deliver speeches and workshops at the university (both in-presence and virtually); including a global perspective in the curricula.

- Empowering and strengthening the role and presence of students' organisations, as a means to supporting incoming and outgoing students' mobility.

- Following successful examples in the country and regional good practices for the development of effective relations with the private sector, strengthening the role of career centres and developing internships opportunities with local providers.

- Focusing on the future by developing cooperation projects in research, both in hard sciences and humanities.

- Relying on existing bilateral cooperation agreements to widen the offer of joint degrees and strengthening the post-doctoral education offer, as well as making agreements for co-supervision of PhD students.

- Creating a dedicated platform where researchers can network with each other and with international peers, showcase their project ideas, exchange resources. The platform should follow in the footsteps of the MIMIr project and has the potential to become a virtual collaborative space for the research conducted in the region.

Lebanon

Internal factors (strengths and weaknesses): Higher Education sector, HEIs and the Ministry of HE and SR
External factors (opportunities and threats): the national, regional and international context

Strengths

- Strong international links with EU and non-EU HEIs
- Full autonomy of HEIs under all aspects, the ministry does not interfere neither in both public nor private institutions
- IROs and QA offices exist in most universities
- HE system works in 3 languages, facilitating 2-ways mobilities
- Erasmus+ has generated a diversification in the partnerships and South-South cooperation
- High levels of incoming and outgoing mobility, gender independent, also supported by the private sector and foreign governments
- Strong interaction with large international organisations
- AUB based in Beirut is at the top ranking for HEIs worldwide

Weaknesses

- Lack of a national strategy for HEI (legislation on several matters exists on paper, but very outdated and rarely translated into action)
- The HE system is highly fragmented
- HEIs communicate with foreign counterparts on an individual basis
- Lack of a vision for the sector by the ministry
- Credit recognition is a big problem, systems are not homogeneous and there are no guidelines at national level
- Cultural resistance and dislike towards virtual activities
- Lack of legislation on online teaching and learning
- Formal recognition of refugees is missing
- Not all level of HEIs staff are equally involved in international activities
- Lack of a national agency for QA and accreditation

Opportunities

- Significant funding opportunities for bilateral cooperation
- Diaspora as a networking opportunity
- Cultural bridge between Europe and the Middle East
- Opening to the Gulf area

Threats

- Financial crisis and the 2020 crisis of the banking system
- Governmental and institutional crisis
- Turmoil and unrests affecting security since October 2019
- External policies affect internal processes
- Bureaucratic barriers negatively affect in-ternationalisation
- Internet and ICT infrastructure of bad quality

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1 The reform process initiated with the aim of developing a coherent and tailored national strategy for the higher education sector should be accelerated, in order to reduce the negative effects generated by a highly diversified and fragmented sector, providing HEIs with a number of guiding principles to maximise their impact and contribute to the development of the country.

R2 The issue of qualifications recognition poses a challenge to the Lebanese higher education system, due to the coexistence at HEIs of both the European and the American frameworks for recognition. The definition of a national qualification framework, providing universities with clear guidance in the matter, would be beneficial and in turn would facilitate exchanges and international cooperation both with Europe and the Middle East.

R3 A long-term regulatory framework for online learning and the recognition of virtual activities should be further developed, beyond the recent emergency legislation issued to cope with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

R4 HEIs should leverage on the strong bilateral cooperation agreements with a wide range of international organisations to generate synergies and reduce duplication of efforts and replication of initiatives.

THEME-BASED ROADMAP

- Developing a national strategy for higher education that is up-to-date and supports the modernisation of the sector in line with international standards and trends, with the support of reliable institutional actor, such as the HERE working group and the World Bank. The strategy should be implemented with the support of dedicated structures at the Ministry and at the institutional level.

- Creating a national agency for quality assurance as a national reference for HEIs, in order to guarantee the adequacy of the education provided and to complement international accreditations of institutions and programmes.

- Developing dedicated actions that build on past and current experiences (above all on the MERIC-Net project and the LEBPASS project) and on the collaboration with international stakeholders, in order to define a national qualification framework (NQF), providing universities with a clear guidance in the matter. The creation of the NQF for recognition of qualifications will enhance transparency, coherence and compatibility between systems. Support may be granted by the already existing Recognition and Equivalence Committee.

- Developing capacity-building actions to train academic and administrative staff on the recognition procedures in the different systems, reducing the complexity of assessing foreign qualifications and the credits acquired by national students in mobility.

- Developing a long-term national legislation on e-learning and a system of recognition of virtual activities. Thanks to these national regulations, universities would be able to offer blended learning experiences, including international contents, in their curriculum, involving foreign teachers in course delivery (virtually). Moreover, virtual collaborative learning may become an additional opportunity of internationalisation for students.

- Developing a capacity-building action to strengthen digital skills (for both academic staff, administrative staff, and students) and explore all the possibilities offered by the use of technology in education. This should be complemented by an investment in terms of infrastructures and equipment, to increase access to digitalisation.

- Organising a cluster meeting with the main international organisations operating in the country to showcase their initiatives and create synergies, among them and with other institutions in the region experiencing similar challenges.

Libya

Internal factors (strengths and weaknesses): Higher Education sector, HEIs and the Ministry of HE and SR
External factors (opportunities and threats): the national, regional and international context

Strengths

- A number of HEIs have good skills and internationalisation capabilities thanks to EU projects (Tempus + CBHE)
- Education Ministry is running a significant scholarship programme for international mobility
- Each HEI has an international relationships office and they work in a coordinated way
- HEI remained open and operational in spite of the crisis
- Recognition of international mobility as a career opportunity
- HEIs are committed to enhancing their international standing
- A number of HEIs have formalised relationships with African universities

Weaknesses

- Lack of ministerial policy
- A number of HEIs lack skills in internationalisation (young HEIs)
- Regulations for usage of funds by HEIs
- Scarce knowledge of foreign languages by HEIs staff
- Lack of IT equipment
- Lack of legislation for online teaching
- Low quality and quantity of research projects reduced the international attractiveness of the whole HEI system
- Gender gap in the access to internationalisation opportunities especially by HEI staff
- Frequent staff turnover in IROs

Opportunities

- New EU programmes for HEIs internationalisation
- Libya is a priority for EU external cooperation and for international stakeholders

Threats

- Conflicts and war-like situation affecting HEIs' performances
- Legislation on financial matters is a blocking factor for payments
- Security restrictions and Visa problems (affecting incoming and outgoing mobility)
- Lack of efficient Network infrastructure (web)
- Other countries are developing online teaching as a means of internationalisation
- Lack of readiness of industry for cooperation with academia

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1 Supporting a structural reform process in the country for a clear definition of a strategic vision concerning the higher education system, with specific attention to research, governance (with a focus on institutional autonomy) and quality of teaching.

R2 Strengthening universities' exposure and performance in particular by addressing language and cultural barriers, which are currently limiting the access to internationalisation opportunities for both academic and administrative staff and consequently limiting their capacities.

R3 Widening the outreach of Libyan universities by involving the less involved HEIs in order to allow a coherent growth of the Libyan HE system and benefiting from the possibility of connection with Sub-Saharan Africa.

R4 International stakeholders should support the development of infrastructure and the country digitalisation in order to allow the local higher education institutions to increase attractiveness and technological readiness.
Theme-based roadmap

THEME-BASED ROADMAP

- International stakeholders should support local institutions, in cooperation with the universities, in the finalisation of a structural reform process for higher education. The creation of a multi-stakeholder committee (under the supervision of the EU delegation for Libya) for supporting this reform process is highly recommended as the first concrete step.

- The Libyan University Presidents Council should be supported in playing a decisive role in assisting the Ministry of Education towards strategic advancements of the HE sector.

- Universities should take capacity-building actions aimed at raising the quality of their research and engaging in high-quality scientific research activities, complemented by the definition of successful actions tackling the challenges of the Libyan society.

- The EU should find concrete and tangible synergies among ongoing programmes and projects by upscaling already ongoing initiatives and by efficiently using different budget lines.

- European universities should abandon a stereotyped vision of the country and recognise that, despite all the difficulties, it is possible and feasible to cooperate with the Libyan higher education system.

- Universities should guarantee an ongoing update of university's staff skills, in particular on the following issues: quality assurance, institutional management, pedagogical innovation, teaching and research methodology.

- Universities should upscale and upgrade the existing quality and performance evaluation offices, in a way that they become a reference point to disseminate quality and assurance practices at the institutions.

- Supporting scientific collaboration under the form of "science diplomacy action" with the aim of easing political tensions, guaranteeing stability, mitigating the economic crisis, supporting long-term stabilisation and, ultimately, reducing the country's isolation.

Mauritania

Internal factors (strengths and weaknesses): Higher Education sector, HEIs and the Ministry of HE and SR
External factors (opportunities and threats): the national, regional and international context

Strengths

- Historical bilateral cooperation with France, Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Spain
- Ministry funds scholarship programmes
- Short missions of foreign teachers locally
- Relying on North African competencies to enhance academic quality
- Inclusive system for international vulnerable students
- Bilateral cooperation with France and Spain
- Ministry has defined its priority
- Leadership of HEI is well trained
- International stakeholders have positively impacted the training of HEIs staff
- Voluntarism and ongoing modernization of the system

Weaknesses

- Young and inexperienced system
- Lack of multilateral cooperation experience
- Lack of trained staff
- Lack of knowledge of foreign languages
- National recognition system is missing
- Digital divide
- Problem of access to HEIs due to distance and internal mobility difficulties

Opportunities

- Geographical position exposes to both Mediterranean and African cooperation
- The country looks at the 3 Maghreb countries as cooperation partners
- Diaspora

Threats

- Low-income country
- HE is not a priority of international stakeholders
- Country is not well known abroad
- Scarce attractivity of research at the international level

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1 International players should support the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research strategic vision concerning the higher education system, with specific attention to research, governance, quality of teaching and internationalisation.

R2 Strengthening HEIs exposure and performance in particular by addressing language and cultural barriers, which are currently limiting the access to the internationalisation opportunities for both academic and administrative staff and consequently limiting their capacities.

R3 Organising a cluster meeting with the main international stakeholders operating in the country to imagine synergies and ways to strengthen national efforts towards higher education.

R4 Supporting the national and institutional efforts for developing scientific research.

R5 EU institutions should consider Mauritania as a bridge towards other Sub-Saharan countries and invest in cross-regional cooperation.

THEME-BASED ROADMAP

- Increasing the mobility of all categories involved in international activities in order to reinforce the modernisation of teaching and services, and to strengthen the capacities of university's staff members and students.

- Increasing the knowledge of foreign languages among all the categories involved in international activities (students, academic staff and administrative staff), in order to increase the international exposure of the universities.

- Exploring the privileged cooperation with some European countries and Maghreb countries in order to develop more structural cooperation and explore the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme.

- Raising awareness on internationalisation needs at the national level through dissemination activities and deepening the understanding at the institutional level of all the possibilities included in a comprehensive internationalisation process.

Morocco

Internal factors (strengths and weaknesses): Higher Education sector, HEIs and the Ministry of HE and SR
External factors (opportunities and threats): the national, regional and international context

Strengths

- Institutional commitment towards internationalisation
- High participation to ICM
- Destination country for Sub-Saharan Africa
- Presence of foreign providers in the HE sector (international universities)
- Double degree accreditation
- Openness to Europe and new countries and also towards Anglophone countries
- Strong bilateral cooperation with France

Weaknesses

- Language problem: courses are only in French and Arabic, this is an obstacle for incoming students
- Credit recognition not aligned with EU standards
- Lack of national system for credit recognition
- Lack of infrastructures for receiving incoming international students
- IROs not well implemented in all HEIs, staff is not always well trained for internationalisation
- Websites available in Arab and French only

Opportunities

- Geographical position and attractiveness favours incoming mobility
- Stability of the country
- Bilateral cooperation
- Erasmus+ support the implementation of the credit system

Threats

- Digital divide in the country
- Visa problems for outgoing students

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1   Increasing the leadership commitment through an internationalisation strategy, which strives to be as consolidated as possible, by restructuring the internal institutional organisation chart and enforcing management skills.

R2   Increasing the attractiveness of the Moroccan HE system by leveraging on the country's geographical position and its role in Africa. Becoming a destination country by including the HEIs in the national strategy for the country's development, benefiting from the possibility of connection with Sub-Saharan Africa.

R3   Strengthening the role of universities (in terms of human resources and equipment) through the acceleration and regulation of the digitalisation process and by exploiting ICT tools for greater international exposure.

THEME-BASED ROADMAP

- Defining a national comprehensive strategy for the establishment of internal structures dedicated to international activities, by strengthening existing international relations offices or through dedicated investments of resources in the case no structure dedicated to internationalisation within the institution exists.

- Developing and aligning reception policies at the national level for incoming mobilities. Improving the management of the arrivals of foreign students in terms of infrastructures and guidance, in order to increase appeal of the Moroccan HE system. Leveraging on country stability and tourism flows to increase short-mobilities, with specific attention to the flows to and from Europe.

- State institutions should strengthen the foreign-language learning process during the whole education pipeline in order to foster openness to the Anglo-Saxon world.

- Increasing the knowledge of foreign languages among all categories involved in international activities (students, academic staff and administrative staff) in order to increase the international exposure of the universities.

- Moroccan universities (under a clear strategy set by the Ministry) are about to implement the Anglophone bachelor system. An acceleration in the implementation of the reform, specifically with regards to the credit recognition system, would facilitate the diversification of the international relations portfolio. At the same time, a regular evaluation of the reform process will allow to measure its transferability potential at the regional level and its long-term impact.

- Providing a decisive boost in terms of EU funds and developing capacity-building actions to strengthen digital skills (for both academic staff, administrative staff and students) capitalising on European funded projects of the past and exploring all the possibilities offered by the use of technology in education (as stated in the OER Morocco Declaration). This should be complemented by an investment in terms of infrastructures and equipment, to reduce the digital divide in the country, through the definition of a national plan for structural investment.

Palestine

Internal factors (strengths and weaknesses): Higher Education sector, HEIs and the Ministry of HE and SR
External factors (opportunities and threats): the national, regional and international context

Strengths

- Capability to quickly adapt to the isolation due to COVID19 because of previous experience in being isolated
- High capability of exploiting the Erasmus+ funding system as a whole
- Ongoing university reform process on internationalisation
- High level of digital competencies allowing virtual mobility
- HEIs have large autonomy related to international cooperation
- HEIs leadership is well established
- Several curricular activities for internationalisation

Weaknesses

- Not all HEIs are equally capable of exploiting the EU programmes
- Lack of ministerial strategy on internationalisation
- Different credit systems affect the credit recognition
- Concerns about virtual mobility which could replace physical mobility
- Brain drain effect
- Job market is not prepared to recognise international experience as an added value

Opportunities

- International cooperation with EU institutions is not perceived as being politically biased
- Bilateral cooperation opportunities are well exploited by HEIs
- Presence of international funds for international activities
- Cultural and social diversity should be perceived as an opportunity

Threats

- Heavy restrictions to the mobility of people
- Problems in obtaining visas
- Financial crisis
- Incoming international students have difficulties in getting long term visas

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1 Standardising the variety of credits systems and practices presents in the Palestinian higher education sector as this variety is perceived as one of the main obstacles affecting the recognition of qualification and, consequently, students' mobility. Efforts and engagement of the MoEHE in Palestine in developing national regulations related to recognition of credits and mobility, should be supported, especially to amplify the offer of joint master programmes.

R2 Strengthening the university leadership engagement and commitment in social sciences and humanities, especially in terms of students and academic mobility, so that Palestinian good practices are upscaled and may become regional good practices for international cooperation.

R3 Major efforts and institutional commitment should be made to favour access and exposure of universities to international experiences in terms of teaching, research and business, to cope with the high-level unemployment of graduates in order to enhance attractiveness and reduce brain drain.

R4 Supporting the development of national regulations on e-learning and virtual mobility as a national strategic priority, also due to the specific condition in which some institutions are operating (e.g., Gaza Strip)

THEME-BASED ROADMAP

- International stakeholders should support the Ministerial efforts in the issue of standardisation of credits systems and assessment of qualifications in the HEIs in Palestine in order to improve and promote students' mobility.

- Palestinian universities should disseminate and share their experience in social sciences and humanities at the regional level, capitalising on past successful experiences.

- Palestinian universities should focus, with the support of international stakeholders, on research internationalisation activities targeting specific national priorities.

- The private sector should be sensitised and trained to value the international experiences of students which should be recognised as an added value while hiring. This may in turn help overcoming unemployment problems.

- Palestinian Ministry of higher education should to be supported in defining a national strategy and legal frameworks to encourage and recognise virtual mobility and e-learning as tools of internationalisation at home, with the potential of balance the limitations related to the specific conditions in which HEIs operate.

- Providing a decisive boost in terms of EU funds for digitalisation and virtual mobility, without reducing support and investments for physical mobility, which still remains a challenge for Palestinian students, educators and staff.

- Palestinian universities should focus on regional best practices regarding innovative online teaching methodologies.

Tunisia

Internal factors (strengths and weaknesses): Higher Education sector, HEIs and the Ministry of HE and SR
External factors (opportunities and threats): the national, regional and international context

Strengths

- Strong connections with sub-Saharan Africa HEI system
- Bologna process is implemented since 2008
- Strong South-South cooperation
- "AAET-Agence D'Accompagnement des Étudiants vers la Tunisie" is set up to attract foreign students
- Peripheric HEIs are very active in terms of the EU projects
- Tunisian HEIs are highly interested in double degrees
- Quality tests are carried out by the National Evaluation, Quality Assurance & Accreditation Authority
- Tunisia has a strategy to become a destination country
- Ministry financially supports mobility projects
- Strategic plan declares online training as a priority
- The adoption of ECTS facilitates international exchanges
- No gender gap in mobility with the exception of teaching mobility

Weaknesses

- In some specific areas there is a problem of credit recognition for returning students
- Quality of teaching has to be improved
- Limited autonomy by HEIs: system is strongly centralised
- Cultural barriers to improve the online teaching by academic staff
- Lack of human resources to manage more mobility activities abroad
- Performances on Framework participation affected by lack of competence

Opportunities

- Geographical position
- International stakeholders intend to increase the participation of less involved/smaller HEIs
- Significant funding by EU sources to Tunisia in the last years
- New emerging financial and cooperation partners beyond the EU
- Tunisia is associated partner of Horizon2020 programme

Threats

- Strong brain drain
- Frequent changes in government are affecting long terms strategies
- Economic system in crisis
- Bureaucratic obstacles to spend public money
- Visa problems for outgoing students

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1 It is desirable to make further efforts to increase the double degree offer with European universities. Preliminary steps have already been taken with the establishment, for instance, of the Franco-Tunisian University in 2019. The Tunisian system is ready to increase double degree options in the coming years, and to relaunch the internationalisation process reinforcing the attractiveness of Tunisian HEIs for international students.

R2 Tunisian universities should capitalise on the skills acquired thanks to the Erasmus+ programme to strengthen research skills and exploit the possibilities offered to the country by the participation in research programmes, also considering its privileged position as a H2020 associated country (currently Tunisia is negotiating its participation as an associated country in the new Horizon Europe programme).

R3 European institutions and universities should leverage on the potential of Tunisia to act as a bridge between the two continents (Europe and Africa), improving, through dedicated national and international resources (projects and training), Tunisia's ability to manage and attract African students and researchers.

R4 It is necessary that Tunisian universities and the Ministry of higher education make greater efforts and invest more in lifelong learning for the country's international relations officers by building on previous experiences, in order to increase attractiveness and funds.

THEME-BASED ROADMAP

- Supporting the ongoing governance reform process to allow universities to be more autonomous from the central authorities in the definition of their internationalisation actions, strategies and targets.

- Increasing the national budget share dedicated to research and innovation.

- Updating institutional websites and widen the availability of information to give more visibility to the educational offer and to the actions undertaken by Tunisian HEIs.

- Planning strategic international alliances and initiatives such as the recently established Université Franco-Tunisienne pour l'Afrique et la Méditerranée-UFTAM; the Programme UTIQUE 2022 that enhances research capacities and the exchange of researchers; and the double degree set up in the framework of the FORMED project between the University of Carthage and the University of Sassari in urbanism and architecture.

- Strengthening the skills of international relations officers in order to improve the recruitment process of international students and staff improve services related to the management of international activities, supported by a stronger institutional commitment by the university leadership.

4.2 Regional Recommendations

The impact of the Erasmus+ programme

- **R1.** Strengthening and broadening the consultation process between the European Commission and the HE systems of South-Mediterranean countries (Ministries, universities, local stakeholders) for the definition of thematic areas of interest and national priorities, strengthening the role of NEOs which generated a positive impact in university participation and in the capacity building process.

- **R2.** Strengthening the participation of remote, peripheral and smaller universities in the Erasmus+ programme, ensuring a homogeneous growth of the HE system in the target countries, promoting a shared approach between several players, each upon their role and ability to contribute to the overall goal of comprehensive internationalisation.

- **R3.** Promoting a "Euro-Mediterranean free-exchange area for diplomas" that allows for longer-term degree mobility and ideally more two-ways and less one-way mobility, as it happens today with short-term outgoing mobility for credits. The aim is to generate shared research and teaching arrangements expected to increase the attractiveness of the Southern Mediterranean systems.

- **R4.** For the future generation of Capacity Building projects, it is advisable to achieve greater coordination among projects active in the same fields, through the creation of thematic multilateral

clusters: governance, digitalisation, international relations, students' services, etc. A horizontal action (upon the example of the Interreg MED programme) would encourage synergies and collaboration among projects and would guarantee greater impact and visibility to all the actors involved.

- **R5.** In the light of the current pandemic and of the urgent need for MENA HEIs to maintain the reform process initiated in the sector of internationalisation and cross-border cooperation, virtual exchanges represent a cost-effective tool to be further promoted and exploited, offering innovative forms of virtual learning and collaboration, which can equip future graduates with the competences and skills needed for the international labour market, as well as with a higher capacity to understand different cultures. Virtual exchange must be intended as a complement to physical mobility, providing a scalable and highly inclusive opportunity to access international and intercultural learning and soft skills development.

- **R6.** Sharing and enlarging the initiative of Erasmus+ traineeship (nowadays present at the EU level), to support internships, work experiences, apprenticeships abroad for students enrolled in a three-year and master's degree course, and for doctoral students in Southern Mediterranean countries. This type of mobility will not only improve students' communication skills and their language and intercultural competences, but also their transversal skills and entrepreneurial spirit.

Administrative staff competences

- **R7.** The HE system should guarantee recognition and opportunities for administrative staff members to strengthen their language, intercultural and management skills by promoting their international exposure. Consequently, a change in the perception of their position and a strong commitment on the part of the university leadership is necessary to guarantee administrative staff mobility and training, consistent with the institutional internationalisation strategy. This would enhance the key role of the administrative body in the management of internationalisation activities and will guarantee to the institutions themselves a reliable expertise. Universities should define a three-step awarding scheme: first, raising awareness on the topics and their importance for HE, secondly defining a training scheme for both administrative staff, third providing participants with awards as an incentive for their professional growth.

Recognition of credits and qualification systems

- **R8.** Supporting the ongoing reform processes in each country to define/ redefine/refine the credit and qualification recognition systems, for a simplification of practices and the creation of a national reference framework for HEIs. This will in turn improve the level of attractiveness and accessibility of the HE systems and facilitate dialogue with European and regional institutions.

- **R9.** Supporting the regional efforts made by international stakeholders, such as the initiative recently promoted by AArU to create an Arab qualification framework project in cooperation with the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO) and the League of Arab States; upscaling the experience of the MERIC-Net project which had the great value of stimulating a dialogue between different systems; mainstreaming the UNESCO-UNHCR qualifications passport for refugees and vulnerable migrants to support inclusion in HE.

- **R10.** Improving the knowledge and implementation of Bologna-process-related practices as a further tool for strengthening internationalisation of HE, also thanks to the support of international organisations.

Regional and national structural difficulties in gathering information on the process of internationalisation and mobility

- **R11.** Defining a common framework and methodology for improved data collection, monitoring, and accessibility of information on internationalisation activities and mobility, complemented by the improvement of technical skills and equipment. Culturally enhancing the perception about the importance of data with the aim of informing strategic leadership decisions, measuring impact, giving visibility to the activities carried out and the opportunities that universities can guarantee, increasing the appeal of universities and the involvement of the academic community, exploiting

successful experiences, and – last but not least – encouraging investments on behalf of national and international stakeholders.

Low attractiveness of local higher education systems

- **R12.** Developing concrete actions, upscale initiatives, multiplicate efforts to reduce feelings of Islamophobia and combat stereotypes towards the region: the two factors that are clearly and constantly reducing its attractiveness.

- **R13.** Universities must strive to improve quality of research and teaching, to internationalise editorial committees, to implement co-supervision actions for PhDs. South-Mediterranean researchers need to be more present in international journals. In addition, course catalogues must be updated with a richer educational offer, also in terms of multilingual courses and updated research activities.

- **R14.** In order to improve attractiveness, a better visual web identity at the institutional level is needed. It is also vital to have greater transparency on scholarship opportunities including bilateral ones. It is essential that each university make available on their respective institutional websites an updated and visible organisational chart with roles and responsibilities clearly defined and assigned, to facilitate reaching out to institutions.

Visa problems

- **R15.** European institutions should create a formula (Erasmus+ visa/Erasmus+ passport) to increase participation in the Erasmus+ programme of academics,

students and administrative staff by creating a dedicated channel for mobility. Without a clear and recognised regulation that facilitates the procedure of access, the Erasmus+ programme risks losing its impact in favour of other non-European cooperation programmes. In addition to that, European institutions should reinforce the participation of disadvantaged groups in Erasmus+ which may have more difficulties in obtaining visa.

- **R16.** Creating a permanent forum, gathering all the involved actors responsible for visa procedures, in order to share information, understand common problems, promote mutual comprehension and find shared solutions.

International cooperation in human and social sciences

- **R17.** All the participating countries aim to increase international cooperation in human and social sciences, currently less developed than cooperation in hard sciences. Cooperation in humanities and social sciences has the potential to deepen mutual knowledge and strengthen South-South cooperation (for example in arts, archaeology, history).

- **R18.** Improving integration between hard and social sciences through a multidisciplinary approach, expanding the quality of cooperation and the impact on society at large. Knowing the history, culture, and literature of the respective countries may reduce radicalisation, boost intercultural dialogue, mutual knowledge and the understanding of mutual differences.

Knowledge of all the dimensions of internationalisation

- **R19.** South-Mediterranean HEIs do not know all the aspects related to the internationalisation of higher education. Often internationalisation is seen only as mobility and capacity building, while other dimensions such as scientific and research cooperation should be also promoted and explored.

- **R20.** A comprehensive and responsible internationalisation strategy is needed as a governance tool for universities, which relates to the wider social responsibility and third mission of the institution. The strategy should not solely focus on numbers (mobilities, agreements, partnerships), but follow quality standards to ensure opportunities to all. Actions should be taken to grant opportunities for those not engaged in mobility, through internationalisation at home practices, ensuring a global perspective in the curricula and setting-up tools to monitor the quality (over the quantity) of international collaborations.

Simplification and harmonisation of bureaucratic procedures

- **R21.** Simplifying the access to international opportunities and the procedures to manage resources, both for the beneficiaries and for the funding agencies, will help fully exploit trans-national cooperation, streamline internationalisation, increase accountability and transparency, and avoid corruption and waste of time and resources.

- **R22.** Sharing good practices (e.g., among Ministries) in order to simplify procedures and unburden the HE system, while increasing the accountability of HEIs, making them more autonomous in the financial and overall institutional management.

Upscaling bilateral cooperation towards a thematic regional approach

- **R23.** Strengthen ongoing bilateral collaborations to overcome some obstacles to internationalisation (for example credit recognition and language barriers) and to reinforce existing good practices extended to the whole HE sector. Fragmentation and exclusiveness of international relations (especially in countries where historical links risk to prevail over new opportunities) should also be avoided. In addition, thematic South-South cooperation should be enhanced and boosted based on common priorities.

- **R24.** Supporting the role of European and regional university networks to promote the international dimension of HEIs. These networks play a fundamental role in promoting academic mobility and cooperation at all levels. We strongly recommend the creation of a permanent forum for dialogue with national and international networks, in line with the policy dialogue promoted by DG Education with the aim of strengthening regional cooperation.

Internationalisation of research

- **R25.** Enhancing the educational offer at postgraduate level (PhD) and encouraging co-supervision of PhD students.

- **R26.** Boost investments in technology, labs and equipment to raise the level of research and increase the opportunities for South-Mediterranean universities to engage in international collaboration in research.

- **R27.** Improving publication policies in order to give more visibility to the outcomes produced by the South-Mediterranean researchers, overcome language barriers and stereotypes.

- **R28.** Enhance capacity building for South-Mediterranean researchers with regards to research methodology, R&I management and knowledge transfer.

- **R29.** Creating a bridging programme linking capacity-building (as part of the new Erasmus+ programme) to research-cooperation (through the new Horizon Europe) in order to build on the skills acquired and to prepare researchers to be engaged in high-level research projects. Single researchers' skills should be increased, but also the institutions ability to compete and participate in research on a global scale is key.
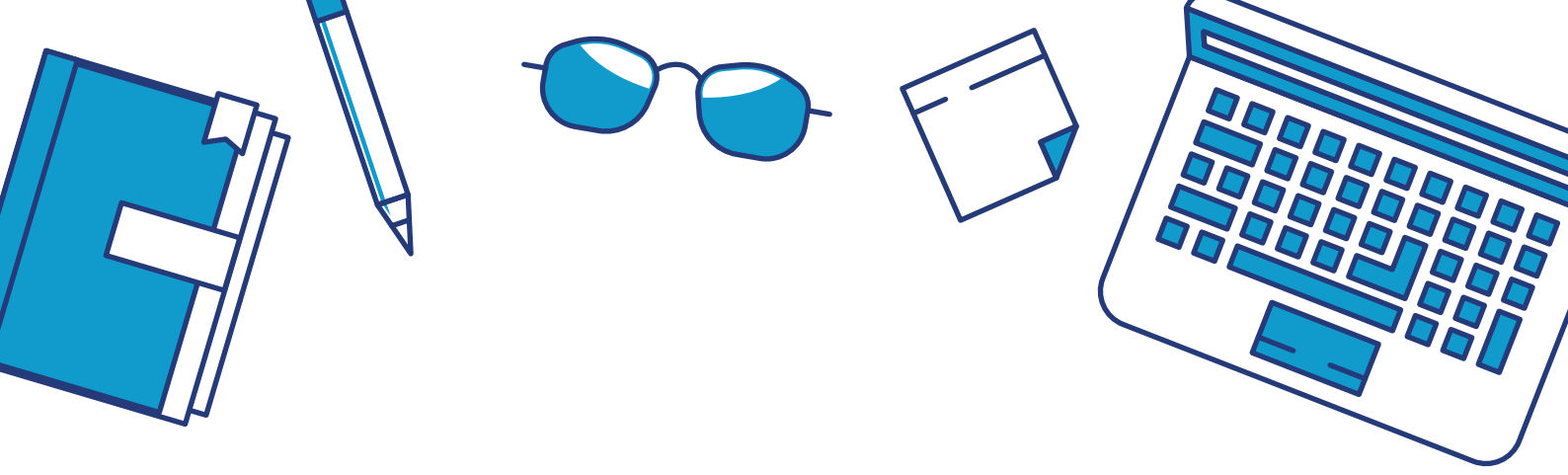
Conclusions

The first thing that we realised when concluding the study is that it represents a first milestone for future research in the forthcoming years. It should be considered as a starting point, but a particularly exhaustive one. There is significant room for improvement once more reliable and comprehensive data will be made available to researchers and international stakeholders, which have the duty of taking advantage of the "unpacked opportunities" (to use Laura Rumbley's words) that are still hided beyond the curtains of misinterpretation and stereotypes.

There are difficulties, but also opportunities, in a young region, full of dynamism and thirst for cooperation. The study clearly shows the weaknesses of the South-Mediterranean HE systems: poor research quality, high bureaucracy, lack of capacities, language barriers, visa policies and in general a limited attractiveness of the HEIs in the region. On the other hand, we must recognise that the rate of participation of universities and international stakeholders in the research, their interest, their active contribution clearly highlight that all actors are ready to reach out to each other and embark hands in hands on new cooperation paths.

It is worth mentioning that Europe is still perceived as the main partner and the most important HE arena. Other actors are stepping in (Turkey, China, India, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia), but the European countries are still the top destinations for all target countries' students, teachers and administrative staff. Rather than considering it as an arrival point, this should be considered as a starting point. We have to reverse the perspective and abandon our Orientalist lens, strengthening the reciprocity principle, beginning a new era based on two-directions cooperation and collaboration.

We are still far away from the finish line and we are not sure that we will be able to reach it. The study can be viewed as an effort to upscale existing research and as a building block for opening up future studies. The shared and strong willingness of enhancing internationalisation of higher education in the Euro-Mediterranean region is undoubtedly a good sign that we are going in the right direction. "Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do". It is time to start working. It is time to act.

Authors profile

Maria Giulia Ballatore

(external expert)

Maria Giulia Ballatore is a Research Fellow at the Department of Mathematical Sciences of the Politecnico di Torino, Italy. At the same time, she is a PhD student in Engineering Education at the School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Technological University Dublin, Ireland. She holds an Electrical Engineering Master's degree. She is a member of the TEACH group. Her research activities are related to engineering education with a particular interest in spatial ability, gamification and gender issues. Moreover, she has developed robust qualitative research skills thanks to different projects aiming to foster the open practice and develop and standardise learning technology.

Raniero Chelli

He has been involved since 1985 in European projects (mainly in RTD, training and international cooperation), as a Commission Official (ESPRIT Programme 85-88), Project Manager, Project Design specialist, Evaluator and reviewer, Quality assurance manager, National Delegate in IST management Committees and as a trainer on EU programmes and funding. He is currently the Coordinator of EU projects at UNIMED, aimed at facilitating access to EU funding by identifying appropriate calls for proposals, drafting successful proposals and setting up consortia, and where applicable, supporting the management of selected projects with a particular emphasis on Quality Assurance. Over the years, he has managed more than 10 significant projects funded by the European Commission through R&D Framework Programmes, TEMPUS, Erasmus+ and Euromed Heritage and he has consequently acquired an outstanding experience in managing large and complex international publicly funded projects, especially as regards the planning the activities of highly diversified consortia, conflicts resolution and administrative matters.

Federica De Giorgi

Federica De Giorgi holds a Postgraduate Master's Degree in European Project Planning and Management at PIXEL International School and Bachelor's and Master's Degrees in Classics at Roma Tre University. She joined the UNIMED team in 2015 as International Project Officer. She is in charge of Euro-Mediterranean and international projects, research activities and analyses, contributes to networking, drafting project proposals and managing ICM mobility projects. She is Italian mother-tongue and she speaks fluent English and French.

Marco Di Donato

PhD researcher in Political Thinking and Political Communication, Marco Di Donato also holds a Master's Degree cum laude in Arabic language and Islamic Studies at the L'Orientale University of Naples (Italy). He focuses his research on the Islamist movement in the Middle East area. Author of several publications with Italian and International publishing houses, in 2015 he wrote his first monograph on "Hezbollah, the Lebanese Resistance Movement" published by Mimesis; in 2018 he published his second monograph on Salafism and in 2019 his third one on Islamic political thought. Proficient in Arabic and English, he was the professor (2013-2015) of the course on "Islam and Politics" at FUA (Florence University of Arts) in Florence. Since 2014, he has been part of the UNIMED Research Unit. From 2016 to 2018, he worked as Professor of "History of Islamic Countries" and "Islamic Thought" at the University of Trento. In the last academic year (2019/2020), he has been professor of "Arabic Culture" at the University of Bari "Aldo Moro".

Federica Li Muli

Federica Li Muli graduated from SSML Centro Masterly in Translation and Interpreting and has also obtained a Master's Degree in Intercultural Studies and International Relations at Enna Kore University. After having worked as an interpreter in some meetings, she joined UNIMED in 2017, looking after the organisation and the logistical aspects of UNIMED projects. She currently works within UNIMED, in the International projects and networking team, as Assistant Project Manager. She speaks Italian, English and French and she has some knowledge of Spanish.

Silvia Marchionne

Silvia Marchionne holds a Postgraduate Master's Degree in International Cooperation and Development, with a focus on Middle East and North Africa region, a Master's Degree in "Arabic Language and Islamic Studies" at the L'Orientale University of Naples and a Bachelor's Degree in Languages and Intercultural Communication. She has been part of the UNIMED team since 2013, she works within UNIMED in the International Projects and Networking Team as Project Manager. She gained experience in research activities and analysis for Euro-Mediterranean and international projects, in proposals writing, monitoring and evaluation and in project management (with particular focus on governance of higher education and employability issues in the MENA region). She is also in charge of networking activities with UNIMED university members. Furthermore, she acts as external consultant for the World Bank programme "University Governance and Quality Assurance of higher education in the MENA region".

Anne-Laurence Pastorini

Anne-Laurence Pastorini joined UNIMED in 2017, where she works as project manager and contributes to research and networking activities. She holds a Master's Degree in International law - international administration (Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne university) and gained experience in international cooperation within different institutions such as the FAO office in Ecuador, CISP (an Italian NGO) and the French Embassy in Algeria, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, World Bank Regional Office in Dakar. University cooperation has been the main focus of her work, especially in the Maghreb region. Before joining UNIMED, she was in charge of the Mediterranean-Arab world partnerships for Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, where she also contributed to the creation of Chaire Maghreb.

Eugenio Platania

Eugenio Platania holds a Postgraduate Master's Degree in international relations and diplomatic studies and a Master's Degree in Law, with a focus on industrial policy in the European, French and Italian legal system. He has been part of the UNIMED since March 2019. He works within UNIMED in the international projects and networking team as Assistant Project Manager. He has been working in the field of international cooperation in the Mediterranean area since 2015 thanks to his experience as junior consultant at the CIHEAM-Headquarters in Paris. He is currently a Teaching Assistant at the Department of European Law of the University of Rome "La Sapienza". He speaks Italian, English and French.

Martina Zipoli

Martina Zipoli joined UNIMED International projects and networking team in 2016. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Political Sciences and Cooperation Studies (Università degli Studi Roma Tre, Italy) and a Master's Degree in Public Administration (MPA) from the University of Bergen (Norway) with a specific focus on organisations and politics, and on higher education Institutions. She has been working with EU funded projects in the field of education since 2014, and gained experience in proposals writing, research activities, monitoring and evaluation, and project management. She speaks Italian, English and Norwegian, and has some knowledge of Spanish and French. She is currently working as project manager and expert on internationalisation of higher education in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Stakeholders Register

Name	Surname	Country	Organisation	Role
Hadjira	Benoudnine	Algeria	University of Mostaganem	Focal point
Djamel Eddine	Kati	Algeria	University of Bejaia	Vice-rector for external relations
Elhabib	Guedda	Algeria	University of El Oued	Vice-rector for external relations
Arezki	Saidani	Algeria	Ministry HE - Direction de la coopération et des échanges	Director
German	Bernal-Rios	Belgium	DG EAC	Policy Officer at Erasmus+ Coordination Unit
Kostis	Giannidis	Belgium	ESN	President
Yassin	Khalil	Belgium	ESN	Liaison Officer
Michael	Gaebel	Belgium	EUA	Director
Manal	Stulgaitis	Denmark	UNHCR	Associate Education Officer
Karim	Hamdy	Egypt	NEO	Coordinator
Mayada	Belal	Egypt	Ministry of HE	Acting Manager, International Relations and Agreements
Nadia	Badrawi	Egypt	Arab Network for Quality Assurance in higher education ANQAHE	President
Yasser	El Shayeb	Egypt	American University of Cairo	Professor and Former NEO Egypt
Blanca	Moreno-Dodson	France	CMI	Director
Giulia	Marchesini	France	CMI	Senior Partnership Officer
Calogero	Sciandra	France	AFD	Division Education
Quentin	Delpech	France	AFD	Project manager
Frédéric	Sansier	France	Expertise France	Directeur département capital humain
Nathalie	Menut	France	Expertise France	Deputy Director
Mauve	Carbonell	France	Téthys	President
Raphaelle	Hallier	France	Campus France	Director Int cooperation
Olivier	Chiche-Portiche	France	Campus France	Director of Geographic coordination
Leo	Vincent	France	HOMERe	General Manager
Giorgio	Marinoni	France	IAU	Manager of higher education and Internationalisation6
Jean-Noel	Baleo	France	AUF Moyen-Orient	Regional Director for Middle East
Kathrin	Theurillat	Israel	NEO	Director
Miri	Yemini	Israel	Tel Aviv University	Professor
Marissa	Gross-Yarm	Israel	Israel Council of higher education	Head of International Student Affairs
Claudia	Peritore	Italy	INDIRE	Head of higher education Unit
Emanuela	Di Paola	Italy	IOM	IOM Officer
Abdallah	Al-Zoubi	Jordan	PSUT	Professor
Ahmad	Abu-El-Haija	Jordan	NEO	Director
Amr	Salama	Jordan	AArU	President
Irina	Isimova	Jordan	UNHCR	Associate Education Officer

Hadeel	Yaseen	Jordan	International Relations Office, University of Jordan	Director
Naim	Ouaini	Lebanon	Ministry of HE	Advisor to the Minister of HE
Aref	El Soufi	Lebanon	NEO	Director
Ahmad	Jammal	Lebanon	Former Ministry HE	General Director
Georges	Yahchouchy	Lebanon	American University of Middle East	President
Annasse	Bouhlal	Lebanon	UNESCO - MENA	Programme Specialist in higher education
Carla	Edde	Lebanon	Université Saint-Joseph	Director IRO
Sobhi	Abou Chahine	Lebanon	Beirut Arab University	Dean of Student Affairs
Antonis	Tsamoulis	Libya	EU delegation for Libya	Programme Officer
Pierre-Yves	Bertrand	Mauritania	French Embassy	Conseiller de coopération
Koffi	Segniagbeto	Mauritania	IIEP - UNESCO pole de Dakar	Director
Sidi	Salem	Mauritania	Ministry of HE	Minister
Latifa	Daadaoui	Morocco	NEO	Coordinator
Anass	Bennani	Morocco	Ministry HE	Director of Cooperation and partnership
Wail	Benjelloun	Morocco	Mundiapolis University and Unimed	Former UM5 President and Unimed Honorary President
Sanaa	Zebakh	Morocco	Agronomic and Veterinary Institute Hassan II	Deputy Director in charge of cooperation
Najib	Hamouti	Morocco	ESITH Career centre	Head Career Centre-Erasmus+ Coordinator
Sara	Mousaid	Morocco	Ecole Nationale de l'Industrie Minérale	Head of Cooperation Department
Danielle	Pailler	Morocco	Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie	Director of Maghreb office
Laura	Rumbley	Netherlands	EAIE: European Association for International Education	Associate Director Knowledge Development and Research
Kherieh	Rassas	Palestine	An-Najah National University	Former Ministry of HE
Nedal	Jayyousi	Palestine	NEO	Director
Laura	Howard	Spain	University of Cadiz, former president of EAIE	Lecturer at the University of Cadiz and former President of EAIE
Alessio	Baldaccini	Switzerland	UNHCR	Associate Education Officer
Adel	Alimi	Tunisia	NEO	Coordinator
Malek	Kochlef	Tunisia	Ministry HE - Directorate of International Cooperation	Director
Laurent	Le Danois	Tunisia	EU delegation in Tunisia	Health, Education and higher education Cooperation Attaché
Hmaid	Ben Aziza	Tunisia	UNIMED	Secretary General

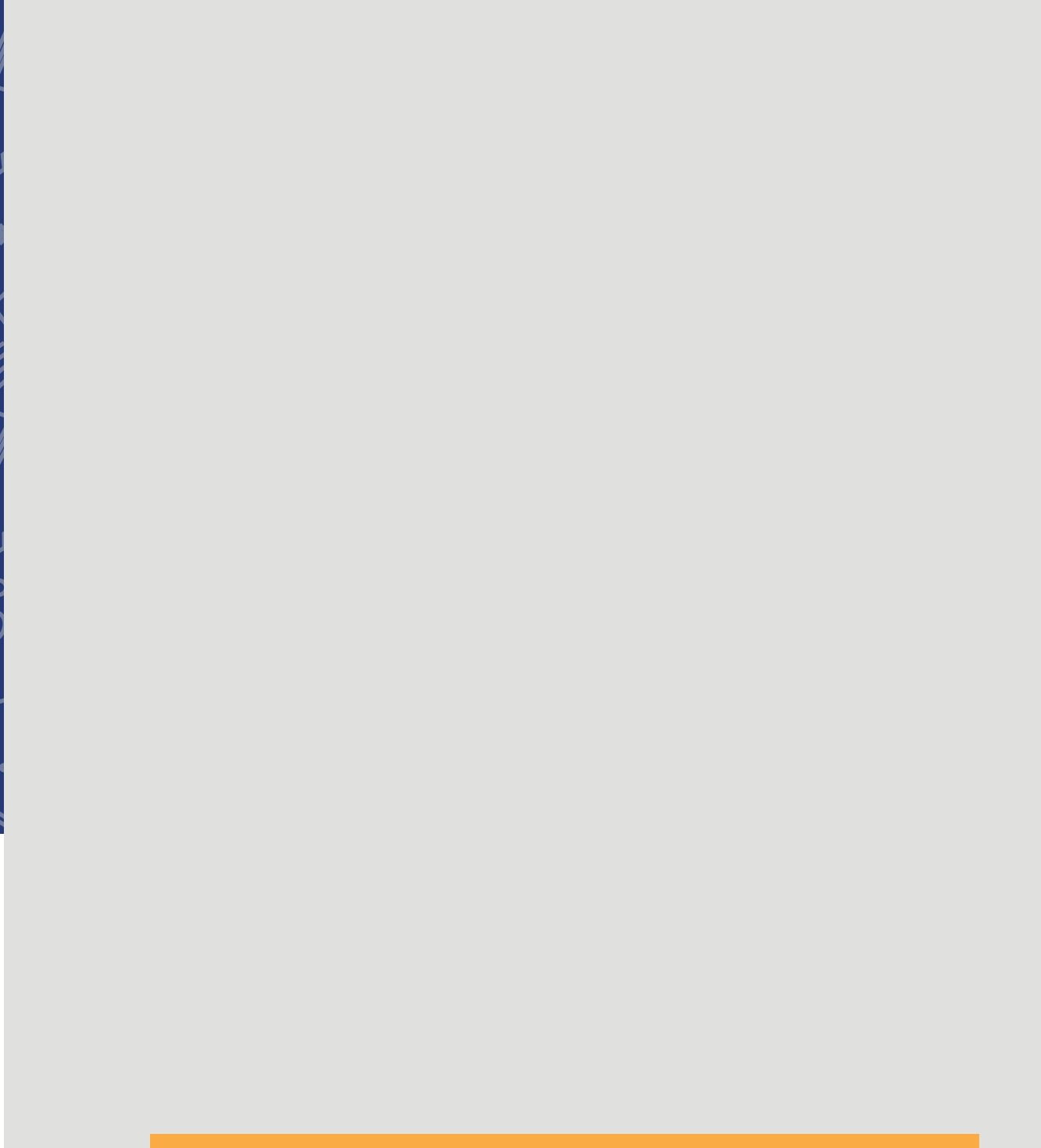# Final sample of the universities involved in the study

Country	HEIs in the sample
Algeria	University of Algiers 1, University of Algiers 2, University of Bouira, University of El Oued, University of Mohamed Khider Biskra, University Mohamed Lamine Debaghine of Sétif 2, University of Science and Technology of Oran Mohamed Boudiaf, Djillali Liabes University of Sidi Bel Abbes, University of 20 August 1955 – Skikda, University of Bejaia, University Mouloud Mammeri of Tizi Ouzou, University Kasdi Merbah of Ouargla, University Ferhat Abbas of Sétif 1, University of Frères Mentouri - Constantine 1, Polytechnic School of Architecture and Urbanism - Algiers, University of Oran 1,Abdelhamid Mehri – Constantine 2 University, University of Science and Technology Houari Boumediene, Badji Mokhtar University Annaba, University of M'hamed Bougara Boumerdes, University of Tiaret, University 8 May 45 of Guelma, University of Abou Bekr Belkaid Tlemcen, University Abdelhamid Ibn Badis of Mostaganem, University of Blida 2, University of Laghouat, University of Constantine 3
Egypt	Al-Azhar University, Ain Shams University, Alexandria University, Arab Academy for Science And Technology and Maritime Transport, Assiut University, Damanhour University, South Valley University, University Of Sadat City, Zagazig University
Israel	Apart from the NEO, UNIMED has contacted the following Universities but did not receive yet full availability to participate in the study: Tel Aviv University, University of Haifa, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Bar-Ilan University, Technion - Israel Institute of Technology
Jordan	University of Jordan, Yarmouk University, Zarqa University, Princess Sumaya University for Technology, University of Petra Jordan University of Science and Technology, Mutah University Isra University, Irbid National University
Lebanon	Lebanese University, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, Lebanese International University, Antonine University
Libya	University of Zawia, Misurata University, Sebha University University of Benghazi, University of Tripoli, Libyan International Medical University
Mauritania	University Nouakchott Alasriya, Lebanese International University of Mauritania
Morocco	Mohammed V University in Rabat, Ibn Tofail University of Kenitra Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, Abdelmalek Essaâdi University in Tangier, Mundiapolis University University Moulay Ismail Meknès, Université Sultan Moulay Slimane, Beni Mellal
Palestine	An-Najah National University, Birzeit University, Arab American University, Al-Quds Open University, Al- Aqsa University (Gaza) Hebron University, Islamic University of Gaza
Tunisia	Jendouba University, Carthage University, Sfax University Gafsa University, Gabès University, Monastir University

Institutions involved in the Focus Groups

- **Algeria (14/01/2021)**
  University of Mohamed Khider Biskra, University Mohamed Lamine Debaghine of Sétif 2, University of Science and Technology of Oran Mohamed Boudiaf, University of Bejaia, University Mouloud Mammeri of Tizi Ouzou, University Ferhat Abbas of Sétif 1, University of Frères Mentouri - Constantine 1, University of M'hamed Bougara Boumerdes, University 8 May 45 of Guelma, University Abdelhamid Ibn Badis of Mostaganem, University of Blida 2

- **Algeria (19/01/2021)**
  University Abdelhamid Ibn Badis of Mostaganem, University of Algiers 2, University of El Oued, Djillali Liabes University of Sidi Bel Abbes, Polytechnic School of Architecture and Urbanism - Algiers, University of Abou Bekr Belkaid Tlemcen

- **Egypt (18/01/2021)**
  Alexandria University, Damanhour University, Arab Academy for Science And Technology and Maritime Transport, University Of Sadat City, Helwan University, Tanta University, Assiut University.

- **Mauritania (25/01/02021)**
  University of Nouakchott Al Aasriya, Lebanese International University in Mauritania

- **Morocco (14/01/2021)**
  Mohammed V University in Rabat, Ibn Tofail University of Kenitra, Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, Cadi Ayyad University, Mundiapolis University, University Moulay Ismail Meknes, Sultan Moulay Slimane University Beni-Mellal

- **Lebanon (15/01/2021)**
  Lebanese University, USEK, Antonine University, Lebanese International University, University of Saint-Joseph

- **Libya (13/01/2021)**
  University of Zawia, Misurata University, Sebha University, University of Benghazi, University of Tripoli, Libyan International Medical University

- **Jordan (12/01/2021)**
  Princess Sumaya University for Technology, JUST, University of Jordan, Isra University, Mutah University, Yarmouk University, University of Zarqa

- **Palestine (13/01/2021)**
  An-Najah National University, Birzeit University, Arab American University, Al- Aqsa University (Gaza), Hebron University, Islamic University of Gaza

- **Tunisia (15/01/2021)**
  University of Gabès, University of Gafsa, University of Jendouba, University of Monastir