



EDUCATION AND TRAINING POLICIES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19, PREPARING FOR THE RECOVERY

A FOCUS ON ARAB MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES

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ABOUT THIS STUDY

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Amidst the disruptive circumstances resulting from the COVID-19 global pandemic, this new study provides an overview of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in the Arab Mediterranean countries (AMCs), zooming in on education and training systems and policies, analysing their resilience in managing and resisting the crisis and how lessons learned can be embedded in recovery plans and long-term reform processes. It relies on data and information available as of January 2021.

The study is led and co-authored by Prof. Rym Ayadi, President of EMEA and Director of EMNES with the support of Sara Ronco, Researcher at EMEA. Contributions on the education and training systems of the AMCs are provided by EMEA and EMNES researchers, in particular Marwa Biltagy for Egypt, Mais Shaban for Jordan, Sandra Challita for Lebanon and Palestine and Yeganeh Forouheshfar for Algeria and Morocco. Acknowledgement to EMEA copy-editor Rob Atree for proof-reading and IT and AI officer Nektar Baziotis for design and formatting. Valuable comments by the European Training Foundation (ETF) team during various rounds of revision, in particular Abdelaziz Jaouani, Sabina Nari, Francesca Rosso, Elena Carrero Perez and Stefano Lasagni are acknowledged. The study is prepared in the context of a project funded by the ETF. The content complements ETF expertise in this area.

The study made use of the EMEA COVID-19 Tracker: <https://research.euromed-economists.org/covid-19/> The Tracker automatically collects daily data from international institutions (e.g. WHO, OECD, IMF..) on the COVID-19 pandemic via a built-in algorithm; and the EMEA COVID-19 Monitor: <https://research.euromed-economists.org/introduction/> The Monitor provides weekly assessments of the COVID-19 evolutions and EMEA analysis on the topic.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic caught the world unprepared. On 11 March 2020, with 118,000 cases and 4,291 deaths detected in 114 countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 to be a global pandemic. More than one year later, on 15 April 2021, the total number of cases detected worldwide is 139,361,009, of which 118,490,366 are recoveries and 2,991,750 deaths¹.

The present study provides an overview of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in the Arab Mediterranean countries² (AMCs), zooming in on education and training systems and policies, analysing their resilience in managing and resisting the crisis and how lessons learned can be embedded in recovery plans and long-term reform processes. It relies on data and information available as of January 2021.

Although taking stock of a moving and evolving situation represents a challenge, available studies and literature on the impact of the pandemic provide information and sufficient data to be able to draw an overall assessment and analytical conclusions.

At the start of the pandemic, most countries worldwide adopted preventive and containment measures to curb the spread of the virus. With border closures and supply chain disruptions, global trade collapsed. Worldwide, remittances declined substantially and unemployment increased almost everywhere, with youth and women being the most affected categories. As of January 2021, around 93% of the world's workers were in countries with some form of workplace closures. In 2020, working hour losses were four times greater than during the 2009 global financial crisis (ILO, 2021). Furthermore, in 2020, employment losses were, in relative terms, higher for women (5%) than for men and for young workers (8.7%) than for older workers. Simultaneously, given the economic shrinkage, combined with the dramatic decline in fiscal revenues and the need to sustain policies to support healthcare systems and the socio-economic environment, public indebtedness increased. Children and the youth of today are the ones who will have to bear the burden of enormous debt repayment in the future. The children, youth and women are amongst the categories suffering most from the pandemic, on one hand because of labour market disruptions and on the other because they experienced a loss of learning opportunities linked to the discontinuation and (in some cases) the suspension of education and training activities.

¹ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

² Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Morocco, Tunisia. Libya is not part of this study due to the lack or limited access to data and information. Israel is also not dealt with in current the study due to differences in socio economic contexts, response to the pandemic as well as differences in indicators and data which make comparisons difficult.

The AMC countries are characterised by socio-economic challenges and transition processes and the pandemic breakout caught these countries at different stages of these reform processes (ETF, 2021).

Indeed, over the last ten to fifteen years, AMCs have registered an increase in education levels and attainment rates. However, this has not translated into an improvement of the labour market environment, which remains characterised by high unemployment, large proportions of informal employment, and high inactivity rates, particularly amongst the young and women. The region reveals important gender and rural-urban dichotomies and disparities. Even though most of the AMCs are middle-income, they still suffer from inequalities linked to income distribution, rising poverty levels and high debt levels, which reduce their room for manoeuvre via safety nets in order to respond to shocks.

The present study observes how the pandemic mirrors the countries' socio-economic trends and challenges. The estimated job disruption in the AMCs for 2020 is massive. This is coupled with scarce social security coverage and safety nets and limited or no access for people that work in the informal sector or in precarious conditions. During the first wave of the pandemic, the economic policy response in the region was below the global average (Ayadi, 2020 a&b). The second wave of the pandemic represented a further deterioration in economic and social stability in the majority of AMC's. All the countries extended the main economic measures of the first wave (i.e. guarantees, tax deferrals, postponement of bill payments) despite the further deterioration of the overall socio-economic situation. Some additional measures to support workers during the lockdowns (i.e. unemployment insurance, wage subsidies and other quick measures to support salaries) were put in place and, in some cases, these also targeted informal workers. All AMC governments implemented social assistance measures, via cash transfers and in-kind transfers, addressed to the most vulnerable part of the population (which also indirectly targeted informal workers).

The adopted measures disproportionately affected women and the young, mainly NEETs and those working in informal sectors. This was particularly the case for the AMCs, where these two categories were already the most vulnerable before the health crisis. Whilst some countries introduced specific measures for protecting women, none of the countries presented specific policy measures for the youth population.

The impact of COVID-19 has been detrimental to education and training systems worldwide and the AMCs were caught largely unprepared to face such an overwhelming contagion. As of 24 March 2020, around 80% of the world's student population (1.3 billion children and youths in 138 countries) was concerned by school closures. By mid-April, around 94% of pupils worldwide were kept away from school. In the following months, governments tried to minimise the countrywide closure of schools, moving to a partial and or local closure strategy. This

seems to be the prevailing one since the second wave (i.e., in April 2020, countrywide closure of schools was applied in 190 countries and in January 2021 it was only in 30). In January 2021, globally 720 million children (41% of student population) still experienced total or partial school closures.

Schools are particularly crucial for low-income families, representing a vital means to access support, food and incentives, both financial and non-financial, and to address structural inequalities. Without the school platform and access to the health and nutrition programme provided in schools, hunger, poverty and malnutrition are exacerbated for hundreds of millions of children and their little families, affecting their chances of ever recovering from the COVID-19 induced crisis.

How resilient are the education and training systems in the AMCs?

The methodological approach applied in the present study to assess the resilience of education and training systems in the AMCs, relies on a three-pillar framework to enhance systemic global resilience. The framework was developed by Ayadi (2020 a,b) and consists of three mutually interactive pillars: **preparedness and early warning system (PEWS)**, **crisis management system (CMS)** and **recovery management system (RMS)**. The results of the analysis are summarised in table 1 and are available in detail in section three.

TABLE 1: RESULTS OF ANALYSIS APPLING THE THREE PILLARS SYSTEM

Preparedness and early warning system (PEWS)	Crisis Management System (CMS)	Crisis recovery system (CRS)
Weak preparedness of the educational and training system. Structural and societal problems, hampered by the pandemic, undermined governments' extensive efforts to build functioning, blended educational and training systems.	The emergency protocols put in place are not well structured in the majority of cases. The management relies on closing and opening schools depending on the epidemiologic situation. Lack of specific measures to manage the training sector.	Lack of financial resources and plan to mobilise financial resources in this sector. Lack of plans to re-organise the educational and training sector, empowering infrastructures (physical and digital), increasing human resources or partnership with the private sector.

Source: Authors' elaboration

The limited preparedness of the educational and training systems prevents the **early warning system** from working well and putting in place efficient and quick responses based on data. All the countries implemented the closure of schools as a first measure to curb the pandemic, showing the capacity to build an alternative e-learning system and public-private partnership to quickly build-up new learning platforms or provide broadcast lessons via TV and

radio. Nevertheless, the vocational and training systems seem to be left apart, with limited data available to analyse their preparedness and the measures put in place, which appear to be more ad-hoc. Furthermore, structural problems, such as important digital divides, poor living conditions and pre-existing inequalities not only weakened the effect of the solutions put in place but amplified those challenges, leading to the exclusion of some groups to basic education services.

The **crisis management system** relied, in almost all AMC, on the closing and opening of schools and universities (private or public) depending on the epidemiologic situation and shows that emergency protocols were, in most cases, not well structured and lacked specific management measures, follow-up and monitoring in order to prevent disruption to the flow of learning. Only a few countries implemented some clear protocols for managing the crisis in schools to prevent the contagion and manage possible within-premise contagion cases. Generally and according to the information available, countries did not look to partner up with the private sector and civil society in order to increase physical infrastructure availability (for instance, using closed cultural centres) or plans for hiring more teachers to cover more shifts. The limited information available on measures specific to Vocational Education and Training makes it difficult to draw any robust and general conclusions with respect to their CMS.

With regard to the Crisis Recovery Plan (CRP), information available for the AMC shows that there are no recovery plans specifically targeting education and training systems, formal and informal training opportunities and offers for re-skilling and up-skilling. It should also be noted that the medium to long term effects of the pandemic have an impact on mental health, particularly for young people and students as a result of the long periods of isolation. These have not been studied in depth, possibly because they have not yet come to the surface.

Targeted recovery plans are critical for building a resilient education system. The pandemic and the response of education and training systems to external shocks has brought to light, in AMC as well as in many other countries worldwide, the inflexibility and lack of adaptability of these systems, their continued reliance on traditional forms of learning and, overall, a slow implementation of credible reforms³.

Following the analysis based on the three-pillar framework for the resilience approach, recommendations have been developed, which should be considered with caution, bearing in mind that the emergency is still ongoing and the real impact on education and training is still to be monitored and analysed from all perspectives.

Here below follow some recommendations, deriving from the three-pillar framework analysis.

³ ETF, 2021

On preparedness and early warning system:

- Local authorities should put in place systems for assessing and monitoring the **digital preparedness** of schools, students and teachers in order to prepare and implement targeted response plans, in collaboration with schools, universities and educational and training centres; the systemic and regular collection of this information would enable them to quickly adapt to possible future crisis and external shocks⁴.
- Governments should further build on reforms for continuing professional development of teachers, enhancing and reinforcing current initiatives to be able to keep professional educational staff up-to-date with the latest developments, including digitalisation, digital skills as well as new forms of learning and innovative pedagogical models and to be prepared mentally to deal with external shocks.
- Governments should incentivise involvement and partnership with the private sector and civil society to be able to find collaborative, flexible and innovative ways for training delivery. The involvement of the private sector in education and training has been increasing, but it is not yet effectively implemented. In a crisis situation, partnership opportunities with the private sector would have helped in many ways, from the development of joint education programmes to the sharing of physical spaces.

On crisis management system:

- Opening schools and educational centres should be a priority, whilst closing them for an extended period should be an exception.
- Schools should guarantee safe access to education and training services for all users, applying the necessary safety measures, including availability of individual protection devices, constant sanitation, health condition monitoring, etc.
- All schools and learning centres should provide a clear "pandemic protocol" covering a precise and standardised method for managing lessons in presence, at distance and eventual infections in school premises.
- A pool of experts should be created for each region/province. The pool's role should be to help schools and learning centres to build emergency plans, considering their functional areas of specificity.
- Private and public institutions must collaborate to manage distress - in close collaboration, not in competition.
- In continuity with on-going reforms and with the long-lasting presence of the pandemic, new school models may be devised including, for instance, the use of open-air spaces close to the nature (gardens, courtyards, forests), introducing shifts which would allow all

⁴ One possible tool to be used is the EU SELFIE (Self-reflection on Effective Learning by Fostering the use of Innovative Educational technologies), a free tool designed to help schools embed digital technologies into teaching, learning and assessment. SELFIE has a strong basis in research and was developed based on the European Commission framework on promoting digital-age learning in educational organisations. [About SELFIE | Education and Training \(europa.eu\)](#)

students to attend in presence at least a few days a week and developing mechanisms to ensure in presence attendance for students with special needs.

On crisis recovery system:

- The recovery system needs medium-to-long-term plans to increase the potential of early warning and management systems for future shocks and disruptions. AMCs are all characterised by limited fiscal space. **Governments in this region should increase partnership with the private sector and international organisations to raise more financing for the education and training systems** to a) Address the digital divide and urban-rural divides; b) Improve school and education and training institution infrastructures and; c) Rethink education and training business model towards using open spaces and developing new skills to enhance resilience to shocks.
- AMCs should continue and further advance education and training reform processes, including in the field of vocational education and training, re-skilling and upskilling for all. Reform processes for more resilient systems would help to better cope with changes, including the fast-changing demands of the labour market, not only digitalisation but also green and creative economies, amongst others.
- Distance and online learning solutions should be addressed at system level, adapted and contextualised in order to maximise opportunities and alleviate potential risks of exclusion.
- Reinforce data collection and monitoring capacities to include the collection and analysis of the student and teacher population characteristics and learning and household environments. This would provide schools with the intelligence needed to address local challenges and the issues faced by students and young people, including possible vulnerabilities.

INTRODUCTION

The present study was commissioned by the ETF for Professor Rym Ayadi, president of the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA), in September 2020, with a view to complement the ETF analysis of Human Capital Development issues in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Region, carried out as part of the Torino Process 2018-2020. The present study provides an overview of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in the Arab Mediterranean countries⁵(AMCs), zooming in on education and training systems and policies, analysing their resilience in managing and resisting the crisis and how lessons learned can be embedded in recovery plans and long-term reform processes. It relies on data and information available as of January 2021.

Considering the evolving situation of the pandemic, new variants, as well as the slow down and uneven implementation of vaccinations, the study cannot be considered exhaustive in providing an assessment of the long-term impact of the pandemic. It relies on existing studies and literature, providing sufficient information related to the overall socio-economic impact, whilst for the education and training systems a specific methodological approach has been put in place, developed by EMEA and completed by information collected through the Euro-Mediterranean Network for Economic Studies (EMNES). In this respect, data and indicators used throughout the study primarily refer to AMCs and references to other studies and analysis may refer to the clustering of other geographical countries, in which case the exact reference is provided in the footnote.

It should be also noted that the objective of the study is not to provide an holistic assessment of the education and training system function, efficiency and effectiveness but to provide an overview and appreciation of their preparedness and responsiveness to the pandemic crisis, providing some policy orientations and recommendations that refer to the resilience of systems, in response to crisis and external shocks. An analysis of the education and training systems and their reform processes, as well as their effectiveness in responding to socio-economic demands, is available in the ETF report on “Human Capital Development in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean: an imperative for Vocational Education and Training – Torino process regional report”⁶.

⁵ Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Morocco, Tunisia. Libya is not part of this study due to the lack or limited access to data and information. Israel is also not dealt with in current the study due to differences in socio economic contexts, response to the pandemic as well as differences in indicators and data which make comparisons difficult.

⁶ The executive summary is available in Annexe 1 of this report.

The methodological approach applied for the analysis is based on a three-pillar framework to enhance systemic global resilience. The framework was developed by Ayadi (2020 a,b) and consists of three mutually interactive pillars: **preparedness and early warning system (PEWS)**, **crisis management system (CMS)** and **recovery management system (RMS)**. The results of this analysis are available in chapter 3.

The study is organised in four sections:

- The first section summarises the main socio-economic challenges of COVID-19, with a focus on the AMCs, their preparedness and response to the crisis.
- Section two delves into the economic policies adopted to mitigate the effects of the contagion in the region, particularly on the education and training systems and the return to school, as well as innovative initiatives in education and training, transition from school to work.
- Section three explores resilience of the education systems by providing an overview of the preparedness and assessing the early warning capacity of the region, shedding light on government policy actions in terms of crisis management and recovery.
- Section four provides main conclusions and key policy recommendations.

1. SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT: IMPACT AND CONSEQUENCES OF COVID-19

COVID-19 caught AMCs, like many other countries worldwide, insufficiently prepared, both economically and socially. Most of the AMCs present high debt levels and a fairly insufficient room for manoeuvre, due to a relatively small fiscal space. Their relative weak economic capacity is hampered by various socio-economic challenges exposing the countries to higher vulnerability (Ayadi et al., 2020b)⁷.

Some of the main socio-economic challenges faced by these countries include the high level of poverty and inequality and the lack of social protection, high levels of informality, inactivity and unemployment, together with great reliance on food imports that could represent a critical burden on countries' food security.

The ultimate impact of COVID-19 on the economic system is hard to predict, due to the multifaceted nature of the shock and the prolonged health crisis. Economies across the world are going through a massive contraction of economic activity - the fourth deepest recession since 1879 and the most severe since the end of World War II (WB, 2020), with multiple social implications (Carracciolo, G. et al., 2020, in Ayadi et al. 2020b).

According to the Initiative Global Markets (IGM) Economic Expert Panel⁸, the contraction in economic activity is due to five main reasons (Idem):

- Direct loss of labour supply due to deaths and infections with associated medical costs;
- Further loss of labour supply due to non-pharmaceutical Government interventions, such as lockdown and social distancing;
- A decline in household consumption propensity and firms' propensity to invest due to increased uncertainties and lockdowns;
- Global interactions, in terms of disruption to trade and global value chains;
- Possible hysteresis effects, preventing a return to the pre-crisis economic equilibrium.

During 2020, the economic output in developed and developing economies has reduced, following a major disruption in domestic demand and supply, trade and finance. In the Euro Area, economic output decreased by 9.1%, in MENA by 5.8% and in Sub Sahara Africa by 5.3% (Idem).

⁷ See Annexe 2 for more information regarding EMEA Preparedness index (<https://research.euromed-economists.org/pillar-3-economic-preparedness/>)

⁸ <http://www.igmchicago.org/surveys/policy-for-the-covid-19-crisis/>

Global working hours declined by 8.8%, equivalent to approximately 255 million full-time jobs⁹. Equally, early on during the crisis, earnings of informal workers declined by 60% globally (ILO, 2020). The UNCTAD foresaw the expected fall in world merchandise trade of between 13% and 32%, with a decline in FDI of up to 40%¹⁰, with only a potential, slow recovery of investment flow by 2022¹¹. In April 2020, global remittances to low and middle-income countries fell by 19.7% and flows to the Middle East and North Africa by 19.6%¹². In October 2020, the decline was estimated to have reached 8%¹³. Furthermore, the cost of sending money to the Middle East and African countries has increased during 2020, creating an additional obstacle for workers to send money back home.

The importance of social protection was shown to be an essential contribution to household level resilience. Around 55% of the world's population has no access to any form of social protection¹⁴. The lack of social security/safety nets is particularly critical if combined with a high prevalence of informal work and unemployment, as is the case for the AMCs.

Poverty and inequality are expected to increase further, reversing all the improvements made during recent decades (UN, 2020) particularly for vulnerable socio-economic groups (women and the young)¹⁵.

The World Bank confirmed that 100 million people are at risk of moving into extreme poverty¹⁶, representing the first increase in extreme poverty since 1998. The Poverty Headcount Ratio (PHR) already showed high values before the pandemic in AMCs [29.2% in Palestine (2016), 32.5% in Egypt (2017), 4.8% in Morocco (2013), 5.5% in Algeria (2011), 14.4% in Jordan (2018) and 15.2% in Tunisia (2015)]¹⁷. Furthermore, the loss of human capital accumulation after widespread

⁹https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_767028.pdf + <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/covid-19/>

¹⁰ <https://unctad.org/en/pages/newsdetails.aspx?OriginalVersionID=2396>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/22/world-bank-predicts-sharpest-decline-of-remittances-in-recent-history>

¹³ This data could also be partially driven by the counter-cyclical behaviour of Egypt (one of the largest receiving countries in the region, with Egyptian workers abroad increasing one-off transfers to their families back home

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/10/29/covid-19-remittance-flows-to-shrink-14-by-2021#:~:text=Remittance%20flows%20to%20low%20and,to%20%24470%20billion%20in%202021.>

¹⁴ <https://www.ilo.org/secsoc/technical-cooperation-projects/building-social-protection-floors-for-all/lang-en/index.htm>

¹⁵ Inequality and extreme poverty are expected to increase (IMF, 2020).

¹⁶ Developing countries and vulnerable people are the most dependent on remittances. A fall in remittances is likely to severely contribute to pushing a large number of people into poverty (Kalantaryan, S. and McMahon, S., 2020).

¹⁷ EMEA data collection from World Bank database, last data available for each country. Poverty headcount ratio represents the percentage of the population living below the national poverty line and it refers to the one based on the US\$ 1.9 poverty line in 2011 PPP.

school closures creates a series of critical challenges that may have a further impact on poverty and inequality.

COVID-19 has also magnified inequality trends both within AMCs and between countries (in terms of access to income, assets, internet, public services, education, formal employment, equal opportunities and social protection) where the inequality index (GINI)¹⁸ shows values of around 30. The effects of the pandemic, coupled with existing vulnerabilities and inequality, were disproportionately **adverse to women**, particularly for those with low education levels, those employed in the informal market, or in sectors most exposed to the negative effects of the pandemic, such as manufacturing which employs a large share of women across the AMCs.

Unpaid care and domestic work are characterised by a high gender gap across the AMCs (in Tunisia and Morocco the female-to-male ratio of unpaid care and domestic work is as much as seven to one). Additionally, the closures of education and care facilities require parents to spend more time on childcare, supervising home schooling and taking care of the sick and elderly, alongside cleaning responsibilities and routine housework, with women being likely to take on this burden alone¹⁹. The long and lasting confinement has also exposed women to more risks compared to men, including increased domestic violence and abuse²⁰. In the AMCs, gender focussed response measures have been uneven across countries but, nevertheless, with some showing a number of innovative examples²¹.

Before the pandemic, the unemployment rate for the population aged 15+ was only below 10% in Egypt (2018) and Morocco (2019), whilst in 2019 it reached 19.1% in Jordan and 25.3% in Palestine. Unemployment rates are particularly alarming amongst young people across the AMCs. Figure 1 below shows unemployment rates for the 15+ population, women and young people (age group 15-24)

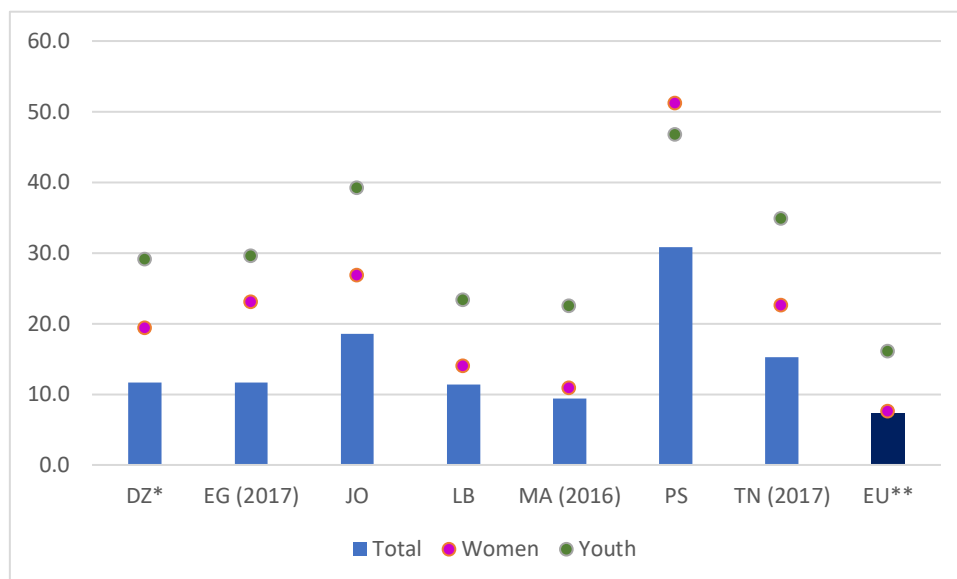
¹⁸ The Gini index measures the extent to which the distribution of income (or, in some cases, consumption expenditure) amongst individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. The Gini index measures the area between the Lorenz curve and the hypothetical line of absolute equality, expressed as a percentage of the maximum area under the line. A Gini index of zero represents perfect equality and 100, perfect inequality. (OECD definition). The index indicates that across the region, the index turns around 30, with the highest value for Morocco (39.5)

¹⁹ <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/covid-19-crisis-in-the-mena-region-impact-on-gender-equality-and-policy-responses-ee4cd4f4/#endnotea0z6>

²⁰ <https://worlds-women-2020-data-undesahub.arcgis.com/app/2546f9aed54c4f1d8d07e65f99a55365>

²¹ <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/>

FIGURE 1: UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (AGE 15+, 2018)



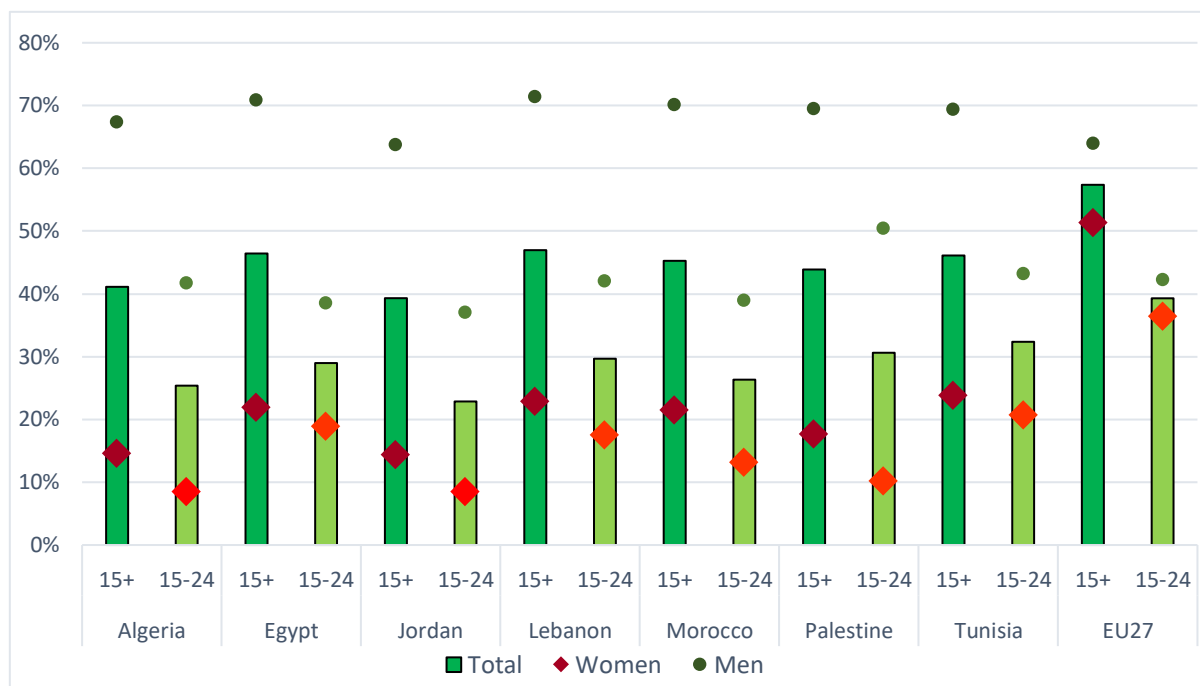
Source: DZ(ONS), EG (ILOSTAT), JO (DOS), MA (HCP), LB(CAS), PS (PCBS), TN (INS). EU 27 (Eurostat)

Projections report an overall increase in these negative trends; the ILO estimates **that youth unemployment in 2021 will reach 29.6% in North Africa and 22.9% in the Arab States**²².

Beyond unemployment amongst the young, high inactivity rates are also a matter of concern and even more worrisome when disaggregated by gender. As shown in **figure 2**, the activity rate across the AMCs is systematically below 50% (with the exception of Israel) and indicates big gender gaps, similarly to the NEET rates, which follow a similar pattern.

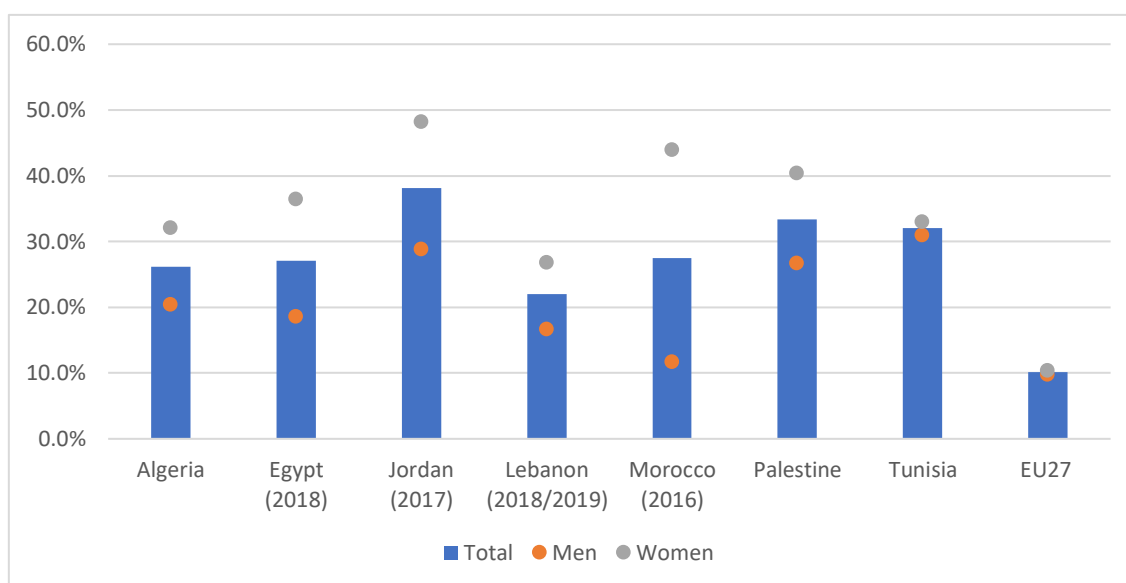
²² ILO estimates for 2021. Data for 2020 is similar (29.8% in North Africa, 23% in Arab States). This data represents, respectively, around 2.2 and 1.7 times the global rate. See ILO (2020). Global Employment Trends, Technology and future of jobs. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_737648.pdf. Reference to country grouping is available in the same publication p. 138

FIGURE 2: ACTIVITY RATE (AGE GROUPS 15+ AND 15-24), 2019



Source: ILOSTAT modelled estimates (<https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/>) and Eurostat

FIGURE 3: NEETS (15-24, MEN AND WOMEN)



Source: ETF KIESE, updated 21/10/2020

The ILO classified sectoral employment by “risk”, based on the level of the projected impact of the pandemic. A study²³ reveals that most of the Arab States present significant numbers of workers employed in sectors, which are considered to be amongst those at medium to high risk of being severely hit by the pandemic. The study also reports generally low levels of teleworkability in the countries surveyed (in the note, The teleworkability index is based on surveys conducted in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Palestine applying the methodology in Dingel and Nieman (2020)) but, despite the employability of men in the selected countries being significantly higher than for women, the latter presents higher scores in the teleworkability index, suggesting that the small share of women who are employed in Arab States tend to be in occupations that have a greater potential for remote work, such as in education, although the study also finds that in practice, even amongst those workers whose jobs could potentially be performed remotely, an even smaller minority actually have access to the necessary tools, such as a home computer and internet connection.

As mentioned above, the limited social security/safety nets²⁴ are a critical factor in this region being characterised by a high prevalence of informal work, particularly amongst young people. The ILO estimates that up to 95% of youths are employed in the informal economy in Palestine, 48% in Jordan, 60% in Lebanon, 92% in Egypt and 86% in Tunisia²⁵. The ILO also estimates that the livelihood of almost three-quarters of informal workers in the world (1.6 billion out of a total of 2.2 billion workers) is threatened as a result of lockdown measures. These have reduced their revenue by 60%, with women over-represented in the most hard-hit sectors (ILO,2020). Assuming a situation without any alternative income sources, the ILO calculates lost earnings would result in an increase in relative poverty (defined as the proportion of workers with monthly earnings that fall below 50% of the median earnings in the population) for informal workers and their families by almost 34 percentage points globally (ILO, OECD 2020).

In addition to informal workers, other categories exposed to vulnerabilities are “precarious” workers, those temporary and part-time workers who are sometimes explicitly excluded from legal social security coverage (ILO,2018). Governments in the region designed some cash transfers and in-kind transfers to help the most vulnerable people facing the pandemic, in some cases with specific programmes targeted towards informal workers (refer to Annexe 3).

²³ AlAzzawi, Shireen (2021). ' Lives versus Livelihoods: The COVID-19 Pandemic and Labour Markets in Arab states.' UNDP RBAS Working Paper Series (forthcoming).UNDP: New York.

²⁴ Social protection measures are limited across AMCs; see ILO social protection database. The proportion of the population covered by social protection floors/system (%) annual, ILOSTAT, last data available at time of consultation (November, 2020). Other countries with data available are Morocco (40% in 2009) and Jordan (42% in 2010).

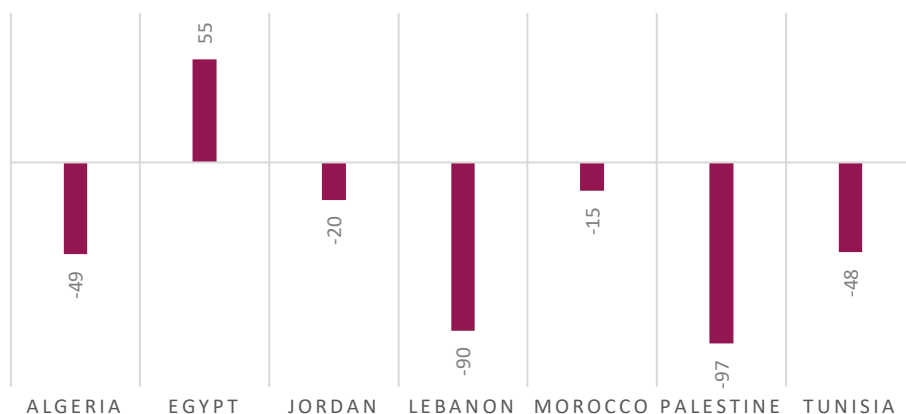
²⁵ https://www.ilo.org/employment/areas/youth-employment/work-for-youth/WCMS_191853/lang--en/index.htm

However, with the pandemic lasting longer than expected, governments will face increasing difficulties in further funding of social programmes.

2. ECONOMIC POLICY MEASURES TO MITIGATE COVID-19 CONSEQUENCES

Most countries worldwide have made unprecedented efforts to deploy resources rapidly, through fiscal and monetary policy. By the end of May 2020, over 90 countries had already announced or introduced measures totalling US\$10 trillion. Budgetary measures in advanced economies average 5% of GDP in each country; the figure is 2.3% of GDP in emerging and developing countries (Ayadi et al. 2020b). In many low-income countries, fiscal space is too limited for governments to act decisively. International community efforts were also unprecedented and put in place early on, during the first stage of the pandemic. Nevertheless, all the efforts deployed were insufficient to restore some economies, given the magnitude of the shock and pre-existing deep vulnerabilities (Idem). The following graph shows the policy response index²⁶ in target countries (for the full methodology of policy index see Annexe 2).

FIGURE 4: POLICY RESPONSE INDEX IN ARAB MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES



Source: EMEA COVID-19 Policy Monitor
*Methodology in Ayadi et al (2020b)

²⁶ The policy response index is based on a three-pillar framework, see executive summary and introduction and EMEA COVID-19 Monitor <https://research.euromed-economists.org/pillar-3-policy-response/>

The economic policy response in the region has been below the global average, except for Egypt. Monetary authority interventions have been timely overall with, at most, a week's delay from the first day of containment and movement restriction measures. Most of the central banks substantially cut their policy rates (except Palestine and Lebanon), with reductions ranging from the high 300 basis points cut in Egypt to 50 basis points announced by the Algerian Central Bank (Ayadi et al. 2020b).

Fiscal stimulus has been weak in all countries. Algeria and Palestine respectively devoted only 0.35% and 0.7% of their GDP to supporting the economy. Other countries spent roughly 2-3% of GDP. Algeria paid a high price for its oil-rent dependency, which accounts for more than 12% of its GDP. Crude oil has even been traded at hostile prices during the first burst of the pandemic. Algeria's insufficient fiscal response reflects the dramatic drop in revenues after the oil price collapse (Idem).

Regarding the types of policy implemented, the majority of countries promoted credit enhancing measures, in most cases via State guarantees on new loan issuance. All governments undertook measures to smooth the fall in income. The measures were shaped as tax deferrals, bills and rent payment postponements, transfers, grants and favourable conditions on new credit lines (Idem). On top of these, Egypt subsidised energy and fuel for three months. Finally, whereas all countries directed resources to the health sector, the support for other sectors at risk has not been homogeneous. It is important to note that, differently from the North Mediterranean region, the authorities in the South and East Mediterranean paid specific attention to the informal sector, mostly via money transfers and food distribution (see Annexe 3). Even before the COVID-19 outbreak, young people faced a difficult transition to the labour market (see section 1) and it is expected that the lack of vacancies will possibly lead to longer school-to-work transitions, thus increasing the number of jobseekers. The current wave of lay-offs and the collapse of business and start-ups put jobs for young workers at risk (ILO, 2020).

In general, the economic response in the region was already constrained in the aftermath of the first wave of the pandemic, mainly by the lack of fiscal space and by pre-existing vulnerabilities. The second wave of the pandemic represented a further deterioration in economic and social stability in the majority of AMCs, who tried to maintain the main economic measures of the first wave (i.e. guarantees, tax deferrals, postponement of bill payments) despite the further deterioration in the overall socio-economic situation. At time of writing (January 2021) only two countries in the region presented a medium-to-long-term recovery plan: Egypt and Morocco²⁷. Morocco announced its recovery plan in August 2020. Egypt announced its recovery plan in September 2020.

²⁷ Tunisia already announced a recovery plan in June 2020, but the plan is yet to be implemented. See <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/MENA-COVID-19-Survey-Tunisia-1.pdf>

The Moroccan “plan for the country’s economic recovery and employment levels”, worth a USD 13 billion budget, presents a longer-term approach to support the country’s recovery²⁸. The Plan has been signed by the government, the General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprises and the Banking Association, built on a co-responsibility approach between public-private institutions. The plan would serve to further mitigate payment delays, boost economic growth through State guarantees and foster the formalisation of the economy, whilst reforming the social protection framework²⁹. The USD 6.13 billion package for Egypt includes many of the measures already undertaken in the aftermath of the pandemic, but more structured and under a medium-to-long-term perspective (i.e., postponement of credit entitlements, facilitation of electronic payments, reduction of basic service tariffs, more State guarantees, increasing tax exception limits etc.)³⁰. State guarantees are at the core of both recovery plans. The Moroccan plan is strongly based on a private-public partnership and aims at funding projects with a large impact on job creation. The Egyptian plan places more emphasis on export earnings and tax regulations, with the aim of enhancing a proposal for a value-added tax for e-commerce transactions. Both plans aim to increase electronic payments with more and easier means.

To raise more funding to finance the recovery, most of the countries launched COVID-19 platforms. The Egyptian government launched the “Ahalina” initiative³¹, which is a community partnership aiming at crowding resources from civil society and the private sector to support irregular workers. Jordan’s “Himmat Watan Fund” aims at collecting local and foreign donations in support of government efforts in facing the crisis. Differently from the Egyptian initiative, the “Himmat Watan Fund” does not target irregular workers. Instead, it aims to raise funds to help eradicate COVID-19. Similarly, Tunisia introduced a COVID-19 fund to raise funds to aid the government response (Fund1818). The fund is partially financed by voluntary contributions and partially by the withholding of one day’s salary from all economic agents, increasing the tax rate on the interest from bank deposits and introducing an exceptional 2% profit tax surcharge on financial companies for 2020–21. The Algerian government established a national solidary fund, accepting in-kind and monetary donations.

Since all AMCs have implemented some form of lockdowns, unemployment insurance, wage subsidies and other measures were designed quickly to support payment of salaries³², some

²⁸<https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/morocco-government-and-institution-measures-in-response-to-covid.html> and <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19#M>

²⁹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/morocco/publication/morocco-economic-monitor-fall-2020-from-relief-to-recovery>

³⁰ <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/egypt-government-and-institution-measures-in-response-to-covid.html>

³¹ [Cabinet launches Ahalina initiative to support irregular workers-SIS](#)

³² All the Information reported in this paragraph was retrieved from the “Social protection responses to the COVID-19 crisis in the MENA/Arab States region. Country responses and policy Considerations”, Regional UN Issue-Based Coalition on Social Protection

targeting the most hit sectors, such as tourism. The type and the economic relevance of the measures implemented differ between countries (examples of measures are provided in Annexe 3). The measures for sustaining wages have been extended in most cases, increasing funds allocated to the emergency plan during the second wave (i.e., Morocco, Egypt, recovery plan), or recurring international aid support (i.e., Jordan, Palestine). Some countries have introduced measures explicitly addressing the issue of the payment of salaries during the sickness/quarantine period and unprecedented business closures (Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon). All the governments in the AMCs implemented measures aimed at protecting population groups most hit by the pandemic, such as informal workers and generally those not covered by any social insurance or social assistance schemes. These measures are represented mainly by cash transfers and in-kind transfers³³. Despite the efforts deployed, targeting the appropriate informal workers remains an issue. In Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, these measures seem to be more targeted, empowering related databases to monitor the informal sector.

All the countries modified their social security contribution payments and adjusted social security benefits. Most of the countries introduced either some facilitations for the payment of social security or deferral/suspensions of the payments, or the extension of coverage of the main social protection systems.

When it comes to the youth population and trainees, however, specific and tailor-made measures seem to be lacking, as observed in the package of measures put in place during the first and the second waves, as well as in the recovery plans (i.e. Egypt and Morocco). Some action can be found in the case of Morocco that launched a guarantee programme, the “interlak”, providing support to micro-enterprises, self-employed workers and young entrepreneurs both through guarantees and direct public financing³⁴.

Some countries introduced specific measures to protect women. Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Palestine have all adopted measures focussing on preventing and/or

(IBC-SP), July 2020, United Nations, 2020 and Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA) and Euro-Mediterranean Network for Economic Studies (EMNES) research on COVID-19, between March and November 2020, comparing completed information with two other COVID-19 trackers: the COVID-19 Government Measures Worldwide, available on tableau public and made by Visualitics, retrieved from <https://public.tableau.com/profile/visualitics#!/vizhome/Covid-19GovernmentMeasuresWorldwide/CovidGovernmentMeasuresWorldwide> and COVID-19;Government Measures Dataset, made by acaps, retrieved from <https://www.acaps.org/covid-19-government-measures-dataset>; the Policy Responses to COVID-19 of the International Monetary Fund from <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19>; and KPMG Government Responses to COVID-19 <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/government-response-global-landscape.html>.

³⁴ <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/365441608752111119/pdf/Morocco-Economic-Monitor-From-Relief-to-Recovery.pdf>

responding to violence against women and girls, as well as strengthening services for survivors. Egypt and Palestine have also taken measures to improve the collection of data on the use of violence against women in the COVID-19 context³⁵. The majority of countries in the region adopted some gender-sensitive measures for women's economic security (i.e., Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Morocco)³⁶ whilst only Egypt and Jordan provided some measures addressing unpaid care work for women³⁷.

Countries hosting high numbers of refugees in their territories (namely Jordan and Lebanon)³⁸ devised specific measures. Jordan has put in place transfers and in-kind aid through different funds and programmes for vulnerable families (both vulnerable Jordanians and refugees), a combination of old and new beneficiaries. Particular attention was given to daily wage workers, with programmes carried out by the National Aid Fund (NAF). Furthermore, the Jordanian cash for health, in partnership with UNHCR, was also extended to non-Syrian refugees. A similar Common Cash system was also set up in Lebanon, through a platform including UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP amongst the main partners, which was specifically designed to channel cash-based assistance through one common card for Syrians, refugees of other nationalities and disadvantaged Lebanese citizens.

The international community has been mobilised to provide support to countries in the region facing the negative effects of the pandemic. In particular, since the beginning of the pandemic, the European Union has acted with specific assistance and adjustments to ongoing

³⁵<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/COVID-19-Global-Gender-Response-Tracker.html>

³⁶ In Egypt, under the Takaful and Karama cash transfer programme, a specific programme was included to target women heads-of-households. In Palestine, the Monetary Authority launched a low-cost financing programme, "Istidama", to support the sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), including women-run SMEs. In other countries, like Jordan, this was limited to support sectors where work for the majority women is in areas like human health and social activities. In Morocco, the Ministry of Tourism, Handicrafts, Air Transport and Social Economy introduced a certification system for cooperatives to produce 30,000 reusable masks per day and the certified cooperatives were composed of women

³⁷ In Egypt, pregnant women, or those looking after one or more children under 12 years old, were granted exceptional leave and job protection for the duration of the lockdown. In Jordan, the Government applied flexible working arrangements for parents with children under 11 during the initial re-opening phase, since childcare centres remained closed. From <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/COVID-19-Global-Gender-Response-Tracker.html>

³⁸ The ILO implemented a survey in late April 2020 assessing the impact of COVID-19 on Syrian refugees, host communities and enterprises in Jordan and Lebanon. Results are quite scarce, particularly because these were taken in April, thus only accounting for the first wave of the pandemic. The main findings of the research reveals that, in Jordan, 47% of people employed before the lockdown were out of work, 13% of them on permanent dismissal; in Lebanon, 50% of people with work before the lockdown were permanently dismissed, another 35% were on temporarily laid-off or on paid leave, the remaining share worked from home (4 per cent) or worked at their workplace (9 per cent). The survey also reveals that, with respect to individual workers, most of them were working without written contracts, paid leave, social security coverage or health coverage before the pandemic outbreak. This first group of surveys on the specific impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations reveals the centrality of social security policies.

assistance in order to mobilise over 2.3 billion Euro. This support focusses on health, economic and social sectors³⁹. Through the COVAX programme, implemented by the GAVI alliance, the EU has recently invested 500 million Euro to reach more countries and more people with the vaccine⁴⁰.

3. POLICY RESPONSES: AN ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS' RESILIENCE

At the start of the pandemic, in early 2020, school closures were amongst the first containment measures taken worldwide, resulting in education discontinuity and disruption. Available evidence already shows a clear negative impact of school closures on child health, education and development (WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO, 2020). A large amount of information on school closures and management during the pandemic is available for the AMCs and worldwide, whilst similar information for Vocational Education and Training (VET) is limited.

As part of the coordinated global education response to COVID-19, the World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF have conducted two rounds of surveys on National Education Responses to COVID-19 School Closure. The first round of surveys has been conducted between May and June 2020, the second round between July and October 2020. The surveys covered primary and secondary education, whilst tertiary education and training was not included (UNESCO, 2020a).

Although school closures were adopted rather systematically as a way to curb the pandemic, a recent study in the Lancet highlights some negative impact on both parents working from home (economic harm, a drop in parental productivity) and students learning from home (loss of education, social interaction, overall development, as well as nutritional problems amongst the most vulnerable children)⁴¹, let alone the psychological effects of long term social isolation. In addition, when parents cannot work from home, they often seek the support of grandparents to take care of their children, thus increasing the likelihood of the virus transmission⁴². Furthermore, the disruption of educational and training systems during the pandemic bear with them various risks⁴³, including nutrition risks⁴⁴. Specific and targeted

³⁹ [coronavirus_support_south.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴⁰ [Team Europe contributes €500 million to COVAX initiative to provide one billion COVID-19 vaccine doses for low- and middle-income countries | Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance](#)

⁴¹ Ibid. See also <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/consequences>

⁴² [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642\(20\)30095-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642(20)30095-X/fulltext)

⁴³ <https://analysis.covid19healthsystem.org/index.php/2020/09/15/what-strategies-and-approaches-are-countries-implementing-within-schools-both-in-response-to-covid-19-and-to-localized-outbreaks/>

⁴⁴ Many children and young people, especially those coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, rely on free or discounted school meals for healthy nutrition. More than 70 countries have adopted some programmes to continue supporting girls and boys during school closures through take-home rations, vouchers or cash transfers. The World Food Programme (WFP) has reached 7 million

measures (localised school closures, inserting shifts, keeping schools open for learners with special needs, closure of common spaces such as playgrounds) may prove more effective, which has also been the trend during the second and third waves in some of the AMCs and EU countries alike.

In September 2020, UNICEF, UNESCO and WHO published a collaborative document⁴⁵ analysing school-related public health measures in the context of COVID-19. The study underlines that whatever decision is made about schools, it brings important implications for children, parents or care providers, teachers and other school staff. The document stresses the importance of basing the decision on a risk-based approach, which considers the epidemiological situation in the concerned area and the capacity of the educational institutions to adapt their systems to operate safely. From as early as March 2020, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) published an Interim Guidance for COVID-19 prevention and control in schools⁴⁶. The document provides specific key messages and actions for school administrators, teachers and staff, for parents/care providers and community members, and for students and children for each age-specific educational stage. In particular, the report proposes specific checklists for each group of stakeholders, summing up the main vital rules and suggestions about implementation. Despite the international guidelines, each country adopted its own strategy. In some cases, the strategies and preventive measures differ between schools in the same countries. Whilst some common measures have been adopted throughout the AMCs (i.e., distant-learning, wearing of masks in company), overall response strategies differ from country to country (i.e., a staggered return to school, based on different dates, handling of confirmed cases in schools, criteria for moving students to distance learning versus in-person)⁴⁷.

All countries introduced or scaled-up existing distance education modalities, based on different mixes of technology and trying to avoid learning disruption and discontinuity. Teachers and school administrators are encouraged to use applications to support communication with students and parents, deliver live lessons, record massive open online course styled classes (in some countries learning content is delivered through TV and other types of media). Equality in access to online and ICT-based learning is a significant concern, as learners from under-privileged backgrounds tend to have less access to computers and other devices outside of schools. In some cases, they live in areas with no electricity and low (or no) internet connectivity⁴⁸. Furthermore, supporting children in their new learning environment turned out to be challenging, for both

children in 45 of the poorest countries. For more details see <https://en.unesco.org/news/school-health-and-nutrition-why-covid-19-demands-rethink-education-address-gender-inequalities>

⁴⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Framework-for-reopening-schools-2020.pdf>

⁴⁶ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/74755>

⁴⁷ https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/8061/file/MENA%20SitRep_COVID%2019#1_31%20March%202020.pdf%20.pdf

⁴⁸ See <https://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com/2020/03/24/how-are-countries-addressing-the-covid-19-challenges-in-education-a-snapshot-of-policy-measures/>

teachers and families. Alleviating the burden on parents and families has emerged as a priority. Schools also constitute an important hub for social activity and human interaction. When schools are closed, many children and young people miss out on social contact that is essential for learning and development. Due to prolonged confinement, children are being separated from their peers and teachers and deprived of socialising activities, including sports. Furthermore, when it comes to the vocational and technical sub-sector, students miss out on all practical learning in schools, workshops or enterprises that benefit those using work-based learning. Finally, as the restrictive measures continue, it is critical to protect the well-being and mental health of children and young people, along with governmental actions to increase support to families, teachers and care providers.

In the MENA⁴⁹ region, more than 110 million school-age students faced limited access to both formal and non-formal education as a consequence of the generalised closure of schools, university facilities, youth centres and other public spaces⁵⁰. Recent OECD estimations consider that a typical learner lost around one-third of a school year of learning, resulting in a reduction in a learner's lifetime income of about 3%, which could lower the GDP of a country by an average of 1.5% over the remainder of the century⁵¹.

Here below, the mutually interactive three-pillar system developed by Ayadi (2020 a&b) has been applied to assess the preparedness and resilience of education and training systems in the AMCs. The system proposed includes a **Global Early Warning System (GEWS)**, a **Global Crisis Management System (GCMS)** and a **Global Crisis Recovery System (GCRS)** reinforced with a **Global Crisis Recovery Fund or Financing Plan**. In more detail, as follows:

- **Preparedness and early warning** can be considered as the capacity of the education system to face a crisis. This pillar accounts for the availability of resources (i.e., funding, existing good infrastructures - physical and digital - and prepared educational staff), the capacity to transparently disclose information and mobilise additional infrastructures, strengthen research and partnership between different actors (i.e., Ministry of Health, teachers, trainers, private and public institutions), and the stakeholders (i.e., students, carer providers) to be ready to respond in case of large-scale infections.
- **The Crisis Management** builds on the level of preparedness and early warning capability to activate policies to face the crisis with practical solutions and clear rules and plans of implementation.
- Finally, the **Crisis Recovery** is activated to ensure recovery from the health crisis. It includes investment plans to further enhance and reform the capacity of the education sector (e.g.,

⁴⁹ Middle East and North Africa, this geographical clustering is used here as it is the one referred to in the OECD referenced report.

⁵⁰ https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=129_129919-4li7bq8asv&title=COVID-19-Crisis-Response-in-MENA-Countries

⁵¹ Ibid.

investing more in education to modernise learning tools, training teachers, digitalisation etc.) to manage future distress episodes.

The paragraphs below present the results of the assessment through the application of the EMEA three-pillar framework.

3.1 PREPAREDNESS AND EARLY WARNING

During recent years, the AMC governments have shown a strong engagement in increasing investment in education, which translated into increased enrolment rates and gender parity at almost all levels of education. Nevertheless, expenditure on education is not always available and varied significantly over time and across the target countries⁵². According to the latest available data, Tunisia stands out with 6.6% of GDP spent on education, followed by Palestine (5.3% of GDP, 2017), Morocco (5.3% of GDP, 2009), Algeria (4.3% of GDP, 2008), Jordan (3.1% of GDP, 2019), and Lebanon (2.4% of GDP, 2013)⁵³. The Incheon Declaration and the Framework Action for Education 2030 urges countries to reach the international benchmark of allocating at least 4-6% of GDP to education and/or 15-20% of public expenditure on education⁵⁴. In all countries, public education is predominant (e.g., in Jordan and Tunisia, whilst private education is growing and overtaking the sector (e.g., in Lebanon).

With the eruption of the pandemic, the majority of countries engaged in partnerships between ministries and with the private sector to increase the means and tools for distance-learning, both for building new e-learning platforms and for providing software to students in difficulties for free. Nevertheless, the lack of internet availability, accessibility and the large amount of digital divide constituted a major problem, only partially overcome by the use of television and radio in providing educational support.

Most of the countries in the region had the infrastructure to provide for specific platforms or initiatives to train teachers and to increase the exchange of information between teachers and parents, or care providers, particularly for primary and secondary education. Some countries quickly set up or enhanced some sort of psychological support for youths, children and parents.

Since the very beginning of the pandemic, international organisations played a key role in helping the education and training systems in AMCs to cope with the virus, particularly UNICEF, often in partnership with the WFP and the UNHCR (but also World Bank, UNDP, various local

⁵² <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/mena/publication/expectations-and-aspirations-a-new-framework-for-education-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa>

⁵³ UNESCO database, latest date available, consulted on February 15, 2021.

⁵⁴ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373276>

NGOs). One of the major initiatives undertaken by the UNICEF even since March 2020 was to help AMCs in strengthening the Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE)⁵⁵. The RCCE is fundamental for providing an EW mechanism, helping most of the countries in the region in planning their response to the pandemic and designing a strong communication strategy to keep citizens informed. Particular attention was given to students and parents or care providers, through specific information campaigns on health awareness and on alternative learning materials access⁵⁶.

Whilst such a level of preparedness and early warning system was put in place in all countries, swiftly setting up a platform for continuing education, the great digital divide did not allow the system to function well⁵⁷ particularly when the time to adapt to these new conditions was rather limited. The poor digital infrastructure and lack of access to the internet have hampered the successful functioning of distance learning and emphasised the digital divide, particularly in rural areas, villages and amongst the vulnerable population. In Algeria, less than half of the population uses the internet (49%), whilst in Morocco the percentage is significantly higher (74%) and Jordan is somewhere in the middle with 67% of internet users⁵⁸. More so than access to internet, often households do not have any technological devices or not enough for all the family members. Moreover, both parents or care providers and students were unprepared to manage self-organised learning from home. Difficulties have been exacerbated in some cases by the living conditions, where poor households living in small, crowded houses faced bigger challenges in continuing learning from home. In the medium to long term, the risk of dropout rates may increase as a consequence of prolonged at-distance education, in difficult conditions.

Considering that some digital infrastructures were already in place, or were put in place soon after the break-out of the pandemic, the following initiatives are worth highlighting⁵⁹:

In Algeria, the National Bureau for Distance Education and Training (Office national d'éducation et de formation à distance) of the Ministry of Education set up online learning

⁵⁵https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/8061/file/MENA%20SitRep_COVID%2019#1_31%20March%202020.pdf%20.pdf

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/10231/file/Impact%20of%20COVID%20on%20Children-Snapshot%20report.pdf%20.pdf>

⁵⁸ Source: International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

⁵⁹ All the Information reported in this paragraph were retrieved from the COVID-19 Education Policy, Centre for Global Development (<https://www.cgdev.org/media/covid-19-education-policy-tracker>) and Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA) and Euro-Mediterranean Network for Economic Studies (EMNES) research on COVID-19, between March and November 2020, comparing completed information with two other COVID-19 trackers: the COVID-19 Government Measures Worldwide, available on tableau public and made by Visualitics, retrieved from <https://public.tableau.com/profile/visualitics#!vizhome/Covid-19GovernmentMeasuresWorldwide/CovidGovernmentMeasuresWorldwide> and https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/8061/file/MENA%20SitRep_COVID%2019#1_31%20March%202020.pdf%20.pdf and from https://www.unicef.org/mena/media/8061/file/MENA%20SitRep_COVID%2019#1_31%20March%202020.pdf%20.pdf

platforms in different subjects for all academic levels to assist students at home⁶⁰. UNICEF collaborated with WHO and the Ministry of Health to disseminate information and materials via social media, television and local religious leaders. Particular attention was immediately given to youths and adolescents through a partnership between UNICEF and the Algerian Muslim Scouts, and to refugees with UNHCR and WHO.

In Egypt, the Ministry of Education has provided a digital library (<https://study.ekb.eg>), which includes many different digital education references and resources to help students with self-learning. Another platform that was put in place (<https://stream.moe.gov.eg>) represents a significant resource in preparing research projects for students and a live broadcast platform for virtual classes⁶¹. Edmodo (<https://edmodo.org>), a platform providing free education, helps teachers communicate safely with their students and supports virtual classrooms under the supervision of the parents. The Ministry of Education cooperated with Microsoft to provide office software to nearly 20 million students, free of charge, on the Edmodo platform, to support the new education system and encourage students to handle the digital software. The UNICEF provided support to children in remote areas without access to digital tools by distributing physical textbooks.

In Jordan, some cellular companies offered support for accessing distance learning materials and a virtual teaching training programme was launched at the early stage of distance learning. All students in all grades were invited to interact with education lessons broadcast on two dedicated TV channels offering online lectures, as well as the education portal called Darsak www.darsak.gov.jo (where parents also receive online guidance available in Arabic). Darsak is the official e-learning portal of Jordan, including video lessons for primary and secondary school students. These resources cover the curriculum's core subjects (e.g., Maths and Science for grades 1 to 12) in Arabic and English. The Ministry of Education also supported teaching staff by rolling out new instruments to make the transition easier to distance learning: a new platform for teacher training offering courses on distance learning tools, blended learning, and education technology. Existing online education platforms to allow teachers to deliver lessons remotely have been promoted (e.g., Microsoft Teams and Edraak), likewise other platforms for sharing learning materials (such as Google Classroom). Teachers started using social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, to share learning content with both students and parents. UNICEF reached an agreement with the Ministry of Education to provide 200 laptops to teachers in support of distance learning and to provide a “learning pack” (printed learning materials) to the most vulnerable students from grades 1 to 6 of education, including those in refugee camps.

⁶⁰ <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/nationalresponses#ARAB%20STATES>

⁶¹ Ibid.

In Lebanon, lessons were broadcast on TV according to a timetable by grade, in Arabic, English and French. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education trained teachers in the use of Microsoft Teams to run online classes, to receive and share information, and to offer support. Coaching of teachers, typically carried out face-to-face, was also moved online, allowing all teachers to continue the learning process⁶². The government put in place policies to help students and teachers with training, providing new technological instruments and TV courses. The government started a partnership with Microsoft Teams offering online courses and also provided traditional paper courses in case of no available internet. In private schools, online teaching was always preferred, with each private school using a different platform, in some cases developed by the school itself. UNICEF supported a Learning Readiness Rapid Assessment determining the ability of families to access and manage distance learning opportunities, developing an intervention framework including health awareness for students and parents, support to students and parents with training and through the direct provision of materials.

In Morocco, courses were broadcast on television and daily lesson schedules were available on the Ministry of Education's website, both in Arabic and French. Remote learning was implemented via various digital platforms and TV channels. Nevertheless, in order to enhance equality. Particular attention has been dedicated to the development of TV channels for providing education equality (due to lack of access to digital tools for poor students), helped by UNICEF, with a focus on Preschool and Parental education. UNICEF built a partnership with the Mohammed V University to provide remote psychological support to children in protection centres via WhatsApp.

In Tunisia, two main platforms for education during distance learning were set up. One is CNTE, the Portal of the National Centre for Technologies in Education, containing a virtual library and other useful resources. The other one is Edunet, the official online learning platform of the Ministry of Education, displaying information on examinations, digital school related projects, events and containing resources for learning. UNICEF provided hygiene supplies for schools and centres for childcare and supported the Ministry of Women to enhance the helpline for psychosocial counselling for children and parents suffering from consequences of the pandemic.

In Palestine, school children and their parents were given access to a free online platform for age-appropriate materials, worksheets and lessons to ensure the continuation of knowledge sharing for school children. The Ministry of Education also activated an e-learning platform with rich interactive materials, including capacity building material for teachers and offering IT solutions for direct teacher engagement with their students. The Ministry of Education was engaged in providing support for vulnerable children in remote areas to have equal access to the

⁶² <https://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/innovation-responding-coronavirus-could-pave-way-better-learning-outcomes-mena>

platform, with educational content also being provided via radio and TV. Furthermore, both in the West Bank and in Gaza, support was set up for the psychosocial wellbeing of students, their parents and educators. Among the different issues discussed during the support sessions, particular emphasis was put on gender-specific discrimination. All schools were encouraged to use school social media platforms to provide private counselling for children, parents and teachers.

3.2 CRISIS MANAGEMENT

The crisis management system in AMCs consisted primarily of school closures and in the adoption of different forms of distance and online learning. This paragraph describes and analyses the measures put in place.

The period of school closures in the aftermath of the first wave of the pandemic does not vary much across AMCs (Table 2). All countries implemented school closure as a containment measure between March 10 and March 20, 2020 with a similar total number of weeks of closure (between 24 and 32 weeks) except Palestine (10 weeks). What is interesting to observe is that the decision to close schools came at a different epidemiological stage across countries, with Egypt closing schools when COVID-19 cases detected were 109, whilst in Palestine, only 2 cases were registered and 7 in Jordan. This data suggests a homologation trend in adopting restrictive measures related to schools, with the fear of rapid contagion despite low levels of cases registered.

TABLE 2: SCHOOL CLOSURE AMID COVID-19 IN AMCS, COVID-19 FIRST WAVE IN 2020

Country	School Closure date	COVID-19 Cases at closure time	Planned reopening (at time of closure)	Effective reopening	First wave total weeks of closure
Algeria	12-Mar	24	05-Apr	21-Oct	32
Egypt	15-Mar	109	2 weeks	17-Oct	26
Jordan	15-Mar	7	2 weeks	01-Sep	24
Lebanon	10-Mar	77	Indefinitely	12-Oct	30
Morocco	16-Mar	18	Indefinitely	07-Sep	25
Tunisia	14-Mar	16	Indefinitely	15-Sep	26
Palestine	20-Mar	2	Indefinitely	03-Jun	10

Source: Centre for Global Development, COVID-19 Education Policy Database.

The reopening phases were managed quite differently between countries, ranging from reducing the number of students per classes, to providing different time schedules for lessons in person. The crisis management process was hampered by the uncertainty of the pandemic's

evolution. It generally relied on following the epidemiologic curve to open, close or restrict access to in-person lessons and complementing them with distance learning when the cases increase.

Overall, only few countries provided a plan for the long-term management of school reopenings in time of crisis and, consequently, building a recovery strategy. The majority of countries are following a crisis management approach⁶³ based on a “*response to emergency*” approach.

In Algeria, all schools closed on 12 March 2020, cancelling primary school exams and postponing until October secondary school exams. On 5 April 2020, the country launched a plan for providing television programmes for students, including special programmes for children with disabilities. Initially, the school closure was expected to last less than one month, but schools reopened at the start of the new school year (as in the majority of AMCs). The reopening process started on 21 October 2020, with the re-opening of primary schools, followed by high schools (4 November 2020) and universities (21 November 2020). On 7 September 2020 schools, opened exceptionally for students taking the middle school exam certificate. Where schools re-open all students have to wear masks in class.

Egypt closed all schools and universities, public and private, on 15 March 2020. Initially, the suspension of activities was intended to last for two weeks, but schools remained effectively closed until October, amounting to 26 weeks of school closures. The total number of students affected by the closure of schools and universities in Egypt has reached 27,024,690 students. The Ministry of Education quickly took the necessary measures and procedures aimed at implementing distance learning methods to complete the 2019/2020 academic year. The decision resulting from the suspension of studying, including decisions regarding assessment, public certificates of middle and high schools and of technical education schools, varies by grade level. For the first and second grades of secondary education, electronic exams were organised, delivering tablets and internet slides to first-grade students for free. The process of re-opening schools started on 15 September 2020, but the 2020-21 new academic year began on 17 October 2020. Schools with international curricula students were allowed to go back to school in person by mid-September. Plans and modalities, or the return to school, differs amongst schools, although most schools stipulate that students attend for one to three days a week with the remaining days online. Furthermore, in some schools the hours for starting and ending lessons are staggered. In the schools, morning queues were not allowed and school canteens are closed. Students are not allowed to enter school without face masks and sanitisers and they must bring food. If more than one student tests positive for coronavirus (in two weeks), classrooms close for 28 days, whilst if

⁶³ All the Information reported in this paragraph was retrieved from the COVID-19 Education Policy, Centre for Global Development (<https://www.cgdev.org/media/covid-19-education-policy-tracker>) and Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA) and Euro-Mediterranean Network for Economic Studies (EMNES) research on COVID-19, between March and November 2020, comparing completed information with two other COVID-19 trackers: the COVID-19 Government Measures Worldwide, available on tableau public and made by Visualitics, retrieved from <https://public.tableau.com/profile/visualitics#!/vizhome/Covid-19GovernmentMeasuresWorldwide/CovidGovernmentMeasuresWorldwide> and [COVID-19](#) based on acaps data.

two or more classrooms in a school are closed because of COVID-19 infections, the whole school will close for 28 days.

In Jordan, all schools and universities, both public and private, closed on 15 March 2020, with a planned closure of 2 weeks which was then extended until the following school year. The government quickly implemented distance education and programmes, and the provision of some lessons through the television. After the initial closure in March, most schools re-opened on September 1, but schools did not open in isolated and locked-down neighbourhoods where distance education continued. On 17 September 2020, most schools re-closed again for at least two weeks (along with restaurants and public spaces) due to a new spike in COVID cases and distance learning was applied. If an infection occurs in a school, it will be closed, with distance education being re-activated for 14 days. Students in the same classroom as the COVID-19 detected case, along with his/her teachers must test for COVID-19 and home quarantine for 14 days, whilst the school must be sterilised. Classes have been split, with half the students attending school and the other half learning at home (in alternating mode), and face masks and social distancing are compulsory everywhere⁶⁴. When schools reopened, public transport was rescheduled. Some specific rules have been imposed for the public transport sector: sterilising buses before and after students ride on them in the morning and evening; maintaining social distancing inside the bus; providing sterilisation equipment inside the bus; and the bus attendant must use gloves and masks.

In Lebanon, schools closed early in March and the Lebanese Ministry of Education swiftly organised a meeting with teachers and school administrators to discuss the transition to online learning platforms. The 2020-2021 academic year started later than usual (mid-October 2020 rather than end-of-September 2020). School Coronavirus prevention measures, such as the mandatory wearing of masks and social distancing in classrooms, and checking temperatures of students on arrival, applied to all schools. Public schools have reduced the number of face-to-face sessions and classes are divided into two different groups (50% follow lessons in class, the other 50% from home). For private schools, each school defines its own policy. Both public and private schools do not have the economic means to employ more teachers. There is not an exact general protocol to follow should COVID-19 be discovered in a school. Nevertheless, schools remain closed in "red zones" (zones in which there is a general lockdown). Finally, it is worth noting that the August 4th Beirut explosion has damaged about 160 schools (both private and public schools) with 85,000 enrolled students, delaying the reopening of schools.

In Morocco, at the first stage of the pandemic, and relative containment measures, only schools in the heavily affected city of Casablanca have been shut down, measure which were then extended to all schools with the total containment (20 March 2020). In May, the school closure was extended until September and all exams cancelled (except for Baccalaureate level). The national exam for the second year of the Baccalaureate were held in July 2020. The regional exam for the first year of the Baccalaureate was in September 2020. The reopening process started on September 7. Nevertheless, in some areas, a new lockdown has been imposed and schools were

⁶⁴ <https://www.meed.com/jordan-and-kuwait-target-e-schooling-amid-covid-19>

still closed on the day they were supposed to re-open. Parents have the possibility of choosing between distance learning or sending students to school. The Ministry of Education decided that, at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, school attendance is optional, as long as students follow classes remotely. More than 80% of parents choose to send their kids to school. The Ministry of Education issued a strict health protocol to ensure the safety of students when they go to school⁶⁵. Schools that have re-opened have strict sanitary measures in place as well as a mixture of in-person and online teaching. Before entering school, all students have to check their temperature and disinfect their hands. School kitchens are suspended, students must remain at a distance of one metre from each other throughout the whole school day (in classrooms and sports fields) and during recess. The number of students per class is limited to between 15 and 20 students. Moreover, students only go to school three days per week. 50% of classes are held online (15hr/week online and 15hr/week face-to-face). Classes are divided between morning and afternoon lessons, to limit the number of students to 15 per class maximum. In terms of public transport, students must respect social distancing inside the buses and the vehicles should not exceed 50% of their seat capacity. If there is a positive case, they test everyone in the school. If a student is positive, the procedure works as follows: cleaning the room and testing all students in the same class, and classes move to distance learning for the following 14 days. If a teacher is positive, all students are tested and the class is dismissed for 14 days. If administrative personnel are affected, everyone will be tested and the school will be confined for 14 days.

Schools in **Tunisia** closed on 14 March 2020 and stayed closed for 26 weeks. In some areas, students in the final year of secondary education returned to school on 29 May 2020 to prepare for exams. Other levels didn't return until the following school year begun (September 15). A digital learning platform was developed, including audio-visual digital and paper media to maintain the link between learners and education, in order to maintain the pace of education and the quality of education. Schools were sterilised and equipped with masks, sterilisation equipment and thermometers. Nevertheless, the process for the reopening that started in September seems to be short of preventive measures in several schools, whilst the effectiveness of distant learning tools has also been criticised⁶⁶.

In **Palestine**, all schools closed in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including public, private and UNRWA schools. School children and their parents were given access to a free online platform. Schools only remained open for pre-schools from 20 March 2020 until the 2020/2021 school year (8 August 2020 in Gaza, 6 September 2020 in the West Bank), when students returned to school.

International support for sustaining governments in the implementation of education platforms was key, particularly for countries with limited fiscal space. For example, in Jordan, the World Bank approved a US\$100 million project to support the government's efforts in addressing education challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, expanding access to pre-primary education and reforming student assessment, including transitioning to a competency-based

⁶⁵ <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2020/08/316975/morocco-issues-strict-health-protocol-before-school-reopening/>

⁶⁶ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/back-school-tunisia-amidst-covid-19>

digital tawjihi. Other international organisations played a crucial role in building e-learning infrastructures, providing physical materials to students in remote areas, providing food for children out of schools, amongst other support (i.e. UNICEF, WB, WFP⁶⁷ among others).

3.3 CRISIS RECOVERY ⁶⁸

The main action towards the resilience of the education system in AMCs includes the adoption and creation of new digital platforms for education - for teacher training, for students learning from home and to support parents/care providers. Learning material went online not only through dedicated platforms and websites, but also cellular applications, television and radio.

Given the protracted duration of the pandemic, it is still difficult to talk about recovery, however, some of the initiatives launched and measures taken may provide a valid input into preparation of the aftermath phase and strengthen resilience towards change and evolving external conditions, including a sudden crisis.

The setting up of online platforms, as well as innovative partnerships to deliver learning in new digital environments⁶⁹, can be further deployed and adapted during the recovery phase, to build a progressive integrated plan to react to changing demands, not only linked to digitalisation but also the green economy, innovation and new learning paradigms. Interesting examples that may be scaled up and adopted, as part of the education and training offering, include:

- the **Jordanian** education portal *Darsak*, developed in partnership with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship, and a private enterprise (Mawdoo3), with a content crowdsourced from a number of education organisations⁷⁰. The tool provides weekly-scheduled classes for all grades.
- In both **Egypt and Morocco**, authorities have negotiated a partnership with *Telecom* enterprises allowing access to their education platforms for all students without data fees.

⁶⁷ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WFP-0000119040.pdf>

⁶⁸ Where not differently specified, all the Information reported in this paragraph was retrieved from the COVID-19 Education Policy, Centre for Global Development (<https://www.cgdev.org/media/covid-19-education-policy-tracker>) and Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA) and Euro-Mediterranean Network for Economic Studies (EMNES) research on COVID-19, between March and November 2020, comparing completed information with two other COVID-19 trackers: the COVID-19 Government Measures Worldwide, available on tableau public and made by Visualitics, retrieved from <https://public.tableau.com/profile/visualitics#!/vizhome/Covid-19GovernmentMeasuresWorldwide/CovidGovernmentMeasuresWorldwide> and COVID-19 based on acaps data.

⁶⁹ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/innovation-responding-coronavirus-could-pave-way-better-learning-outcomes-mena>

⁷⁰ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/innovation-responding-coronavirus-could-pave-way-better-learning-outcomes-mena>

- In **Lebanon**, the Beirut Digital District Academy has teamed up with the World Bank Skilling UP Mashreq Project and Code.org to offer free coding courses in English, French and Arabic for students aged 6 to 18 across the country⁷¹.

Collaboration and sharing practices amongst AMCs are another feature that may support recovery. An interesting example of cross-country collaboration is **Egypt**, which is granting users from neighbouring countries access to the *Egyptian Knowledge Bank* (through study.ekb), an online government library housing different types of resources for educators, researchers and students⁷².

Uneven access to internet and important digital divides have hampered the smooth implementation of online learning solutions. From a medium-to-long-term resilience perspective, guaranteeing internet access to all will be crucial, increasing both infrastructural availability and economic subsidies to enhance the capacity of the education sector to provide essential basic services. In fact, the initial surveys on this issue reveal that parents and care providers feel that distance learning in the region was ineffective due to lack of resources, limited access to the internet, lack of support for families and difficulties in connecting with teachers⁷³.

One key element towards education system resilience is a clear and detailed plan for school continuity and operating during a pandemic/external shocks. As for cases reported in paragraph 3.2, only Egypt, Jordan and Morocco presented a clear long-term plan for managing school access and specific protocols for eventual contagion at school. None of the countries presented any plan for increasing teacher and trainer support, enhancing infrastructure capabilities or increasing collaboration with other structures to help provide in person learning and training programmes. Whether some countries have set up or enhanced some psychological support for children and parents, the effects of the pandemic on children's mental health in the region seems to be profound⁷⁴ and a better structured plan should be set up to tackle this issue. Not only for children, but also for youths and adolescents who, in most cases, seem to have been forgotten in the region during this pandemic.

In general, the AMCs did not devise specific recovery plans targeting human capital and education, which would be key in order to build a resilient education system and the continuing development of human capital. The recovery plan, launched by Morocco, represents the basis for building more targeted recovery plans, supporting certain specific sectors. The first specific

⁷¹ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/innovation-responding-coronavirus-could-pave-way-better-learning-outcomes-mena>

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ <https://www.unicef.org/mena/press-releases/covid-19-leaves-profound-impact-children-middle-east-and-north-africa>

⁷⁴ <https://www.unicef.org/mena/press-releases/covid-19-leaves-profound-impact-children-middle-east-and-north-africa>

partnership issued was for the tourism sector (joint decision between the Ministry of Employment and the Ministry of Economy & Finance to authorise the cancellation of penalties for late payment on social security contributions, September 25, 2020). In this partnership, the importance of supporting human capital development features, , but it is strictly related to the tourism sector and does not target young people in general, students or the importance of investing in skills development for the sector growth and competitiveness, as well as its recovery⁷⁵.

Forecasts for 2021 show that public education spending is expected to stagnate in most of the countries and fall in some, even though the economy is expected to grow again in most countries during 2021. In particular, across the region, the real growth in education spending per capita is expected to be -2.4% in 2021, after an estimated downturn in 2020 of -6.6%⁷⁶.

Resilience of education and training systems should be nurtured through a more in-depth reflection on the preparedness of current systems to commit to putting in place real transformations, to move towards more flexible and more learning centres and learning paths, including coping with fast changing labour markets and skill demands.

⁷⁵ <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/365441608752111119/pdf/Morocco-Economic-Monitor-From-Relief-to-Recovery.pdf>

⁷⁶ <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/479041589318526060/pdf/The-Impact-of-the-COVID-19-Pandemic-on-Education-Financing.pdf>

4. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The study reveals that education and training systems in the AMCs, similarly to many other countries worldwide, lack resilience, capacities and sufficient resources to be able to respond to fast changes and sudden shocks, as has been the case of the covid pandemic.

In the specific context of the pandemic and through the analysis of the measures put in place, the education and training systems do not seem to be ready yet to bridge the urban-rural divide and overcome the digital divide and, consequently, to reduce the high levels of unemployment and inactivity, especially amongst young people.

To enhance the region's educational and training system resilience, the present study brings forward some possible recommendations following the three-pillars framework of resilience. These recommendations are limited to the area of analysis in this study, therefore focussing on the preparedness of education and training systems to respond and manage crisis. For system and policy level recommendations, it is suggested to refer to the ETF Regional report on "Human capital development policies, an ETF assessment – Southern and Eastern Mediterranean region" (ETF, 2021).

Preparedness and early warning system

Establishing an efficient early warning system is key, to strengthen the school and educational centre capacities, to find alternative solutions that would ensure continuity of education and the training offering, adapted to the needs of students at different education levels. The study indicates that countries in the region could swiftly create new platforms to guarantee the continuity of education, however, structural problems could not be addressed easily and in some cases they have been exacerbated.

The primary structural problem is the digital divide both in terms of competences, as well as in terms of access to devices and internet services. This has translated into an uneven access to education and training, which also has an impact on compulsory education. It has also brought pre-existing issues of inequalities to the surface.

One possible action to counter this problem would be a more systematic collection of household data. This would enable **local authorities to have a better understanding of each area's "digital preparedness" and put in place targeted plans in collaboration with schools, universities, and education and training centres. In line with growing demands to become more digitalised**, central governments should invest in digitalisation, including through enhancing public-private partnership to extend free/discounted internet access in remote areas and to map the availability per capita of at least a phone with internet provision. That kind of investment will

be crucial for improving educational access when it comes to online learning. The increase of tools and connections will also benefit data collection on schools and educational centres. It will create positive gains for learning opportunities and communications and for contact tracing purposes, in the context of this pandemic and for any potential similar future crisis. The COVID-19 crisis has revealed that blending learning and innovative learning environments can bring significant opportunities for enhancing learning at all levels and widening lifelong learning opportunities.

In line with digitalisation plans, **governments should also put in place mechanisms to offer continuing professional development to teachers and educators on new digital tools, new pedagogical models, including blended learning. Teachers and educators should also be given opportunities for CPD and be more prepared to change, and to be aware of the effects of protracted home schooling on children and young people.** The pandemic caught teachers and educators unprepared, as much as students and their families. This indicates that reforms towards new ways of learning and innovative pedagogies were not mature enough and not sufficiently implemented.

A closer partnership and closer involvement of the private sector in education and training policy making, particularly at the planning stage, would have enhanced the early warning system and support learning during the crisis. While some forms of ad hoc partnership with the private sector were put in place, this is not yet structured and has not been efficiently implemented throughout the education and training policy cycle. Partnership with the private sector and civil society may benefit education and training systems in many ways, including developing joint projects for learning programmes as well as sharing physical infrastructure when needed. A closer involvement of the private sector would also help contribute to financing education and training programmes, building them together with experts in education, based on and closer to new/evolving labour market needs.

Crisis management system

The CMS is critical for protecting health and preventing learning losses.

Safe access and use of schools, education and training institutes should be ensured to all users, students and staff. The government should provide education and training institutions with the necessary individual protection devices and equip them to be in a position to follow the necessary containment and hygiene measures. Easier and more rapid access to testing and vaccination should be provided to educators, teachers and school staff who may be more exposed to the contagion.

As analysed above, the effectiveness of total school closures has proved to be limited, compared to the countereffects of the protracted closures. Systems in AMCs, similar to and based on practices in other countries worldwide, and in continuity with on-going reforms, may implement

new school management models including, for instance, the use of open air spaces (gardens, courtyards), introducing shifts which would allow all students to attend in person at least a few days a week and developing mechanisms to ensure in person attendance for students with special needs.

All schools and learning centres should provide a clear "pandemic protocol" covering a precise and standardised method for managing lessons in person, online lessons and eventual infections in school/education and training institution premises.

Since AMCs show significant levels of inequality amongst different areas and localities, the pandemic protocol should consider specific characteristics relating to the referenced areas. **A pool of experts for each region/province may be created.** This pool of experts would refer to the central government. The pool's role should be to help schools and learning centres build the protocol plan for an emergency, considering their functional area's specificities. The pool should favour the creation of "virtual tables" to exchange opinions amongst the different actors involved and to monitor the students' difficulties, as well as those of parents and care providers. Specific support for working parents/care providers should also be part of the plan.

Recovery system

Given the protracted duration of the pandemic, it is difficult to talk about recovery plans whilst some measures and actions that have been put in place may already offer insight to future plans and are already embedded in reform processes.

The recovery system needs medium-to-long-term plans to increase the potential of the early warning and management systems. AMCs are all characterised by limited fiscal space. **Governments in this region should increase partnership with the private sector and international organisations to raise more financing for the education system** to a) Address the digital divide and urban-rural divides; b) Improve school and education and training institutions infrastructures; c) Rethink education and training business model towards using open spaces and developing new skills to enhance resilience to shocks.

AMCs should continue to further advance education and training reform processes, including in the field of vocational education and training, re-skilling and upskilling for all. Reform processes towards more resilient systems, more flexible learning pathways and innovative teaching methods would help systems to better cope with changes, including the fast changing demands of the labour market, not only digitalisation but also the green economy, amongst others.

The experience of the on-going pandemic saw the emergence of important challenges linked to the introduction of distance and online learning, for which solutions should be addressed at system level, and adapted and contextualised, in order to maximise opportunities and to alleviate potential risks of exclusion.

The **pool of experts** proposed in the previous paragraph should be involved in a process that gathers the public and private sector and civil society to build a plan for financing training and education in the medium to long term. Notwithstanding the presence of the pool of experts, education and training systems should strengthen their monitoring capacities, including the collection and analysis of the student and teacher populations and learning, as well as household environments. This would provide schools with the intelligence needed to address local challenges and issues faced by students and young people, including possible vulnerabilities. These plans would include:

- Investments to enhance digitalisation and address the digital divide;
- Investments to improve the infrastructure and equipment dedicated to education and learning, including for continuing professional development of teachers and trainers;
- Recommendations and guidelines for the preparation of a pandemic management plan for the different structures and institutions involved in education, learning and training;
- Recommendations and guidelines for the elaboration of new educational programmes, in line with online delivery modality etc...
- Mechanisms to create more incentives for companies and enterprises to skill or re-skill inactive or unemployed people (i.e., governmental cash transfers raised with a degree of partnership with international organisations for training programmes, which provide subsidised vouchers for skilling and re-skilling for all. These mechanisms should also be specifically targeted to vulnerable categories such as the unemployed, people who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic, etc. The World Bank reports successful initiatives in this sense⁷⁷).

According to the information available at the time of writing this report, only Egypt and Morocco presented a Recovery Plan for COVID-19. Nevertheless, both plans lack initiatives specifically addressing young people and VET. **The study has shown the importance of dedicating even more attention to young people in the region. The human capital deterioration resulting from the loss of education and training, because of the pandemic, could have long-lasting detrimental effects.** Those effects will be particularly critical in a region like that of the AMCs, with high rates of young population. **Countries in the region need to produce recovery plans that put young and vulnerable people at the centre, with vocational and education system improvement and broader opportunities for skilling and re-skilling for all, as part of a lifelong learning perspective.**

⁷⁷ <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/365441608752111119/pdf/Morocco-Economic-Monitor-From-Relief-to-Recovery.pdf>

ANNEX 1 – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE ETF REPORT ON “HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT IN SEMED: AN IMPERATIVE FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING”, ETF (2021)

Socio-economic and demographic context

Despite their differences in socio-economic development, demography, political systems and wealth distribution, Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEMED) countries face the same challenges in terms of sustainable growth, youth employment and demographic transition⁷⁸. Inclusive growth and job creation are at the heart of reforms in all SEMED country agendas. Yet, looking at the figures, much work still needs to be done to ensure sustainable development and prosperity, in order to face inequity and unemployment, especially for young people and women.

SEMED countries are, in general, middle-income countries with challenging socio-economic contexts, characterised by high demographic pressure (significant share of young people within the total population) and modest economic growth, with very high volatility and large regional variations. Global competitiveness, innovation capacity, technological readiness and export diversification remain limited in the SEMED region (see NB on Israel below). On trade, the region remains poorly integrated, whilst individual countries are better and increasingly more integrated into the global economy. Another feature of the region is the high level and persistent informality in the economy.

Despite all the efforts deployed by governments, the labour market in the Arab Mediterranean Countries (AMCs⁷⁹) is characterised by low levels of activity and employment rates, especially for the young, a limited participation of women, a large sized and expanding informal sector, a relatively high level of emigration in general and of educated persons in particular (Brain Drain) as well as an influx of refugees and foreign workers (mainly in Lebanon and Jordan, but not exclusively). This situation (inactivity, unemployment, migration and informal sector) increases the risk of human capital depletion. Whilst this risk covers all AMCs, its level varies amongst countries and population groups: young people, women and rural populations are the most exposed.

It is expected that the outbreak of the Covid pandemic will exacerbate the socio-economic challenges, adding even more pressure on those countries already suffering from economic crisis

⁷⁸ This is not the case for Israel where the socio-economic context is quite different and characterised by high economic development, higher employment rates and lower unemployment of young people and women.

⁷⁹ The term AMCs has been introduced in this report to acknowledge the unique situation of Israel in the SEMED region, both in terms of socio-economic development and educational characteristics (see also note on ISR in beginning of Chapter 2).

and political turmoil. However, this crisis is also an opportunity for innovation, both in the economy and in education and training systems, particularly through the use of digital technology.

Human capital challenges

The analysis of available data and TRP5 national reports suggest that human capital is the region's main asset but, at the same time, subject to many challenges. Three main clusters of human capital development and utilisation issues emerge as those that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Underutilisation of human capital hampers growth and job creation	Social exclusion and gender gap, a substantial loss of HC potential for socio-economic prosperity	Insufficient preparedness to anticipate and address the future skills demand
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• high level of inactivity and unemployment for young people and women• negative incidence of horizontal and vertical mismatch• negative stock of net migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• high gender gap and NEETs• long spells of joblessness• low participation in adult learning• high level of informality• COVID-19 crisis expected to exacerbate inequity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• limited involvement of private sector in skills anticipation and development• inflexible education and training systems not responsive enough to LM requests• lack of data and monitoring & evaluation systems

The improved education level of the population (in particular amongst young women) has not translated into better labour market outcomes in all countries, with Israel being an exception. Skills gaps and mismatch are recognised as a major challenge by policy makers, practitioners and social partners, as they are often associated with dynamic social and economic contexts, such as restructuring processes, changing trade patterns, technological transformation, demographic change or negative social aspects (e.g. informality, long-term unemployment, inactivity).

Despite the attempts to make labour markets and societies more inclusive, wide disparities both amongst and within countries are still very prominent and cast a shadow on sustained human development. Countries score quite low in human capital development, have very high gender inequality, and often also face increasing inequalities within their own territories (urban vs. rural).

In addition to the unfair distribution of limited resources and the political instability, several other factors can explain this precarious situation amongst which are: i) low level and quality of job creation; ii) difficult transition from school to work due to insufficient support and lack of private sector involvement in policy design; iii) informality, working conditions and wage levels; iv) gender inequality in labour market; and v) low capacity and effectiveness of education and training systems to provide relevant skills for current and future labour market needs.

Skills systems reveal important shortcomings in terms of effectiveness and efficiency because of not being flexible, responsive and anchored enough in the professional environment. Though education and training systems in the SEMED region have substantially improved their outcomes in terms of access, geographical coverage and closing the gender gap, as well as the relevance to employment and career development prospects, more remains to be done to face rapid transformations.

While Education and Training is often declared as a priority sector, the related resources do not always support this goal. All the SEMED countries declare Education as capital for their development and VET is often considered as being an alternative to academic tracks and a way towards job creation, increased employability, reduced dropouts, and better social inclusion etc. However, the weak financial resources and institutional capacities of VET authorities and PESs to lead structural reforms, make it difficult to reduce the skills mismatch and gaps, and to anticipate and respond to labour market needs. Financing of VET remains centralised, government-led and not diversified **enough** to accompany the skills, ambitious policies and action plans. The lack of costing systems leads to incremental expenditure planning (based on the previous years). This is another issue restraining performance and innovation in skills development. The data on expenditure of education is very limited in AMCs, especially for the VET sub-sector which limits the analysis of this important aspect.

In fact, there is a general lack of data, relevant M&E systems and national labour market information system (LMIS) to accompany and adapt these constant and rapid transformations. Education and training systems have a key role to play in ensuring that opportunities are provided for all individuals, to continually develop their skills in a lifelong learning perspective, thus enabling them to adapt to rapidly changing labour market requirements.

Policy responses

Since the last Torino Process round in 2016, the SEMED countries have undergone important political, socio-economic and demographic changes in continuation of the Arab spring. The recent developments keep putting human capital, and especially education and training, at the heart of policy agendas addressing both social and economic challenges. The COVID-19 crisis which began in 2020, like for the rest of the world, added new challenges and created the need for new policy responses and the implementation of structural reforms is likely to become more difficult. Still, signs of progress made by the countries in the last four years are visible in most of the areas addressed in this analysis.

On partnerships with the private sector for skills anticipation and development: Countries in the region have continued to build their education, skills and labour market information systems in order to better answer the LM needs. These efforts are increasingly made in

partnership with the private sector. More attention is being paid to economic diversification and SME development as core pillars for socio-economic prosperity, where skills are increasingly recognised as a key driver.

On governance and partnership for skills anticipation and development, there is good progress in all countries, with a gap between Maghreb and Mashrek countries. All SEMED countries are increasingly involving the private sector, though at different levels and rhythms, in policy design and review. Still, they often rely on rather short-term trends in demand and supply when planning education and training. There is a need to raise awareness about the changing skills demand, to identify pointers of change and to stimulate a discussion amongst policymakers and practitioners, including the private sector, on the future of work and skills, in order to adapt education and training provision accordingly.

On modernisation and diversification of VET provision: SEMED countries have increased efforts to reform and modernise their VET system to support economic development, social prosperity and to better meet labour market needs. This includes learning methodologies to enhance competency-based approach and work-based learning, to ease the transition to work as well as teachers' continuous professional development. The ongoing health crisis has accelerated the need to reform curricula and introduce key competencies such as digital and entrepreneurial skills. Quality assurance, national qualification frameworks and recognition of prior learning are also high on the agenda of most countries, although implementation remains challenging.

On inclusiveness and accessibility of skills for all: more attention is being paid to inclusiveness and skills accessibility for all, by boosting inclusive growth and job creation as well as making VET programmes more accessible to vulnerable groups, such as people with disabilities, the low-qualified, migrants, people with fewer opportunities because of their geographical location and/or their economically disadvantaged situation. Related policies are aiming at developing adult learning in a lifelong learning perspective, to increase employability, prevent early leaving from education and training and to support the school-and work-to-work transitions.

Priorities for action and conclusion

The findings and recommendations of the ETF Torino Process regional report provide elements that can inform policy dialogue and future regional initiatives within the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean area. The findings of this report will also feed into the current dialogue, led by the Union for the Mediterranean and the European Commission, Directorate General for Employment and Labour, on monitoring the progress of the 2019 Ministerial Declaration on Employment and Labour. This underlines a range of issues, including the importance of reforming

education and training systems in a way that responds to the challenges presented by ensuring employment, employability, and decent work⁸⁰.

Structural challenges need systemic approach for reform. Skills development systems in the SEMED region need to undergo a true shift of paradigm, away from an exclusive focus on formal provision and one-size-fits-all solutions. There is a need for lifelong learning systems that can offer flexible, individualised pathways for each learner, combining formal and informal learning, hard and soft skills, and ease of access to education and training opportunities throughout life. Obviously, this is a complex task, as it tackles all aspects of education and training systems, ranging from teaching and learning practices, organisation of provision and ensuring visibility of the skills that people develop through their lives, to new cooperation modalities amongst different actors, reviewing the division of responsibilities and ensuring adequate resources through multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance.

A system change of that kind requires a sustained effort and agility to manage a non-linear transformation process, address resistance to change, absorb external shocks to stay on course, and to accommodate socio-economic needs. Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis created new challenges and a renewed sense of urgency for education and training systems, to move faster in their transformation processes by tapping into the potential of digital technologies, building on innovative practices, and promoting collaborative solutions, including with the private sector, in order to avoid disruption.

PfA.1. Building strong skills partnerships - a must for socio-economic prosperity - and agile and resilient systems

As discussed in this report, the issue of youth unemployment is a major concern for all authorities in the region. There are multiple main drivers of this human capital challenge, including insufficient job creation, skills mismatch, labour market rigidities, as well as poor job quality, barriers when searching for employment, high regional disparities, and insufficient involvement of the private sector including civil society in effective and participatory policy making.

PfA.1.1. Foster the establishment of a multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance ecosystem: at national sectoral and local levels

PfA.1.2. Diversify and sustain the financial mechanisms of VET to address the various needs and ensure budget sustainability

⁸⁰ For the importance of investment in education, higher education and training systems, including VET, as well as lifelong reskilling and upskilling of workers to prepare them for constant changes in the world of work, see Ministerial Declaration on Employment and Labour, April 2019, p. 4.

This recommendation focuses on the need to give more space to the private sector in national policy design, implementation and monitoring in order to guarantee a participatory governance, as well as diversified and sustainable financing mechanisms. Tripartite and bipartite bodies, as well as social dialogue, should include the area of skills development in policy agendas as they are a win-win area for cooperation. The private sector could play a more prominent role in anticipating skills needs, improving employability and reducing skills gaps and skills mismatch, if fully involved in the policy cycle.

PfA.2. Establish a LLL culture and reinforce adult education to ensure economic growth, social inclusion and digital/green transition.

Technological transformation in general and digital and green transition in particular call for more agile and responsive skills systems that initial and formal education and training systems cannot always ensure alone. Individuals need support to upskill and update their skills in a permanent manner.

Promoting a culture of LLL calls for more awareness of employers and workers on the value and benefits of upskilling and reskilling, the availability of guidance and career development support, the development of appropriate financial resources, the existence of regular monitoring and quality assessment. Special attention should be placed on upskilling and reskilling of disadvantaged groups, including older workers and adults struggling with basic skills, support for management and staff to learn and to overcome barriers, in order to create and sustain a learning culture in the organisation for both management and staff.

Building a lifelong learning vision also suggests an analysis of the main issues that inhibit LLL and which describes what is needed to transform them into opportunities. Looking to the future, the recent UNESCO report, “Embracing a culture of lifelong learning: contribution to the Futures of Education initiative, August 2020”, sets out 10 key messages for creating a culture of lifelong learning.

PA.3. Skills provision should ease the labour market transition, support job creation and reinforce inclusion

As highlighted in chapter 3, the school-to-work transition is often painful and long for graduates in the SEMED region, due to the gaps between education & training supply and labour market needs and the insufficient support and effectiveness of labour market measures. To ease this transition from school to work and also from job-to-job, the ETF recommends, in addition to the expansion and adaptation of active labour market policies and programmes, reinforcing career guidance services, work-based learning, entrepreneurial learning and digital skills, as well as adult education that further supports professional mobility and lifelong transition (as mentioned above in PfA.2) .

PfA.3.1 Create the condition for lifelong career guidance systems.

PfA.3.2 Regulate and extend Work-based Learning for more effective and faster transition

PfA.3.3 Key competences, notably on digitalisation and entrepreneurial learning

This recommendation focuses on these 3 areas that ETF considers to be important and which should be addressed as a priority. The modernisation of skills provision obviously covers other important areas, mentioned in the report, such as enhancing the competency-based approach, teachers' continuous professional development, quality assurance, national qualification frameworks and recognition of prior learning that are high on the agenda of most countries, but where the pace of implementation remains slow.

PfA.4. Data for better skills anticipation and matching and monitoring labour market outcomes

Policy-makers, employers, workers, providers of education and training and students all need timely and accurate information about demand for skills in the labour market and how it relates to skills supply. Given the speed at which labour markets are changing, skills need identification becomes even more key to addressing the skills mismatch, skills gaps, and the substantial unemployment and underemployment in all SEMED countries - independently of their level of economic development.

To build a sound monitoring system, promote a culture of lifelong learning for all, anticipate skills needs and to work against discrimination and gender gaps, it is important to build strong skills partnerships and to ensure that the strategies include clear objectives and priorities, time-limited targets and benchmarks, staff and budget allocations, institutional coordination arrangements, mechanisms to integrate the private sector and international cooperation resources. A strong monitoring of economies and labour markets will increase the relevance of education and training systems, in order to prevent skills depletion, underutilisation and brain drain, and to regularly assess and review policies.

To conclude, it is worthwhile mentioning that most countries have made unprecedented efforts to deploy resources and adopt crisis dispositions. Still, we are far away from comprehending the full magnitude and the resultant effects of all these disruptions. They create risks and opportunities for inclusive, innovative and greener societies. The policy makers in the SEMED region need to be aware of and, consequently, adapt policy making processes to face these fierce transformations. Skills systems are obviously part of the solution. This report was completed during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought a certain degree of uncertainty regarding the future skills reforms to be undertaken by countries. However, the findings of this report are less sensitive to changes over the shorter term, with immediate and direct impact. The pace of change may slow down or accelerate as a result of the pandemic, but the nature of that change is likely to remain the same.

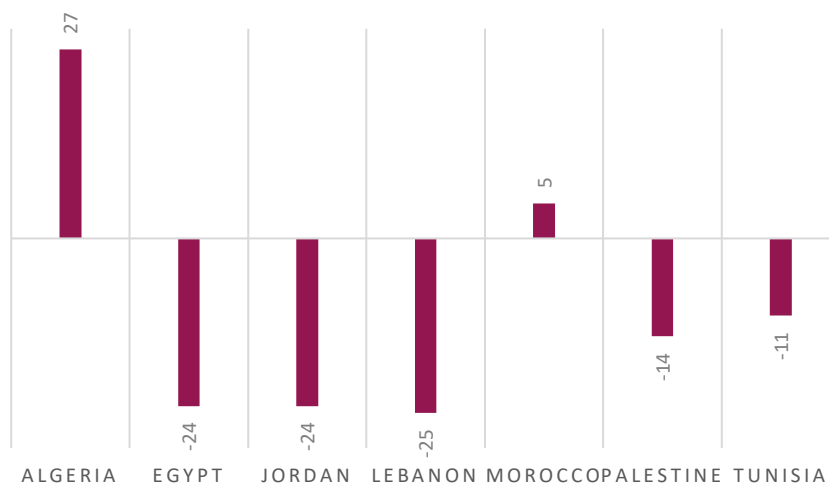
ANNEX 2 – EMEA’S PREPAREDNESS INDEX

Methodological note. To assess economic preparedness and short-term socio-economic mitigation policies (crisis management), we build two synthetic indexes. The Preparedness Index takes into account 35 pre-crisis macroeconomic and banking indicators, which are normalised on the regions mean and standard deviation and then aggregated by average. The second index assesses countries’ policy response by looking at the measures implemented by competent fiscal, monetary and banking/supervision authorities. Whereas the aggregation strategy is almost identical to the Preparedness index, raw data to be input to compute the Policy Response index is predominantly qualitative or binary. In order to ease synthetic comparability, we convert information into quantitative series, by summing all relevant policy interventions undertaken by governments, central banks and the banking sector in the aftermath of the shock. Notably, in both indexes, absolute normalised values are mathematically derived, whereas the sign is imposed ex-post to reflect qualitative considerations (e.g., a negative sign is assigned to a debt/GDP above average; a positive sign is assigned to a fiscal balance above average; a negative sign is assigned to a delay of policy intervention above average). Values are multiplied by 100 to improve readability. Positive values indicate a performance above average, the opposite applies to negative values. The higher the absolute value, the higher the deviation from mean performance.

The two figures here below illustrate the results of the EMEA Preparedness index (Figures 1 and 2)⁸¹ and the relative performance in the main areas considered for the index calculation (see above methodological note). Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine and Tunisia present the lowest preparedness scores. Lebanon shows potentially more ample room for manoeuvre, thanks to its low tax rates, despite very high public debt. Furthermore, the quality of institutions and the rule of law are worryingly low and corruption scores high. Social vulnerability and the lack of comprehensive social safety nets are common features within these countries. In particular, high inactivity, unemployment and poverty rates, combined with a lack of sufficient precautionary savings buffers, are reasons for concern. Lebanon scores dramatically low in all the banking-related component parts of the index calculation. Algeria shows favourable social conditions and an inward-looking, profitable banking sector. Jordan stands out for the quality of its institutions, low corruption rates and the rule of law (Ayadi et. al, 2020b).

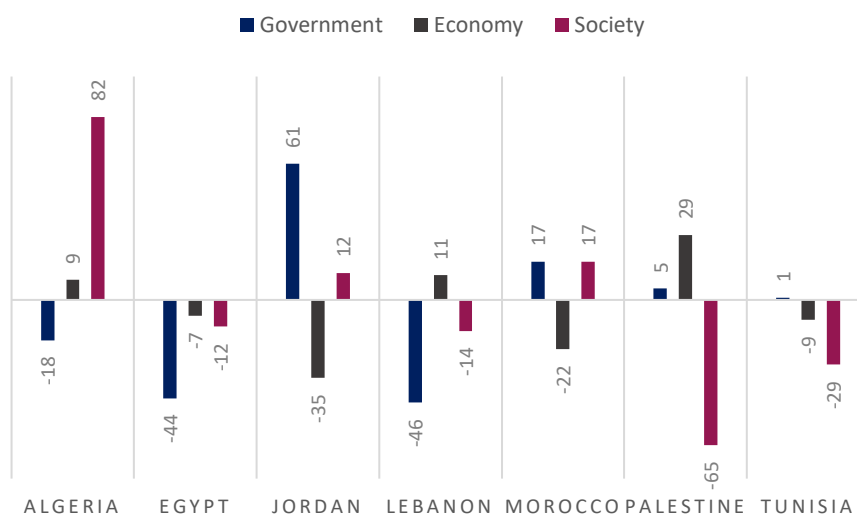
⁸¹ EMEA developed the socio-economic Preparedness index (under the Pillar 3 of the EMEA COVID-19 Monitor) to assess socio-economic conditions pre-pandemic: [EMEA COVID-19 Research - Updates on EMEA Covid-19 Study \(euromed-economists.org\)](https://www.euromed-economists.org/).

FIGURE 1: PREPAREDNESS INDEX



Source: EMEA COVID-19 Policy Monitor
*Methodology in Ayadi et al (2020b)

FIGURE 2: PREPAREDNESS INDEX: RELATIVE PERFORMANCE IN MAIN AREAS



Source: EMEA COVID-19 Policy Monitor
*Methodology in Ayadi et al (2020b)

ANNEX 3 - LABOUR MARKET AND SOCIAL SECURITY: SPECIFIC MEASURES ADOPTED⁸²

In **Algeria**, the national minimum wage was increased (from DZD 18,000 to DZD 20,000) and income tax on salaries was reduced below DZD 30,000 (May 2020). In April, a US\$80 "solidarity transfer" was announced for families that were in need, impacted by the measures against COVID-19. The authorities postponed the payment of income taxes for individuals (and small enterprises) and relaxed contractual deadlines for all, measures that were adopted in the majority of the AMCs countries. Other measures, providing bonuses or subsidies to specific categories, were introduced quite soon, particularly for healthcare workers (i.e., 16.5 billion in bonus payments to health workers) and the National Social Insurance fund (CNAS) has extended the deadline for the payment of employers' contributions and suspended for six months the penalties from previous late payments not made on time (starting from April 2020). In September, the government decided to expand the benefit of financial assistance of 30,000 dinars for the benefit of the transport sectors most affected by the restrictive measures. In December, the National Commission for Social Works of Education Workers (CNOSTE) established bonuses and allowances for staff in the education sector which are infected with COVID-19, reducing their healthcare bills. Separately, specific measures targeting the exceptional closure of places were lifted. For example, pregnant women and women raising children, as well as people with chronic illnesses and those with medical vulnerabilities, were given access to exceptional paid leave, in both the public and private sector (i.e., exceptional paid leave granted to pregnant women and those raising children). This measure was lifted in September when the nurseries reopened. On the financial side, the exceptional relief measures adopted by the Bank of Algeria in April, have been extended until December 2020.

In **Egypt**, as for many other countries not just in the region, the first measures introduced were targeted towards protecting workers in the most affected sectors. The government agreed bonuses for medical staff working in labs and quarantine hospitals and a 75% allowance over the

⁸² All the Information reported in this paragraph was retrieved from the "Social protection responses to the COVID-19 crisis in the MENA/Arab States region. Country responses and policy Considerations", Regional UN Issued-Based Coalition on Social Protection (IBC-SP), July 2020, United Nations, 2020 and Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA) and Euro-Mediterranean Network for Economic Studies (EMNES) research on COVID-19, between March and November 2020, comparing completed information with two other COVID-19 trackers: the COVID-19 Government Measures Worldwide, available on tableau public and made by Visualitics, retrieved from <https://public.tableau.com/profile/visualitics#!/vizhome/Covid-19GovernmentMeasuresWorldwide/CovidGovernmentMeasuresWorldwide> and COVID-19;Government Measures Dataset, made by acaps, retrieved from <https://www.acaps.org/covid-19-government-measures-dataset>; the Policy Responses to COVID-19 of the International Monetary Fund from <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19>; and KPMG Government Responses to COVID-19 <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/government-response-global-landscape.html>

wage of medical professionals. An emergency benefits programme for formal workers in the tourism sector was also rapidly introduced and disbursed through the Employees Emergency Fund⁸³. The government readjusted the variable wage by adding 80 per cent of the special allowances that are not included in the basic wage of pensioners who completed their service between 2006-2016. Pensioners will receive five bonuses (variable income) at a total cost of EGP35 billion this year (2020). Furthermore, the main targeted cash transfer social programmes (Takaful and Karama) were extended to include more families. The government put in place a specific programme providing one-off monetary compensation (a one-off monetary grant) to informal workers registered at the database of the Ministry of Manpower through post offices enlisted through a new registry from the Ministry of Manpower's database. As of April 2020, registration included around one million individuals working in construction, agriculture, fishing and plumbing. Nevertheless, due to the large amount of informal workers in the countries and the underdeveloped infrastructure not able to detect and cover everyone in need, the cash transfers were particularly challenging and only 10% of the population received such assistance, despite the estimated 32.5% of people living below the state's poverty line⁸⁴. Furthermore, Egypt widened one of the biggest social safety nets in the country, the Takaful & Karama programme, both including thousands of new people and increasing payments to women community leaders in rural areas. Egypt implemented other programmes for providing cash transfers and in-kind transfers to the vulnerable population, particularly concerning food aid, in collaboration with the World Food Programme.

In **Jordan**, the government swiftly introduced the option for workers on unpaid leave to apply for disbursement of unemployment benefits (only if employed in specific sectors, such as tourism, transportation and trade). The SSC has suspended old-age insurance for private-sector employees for three months (starting 1 March). Companies that owe contributions to the SSC from the past (arrears amounting to JOD340 million) will be legally allowed to make such payments in the future. Half of the Maternity Insurance Contributions in 2020 in Jordan will be used to support vulnerable groups, mainly the elderly and sick, via cash transfers and in-kind benefits. From April 17, 2020, the Prime Minister announced three specific wage support programmes (Tadamon 1, Tadamon 2, and Musaned). The Tadamon programmes are dedicated to companies that had to reduce wages by 50%, providing unemployment allowance and also supporting uninsured people. Musaned programmes are designed for companies who had to suspend activities without pay, providing to them unemployment insurance, the possibility for employees to retrieve a certain amount from their employment savings and spend it in advance of

⁸³ The fund was already established in 2002 to provide financial help to workers not receiving salary because of employer's inability to pay due to financial crisis.

⁸⁴ <https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/road-instability-impact-covid-19-egyptian-economy-27495>

their insurance funds. It is important to underline that the Jordanian government also stipulated that the self-employed, irregular and daily workers are eligible for these programmes, including Gazans and Children of Jordanian mothers (the aim is to reach 400,000 vulnerable Jordanian families). Early in March, the Bread Subsidy Cash Compensation Programme was expanded to National Aid Fund (NAF) beneficiaries, allowing Jordanian women married to non-Jordanian men and Gazans, registered with the passport department, to apply. The Government of Jordan provided a lot of other cash transfers and in-kind aid through different funds and programmes for vulnerable families, both Jordanian citizens and refugees, a combination of old and new beneficiaries. Particular attention was given to daily wage workers, with programmes carried out by NAF. On December 3, the cash transfer programme was expanded to cover 100,000 new families and daily workers, and new funding were announced to protect nearly 180,000 jobs in the most-hard hit sectors and tourism. During the quarantine period, an official license was granted to public and private sector workers (except for some essential sectors)⁸⁵.

In **Lebanon**, an aid package worth USD300 million was swiftly issued for low-income families and vital sectors of the economy (i.e., agriculture, industry). The Lebanese Central Bank enabled commercial banks to provide loans to companies for paying salaries and covering debts accumulated in recent months. Special conditions for the loans are zero interest; they can be issued both in dollars and in Lebanese pounds, and for five years starting from 1 June 2020. As with the previous countries analysed, Lebanon also set up a national solidarity fund accepting in-kind and monetary donations. The government introduced specific measures to ensure financial protection to access healthcare. The General Director of the National Social Security Fund issued a memorandum related to the laboratory diagnosis of COVID-19, setting the laboratory examination fee at a maximum of LBP150,000 (all laboratories are recommended to abide by this fee). The **Lebanese** government developed a new social registry for a new emergency cash transfer for people in need. Lebanon's Parliament ratified an LBP1.2 trillion (US\$300 million) aid package for low-income families and vital sectors (agriculture and industry). Half will go to the Emergency National Social Solidarity Programme, providing monthly cash assistance of LBP400,000 (about US\$100) to about 200,000 families for seven months (until December 2020). People with disabilities, victims of landmines and explosions, parents of public-school children in need will be prioritised, as well as non-food voucher households in the National Poverty Targeting People (around 28,000 households). Also, the Lebanese Food Bank, thanks to private donations, distributed food boxes to vulnerable people. The disaster which occurred in the Port of Beirut on August 4, 2020 increased the country's economic deterioration, further impacting poverty, inequality and food security, for which the existing targeted safety net programmes are

⁸⁵ Employers cannot calculate this period as annual leave or sick leave and cannot deduct it from workers' vacation balance

insufficient to protect the increasing numbers of vulnerable people⁸⁶. The Lebanese Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MOIM), in collaboration with the Central Inspection Office, and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (PCM), launched an electronic platform (IMPACT) collecting household applications for social assistance under the National Social Solidarity Programme (NSSP), providing emergency aid to households impacted by lockdown restrictions. In October, the World Bank created a project, in collaboration with the Government of Lebanon, to provide further cash transfers to the extremely poor and vulnerable population⁸⁷.

Morocco introduced a measure aimed at protecting access to healthcare, providing that workers in the formal sector (covered by the National Insurance Fund—CNSS) who were dismissed due to the crisis remained covered by health insurance. The government also provided cash transfers for households which were not benefitting from the RAMED health card (Régime d'Assistance Médicale, medical assistance scheme) and non RAMED workers working in the informal sector (from 78 to 117 dollars of financial aid, according to their family size) during the lockdown in the country. The initiative clearly targeted informal workers, households operating in the informal sector and with no income because of the mandatory lockdown. The government implemented an outstanding labour market measure designed as a new unemployment benefit, replacing the existing one, for employees of companies whose activities have ceased entirely, as well as to those of companies that needed to reduce their staff. Furthermore, companies with less than 500 employees, which had to stop their activities and whose revenues fell by more than 50% compared to the same period in 2019, will be considered companies "in difficulty". Those whose revenues decrease between 25% to 50%, or with more than 500 employees, will go before a special commission that will decide whether they should receive government assistance. These businesses will be able to pay up to 50% of their employees' salaries without paying taxes or fees to social insurance. Furthermore, Morocco's Economic Monitoring Committee decided to suspend the payment of social security contributions (CNSS). Specific measures were adopted for the Tourism sector, with the provision of a net monthly lump sum indemnity of 2,000 DH from July to December 2020, also including trainees under integration contract. In October, the government launched the "Damane Relance Promotion Immobilière", a facility for financing real estate firms (it is supposed to work until the end of March 2021). With the recovery plan announced in August,

⁸⁶ <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/216001603902307374/pdf/Project-Information-Documents-LEBANON-EMERGENCY-CRISIS-AND-COVID-19-RESPONSE-SOCIAL-SAFETY-NET-PROJECT-P173367.pdf>

⁸⁷ <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/216001603902307374/pdf/Project-Information-Documents-LEBANON-EMERGENCY-CRISIS-AND-COVID-19-RESPONSE-SOCIAL-SAFETY-NET-PROJECT-P173367.pdf>

the State aims at maintaining the guarantee programme used for supporting firms during the first wave, adding new programmes with longer maturity and period of grace⁸⁸.

In **Palestine**, the Minister of Labour launched a Fund to provide support to workers affected by the pandemic, and, in partnership with the World Bank, the Palestinian Authority launched a two-month temporary employment programme for unemployed workers and financial aid of USD100 for three months for female workers who had stopped working (and whose salaries have been cut off). The Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Labour developed various cash transfers and in-kind programmes. Since April, 10,000 new families were included in the Palestinian Cash Transfer Programme (CTP) and urgent financial aid was established for families affected by COVID-19, covering everyone who lost the job, having no income or an income less than ILS1,400. In May 2020, the Palestinian Ministry of Labour started the distribution of cash assistance to 40,000 workers affected by the crisis, establishing a technical committee to verify eligibility conditions. The government has stopped collecting contributions from Palestinian workers, instead leaving compliance with sick pay rules to employers. The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) social protection system extended its provisions from 85,000 to 120,000 affected families. In August, the Palestinian finance ministry signed a USD30 million agreement with the World Bank aimed at sustaining vulnerable citizens (i.e., financial assistance for the jobless, temporary employment programme)⁸⁹.

In **Tunisia**, the government allocated an amount of TND300 million in aid for unemployed workers, allowing part payment of the wages of workers that were in 'technical unemployment' (for those who could not continue their work) after registering through an online platform. Another platform for a similar assistance measure was instituted for self-employed Tunisian workers. **The government** allocated TND150 million (USD51.3 million) for vertical expansion of existing social assistance programmes, targeting the beneficiaries in different specific categories and providing specific cash transfers dedicated to households working in the informal sector, not covered by any social assistance programme.

⁸⁸ The plan also provides a guarantee scheme for supporting the repayment of public companies' obligations with private companies, See <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/365441608752111119/pdf/Morocco-Economic-Monitor-From-Relief-to-Recovery.pdf>

⁸⁹ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/coronavirus-world-bank-to-grant-30m-to-palestine/1933806>

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ABOUT EMEA AND EMNES

The Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA) is a Barcelona-based regional think-tank established in 2012 that serves as a leading independent and innovative policy research institution; a forum for debate on the political and socio-economic reforms in Mediterranean and Africa; and promoter of actions and initiatives that fulfill objectives of sustainability, inclusiveness, regional integration and prosperity. It strives to contribute to the rethinking of the Euro-Mediterranean and Africa partnerships in view of the new dynamics of an emerging multi-polar world and amidst of protracted crises. EMEA has a large network of economists, high-level experts and institutional partners (research institutes, think tanks and universities) in the Euro-Mediterranean and Africa. EMEA builds on the collaborative research network MEDPRO (funded by the EU's Seventh Framework Programme (2009-13) and provides forward-looking thinking and political and socio-economic integrated analyses on the Euro-Mediterranean region. EMEA is also the promoter and co-funder of the Euro-Mediterranean Network for Economic Studies (EMNES), co-funded by the European Commission (DG NEAR) between 2015 and 2019. EMNES is a regional network composed of 30 institutions and more than 100 experts and researchers in the Mediterranean region. From January 2020, EMEA coordinates EMNES.

The Euro-Mediterranean Network for Economic Studies (EMNES) aims to provide a renewed vision for socio-economic development in the Mediterranean region, mainly focussing on employment creation, social inclusion, sustainable development and regional integration. It performs economic and policy research, exploring the pillars of inclusive and sustainable economic models in the Euro-Mediterranean region, along the following **research areas**:

1. Institutions and institutional reforms;
2. Private sector, micro, small and medium sized enterprises and social business development;
3. Entrepreneurship and innovation;
4. Human capital development, education, labour markets and migration;
5. Demographics, health and social protection;
6. Macroeconomic policy , inequality and social inclusion;
7. Inclusive and sustainable finance;
8. Regional integration, trade, investment and infrastructure;
9. Energy, water, environment and sustainable development;
10. Euro-Mediterranean partnership;
11. Scenario analysis and foresight;
12. Other evolving research areas.

EMNES is a network of research institutions and think tanks from Algeria, Belgium, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Jordan, Morocco, Slovenia, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey and the UK. Between 2014-2019, EMNES was co-funded by the European Commission – under Grant Contract N° ENPI/2014/354-488 and EMNES Partners and Associates. EMNES is built on four core principles: independence, excellence, policy relevance and a deep knowledge of Euro-Mediterranean affairs.

