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Press Release

“YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY IN LEBANON: THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, TRAINING AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP”

Recent economic, social and security crises across Lebanon have led to an increase in the rate of unemployed youth. This is one major priority for the Lebanese government to act on with over 20% of youth being unemployed and over 40% of educated youth immigrating within five years of obtaining their degrees. Commitment to reforming the education system is the only guarantee to increase the employability of youth in their home country.

To this end, the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), the European Training Foundation (ETF) and the Center of Mediterranean Integration (CMI) in partnership with the EU Delegation in Lebanon launched a seminar on “YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY IN LEBANON: THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP” on September 22nd and 23rd in Beirut, hosted by the Social and Economic Council. The seminar brings together over 60 representatives and experts from the Ministries of Education and Labor, private businesses, international agencies, academia, young entrepreneurs and civil society organizations.

The seminar facilitated a debate among stakeholders and raised awareness of decision-makers on the importance of vocational training and entrepreneurship education in enhancing youth employability.

During the opening ceremony, Minister of Labor, Mr. Sejaan Azzi, highlighted the importance of *“matching skills with the Labor market, and fighting the cultural challenge which encourages students to get an academic diploma rather than become an equipped professional capable of creating opportunities of employment”*.

The representative of the Minister of Education and Higher Education, Mr. Ahmad Diab, stressed on *“the importance of vocational education and training in the economic and social development of the country”*. According to him, *“trust in vocational education would be a result of a series of reforms at different levels, namely in the development of a new curricula, investing in equipment and building the capacity of teachers around new concepts”*.

The head of cooperation at the EU Delegation, Mr. Loeber expressed his concern but also his hope in Lebanon’s resilience and said: *“Despite regional and local challenges facing Lebanon, the will, hard work and entrepreneurial spirit of the Lebanese people are important assets that can be used to overcome hardships but this requires everyone’s engagement: government, private sector and civil society.”*

The seminar developed actionable recommendations in order to reform the vocational and technical education system and promote entrepreneurship as a strategy for job creation.

Today, Lebanon - like many of its neighboring countries of the Mediterranean basin, suffers a severe mismatch of skills between demands of the market place and the quality of vocational education. Entrepreneurship education on the other hand remains a shy endeavor and limited to few schools and universities leaving most of the youth with little option but to immigrate to find work.

To remedy this situation, one of the seminar’s main concluding recommendations was for the Lebanese government to make education more responsive to the expectations of the market place in general and economy in particular. This includes reinforcing the roles of economic operators in



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defining and supplying professional training, revising the content and implementing measures of training programs to give a significant importance to the work experience through practical assignments, traineeships or apprenticeships as well as enhancing teacher training programs to be more in line with the economic reality.

In this regard, Mr. Patrice Paoli, the French Ambassador in Lebanon, emphasized the importance of developing *“training programs adapted to the demand of the job-creating and high-potential sectors”*.

He added that *“this undoubtedly requires the upgrading of national vocational training schemes, ensuring a better match between training provisions and the needs of the labour market, reinforcing public-private partnerships, and allowing a greater focus on the informal sector.”*

In his intervention, the President of the Economic and Social Council, Mr. Roger Nasnas, focused on the importance of *« limiting the South migration to the North, the consequences of which are gaining weight and affect the economic, social and security reality. In fact, it is through the promotion of development of Southern countries that North-South equilibrium and integration is achieved, resulting in a suitable frame for the promotion of civil peace »*.

Another important recommendation was for the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to adopt a new entrepreneurship component in public curricula and develop a policy that incentivizes young entrepreneurs through an enabling environment for their successes.

The seminar was praised by all speakers for bringing various stakeholders and encouraging cross-sectoral conversations. A final recommendation was for the Lebanese government to continue to support and be proactive on this issue with the aim of being the lead actor on implementation of these and other recommendations.

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Beyond Reform and Development, part of BRD/I Group, is in charge of facilitating the seminar and supporting the media in collecting information about the topic.