

Report on Effective participation of civil society in the Mediterranean Partner Countries in the context of demographic and cultural changes in the future of the Union for the Mediterranean

**Participating ESCs: Malta Council for Economic and Social Development (MCESD)
National Economic and Labour Council of Italy (CNEL)
Economic and Social Council of Spain
Economic and Social Council of Lebanon**

**Rapporteur: Joseph Montebello
Malta Council for Economic and Social Development**

Aims

The aims of this report are:

- To identify current demographic and cultural changes and their impact on the local, national and regional development in the Euro Mediterranean region
- To present examples of good practices that are currently being implemented to address these changes, and
- to suggest proposals for the effective and active participation of civil society in the drawing up of policies and their implementation
- To address issues resulting from demographic and cultural changes
- In order to promote both social and economic development in the context of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).

Demographic Change

The process of ageing

- Given the magnitude and the time dimension of the demographic changes in the MPC and the EU, an immediate commitment must be endorsed by all stakeholders at local, national and Euromed level
- Priority must be given to the establishing of effective institutional frameworks to deal with their impact on the labour markets, economies, social fabric and cultural settings

Role of Civil Society in response to demographic change

- In view of the huge impact the age-structures have on the economic situation in a country, expressed in terms of the per capita GDP growth rate, it is of utmost importance that the speedy ageing process in MPC will be met by the adequate and sustainable social security and pension systems.
- *“Unfortunately, most of the countries in the region are not anticipating the seriousness of the problems likely to crop up in the future due to a sheer increase in absolute numbers of the elderly population” (Saxena, 2008:37).*

Role of Civil Society in response to demographic change

Migration and integration

- The most recent decades have added a faster pace to migration flows, due to the turbulent geo-political, economic and climatic events resulting in the forced movement of people.
- A clear distinction between legal and illegal immigration, needs to be made, in the sense of incentivising the former and deterring the second, according to law and security
- Civil Society organisations and the social partners have a particular important role to play in ensuring the coherence and effectiveness of the social processes of integrating immigrants, men, women and children and addressing their relevant needs.

Role of Civil Society in response to demographic change

Migration and integration cont

- The role of CS in terms of provision of services such as housing, food and medicine provision, education and care for these displaced persons is of paramount importance, both in the MPC as well as in the EU MS.
- Establishing reception and integration policies and programmes for immigrants should be in tandem with the widespread participation and direct involvement of social organisations and immigrant associations.

Effective participation of civil society at regional level

- The ESC has a major role to play. However the only successful procedure is the one that is directly coordinated between two or more Economic and Social Councils, such as those led by the AICESIS or the EESC.
- There are few ESCs in the South region. There are no ESCs in Morocco, Libya, Syria, Turkey. The “similar organisations” do not have the culture of giving initiative to the civil society and to take responsibility in that field.
- In the institutional framework of UfM, which is essentially intergovernmental, Governments of the partner countries give little space to social actors: trade unions, association of entrepreneurs, etc.

Effective participation of civil society at regional level

- This affects the general approach of UfM. We need a stronger impetus from the European side of UfM to win the battle for better representation of social parties
- Unless the countries along the southern shores of the Mediterranean are able to significantly increase their economic growth to above six per cent per annum, unemployment figures in this part of the world are scheduled to increase rapidly in the next ten years.

Effective participation of civil society at national level

- Promoting effective participation by civil society necessitates the need for actions and measures that guarantee economic and social rights
- Promoting participation by women – including affirmative action – in economic and social councils and similar institutions.
- Approval of programmes to encourage the inclusion of women in political decision-making, especially decisions relating to jobs for women and the business world.

Effective participation of civil society at national level

- Addressing the younger generation by ensuring access to education in particular in ICT and R&D
- Effective exchange and contacts amongst young people in the Euro-Mediterranean area through programmes currently carried out by established institutions of the different countries of this geographical area.
- Civil Society's participatory contribution should ensure that government policies are responsive to the needs of society, and that the basic needs/services of citizens at community and grassroots level are addressed. Civil Society's ownership of public policies should be fostered, so that credibility is boosted.

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Cultural Change

- Closer cross-cultural co-operation can only be achieved if a more concerted effort is made to seek a convergence on the basic values that are part and parcel of the civilizations surrounding the Mediterranean area.
- The increase in attention to the third pillar of the EMP that deals with social, cultural, and human affairs must result in a tangible work programme if such efforts are to be sustainable

Ideas and Ideologies

- Cultural diversity is often used as an instrument of political struggle which has degenerated in open xenophobia, populism and different forms of extremism, converting certain communities or cultures in a target.
- This trend has to be challenged, together with intellectuals, writers and leading figures who contribute to shape public opinions in the region

Education and Culture

- Education is one of the fields where individuals are being prepared, from the very beginning, to welcome or refuse “the difference”, and where they get intellectual tools for interpreting the reality they live in.
- The establishment of the Euro-Mediterranean Anna Lindh Foundation in Alexandria in 2005 that seeks to promote a dialogue between cultures and civilization around the Mediterranean is focusing its programme of activities on seeking to bridge the gap in misunderstanding between people and communities and rebuilding human and cultural bridges across the Mediterranean.

Education and Culture cont/

Education and Research

- Education and research, with their related policies, are considered to be amongst the most important tools and means for strengthening intercultural dialogue and creating better grounds for ensuring bilateral understanding among different cultural groups and countries.
- This includes the promotion of exchange and dialogue with others that extends to groups and countries.
- Education provides also the tools required for the development of human values that are most of the time intangibles. It offers also the necessary means and instruments for economic, social and political development.

Intercultural dialogue

- One of the aims of intercultural dialogue is to create awareness and acceptance of human rights and to promote local, national and regional cooperation.
- Dialogue between various social, economic and occupational, educational and cultural groups and individuals throughout the region is essential for the prosperity of the region facing global challenges not least as a result of the financial crisis.
- Given that young people are a key target group, it is especially important to pay attention to healthy emotional development, and hence to support initiatives to develop multicultural awareness.
- There is also the need to seek more effective and innovative ways of promoting intercultural dialogue to ensure positive lasting outcomes

Conclusions and Recommendations

- Demographic and cultural changes carry socio-economic implications both in countries of origin and in host countries that need to be addressed in South-South relations and North-South relations.
- One of the challenges remains the collating of data on evolving cultural changes.
- Civil Society in the Euromed region should be more active in giving priority to the establishment of more south-south co-operation in socio-economic development in the context of demographic change in the region

Conclusions and Recommendations cont/

- The culture of globalization has already contributed with irreversibility to changing behaviour and attitudes through global communication tools and these changes should be accounted for when setting and implementing educational programmes
- The overall cooperative frameworks that are already in place can benefit from the outcomes of the new research in social sciences. The contributions of both governmental and non governmental-organizations, that are already engaged in debate and recommendations on the area of social capital, can be further enhanced.

Conclusions and Recommendations cont/

- A confidence building initiative that can be introduced as part of an exercise that aims at the nurturing of a Euro-Mediterranean profile within the framework of the UfM is that of establishing a Euro-Mediterranean Development Agency (EMDA).
- The EMDA's principal objective would be to promote the dissemination of information relating to the Union for the Mediterranean in an effort to enhance the level of transparency when it comes to taking decisions about the allocation of funds
- The Barcelona Process in general and the establishment of a free trade area in particular, are expected to assist in improving the Mediterranean socio-economic outlook

Conclusions and Recommendations cont/

- No programme will be sustainable in the long-term unless it is based on consensus, legitimacy and pays attention to the limits of tolerance of society.
- Policy makers need to pay more attention to what people want and what is preventing them from obtaining their goals. It is not really a question of time limits but which policies are required to achieve the goals being sought.
- A gradualist approach is perhaps a better option as it will allow reasonable time for society to be able to adapt and cope with the changes that are being proposed and introduced.
- It is crucial for policy-makers to create win-win situations where all sectors of society are able to benefit.



Anticipating
change

is a challenge and

an opportunity

not to be missed

Thank you