



*Virtual event*

## ***Internationalization of Tertiary Education in MENA in the COVID-19 context***

**28 January 2021**

**15:00 – 17:30 (CET)**

*Online connections available for all participants and attendees*

*Simultaneous translation in English and French will be provided*

### **1. CONTEXT**

In the Mediterranean, youth are bearing the brunt of the crises and undergoing exclusion on the economic, social and political levels, with high unemployment and a lack of opportunities to take part in public life. Nevertheless, they represent the Mediterranean region's best opportunity. A massive investment in human capital is needed, in particular in quality education, relevant not only in the local context, but also at the international level, to allow the youth to meet their aspirations by granting them access to propitious channels of opportunity both locally and abroad. The character of young people's transitions from education to employment, from dependents to providers, will be determined by governments' capacities to deliver relevant and quality education. The internationalization of tertiary education has an important role to play in such efforts, thanks to its capacity not only to help increase the quality of tertiary education, but also to boost students' 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, crucial for their employability.

Whilst the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region could further benefit from increased internationalization of its tertiary education sector, it has not yet taken full advantage of this opportunity. To this end, the Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI)/ World Bank recently published the report "[Internationalization of Tertiary Education in MENA](#)". The report details the benefits of internationalization, assesses the current state of internationalization of tertiary education institutions across MENA, and provides some policy recommendations for both government and educational institutions going forward. But more broadly, recognizing the potential of the MENA region, as well as its interconnectedness with the other shores of the Mediterranean, it also aims to set the scene for the promotion of a Mediterranean space for mobility: mobility of people, ideas, knowledge and skills, for development and shared prosperity.

One of the specificities of the MENA region is the extremely high number of refugees it hosts. While refugees can have a role to play in the internationalization of tertiary education, they face several barriers in access to that education. An important barrier is the lack of recognition of qualifications across borders and the fact that many refugees and migrants are unable to provide evidence of their qualifications and experience.

In an attempt to remedy this issue, UNESCO has launched a "Qualifications Passport", fostering the integration of refugees and vulnerable migrants around the globe by facilitating the recognition of their competencies and qualifications in host countries. Currently in its pilot stage, the goal of the assessments carried out in the project is to map, summarize and present available information on the refugee's educational level, work experience and language proficiency. This document provides credible and reliable information that can be relevant in connection with applications for employment, internships, qualification courses and admission to further studies.

More broadly – and applicable to all students – a [Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education](#) was adopted by the 40th session of the UNESCO General Conference in November



2019, making it the first United Nations treaty on higher education with a global scope. The Global Convention is designed to facilitate international academic mobility and promote the right of individuals to have their higher education qualifications evaluated through fair, transparent and non-discriminatory manners.

In parallel, the COVID-19 global pandemic will have lasting effects on tertiary education and on its internationalization. In its immediate impact, thousands of universities have been forced to close, with courses cancelled, and international students stranded in both home and host countries. In the future, due to the predicted negative economic impact and likely restrictions on international travel in a post-COVID-19 world, student and staff mobility is expected to decrease. However, the crisis may also highlight certain opportunities that institutions in the MENA region could take advantage of. For instance, more efforts could be done to expand internationalization beyond just mobility (which is only possible for a few students and scholars), towards embedding internationalization “at home”, including incorporating international dimensions into the curriculum of all students, and ICT-enabled activities such as virtual exchange.

In the post-pandemic era, circumstances will necessitate radical changes in tertiary education institutions, some of which are already being implemented, such as moving to online learning models. And if MENA institutions are able to adapt quickly to the “new normal”, adopting new and innovative models and pushing for increased internationalization activities at institutions domestically, they may be able to find a silver lining to the crisis.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The objective of this virtual event is to stimulate regional policy dialogue on internationalization. To this end, the event will discuss the findings of the CMI report *Internationalization of Tertiary Education in MENA* and provide an opportunity for tertiary education institutions to present their internationalization strategies and the responses they have developed to meet the challenges engendered by the COVID-19 crisis. The event will also provide an occasion to discuss UNESCO’s Qualifications Passport and its implications for internationalization in contexts of fragility.

In the COVID-19 context, internationalization stands as a good tool and an opportunity for tertiary education institutions to respond to the crisis. The educational landscape has altered dramatically over the course of a few months because of the COVID-19 crisis, including the move towards massively increased online learning, yet beyond this, institutions could use the opportunity to increase certain elements of internationalization. A second key objective of this virtual event is then to discuss collectively the implications the COVID-19 crisis has for tertiary education in the region, and the response implications for institutions and systems to address the immediate and long-term challenges the crisis poses, as well as to seize the opportunities. The virtual event will allow for the launch of a regional policy dialogue, between representatives of tertiary education institutions and governments in the region, on internationalization of tertiary education going forward within this wider context.

## 3. PARTICIPATION & AUDIENCE

Members of the University Governance Screening Card (UGSC) network in MENA countries and of the Aix-Marseille University-coordinated Tethys network, representatives of Ministries of Higher Education, higher education organizations, and other non-university tertiary education institutions from the region are strongly encouraged to take part in this event. Participation in this event will be made possible via an online connection, the link to which will be shared with participants, allowing them to interact by connecting directly from an electronic device with stable internet connection (headsets are highly recommended). Simultaneous interpretation will be offered in English and French.



#### 4. AGENDA

### *Internationalization of Tertiary Education in MENA in the COVID-19 context*

28 January 2021  
15:00 – 17:30 (CET)

15:00 – 15:15 *Welcome Remarks and Introduction*

**Ms. Blanca MORENO-DODSON**, Manager, CMI

**Ms. Mauve CARBONELL**, President, Tethys Consortium of Euro-Mediterranean Universities, Aix Marseille University

15:15 – 16:30 *Session 1: Internationalization in the MENA region: the status quo*

**Ms. Giulia MARCHESINI**, Senior Partnerships Specialist, CMI

- *Findings of the Internationalization of Tertiary Education in MENA report*

Q&A

**Perspectives from the region: Discussants panel**

➤ **Ms. Hala DIMECHKIE**, Director, Office of International Programs, American University of Beirut

➤ **Mr. Amine BENS Aid**, President, Al Akhawayn University

➤ **Ms. Maria Amata GARITO**, President/Rector, UNINETTUNO - International Telematic University

➤ **Mr. Cesar WAZEN**, Director, International Affairs Office, Qatar University

Q&A

16:30 – 17:15 *Session 2: The way forward and the new normal*

**Mr. Francisco MARMOLEJO**, Education Advisor, Qatar Foundation and former Global Tertiary Education Coordinator of the World Bank

- *Prospects of internationalization and online learning in times of COVID*

Q&A

**Ms. Kerstin HOLST**, Chief of Section, Migration, Displacement, Emergencies and Education, UNESCO

- *The Qualifications Passport for refugees and vulnerable migrants*

Q&A

17:15 – 17:30 *Conclusion*

**Ms. Stefania GIANNINI**, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO

**Ms. Keiko MIWA**, Regional Director, Human Development, MENA, World Bank