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## Mainstreaming Employment into Trade and Investment in the Southern Neighbourhood of the European Union (METI)

### FACTS IN BRIEF

**DC symbol:** GLO/19/12/EUR

**Countries:** Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territory and Tunisia

**Evaluation type:** Project

**Evaluation timing:** Final

**Evaluation nature:** Independent

**Project duration:** 01 September 2020 to 31 March 2025

**Date when the evaluation was completed by the evaluator:** 14 March 2025

**Date when the evaluation report was approved by EVAL:** 19 March 2025

**Administrative Office:** EMPINVEST

**Technical Office:** EMPINVEST

**Evaluation manager:** Ussama Kaewpradap

**Evaluation consultant(s):** Svetlana Bronyuk (team leader, international consultant), Ahmed Tamimi and Diana Vainer (team members)

**Donor(s) & budget:** European Union, EUR 4,492,414 – Approved USD 5,291,418

**Key Words:** trade, investment and employment, South Mediterranean region

## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

### Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

“Mainstreaming Employment into Trade and Investment in the Southern Neighborhood of the European Union” (METI) is a program hosted by the Employment in Investments Branch (EMPINVEST) at the ILO’s Employment Policy, Job Creation and Livelihoods Department. It is funded by the European Union (EU), DG NEAR, and implemented by the ILO. METI is a regional program that aims at enabling policymakers in the Southern Mediterranean to mainstream employment perspectives into trade and investment policies.

The project’s duration is 52 months, from 01 September 2020 to 31 December 2024, which includes a four-month no-cost extension phase. The program budget is 4,492,414 EUR, with an approved budget of 5,291,418 USD. The program covers nine countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and Tunisia), with specific focus on the partner countries: Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia.

### Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The purpose of METI program’s final independent evaluation is to assess progress made toward achieving its planned objectives. Specifically, the final evaluation examines the program’s relevance and validity of design, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, emerging impact, and sustainability. It evaluates progress from the start of implementation period, 01 September 2020, to its conclusion, 31 December 2024. The evaluation encompasses all the program’s interventions, including those at regional and national levels. For the national level component, the evaluation covers the implementation of interventions in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, with in-depth desk reviews and interviews with key stakeholders. Evaluation missions were conducted in Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan. The evaluation process emphasizes lessons learned and good practices to inform Phase II of the program (planned for 2025-2028).

### Methodology of the evaluation

The evaluation consultants adhered to the evaluation rules and standards of the United Nations System, as well as the Evaluation Quality Standards and Criteria of OECD/DAC and the United Nations Evaluation Group. To enhance the credibility and usefulness of evaluation results, the evaluators utilized both primary and secondary data sources.

### Limitations of the evaluation

The data collection process, conducted remotely, faced challenges due to several postponements of online interviews, which extended the duration of the data collection phase. Delays in submitting requests to governments to approve evaluation missions limited days for evaluation missions in target countries, such as Egypt. To address this limitation, evaluators conducted interviews online.



## MAIN FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

**Relevance:** The strategic relevance of the METI program has been rated as high by all key stakeholders and constituents. They confirmed the program's significant importance given its regional setup and the strong nexus between trade and investment policies, on the one hand, and associating employment priorities with strategies, on the other. The program's regional dimension included capacity-building activities involving national stakeholders from Southern Mediterranean countries.

**Coherence:** The mapping of METI's activities and national development strategies conducted by the evaluators demonstrated high coherence between the METI program and national development priorities in trade, investment and employment in all nine countries. In Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Morocco,<sup>1</sup> the METI program is well positioned to support the achievement of national gender strategies.

**Effectiveness:** Overall, the METI program achieved all expected outputs, exceeding the targets under Output 1. The project produced a regional thematic report, six country reports (Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, Egypt, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Lebanon), and a comprehensive Resource Policy Guide. The targets under Output 2, concerning the number of stakeholders trained on using evidence for effects of trade and investment policies on employment, were met – 145 trained (55 women and 90 men) versus plans for 128 (50% of whom women). This gives a delivery rate of 113% for the total number of trained stakeholders, and 76% for gender balance. The targets under Output 3 were nearly achieved, with slight under-delivery caused by factors beyond the program's control. The achievement of targets under Output 4 exceeded expectations. METI program conducted four in-depth studies of four EU projects, and a general portfolio assessment of nine additional public infrastructure investments in Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, and Tunisia.

**Efficiency of resource use:** Current program management arrangements are effective to a medium extent. The program initially faced difficulties with staffing and misunderstandings of roles. COVID-19 resulted in significant delays during the first two years of implementation. Key knowledge products, such as the regional thematic report and country reports on Egypt and Jordan were published in 2022. Since 2023, the program made significant progress, once the major crisis impacts were resolved.

**Impact:** METI focused on national and regional ownership of results, by establishing and engaging Public Working Groups (PWGs) in each of the target countries – Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Jordan. However, the METI intervention has not yet led to the development and / or adoption of new policies. Stakeholders, represented by the donor and tripartite constituents, concluded that further actions from the ILO are needed to assist the supported countries in implementing recommendations derived from solid research.

<sup>1</sup> In Libya, the OPT, and Tunisia, no valid gender strategies were observed.



**Sustainability:** The intervention results are likely to contribute positively and sustainably to the relevant SDGs and targets if recommendations proposed by findings of the knowledge outputs are translated into actions. If evidence-based policies are developed, adopted, adequately financed and implemented, they could lead to an increased number of decent jobs. The METI thematic report “Trade, Investment and Employment in the Southern Mediterranean Countries” will serve as a comprehensive source for development actors, including policymakers and academia for years to come.

## LESSONS LEARNED AND EMERGING GOOD PRACTICES

### Lessons learned

- 1:** A joint response through partnership and cooperation should be planned during the conceptualization phase of regional programs, supported by a joint implementation plan and budget.
- 2:** Cooperation with International Financial Institutions (IFIs) should be planned during the conceptualization phase to understand their internal guidelines and principles, including data protection.
- 3:** Staffing a regional project with a policy component like METI, involving multiple countries, should include national-level project staff to provide coordination and support to Policy Working Groups, ensuring impact at the policy level.
- 4:** Regional technical training in Turin and Jordan proved to be a good platform for knowledge sharing, but was not cost-effective in raising the capacity of policymakers based on their country-driven needs and priorities.
- 5:** Country interventions should align with the ILO country program outcomes (CPOs) to ensure a coherent response and synergies between the ILO project and the Decent Work Teams.
- 6:** Effective work of Policy Working Groups on a tripartite plus basis requires capacity building to create an equal level of knowledge on trade, investment, and employment.

### Emerging good practices

- 1:** The communication strategy developed to promote the METI program and its key knowledge products resulted in improved visibility and enhanced access to knowledge.
- 2:** Delivering key METI knowledge products in English, French, and Arabic was appreciated by stakeholders from the region, particularly from Maghreb countries.
- 3:** Regional knowledge-sharing workshops stimulated active participation from stakeholders and increased their sense of ownership.
- 4:** The EU portfolio assessment provided clear recommendations for improving the design of similar EU investment projects regarding the employment of women and youth.

### Main recommendations and follow-up

- 1. To the ILO, EMPINVEST Programme Design**



- Future METI interventions should revisit the Theory of Change and the Program strategy in order to incorporate the needs of women, youth, persons with disabilities, including women with disabilities, and owners/managers of the MSMEs into the program's Logical Framework.
- These considerations should demonstrate that the chain of results leads to a positive impact.
- A higher involvement of social partners (private sector and trade unions) in the project logic and activities must be supported.
- The lessons learned identified during the final evaluation should be carefully considered in the next phase, and further reflection should be conducted to operationalize them into actions.
- The logframe should include qualitative indicators, including targets for gender equality and disability inclusion. Targets should be disaggregated by sex, age and disability where possible.
- Youth (men and women), Women-led organizations, and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), as well as women and men with disabilities, should be consulted.
- ACTRAV and ACTEMP should be engaged at all stages of the Program Cycle to ensure that all the elements of program design encompass activities, outputs, and results, benefiting employers' and workers' organizations.
- Alignment with the relevant ILO-CPOs should be integrated into the logical framework.

#### Program coordination and staffing

- Introduce a Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) position to ensure stronger management of results, with the responsibility to manage program staff and budget.
- Establish national program officer positions in Tunisia and Morocco to enhance communication and coordination with national stakeholders, including participants of Policy Working Groups, EU delegations and stakeholders involved in the delivery of the UNSDCF.
- A Technical Officer with expertise in trade, investment, and employment is needed in ROAS to support interventions in Jordan, Lebanon, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

#### Global, inter-regional and regional cooperation:

- Share lessons learned and emerging good practices in trade, investment, and employment with other global actors, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, other IFIs at international forums, including the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).
- Promote the implementation of lessons learned and good practices at inter-regional level, by sharing results with other





regions of ILO concern, beyond the Arab States, such as Europe, Central Asia, Latin America.

- Highlight benchmarks for countries where employment considerations have successfully been integrated into trade and investment policies, yielding notable results.

#### Capacity building strategy:

- Develop a solid, cost-effective capacity-building strategy at the regional and national levels based on problem, needs, gender and stakeholder analyses, building on results achieved through participatory and peer approaches.
- The deployment of technical training should consider prior assessments of the tripartite constituents' knowledge and skills.
- Training delivery should be gender-sensitive, acknowledging that women remain in minority in the labour market in the region, and face challenges to achieve free and meaningful participation in a male-dominated society.
- ACTRAV and ACTEMP at ILO regional offices should be consulted when designing the capacity building strategy.

#### Influencing policy discussion:

- Knowledge products developed and published should inform high level policy discussions at the national and regional levels, including discussions of policy recommendations at higher administrative/political levels in partner countries.
- Cooperation with ILO regional and country offices is crucial.
- These efforts should build synergies with the OECD and ITC to strengthen the message and influence ministries of economy and trade supporting the adoption of pro-employment policies.
- Ministries of finance should be part of these discussions.

## **2. To the EU (DG NEAR)**

#### Supporting the implementation of findings:

- Support the implementation of findings stemming from the assessment of public infrastructure investments in the Southern Mediterranean to enhance program design regarding employment for women and youth in line with the principles of decent work.
- Consider and deliver a capacity-building program in collaboration with the ILO.

#### Strengthening gender equality and disability inclusion:

- Apply knowledge gained through the Employment Intensive Investment Program to develop suitable policies that address gender and disability inclusion, as conducted by the ILO EMPIVEST branch, to identify suitable policies that address gender bias issues in specific EU-funded projects.



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Enhancing METI visibility:

- Enhance the visibility of METI in upcoming meetings of the Union for the Mediterranean's Regional Platform on Trade and Investment.

**3. To the EU (DG NEAR) and ILO (EMPINVEST)**

- Consolidate knowledge and improve coordination with other EU and ILO projects at bilateral and regional levels,
  - Improve coordination of analytics and policy recommendations between METI, the EU policy dialogue and financing of investments.
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