

**Safir: A first regional event in Beirut aimed at strengthening collaboration among universities, incubators, and civil society organizations**

**Beirut, Monday, September 26, 2022 -** The 18 universities benefitting from Safir project in the Middle East and North Africa took part in the first major regional gathering that brought together all of the actors involved in this international project, which is funded by the European Union and where the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) is both a partner and operator.

This meeting, on the theme of social entrepreneurship, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and support for youth, was held in Beirut from 21 to 23 September 2022. It brought together representatives of the universities, the 7 incubators and the 21 civil society organizations of the Safir network, including four Lebanese universities (Antonine University, Islamic University of Lebanon, Lebanese University, Saint Joseph University of Beirut), as well as the project partners.

The first day, at the AUF's Centre d'Employabilité Francophone (CEF) hosted at the Beirut Digital District (BDD), was dedicated to an exchange of good practices between the universities of Safir around the social responsibility of higher education institutions, the creation of training courses on social entrepreneurship and the SDGs, and the incubation of social, cultural and environmental impact projects carried out by students. The university representatives were then able to strengthen their relationship with Safir's incubators through workshops and networking opportunities.

The second day brought together representatives of universities, incubators and civil society organizations from the Safir network for collective workshops on the SDGs and youth. The study on culture carried on in the framework of the Safir project was also presented during this event.

Finally, the third day of this regional event allowed Safir universities to visit the premises of Berytech, and to meet its team to discover and be inspired by the programs and activities in favor of entrepreneurship development of this important incubator of the MENA region, which is originally a university incubator initiated by the Saint Joseph University of Beirut.

*"The Safir project is perfectly in line with the AUF's new strategy, which places entrepreneurship development and youth at the heart of its priorities. Safir offers a unique opportunity to the universities of the region to open up more to their socio-economic environment, to support their students in carrying out projects with social impact and to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. Safir is a very good illustration of the leading social and societal role of these actors"*, underlined Sabine LOPEZ, Director of the AUF projects in Paris.

On the other hand, the regional Director of AUF Middle East, Jean-Noël Baleo, reminded the participants that AUF launched a series of initiatives in the Middle East (Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, and Palestine) aimed at promoting and supporting the development of student entrepreneurship, be it feminine or social, and underlined that “*if entrepreneurship is no more than a partial response to the systematic problems represented by the absorption of young graduates in the labor market in the region, the development of this approach falls, however, within a world trend and bears specific educational virtues which allow developing some skills among the concerned students: spirit of initiative, creativity, autonomy, taste for risk, problem-solving capacity, self-confidence, and finally, a project-based culture”.*

**About Safir**

Safir is an ambitious 4-year program (2020-2024) of more than 7 million euros in favor of the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the economic inclusion of youth in 9 countries of North Africa and the Middle East (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia). Supported by the European Union and implemented by a consortium of 6 partners (Institut français - lead partner -, AUF, CFI, Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND), Pitchworthy and Lab'ess), it aims to create an environment conducive to the civic engagement of young people and to promote the development of projects with a social, cultural and environmental impact. Safir is based on three pillars: support for more than 1,000 young project leaders, the structuring and development of a regional network of support actors (incubators, universities and civil society organizations) and the creation of spaces for dialogue between young people and the public authorities.

For more information: [www.safir-eu.com](http://www.safir-eu.com)