

# **EUROMESCO ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2022**

## **Towards more Social Justice and Inclusiveness in the Mediterranean**

### **COUNTRY EVENT JORDAN**

Amman, 28 June 2022

Report



# Summary

Putting social justice and inclusiveness at the core of sustainable development agendas in the Mediterranean was the focus of discussion of the second Country Event of the EuroMeSCo Annual Conference “Towards more social justice and inclusiveness in the Mediterranean” in Amman on 28 June 2022. The event welcomed around 50 participants from across the region, including representatives from think tanks, academic institutions, government, civil society organisations, and international organisations as well as EU officials in view of discussing common regional challenges and contributing to policy shaping in the region.

The plenary session focused on social justice and inclusiveness as part of the sustainable development agendas in the Mediterranean. It aimed to approach the challenges and opportunities in a comprehensive manner, exploring the environmental, social, and economic aspects. Regional economic challenges were discussed, with a focus on the private sector and its lack of dynamism, low wages, high unemployment, and a prevalent informal sector offering precarious conditions, low security, and irregular income. Raising salaries was presented as a matter of priority, as well as removing red tape of overregulated markets in order to boost trade and promoting sincere participation in social dialogue. Ensuring better public services was underlined as a paramount step towards more inclusive societies, calling for improved social protection systems which provide basic goods and services for the poorest segment of the population and also for those who have slightly more resources but are still facing hardships. Experts also pointed to skills development as solution to the current mismatch between skills and knowledge on the one hand and the current market demands on the other. The importance of attracting investment was stressed to tap into the potential the digital economy presents and to mitigate the inequality gaps digitalization

can cause between countries and within them.

Experts assessed how the region has been severely affected by food shortages and inflation following the pandemic and the Ukraine war in a context of extreme climate conditions which have impacted food production. Experts agreed on the urgency of this situation, calling for immediate action by investing in countries most affected by food price for short-term and long-term solutions. They underpinned the need for investment to improve and diversify the agricultural sector and tap into its potential as a provider of decent jobs. A change in consumption patterns and waste reduction was discussed in order to ensure greater resource efficiency, including better management of water resources.

The need to consider the gender perspective in any analysis of food security was stressed as women tend to suffer most in times of crises, but they are also key agents of change. The role of youth and civil society as drivers of social innovation was also underscored. When it comes to food security, no country is truly self-sufficient anymore therefore enhanced cross-border cooperation is needed to address the crisis as well as diplomatic tables to put an end to the conflict.

The event was co-organised by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) and the West Asia North Africa Institute (WANA), in the framework of the [EuroMeSCo: Connecting the dots](#), a project co-funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, Regional Programmes Neighbourhood South Unit (DG NEAR B2) and the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) that aims to connect the dots between diverse stakeholders – think tanks, experts, civil society, the private sector, academia – as well as between the EU, its Southern Neighbours and the wider region.

# OPENING SESSION

**Shereen Shaheen**

Director of WANA Institute

**Jenny Gilbert**

Programme Manager of EuroMeSCo, IEMed

**Maria Hadjitheodosiou**

Ambassador of the EU to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

**HRH Princess Sumaya Bint el Hassan**

President of the Royal Scientific Society

Shereen Shaheen welcomed the distinguished speakers and participants to the Jordan Country Event of the EuroMeSCo 2022 Annual Conference co-organised by the WANA Institute and IEMed, the second of a series of five events – including four decentralised events in Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia and Egypt, and a closing event in Brussels, - under the overarching theme “Towards more Social Justice and Inclusiveness in the Mediterranean”. She commended the close co-operation between IEMed and WANA in the framework of the “EuroMeSCo: Connecting the Dots” project which aims at strengthening Euro-Mediterranean relations through policy-oriented research, dialogue and advocacy.

Jenny Gilbert introduced the goal of the Annual Conference and its contribution to the debate on the implementation of social dimension of the EU's New Agenda for the Mediterranean. Social justice remains a key concern and expect-

tation of citizens around the region as it is not only an issue of human dignity and inclusivity, but also an issue of security. She underlined the focus of the Jordan Country Event, looking into the intersections of environmental, social, and economic development, at a time of significant climate-induced risks, while paying special attention to vulnerable groups.

Ambassador Maria Hadjitheodosiou underlined inclusivity, tolerance, and solidarity as crucial to maintaining stability in the region and beyond. She explained what the EU is doing to support social protection in Jordan, with over 100 million euros committed under various programmes. Ambassador Hadjitheodosiou also presented a programme to support the inclusion and empowerment of vulnerable Jordanians, recently signed by the EU and the Government of Jordan which seeks to support the implementation of [Jordan's National Social Protection Strategy 2019-2025](#), an ambitious multi-



HRH Princess Sumaya Bint el Hassan



Ambassador Maria Hadjitheodosiou

sectorial programme that hinges on close coordination across several ministries. This programme is organised around three pillars: health, inclusion (including people with disabilities), and economic empowerment. Under the health pillar, efforts focus on developing cost-effective, efficient, and equitable health insurance coverage across the country as well as on increasing the coverage of essential primary health services for refugee populations and vulnerable host communities. As for inclusion, the Ambassador explained the EU's work with the Jordanian Ministry of Social Development to support the professionalization of social workers and to rehabilitate social care centres, in order to help the

government provide better services to disadvantaged citizens. In terms of economic empowerment, refugees, as well as particularly vulnerable Jordanians, are the main target of the work the EU carries out with the government, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) to establish a referral system for livelihoods opportunities, so that refugees and vulnerable Jordanians can economically empower themselves and graduate from protection and social assistance schemes. Ambassador Hadjitheodosiou reaffirmed the EU's commitment to social protection as a cooperation priority in Jordan and in the region in the coming years.

HRH Princess Sumaya Bint el Hassan, as President of the [Royal Scientific Society](#), advocates for science as a catalyst for change and as the common language to address equitable and sustainable development for all. HRH stressed that it is a matter of importance to see that science fights social injustice as it is a key enabler of evidence-based decision making and policy formulation. HRH underlined how the interdisciplinary mechanisms science provides serve as tools to assess the challenges, devise solutions and advance discovery and innovation. HRH highlighting her vision of "science for peace", which is a call for the promise of hope, opportunity, and equitable access to resources.

# **PANEL SESSION**

## **Putting Social Justice and Inclusiveness at the Core of Sustainable Development Agendas in the Mediterranean**

**Nabil Assaf**

FAO Resident Representative in Jordan

**Mary Kawar**

Former Jordanian Minister for Planning and International  
Cooperation

**Abdelkader El Khissassi**

Deputy Secretary General, Economic Development and  
Employment, Secretariat of the Union for the  
Mediterranean (UfM)

**Haizam Amirah-Fernández**

Senior Analyst, Mediterranean and Arab World, Elcano  
Royal Institute

Moderation

**Majd Al Naber**

Team Leader and Senior Researcher in the Sustainable  
Development Pillar, West Asia North Africa Institute  
(WANA)



The plenary session focused on social justice and inclusiveness as part of the sustainable development agendas in the Mediterranean. It aimed to approach the challenges and opportunities in a comprehensive manner, exploring the environmental, social and economic aspects.

The social dimension of sustainable development was analysed, looking at the concept of human security as an issue that revolves around three main freedoms: freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom from indignity. The Barcelona Declaration was discussed as the first formal attempt to create a Mediterranean partnership. At the time, the idea was revolutionary and reflected the ambitious desire to have a more cohesive region. The signature of the 27 initial countries implied an unprecedented commitment to transform the region to make it more secure and prosperous. Nevertheless, the initial excitement over the project was soon replaced by accumulated disappointment that was transformed into mobilizations. The aftermath of the 2011 protests resulted in a region that is more fractured and where governance has become increasingly difficult. Since then, both shores of the Mediterranean have

been affected by major challenges: the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Even though the latter poses a security challenge to its European neighboring countries, Arab states have been severely affected by food shortages and inflation that are occurring as a direct consequence of the invasion. Authoritarianism is on the rise in some countries like Tunisia and Turkey, and populism has become a general trend in Europe.

Food security was analysed as a pressing regional challenge. During the COVID-19 crisis governments could not exert their full capabilities. During lockdown, food production did not meet the global demand. With the sudden unlock, commodities that citizens were hoping to enjoy could not be accessed simply because they were not available or because the cost was too high. Extreme climate conditions in the horn of Africa were also mentioned given their impact on food production in the region. The rise in energy prices have affected the availability of food and transportation.

Experts looked into the case of Jordan. Jordan counts on a food security strategy





based on four pillars: ensuring availability, improving accessibility and affordability, increasing stability, and enhancing governance. Like many other countries, it is dealing with water scarcity. To face this challenge, the state has been requested to reduce its use and maximize its efficiency efforts. Although the crisis in Ukraine is heavily affecting food security in Arab countries, Jordan is more resilient than other states thanks to its anticipatory strategy and to the country's political stability. Experts pointed out that more data related to Jordan's food reserve would be necessary to be able to assess how this country can cooperate with other Mediterranean states when scarcity arises.

From an economic perspective, experts pointed to the lack of dynamism in the private sector in the which translates into low wages and high unemployment. This is due to the fact that many Arab countries have a large public sector that undermines private activity. A large part of the private sector is family based or it is constituted by small enterprises that do not have an incentive to grow or become more competitive. As a result, governmental policies do not find incentives to liberalize it. Panellists remarked that when

governments have attempted to open the market to foreign competitors, they face rejection from society as these entrepreneurs have something to lose and fail to see the opportunities their country is missing. Therefore, the lack of dynamism can be found in the relationship between those who participate in the private sector and those who serve as interlocutors between the private sector and the government. Overregulation of the market was also mentioned as a contributing factor for the lack of dynamism of trade in the region.

Underdevelopment of human capital is another regional challenge which impacts social inclusiveness, with education systems requiring significant improvement, alongside the predominance of the informal labour market, that offers precarious conditions, low security, and irregular income. Higher salaries for citizens should be a matter of priority, as well as better public services and the promotion of sincere participation in social dialogue.

Experts stressed the importance of ensuring protection systems for the most vulnerable segments of population and agreed that, although social protection systems tend to provide basic goods and





services for the poorest segment of the population, those who have slightly more resources, but are still facing poverty, are not covered. Experts called for a holistic approach, introducing policies at national level to ensure that governments serve the interests of citizens instead of serving the needs of those whose voice is already being heard. Although social protection schemes are considered costly, they should not be underrated. Improving the programmes to make them well targeted and more holistic should be priority. Discussants called for a switch in the narrative, as people have the right to live a decent life. Efforts should focus on creating fiscal spaces to address the needs of the most vulnerable. This would require legitimate fiscal systems and a raise in taxes in order to gather the resources within the country

as international aid can only do so much. Transparent budgeting, where citizens can see how budgets are being managed, should be promoted and, in the same way governments put measures in place to control food, drugs and hygiene, there should be a control on poverty.

Skills development was put forward as a solution to the current mismatch between skills and knowledge and the current market demands. This context creates a situation whereby professionals from non-Mediterranean countries may be preferred over nationals. Digitalisation was also addressed in terms of its potential to increase inequalities. The growing division between digitalised and non-digitalised countries could give way to two blocs which have difficulties to interact. The importance of attracting investment was stressed, highlighting regional cooperation initiatives, in particular, the UfM's work with Estonia, a highly digitalized country, in an effort to spread the expertise among Mediterranean countries.

To conclude, the panel agreed that, in order to work towards guaranteeing social justice, sustainability policies need to be accompanied by political processes and there needs to be a crackdown on corruption. Countries should join efforts, in a coordinated and systemic manner, to review sustainability strategies and put people at the core of policymaking.

# **PLUGGED IN SESSION**

## **Food Security in the MENA Region**

Moderation

**James Moran**

Associate Senior Research Fellow, Centre for European  
Policy Studies (CEPS)

The MENA region has been strongly impacted by the war in Ukraine, due to the food shortages and inflation that have stemmed from the invasion. The MENA region is the number one importer of grain and an important importer of vegetable oil. Its dependence on Russia and Ukraine is [estimated at 50%](#), -with export percentages of wheat ranging from 20% in Morocco to 80% in Egypt. The region also relies heavily on fertilizer imports for local food production. [Data from the FAO](#) indicate that wheat prices in May 2022 had increased 56% compared to May 2021. Russian exports have been hampered by international sanctions. Moreover, the war has had a closing-in effect on many countries, who are more focused on taking care of their own interests; during the crisis, India, Egypt, and Algeria restricted their exports affecting international supply chains.

Experts highlighted that the current food situation is a compounded crisis following the pandemic; the Ukraine conflict has only added fuel to the fire. This food crisis can pose a threat to health - food shortage has led to a severe humanitarian crisis in Yemen due to famine, and there are risks of famine in Syria-, putting pregnant women and chil-

dren particularly at risk of malnutrition. The rise in prices has put stress on the Egyptian government's Tamween subsidy programme and on Lebanon, which is grappling with a severe economic crisis. Estimates indicate that some countries in the region only have enough wheat for the next 13 months and countries stocking large food reserves are putting increased stress on less resilient countries, affecting the most vulnerable population.

Experts agreed on the urgency of this situation, calling for immediate action by investing in countries most affected by food price for short-term and long-term solutions. They stressed the need for a change in consumption patterns to ensure greater resource efficiency. Measures should prioritize balancing consumption and production and reducing food waste. This would require reducing 50% of the consumption of cereal and increasing the consumption of other local products. They discussed the current dependency on a limited number of commodities, -e.g., meat consumption is limited to very few species- and the convergence towards nutritional habits in which everyone eats the same products all over the world. Diversification





of food systems and making them less water dependent could ease their stress. Suggestions from experts included looking into the past to explore regional or local practices of ancestors and bring back traditions and good practices which would allow for a change in food systems, i.e., reintroducing plants and animals which used to be edible to reduce dependence on bread (wheat), exploring the use of non-wood forest products or bringing back neglected crops.

In terms of reducing food loss and waste, initiatives targeting restaurants were proposed, focusing on improved food storage systems and on using digital tools such as mobile applications to distribute excess food to those in need. The role of the informal market, i.e., roadside food sales, was discussed with experts agreeing that formalization would also reduce loss. Moreover, teaching people how to preserve, freeze and take better care of food in order to reduce waste could be beneficial.

The need to consider the gender perspective in any analysis of food security was pointed out; women tend to suffer most in

times of crises, but they are also key agents of change. For instance, with regards to preventing food waste, in the MENA region, it is mostly women who cook, purchase food, and feed the children.

Experts agreed that any solution entailing changing mindsets and behavior would require important targeted efforts to raise awareness about the value of resources and educate the population on the impacts of their actions. Other practical solutions put forward include the reduction of costs of transportation of commodities in order to reduce their price and taking better care of the products transported to avoid food spoiling.

Increasing production to respond to food shortage is not a viable option in many countries in the region due to water scarcity, which is an obstacle to grow more wheat. The water sector in the region is in dire straits, dealing with shocks. New water sources are needed for example treated wastewater for agriculture. The case of Algeria was discussed, namely its intention to produce wheat to replace exports. Algeria has enough water, ho-



wever, a heavy investment in infrastructure is needed.

Discussants explored how agriculture can be further developed in the region. The agricultural sector has been undervalued. Only after the pandemic, has it started to be seen as the essential sector it constitutes. Experts underlined the employment opportunities the sector offers, and its role as a potential provider of decent jobs. Solutions put forward include investing in rural areas that have not been so productive because producing there was more expensive than importing; introducing voucher schemes for farmers to encourage production, which would lead to a dynamization of rural areas; empowering small farmers with tools to sustain their production; and fostering alternative sources of production such as urban gardens or producing food at home. Experts agreed that efforts should focus on promoting nature-inclusive agriculture and a more efficient use of available fertilizer to not depend so heavily on imports. Given the strong reliance of food on water, awareness campaigns for rationing water usage are also necessary; not wasting water resources should be a shared value.

On top of the current crises, the region is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change which will exacerbate food insecurity. The role of universities as pivotal change makers was introduced. The sector contributed greatly in generating knowledge to identify the problem, however, their action could be scaled-up moving away from the academic culture of independence which distances them from the issues at stake. Although many universities have introduced courses on smart solutions or greened their campuses, experts agreed that deep systemic change is needed, and, at a time of emergency, they have potential to contribute more towards finding solutions. The role of social innovation among young people and civil societies, working

within local communities was highlighted as a potential area for progress.

Finally, international and regional cooperation was discussed as paramount to face the current and future crises and find common solutions through platforms bringing together all stakeholders. An anti-globalisation effect has been observed following the war. Experts underlined that food security should not be confused with self-sufficiency, as no country is truly self-sufficient anymore. It is not possible to only work within the borders if a country given the limits of internal production. Diplomatic tables to discuss the conflict and solve the crisis are essential. Discussants also stressed the international community's responsibility to put pressure on oil countries to end the unjust situation and shift towards renewables, i.e., investing in solar power. The European solidarity towards the Ukrainian population was mentioned as the silver lining of the conflict, and experts wondered if this solidarity would be transferred to its action in the region. Discussants addressed the 4.7 billion dollars pledge of the G7 to countries affected by the crisis in the form of humanitarian aid and also support for agricultural development. However, they agreed that delivering this money could be challenging. The Gulf Council Countries has also committed to supporting the MENA region, although the terms for this support remain unclear.

Without an end to the conflict in sight, experts deem the situation is likely to worsen, and that reduced supplies and high prices will continue, regardless of the war ending soon or not. Experts recalled how revolutions start when people are hungry, reminding attendees of the chants "Bread, freedom, human dignity" which could be heard in Tahrir Square during the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011. They questioned if there may be a false sense of security and a risk of the uprisings reoccurring.

# **WORKING SESSION**

## **Presentation of EuroMeSCo Papers on Interlinkages between social justice and sustainable development in Jordan**

**Diana Athamneh**

National Energy Consultant, Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

**Dina El-Heyari**

Energy Engineer, Algebra Intelligence

**Karolina Zubel**

Economist, Center for Social and Economic Research  
(CASE)

Moderation

**Reem Al Haddadin**

Researcher, West Asia North Africa Institute (WANA)



The aim of this working session was to present the concept notes and initial approach of the two research proposals selected in the EuroMeSCo Annual Conference Call for Papers that was launched in the framework of the EuroMeSCo: Connecting the Dots project. Diana Athamneh, Dina El-Heyari and Karolina Zubel presented the approach of their proposals under the theme of *Interlinkages between social justice and sustainable development in Jordan*.

Diana Athamneh and Dina El-Heyari presented their research proposal on *Scaling up renewable energy and energy efficiency to maximize the socio-economic impact – The case of RE and EE applied programmes for households in Jordan*, which will focus on the interlinkage between the country's social and economic development plans and the energy transition goals by evaluating programmes where renewable energy and energy efficiency applications were deployed for households in Jordan. An overview of Jordan's economic situation and the impact of the current crises was presented and the experts assessed the increase of demand for social services, infrastructure, energy and water supply, education and health care.

The paper will highlight the reality of renewable energy and its economic and social impact on the local communities in Jordan by examining: renewable energy and energy efficiency programmes' impact on the vulnerable groups such as refugees and host communities; clean energy policies; innovative financing support mechanisms as policy instruments to achieve the SDG goals; and the role of community-based organisations towards social justice and development goals.

As case studies, the authors will focus on the [Jordan Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Fund \(JREEEF\)](#) programmes in partnership with 190 community based or-

ganisations in Jordan (including 28,122 households). Response programmes targeting Syrian refugees and host communities by providing renewable energy and energy efficiency systems will be also taken into account (World Vision, Mercy Corps, and Norwegian Refugee Council).

Among the recommendations received from the audience during the discussion, experts suggested including other stakeholders such as organisations working on food and water and to look closer to the nexus between water-food with energy. Furthermore, it was suggested to amplify the scope of the study by including the [National Strategy for Social Protection 2019 - 2025](#), especially the strategies targeting public hospitals and schools.

Karolina Zubel presented the research proposal *Urban farming and its socio-economic and environmental benefits for ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth in Jordan*.

The proposal parts from the assumption that urban farming could be an effective solution to mitigate the negative effects of climate change and urbanisation in Jordan.





According to the data presented by the speaker, citizens who live in urban areas - which amounts to 80% of the population in Jordan- are predicted to have a worse economic situation. Urbanisation rates are expected to increase, making the country among the most urbanized in the world. The current food crisis triggers a need for local food production to reduce the impact on the environment. Current farming practices need to be redesigned and trans-

formed into urban and peri-urban farming. The author argues that urban farms are catalysts for business development, economic prosperity and improvement of residential and commercial areas. Organic household waste can be turned into fertilizers and used in gardens and fields. Urban farming also presents health-related benefits. It increases physical activity in societies that are becoming sedentary and provides healthy fresh food. It offers protection of endangered or scarce species, fruits, vegetables, and flowers. Urban agriculture also improves air quality by removing pollutants and is very effective in reducing noise pollution.

The paper analyses how, despite the numerous advantages presented by this type of initiatives, challenges such as insufficient funds, lack of awareness on behalf of governmental officials and citizens, and the lack of will to implement related policies prevent its development. The research explores how urban farming movements in Jordan can be supported, how population can lobby for more land, and which initiatives are needed to encourage citizens to practice farming to benefit from the exercise, nutrition, and physical and mental relaxation it can offer.



