

# Social Justice and Inclusiveness

The first block of the EuroMeSCo Euromed Survey aimed to identify the main factors affecting socio-economic inclusiveness<sup>1</sup> in Southern Mediterranean countries (SMCs), with a special focus on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on inequalities, on already existing vulnerabilities and on specific social groups. It also sought to collect respondents' assessment on cooperation priorities to overcome the Covid-19 effects. Finally, it included an open-ended question aimed at identifying the main socio-economic impact of the war in Ukraine.

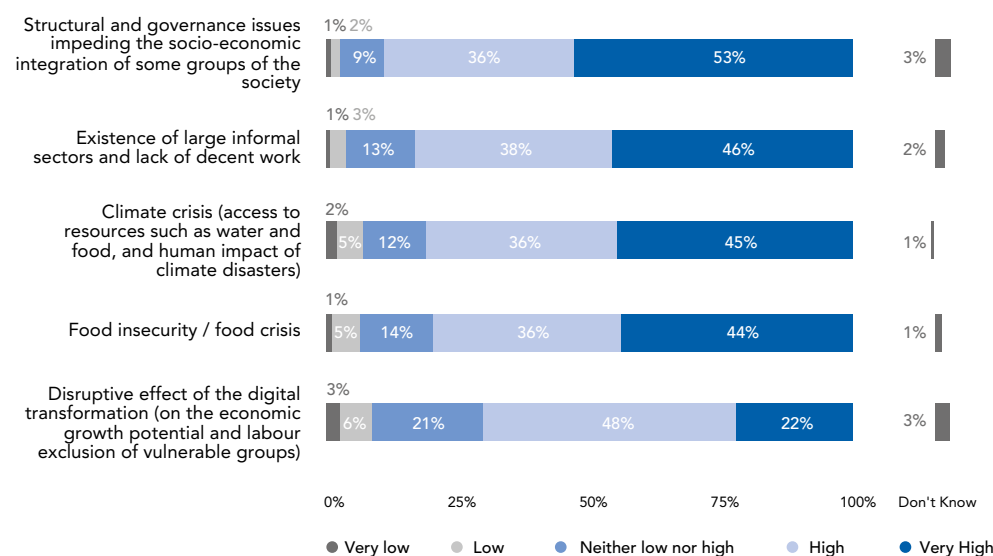
## Main findings:

- There is a consensus amongst respondents of the survey that structural and governance issues affect socio-economic inclusiveness in the region and are an obstacle to socio-economic integration of some groups in the society.
- Respondents clearly agree that Covid-19 has increased inequalities and broadened the socio-economic gap among the population.
- Respondents consider that the capacity of the public sector to provide services in an effective way has been severely affected by Covid-19, particularly affecting persons below the poverty threshold.
- Inclusive economic promotion was considered as the first EU-SMCs co-operation priority to overcome the Covid-19 effects on socio-economic inclusiveness, followed by combating corruption.
- Inflation and food security in SMCs were considered as the main areas impacted by the war in Ukraine.

1. Social inclusion refers to enhancing "the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society – improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those that are disadvantaged" (World Bank). Social exclusion is a "multidimensional phenomenon not limited to material deprivation; poverty is an important dimension of exclusion, albeit only one dimension. Accordingly, social inclusion processes involve more than improving access to economic resources" (United Nations).

The **first question** of the survey invited respondents to evaluate different factors affecting socio-economic inclusiveness in SMCs. Respondents considered “Structural and governance issues impeding the socio-economic integration of some groups of the society” as the main issue, followed by informality, the effects of the climate crisis and food insecurity. Respondents considered that the disruptive effects of the digital transformation have a smaller impact on socio-economic inclusiveness.

**Graph 1: Q.1** To what extent do you consider that the following factors affect socio-economic inclusiveness in Southern Mediterranean Countries?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 13<sup>th</sup> Euromed Survey

In their comments, some respondents highlighted the inter-relation between all the factors listed, as well as the need to improve governance:

A combination of both structural and governance issues as well as global challenges such as food insecurity and the climate crisis all affect socio-economic inclusiveness in the SMCs.

— Greek respondent

Structure of governance, how wealth is distributed (or not), level (or lack of) people’s participation in decision making should not be neglected.

— Jordanian respondent

All the mentioned effects will have serious impacts on gender inequalities as well as cause further obstacles to equal opportunities for a variety of vulnerable groups who have been already facing social exclusion at many levels.

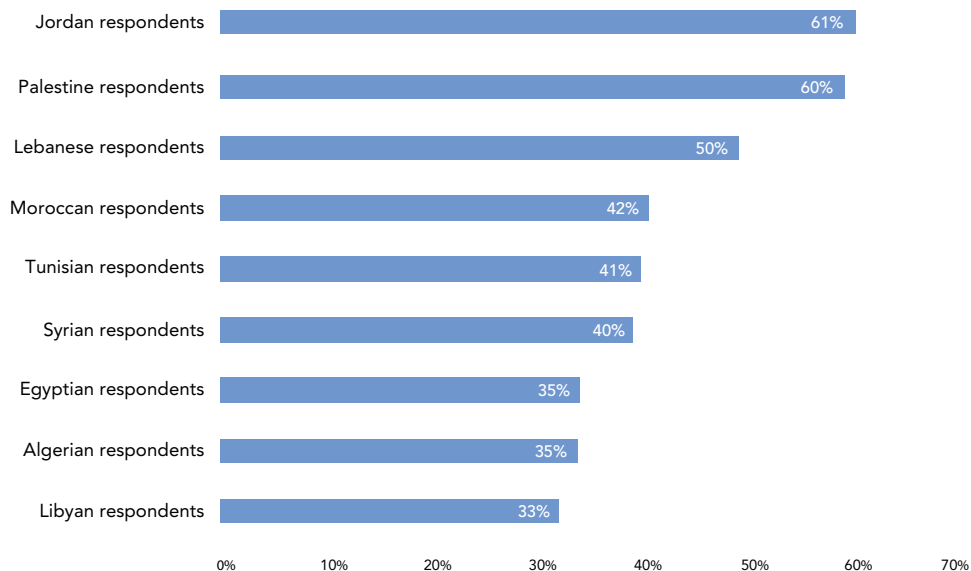
— Slovak respondent

Corruption and non-accountability of corruptors and the existence of outdated laws will impede progress.

— Lebanese respondent

In **Question 2**, when asked about the perception of the impact of Covid-19 on inequalities and the socio-economic gap in their own countries, 41% of SMCs respondents considered that inequalities have increased to a high extent. 31% of EU respondents considered that the socio-economic gap had broadened in all SMCs. There are differences between country respondents: Jordanian, Palestinian and Lebanese respondents considered Covid-19 had a greater impact.

**Graph 1 bis:** Q.2 To what extent do you consider that Covid-19 has increased inequalities and broadened the socio-economic gap between the population in your country? (% of very high answers)

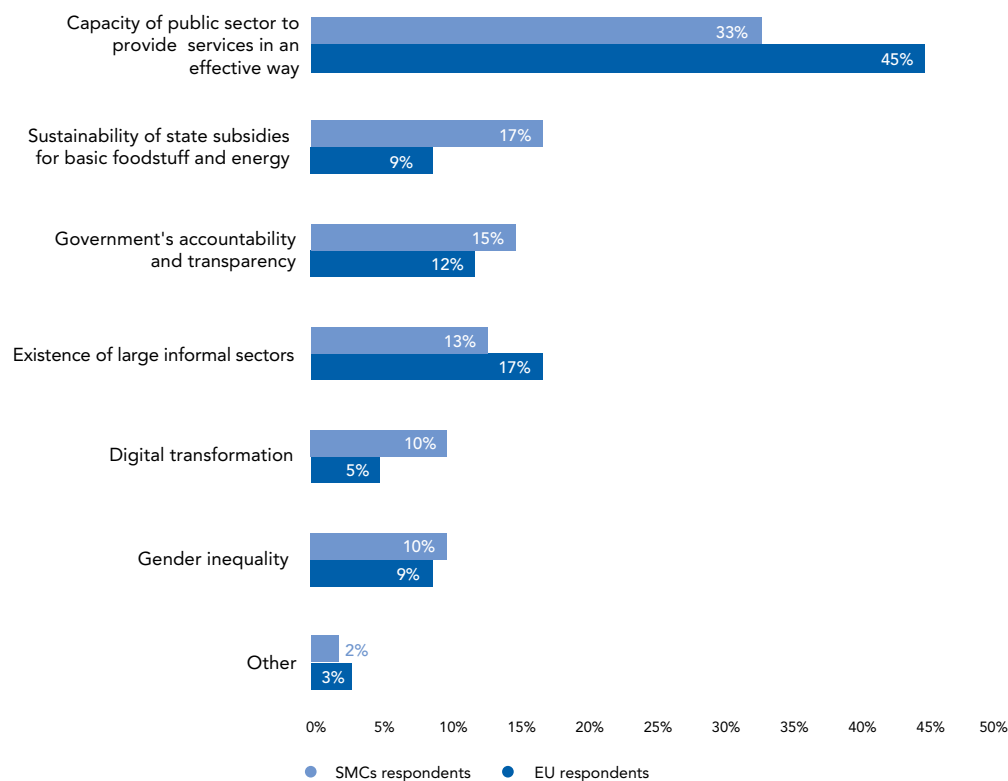


Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 13<sup>th</sup> Euromed Survey

**Question 3** focused on those areas most affected by Covid-19, that is, areas where the pandemic has revealed or exacerbated vulnerabilities in SMCs. **Question 4** was linked to the former as it focused on which social groups had been most affected.

There was a quite consistent agreement (40% of answers) on considering the “Capacity of the public sector to provide services in an effective way” as the area most affected by Covid-19. However, results showed some significant differences when comparing Northern and Southern respondents. For SMCs respondents this option presented a lower percentage (33%). “Sustainability of state subsidies for basic foodstuff and energy” was the second option for SMC respondents, whereas this was the fifth choice for EU respondents who considered the “Existence of large informal sector” as a bigger issue (see graph 2). The sustainability of state subsidies was highlighted by respondents from Lebanon (25%), Algeria (22%) and Jordan (22%). “Government’s accountability and transparency” was the third choice for both Northern and Southern respondents.

**Graph 2: Q.3** The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed/exacerbated vulnerabilities in SMCs. Which of the following has been most affected?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 13<sup>th</sup> Euromed Survey

Some comments provided further details on vulnerabilities revealed by Covid-19:

Workers in the informal sectors were strongly affected. Due to insufficient contractual arrangements, they were amongst the first persons to lose their jobs. The lack of social security coverage i.e., access to unemployment benefits, government subsidies and health insurance, further exacerbated their situation.

— German respondent

Governments emerged as having impunity even with regards to their policies to respond to the pandemic. They used the pandemic as a blanket to crush any remaining dissent and entrenched their control over resources.

— Jordan respondent

Due to pre-existing gender inequalities, the social and economic consequences of the Covid-19 crisis have disproportionately impacted women's jobs, income, and education opportunities.

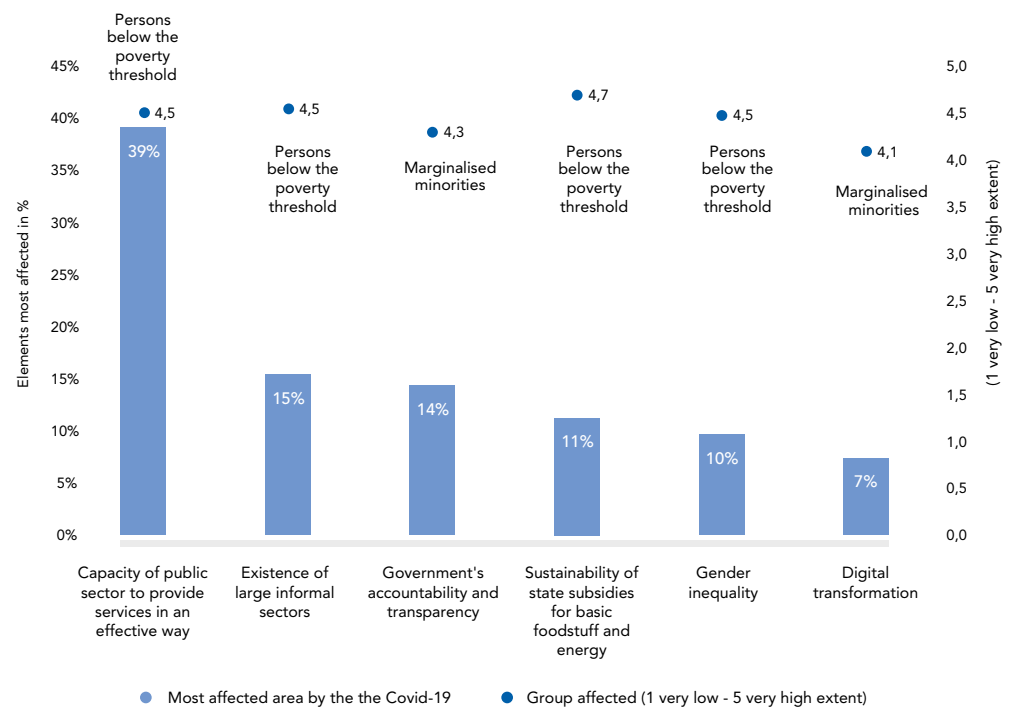
— Italian respondent

South of the Mediterranean suffers from an incredible waste of resources and from governability issues. Informal sectors are the most vulnerable in difficult times like Covid. Policies should formalise these sectors so as to offer decent working conditions.

— Moroccan respondent

**Question 4** focused on the social groups affected by the impact of Covid-19 in the different areas evaluated in question 3. "Persons below the poverty threshold" was considered by respondents to be the main social group affected by four (out of six) different areas, namely the low capacity of public sector to provide services, the existence of informal sectors, sustainability of state subsidies and gender inequality (see graph 3). In other fields such as government's accountability and digital transformation, "Marginalised minorities" was considered the most affected group.

**Graph 3: Q.3-Q.4 Covid-19 pandemic in SMCs: most affected area and most affected social group in each area**

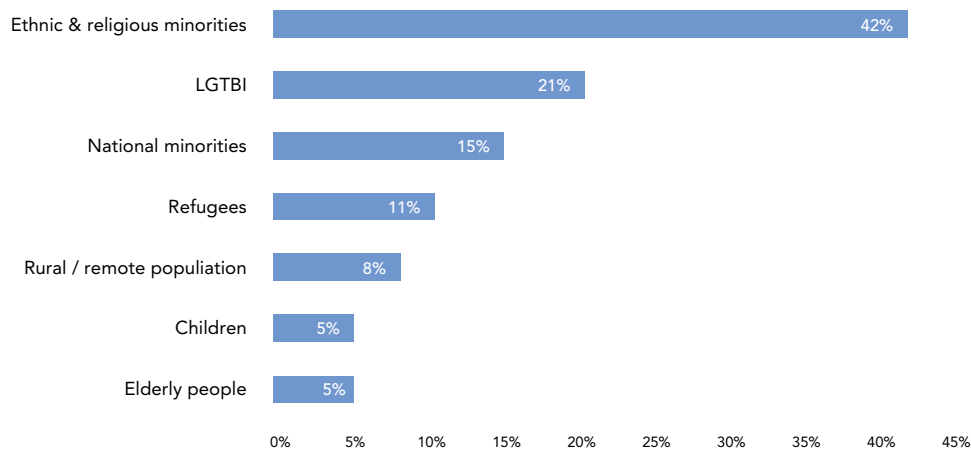


Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 13<sup>th</sup> Euromed Survey

The questionnaire included a specific question for further insight on marginalised minorities. The question was open-ended, meaning that respondents formulated their answers without choosing from pre-established categories. Graph 4 was built from the analysis of all responses. It shows that respondents consider that marginalised minorities comprise mainly ethnic and religious minorities followed by the LGBTI community and national minorities.

**Graph 4:** Q.4 To what extent do you consider that the following social groups have been affected:

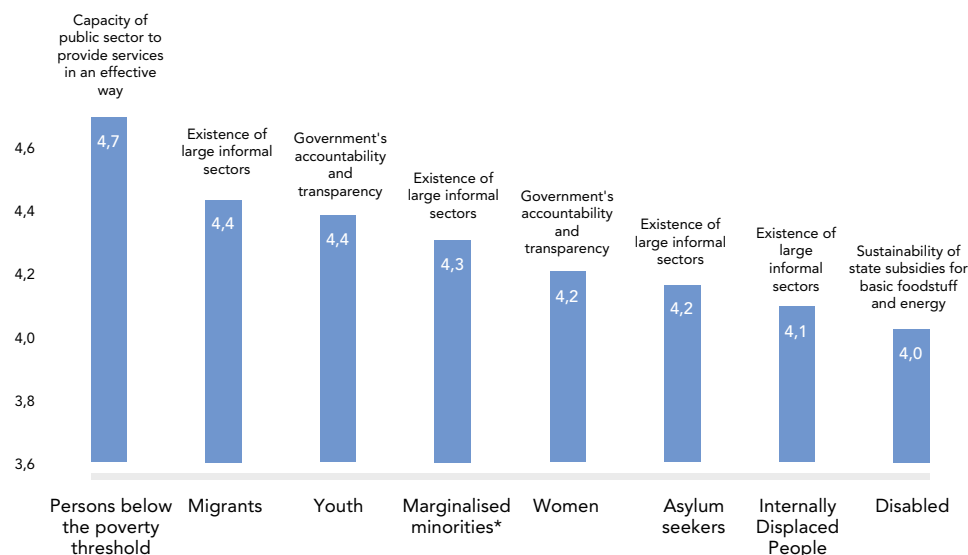
\*Marginalised minorities: categories developed from open-ended answers



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 13<sup>th</sup> Euromed Survey

When looking at results relating to each of the social groups, and which consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic was affecting them the most (see graph 5), results showed that "Persons below the poverty threshold" were particularly affected by the ineffective provision of state subsidies. Migrants, youth, women and internally displaced people, were considered to be most affected by the existence of large informal sectors. Results also showed that marginalised minorities and asylum seekers were affected by the impact of Covid-19 on the government's accountability and transparency. Finally, disabled people were especially affected by the effects on the public sector and its capacity to provide services in an effective way.

**Graph 5: Q.3-Q.4 Covid-19 pandemic in SMCs: social groups' most affected area**  
(Mean 1-very low, 5-very high)



\* See graph 4

Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 13<sup>th</sup> Euromed Survey



In the open comments on these questions, some respondents provided insight on how the Covid-19 has impacted vulnerable groups:

In terms of gender discrimination and gender inequalities, almost all the above social groups have been affected. Being women and migrants, and or disabled people and poor represents often a double/multiple burden.

— Italian respondent

I would prefer to add the elderly (people above the age of 50) because most of the people who were hugely affected by the incapacity of the health sector during the pandemic were old people who needed urgent medical intervention and treatment for which the sector was not ready.

— Egyptian respondent

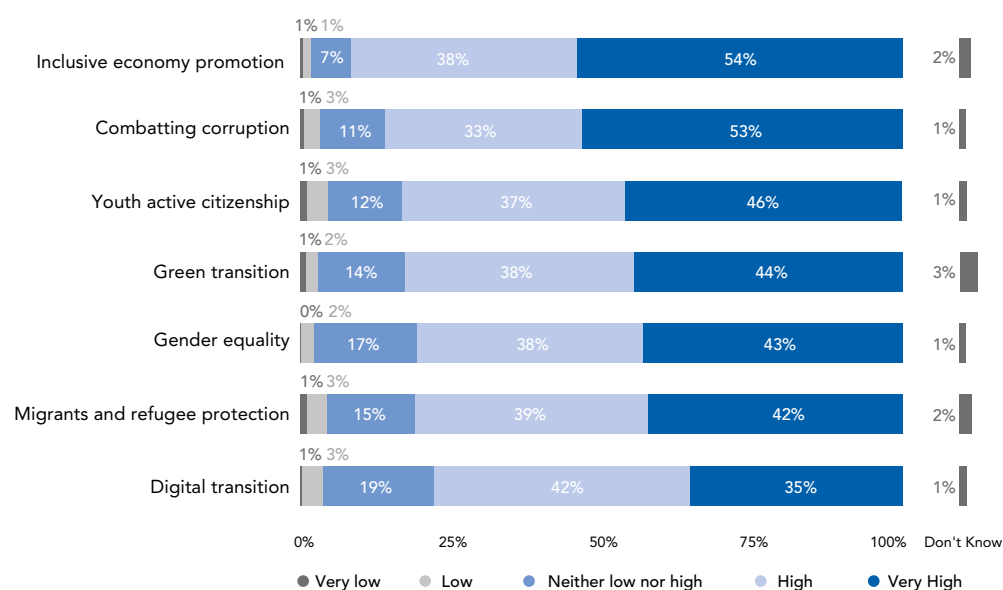
We need to understand that apart from the above-mentioned vulnerable groups, other groups with low income have been strongly affected leading to new forms of poverty and insecurity due to the lack of democracy and poor welfare state.

— Spanish respondent

**Question 5** asked participants about the EU-SMCs cooperation priorities to overcome the Covid-19 effects on socio-economic inclusiveness. All options obtained percentages of high and very high priority beyond 70% (see graph 6).

The first priority was “Inclusive economy promotion”, which encompassed the “promotion of social economy models, formalisation of informal sectors and reform of social protection systems”. The second priority for respondents was “combatting corruption”.

**Graph 6:** Q.5 To what extent do you consider the following areas should be prioritized in EU-SMCs cooperation to overcome the Covid-19 effects on socio-economic inclusiveness?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 13<sup>th</sup> Euromed Survey

Open comments underlined the need for an integrated approach connecting different priority options:

I believe that areas such as youth active citizenship, gender equality and digital transition should be of course supported in parallel, but I consider that the rest of topics are much more related to Covid-19 effects on socio-economic inclusiveness and therefore should be a priority in EU-SMC cooperation.

— Spanish respondent

Everything is important, especially actions for gender equality and active citizenship of young people, which ultimately means initiatives / actions for more democracy.

— Moroccan respondent

Only an integrated approach in terms of EU policy for the SMCs can deliver real change in a medium and long-term scenario. All the areas here above are strongly interlinked, i.e. if the EU and the SMCs want to achieve gender equality they have to work on the social and economic inclusion of youth and women by investing in a just green and digital transition which could contribute to reducing irregular migration flows.

— Italian respondent

Comments also showed the concern about combatting corruption:

Society can achieve a lot if corruption is minimised – more resources for services, empowering women and girls (young people) as contributors to changes in society which can lead to better inclusion and better economic outcomes.

— Latvian respondent

The fight against corruption can have an impact on the preservation of resources and their use for the creation of economic activities to stop emigration.

— Algerian respondent

All structural changes will need to rely on a transparent and accountable political and administrative system.

— Italian respondent

While other open comments showed a sceptical point of view and the need for further reforms:

I am also a bit jittery when I hear someone mention 'reform of social protection systems', especially in a regional context where these systems have been weakened considerably in recent decades. Hence, in my view 'inclusive economy promotion' should include the strengthening, rather than the reform, of social protection systems.

— Italian respondent

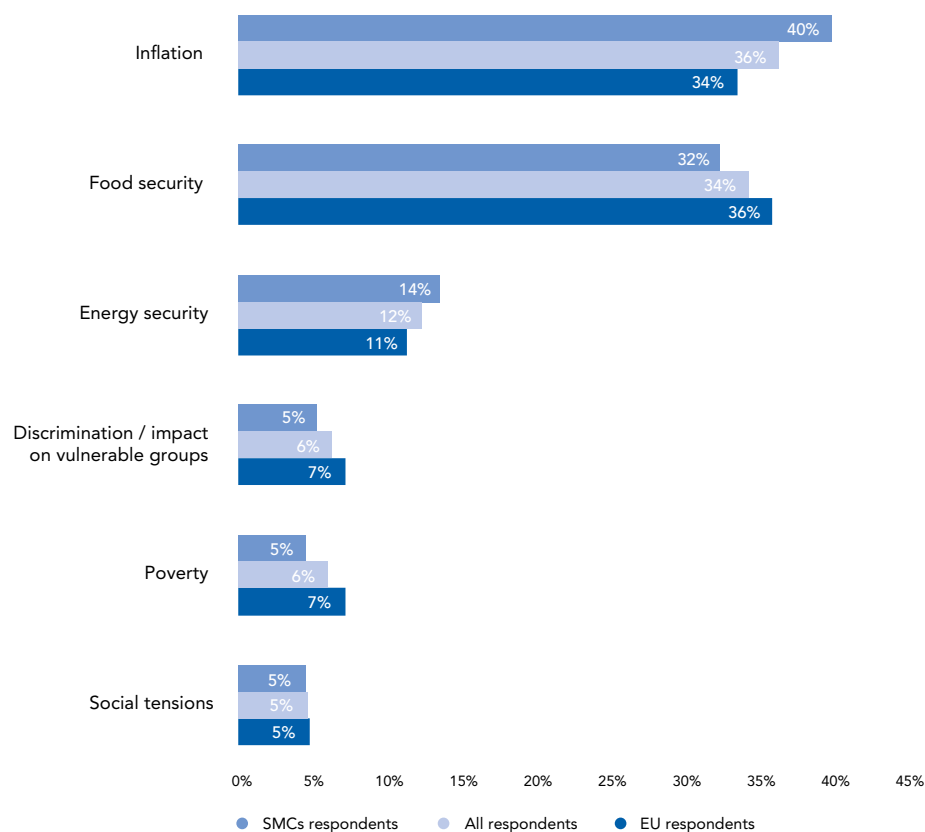
‘Youth active citizenship’ doesn’t really mean anything in countries where authoritarianism is allowed to flourish by the EU.

— Spanish respondent

The final question of this section, **Question 6**, was an open-ended question designed to focus on the impact of the war in Ukraine that broke out shortly before the field work of the survey started. While SMCs respondents answered on the effects in their own countries, EU respondents answered referring to all SMCs. In both cases inflation and food security were identified as the main consequences deriving from the conflict.

A breakdown of answers by geographical origin shows a slightly nuanced picture (graph 7). For SMCs respondents, inflation was seen as the main negative effect (referring to their own country). For EU respondents, food security was seen as the main aftereffect in the Southern Neighbourhood.

**Graph 7:** Q.6 In your opinion, what is the main socio-economic impact of the war in Ukraine in your country (SMC’s respondents) / in Southern Mediterranean Countries (EU respondents)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 13<sup>th</sup> Euromed Survey

Open ended answers expressed respondents' view on the consequences of inflation on vulnerable groups and on institutional instability:

Rising prices have increased social tensions in countries with weak social safety nets; there are few jobs and limited public spending space.

— Algerian respondent

The war has caused the prices of many commodities to rise. Thus, contributing to food insecurity in the region. In addition to exacerbating energy security issues for those who are relying on energy sources from Ukraine/Russia.

— Jordan respondent

The war in Ukraine has caused the prices of all sorts of products to rise (gas, energy, oil, fuel, foodstuffs...) and the purchasing power of many households is falling, especially vulnerable people.

— Moroccan respondent

Increased prices of food and basic commodities is causing more stress on the poor and the vulnerable.

— Egyptian respondent

The rise of the cost of everything, from energy to food, might lead to a rise in the general political mistrust in institutions and the reinforcement of informal groups who are seen increasingly as the legitimate providers of security.

— Tunisian respondent

