

## Summer School

# The State of Social Protection in the MENA Region

05-09 September 2022

### Call for applications for young researchers and professionals

#### **Background and Rationale**

Social protection is a cornerstone of social justice. When it is provided for all citizens, it is the way to ensure that every citizen has equal opportunities, and is secure against all kinds of life hazards. The Social Protection is a right that each government has to ensure for their citizens. This right is enshrined in article 22 of the Human Rights Universal Declaration

Social protection extends and differs over the three stages of a person's life: Before, during and after reaching the age of work. The International Labour Organization (ILO) refers to three social protection dimensions<sup>1</sup>:

- The first is procuring basic goods and services as a traditional objective for social protection. It is a necessary condition to achieve other objectives.
- Prevention and protection: A pre-emptive perspective for protection that may be applied systematically without affecting the well-being of individuals, households, communities, and States. Some of the most notable examples in developing countries include implementing mechanisms to protect farmers from the fluctuation in the global prices of raw materials; from climate changes affecting the crops; or protecting limited-income public sector employees and workers from the loss of income or the loss of their employment due to certain economic measures.
- Providing and supporting opportunities. The more the State addresses this dimension, the less it would need to interfere to provide goods, services, and protection in times of crises. The most notable example is free and adequate education.

The IMF in some publications adds education and health as part of the components of social protection. The World Bank recognizes their importance in combatting inequality and poverty, and measures regularly their efficiency in 217 countries in the new Human Capital Index.

Most recently, the concept of social protection is reduced to a minimum set of policies, called the **Social Protection Floors**. The term was introduced by the ILO and appeared in 2015 as part of the first goal of

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<sup>1</sup> ILO (2004).

the Sustainable Development Goals 2030: “End poverty in all its manifestations”. The objective 1.3 is to “Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors”.

In 2009, the IMF became a collaborating agency in the One UN Social Protection Floor Initiative promoting universal access to essential social transfers and services. And the World Bank formed with the ILO A Shared Mission for Universal Social Protection (2016).

Yet, in practice, instead of ensuring the integration of necessary programs indispensable as social protection floors, both institutions are advocating for limiting all social protection programs and poverty reduction endeavor to statistically targeted cash transfers, in order to replace the existing universal schemes of subsidies.

Education and health, albeit their relevance to the subject, are most often overlooked when designing fiscal policies. Because IFIs are usually wary of expanding public social spending and are continuously calling for austerity measures in order to keep budget deficits low. The IMF monitors fiscal policies for all country members, via regular expert visits, called the article IV consultations and issues relevant reports evaluating the commitment of governments to maintain fiscal deficits low and exchange rates flexible and capitals are free to roam from one country to another.

The myth of private sector-led economies defended and pushed for by the World Bank, ensures that wages are kept low and profits are kept high, mainly through the erosion of social protection schemes and tools. As a consequence of this rigorous pursuit for austerity, along with deregulation of markets, inequality rose across the world, between countries and within countries. In the MENA region, the most unequal region in the world, Social Protection programs are weak and only covers a minority of the population. Social spending is low in the MENA region compared to other peer countries or to other regions.

This summer school is an opportunity to search for an inclusive and more equal development paradigm.

### **Who can Apply?**

The program plans to gather some 20 researchers from Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt.

By gathering young researchers from the region, who will be engaging in debates and trainings with a group of experts on the subjects, the summer school represents an interactive way to expand knowledge, change narratives, find alternatives for a better recovery from a lost decade, combining low growth and underdevelopment along with rising inequality and anger and ultimately use this knowledge to advocate for change.

### **Conditions for acceptance:**

- A master’s degree in one of the following fields: economics, political science, social science, sociology, development studies, Law or any related field.
- Proven interest, activism, professional background or academic work on the issue of social protection, social policies, social spending, social and economic inequalities.
- Maximum 35 years old at the time of submission.
- Citizen or resident of Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Lebanon or Egypt.
- Fluency in Arabic.

## How to Apply?

Send to [info.mena@fes.de](mailto:info.mena@fes.de) the following documents:

- 1) A motivation letter of 300 to 350 words (Arabic or English).
- 2) Your condensed CV of maximum two pages (Arabic, English or French).
- 3) A research proposal, research summary, (published) article, etc. by yourself, addressing one of the research questions below: (Arabic, English or French)

**Research questions can include, but are not limited to:** How to create and expand fiscal space to finance social protection? How to measure inequality and how to fight it with social protection? What are the social protection programs most relevant within the context of our region? How did policy changes during the Covid-19 pandemic effect social protection? How did/does austerity impact social protection in the region? Can we relate IMF programs to weakened social protection? How can we evaluate social protection in MENA? How can we evaluate cash transfer programs in the region? How can a Universal Social Protection/Social Protection Floor work in the region? How does social protection targeting work in the region? What are economic/ social/ environmental benefits of expanded social protection? Who are relevant actors to push for social protection, which role can unions play?

## Important Logistical Information:

**Location of the Summer School:** Tunisia (Tunis or Hammamet)

**Date of the Summer School:** 05 – 09 September 2022 (Arrival in Tunis 04 September, departure 10 September 2022)

**Deadline for Applications:** 04 July 2022. Successful applicants will be notified after 12 July 2022.

## Successful applicants will receive the following support from the organizers:

- Plane ticket from country of residence to Tunisia and back.
- Transportation from Tunis airport to the conference venue and back.
- Full board accommodation during the duration of the Summer School.
- If needed, visa support documents, and supports for visa fees.