



ISSPF Regional Conference on Inclusive Social Security: Towards a Working Agenda in the MENA Region

Inclusive Social Security Policy Forum

Amman, Jordan, 19-20 September 2023

<https://isspf-mena.com/>

**DEVELOPMENT
PATHWAYS**


ARDD
النهضة العربية للديمقراطية والتنمية
Arab Renaissance for Democracy & Development


المركز التونسي للاقتصاد
Observatoire Tunisien de l'Economie

About ISSPF

Inclusive Social Security Policy Forum (ISSPF) is a network and space for civil society organisations and individuals across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region challenging the dominant narratives and making the case for inclusive social security.

Mission: ISSPF aims to shift the narrative on delivering social protection in the region, to move away from the prevailing old-fashioned poor relief model and toward a modern, inclusive social security model.

The project is funded by the Ford Foundation and implemented by Development Pathways in partnership with Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) in Jordan, the Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action (CeSSRA) in Lebanon and Observatoire Tunisien de l'Economie (TOE) in Tunisia. You can find more info on our pilot website: <https://www.isspf-mena.com/>

Purpose and Rationale

An effective social security system is a core component of any successful and sustainable economy and underpins the building of a strong social contract and a cohesive society. This truth has perhaps never been clearer than in the wake of recent crises from Covid-19 to the Russian-Ukraine war and the havoc it has wreaked on the global economy.

High income countries invest an average of 16.4 per cent of GDP in social security, establishing systems that support people across the lifecycle, with the main investments in children, older people, people with disabilities, the unemployed and survivors, and usually through schemes offering universal access. While these schemes are complemented by small programmes for those living in poverty, the main investment is in universal schemes offered on the basis of citizenship.

Across the Middle East and North Africa, however, a different approach has been adopted. While most countries have social insurance schemes in place, they mainly provide support to those in the formal economy. The rest of the population is only offered poor quality programmes for the poor: transfer values are often low while the selection of recipients is inaccurate, with high exclusion errors. A number of countries have implemented a targeting mechanism known as the proxy means test, which, across the world, has been proven to fail, with exclusion errors normally above 50 per cent of the eligible population.

The dominant social security paradigm across the region is, therefore, social insurance schemes for the better-off, poor quality social assistance for the poor, while a large proportion of the population living on middle incomes is excluded from social security, the so-called 'missing middle.' The alienation of the missing middle from social security – and other public services – has become major challenge across middle-income countries and is increasingly a key source of public unrest. The poor-quality delivery of social security systems – in particular the arbitrariness of targeting mechanisms such as the proxy means test – further undermines trust in government, thereby hindering the strengthening of the social contract and the building of democracy. To a large extent, the approach to social security adopted by many MENA countries is similar to that used by some European countries during the 19th Century.

If the social contract and social cohesion are to be strengthened in the MENA region, a paradigm shift in the design of national social security systems is required, with a move to building systems for all citizens, based on the right to social security for all, as happened over time across high-income countries.

In this regional conference, we will reflect jointly on how to shift the narrative on delivering social security in the region and move away from the prevailing old-fashioned poor relief model and toward a modern, inclusive social security model. The event will be an opportunity for civil society organisations to think collectively around key themes related to inclusive social security and social protection in an attempt to mainstream an alternative narrative and agenda on these issues. This will include bringing to the discussions, through different speakers', relevant lessons learned around successful campaigns or policies that support inclusive social security policies.

Audience and Invitees

- Civil society actors and researchers in the MENA region
- Regional and international organisations promoting inclusive social security in the region.

Thematic Approach and Delivery modality

The Event will take place in person over two days with some online interventions. This will be followed by a reception and dinner for networking purposes.

The event centres around three roundtable discussions that aim to reach a collective working agenda for civil society organisations in the MENA region around three themes: Role of International financial institutions, Poverty Targeting programs and Data accessibility in MENA region. These discussions will be moderated and organized by a key ISSPF organization with the presence of one or two key experts on the topic to reach effective actions that can be undertaken for each topic. Experts will be invited to share successful policies/ campaigns and highlight key questions around the theme of the roundtable discussion.

The event will also have an introductory and closing panel for around 90 minutes, while each roundtable discussion will take 2 hours. The introductory panel will introduce key challenges and opportunities for inclusive social security in the MENA region, while the closing panel will present the findings and conclusions of the roundtable discussions.

Agenda: 19-20 September 2023

Day 1	Day 2
<p>8:30 – 9:00</p> <p>Registration</p>	<p>9:30 – 10:00</p> <p>Tea/Coffee refreshment</p>
<p>9:00– 10:30</p> <p>Introductory Panel: Challenges and Hopes of Inclusive Social Security in MENA region.</p> <p>Facilitation: Shahir Ishak, Development Pathways</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Stephen Kidd, Development Pathways. • Dr. Maria del Mar Logrono, Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) • Ameni Ben Sik Ali, Tunisian Observatory of the Economy (TOE) • Lea Yammine, The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action • Dr. Markus Loewe, German Institute of Development and Sustainability 	<p>10:00 – 12:00</p> <p>3rd Roundtable: Data accessibility and needs for Inclusive social security in MENA region.</p> <p>Facilitation: Shahir Ishak, Development Pathways</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. May Gadalla, Statistics Manager, Economic Research Forum (ERF) • Dr. Tareq Abuelhaj, Senior Associate, Development pathways.
<p>10:30 – 11:00</p> <p>Tea/Coffee Break</p>	<p>12:00 – 13:00</p> <p>Lunch Break</p>
<p>11:00 – 13:00</p> <p>1st Roundtable: Role and impact of International Financial Institutions on inclusive social security policies in MENA region.</p> <p>Facilitation: Sahar Mechmech, Tunisian Observatory of the economy (TOE)</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ameni Ben Sik Ali, Tunisian Observatory of the Economy (TOE) • Ali Amouzai, the Association pour la Taxation des Transactions en Aide aux Citoyens au Maroc (ATTAC Morocco) 	<p>13:00 – 15:00</p> <p>Closing Panel: Presentation/discussion on the roundtables working agenda.</p> <p>Facilitation: Shahir Ishak, Development Pathways.</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representative, Roundtable 1 • Representative, roundtable 2 • Representative, Roundtable 3

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lea Yammine, The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action (TBC) 	
<p>13:00 – 14:00</p> <p>Lunch Break</p>	<p>15:00 – 17:00</p> <p>Networking Reception</p>
<p>14:00 to 16:00</p> <p>2nd Roundtable: Poverty Targeting approach to social security in MENA region.</p> <p>Facilitation: Dr. Maria del Mar Logrono, Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD)</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farah El-Shami, Arab Reform Initiative. Shatha Abou Srou, Arab Forum for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Imene Cherif, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), MENA region 	<p>19:00 – 21:00</p> <p>Conference Dinner</p>