**Proposal for Special Issue – Call for Abstracts**

**‘Social Protection and positive peace: a new perspective from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region’**

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[Call for abstracts deadline: 26th November 2021 more details below – please read in full.]

**Overview**

The special issue speaks to one of the most important topics of our time: conflict prevention in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and what role social policies can play in promoting ‘positive’ peace. The issue will bring together conceptual and empirical contributions which explore how different meanings of security are related to the realization of a more resilient or sustainable peace, particularly in the MENA region.

The relationship between social protection and peaceful and inclusive societies is of growing interest to policy-makers around the world (ILO, 2021; Jawad, 2019; Idris, 2017). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly promote both social protection (SDGs 1&4), and “peaceful and inclusive societies” (SDG16) as key dimensions of sustainable development. However, social protection policies and peacekeeping activities have largely remained within separate realms (Gledhill et al., 2021), and much greater theoretical and operational understanding is needed of the pathways which can connect these spheres. Towards this aim, as noted in recent landmark publications such as the United Nations and World Bank’s *Pathways to Peace*(2018), a shift away from a militarized conflict-centric perspective (negative peace) towards an affirmative and preventive agenda for policy action which takes into account the links between conflicts and grievances, discrimination, unfairness and inequality, even during times of no war (positive peace) is crucial (Davenport et al., 2018; Sharifi et al., 2021; Kivimäki, 2021). Particularly in a context of significant growth of social protection programmes in response to Covid-19 (Gentilini et al., 2020), insights are needed into the design, implementation, systems and institutional strategies of social protection which can support peace, justice and strong institutions. This special issue engages with the intersection between social protection and positive peace by exploring some of the connections, complementarities and transferable lessons between different conceptual and policy approaches.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is of global geo-political importance and provides in-depth opportunities to examine the relationship between social protection and peace. The region demonstrates the hazards of a disjointed approach as well as the potential for greater alignment. Many of the most protracted conflicts have occurred and continue to occur in this region (Pettersson et al., 2021; Palik et al., 2020). Yet narrow state security mandates and the militarized management of armed non-state actors have tended to dominate national and international peace-keeping efforts (Gledhill, Caplan and Meiske, 2021). Historically, social welfare systems have followed residual and elitist policy and institutional configurations leading to high levels of political factionalism and social inequality (Jawad, 2019). However, over the past decade, the Arab uprisings starkly demonstrated the widespread significance of livelihood security and access to public services as central public concerns, including among youth and women. Even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, as a result of armed conflict and climate change, estimates showed that the number of people living in extreme poverty had already doubled between 2015 and 2018, drastically heightening the need for social protection (ILO, 2021). Thus, against a prevailing backdrop of political, religious, and military perspectives, the role of social policy, and social protection in particular, is starting to be recognized as key to both understanding and addressing conflict in the MENA region, and towards achieving sustainable peace.

The special issue is framed by four key concepts as explained further below:

Positive peace: A conceptual and operational understanding of positive peace is required for a greater alignment of conflict prevention and peace promotion with social protection interventions. Citing Galtung (1964)’s foundational work, Amadei (2020) notes that positive peace relates to the presence and prevalence of positive attributes, conditions, and priorities that promote “social and economic justice, environmental integrity, human rights, and development” and contribute to the structural “integration of human society”. Similarly, Fischer (2007) describes positive peace activities as ranging from “building a life-sustaining economy at the local, national and global level in which everyone’s basic needs are met” to “good governance and participation, self-determination, human rights” (cited in Amadei, 2020:1115) To analyse the quality of peace, and its perceptual, procedural and relational dimensions, Davenport, Melander and Regan (2018) describe a peace continuum which spans from the absence of violence at one end to a sense of security and mutual respect for the identity of all major actors (‘political mutuality‘) at the other. This policy and academic background enables a more nuanced study of the MENA region that is central to many conflict and international security studies but largely absent from peace studies (Kivimäki, 2021), and provides a framework for engaging with the many examples where armed conflict is punctuated by periods of peace that are often achieved through political coercion and not linked to longer-term forms of stable and equitable social pacts. The focus on positive peace also supports the study and development of systemic approaches to its realization (Sharifi et al., 2021; United Nations and World Bank, 2018). In this special issue, we therefore expound the argument that social protection can be a major driver of positive peace and hence a key tool of conflict prevention for global and domestic decision-makers.

Security: Engaging with the notion of ‘security’ is helpful in overcoming the disciplinary and applied separation between social protection and peace-oriented approaches (Gledhill et al., 2021). The term is central to several academic spheres, and yet has many different and at times contrasting connotations. In international relations, security focuses on the internal and external threats to a nation state, with a particular focus on organized violence, and military defensive strategy. The overly militarized understanding of security is pertinent in the MENA region which has its legacy in the authoritarian regimes that have dominated the countries of this region for the best part of their modern history (El-Ghonemy, 1990). Further, the ‘international’ aspect of security in the region is particularly evident, with a strong lead from foreign policy in power blocs external to the region itself. In contrast, social protection is itself closely allied to the concept of social security, and the public provision of social and economic welfare for a nation’s citizens. Notions of human security, and the provision of multi-disciplinary ‘security’, including health and security from environmental threats are helpful in finding common ground (Gasper et al., 2020). The human security triple focus on ‘freedom from fear want, and indignity’ is also important for linking concerns over livelihood security at the micro level with macro-level approaches to social protection.

Redistribution: Empirically, several articles in this issue highlight areas of compatibility between social protection and peace agendas such as their common mandate to address distributional challenges in the region. The exclusion of particular groups from power, resources, services and security on the basis of identity or geography is a key factor in most violent conflicts; addressing grievances and inclusive decision making are fundamental to sustaining peace (Kivimäki, 2021; Nolan et al., 2019). At the same time, when access is limited, social and public services such as cash transfers, education, water and jobs act as a political fault line both for civic unrest as seen in the Arab Spring events and also for appeasement by both state and non-state factions vying for social control (as seen historically in the post-independence policies and also more recently in the rise of Islamic movements). Hence, the capacity for societies to provide adequate means of resource distribution occurs at the intersection between identity factors and structural inequalities and emerges as a key aspect of tackling structural violence to facilitate peace (Nicoson, 2021).

Risks: In the context of peace, security, and development, the notion of compound, interconnected risk is becoming more prominent. Contests over economic and social inequalities and a lack of development and social protection are exacerbated by other emerging contemporary risks, such as climate change, natural disasters, pandemics, and political migration. Beyond its environmental impact, climate change has profound social, economic, and political implications and has become a threat to different layers of security (water, food, human, community, infrastructure, state) (Busby, 2021), particularly in the region (Borghesi and Ticci, 2019). Causing mass loss of secure livelihoods and complex migration movements, eroding social cohesion, and exacerbating gender inequality, climate change has also been linked to conflict – at least indirectly, as a threat multiplier (UNDP, 2020; Kaczan and Orgill-Meyer, 2020). Emerging compound risks hamper regional pathways towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and increase social vulnerabilities especially given the background policy context of very high-income inequalities and fiscal deficits (Otto et al., 2017). In the past couple of years, specific attention to social protection provision has been amplified by intensifying natural resource shortages in the region as well as the social and economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on MENA countries (OECD, 2020). However, developing integrated social protection mechanisms and peace-oriented strategies geared towards addressing these complexities through strategies for social resilience and positive peace remains a challenge in the region. Such strategies require a better understanding of compound risk and climate impact chains in their complex interrelations with underlying, systemic social inequalities and vulnerabilities (Mach and Kraan, 2020).

A broad, multi-disciplinary analytical lens that also factors in institutional and political processes enables this special issue to engage with the reality that social policies and peacekeeping canbe a lever for both conflict and peace (Jawad, 2019; Kivimäki, 2021). For example, austerity policies involving food subsidy reforms and income tax rises that are part of donor-driven reform packages have directly fueled rioting and social discontent in countries such as Egypt and Jordan (see for example https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/egypt-bread-riots-protests-erupt-after-subsidy-cut-hits-poor). Papers in this issue contend that the role of the state and international institutions as key policy actors is increasingly contested at a time of mounting evidence in support of community and local level actors promoting social cohesion, trust, and social justice in both social protection and peace-keeping mainstream debates. Historically, social protection has built on an understanding that is less state-centric and compatible with contexts where the state does not or cannot provide for its people, yet the state’s role has been increasingly emphasized as social protection programmes have grown in scale (Loewe et al., 2019). In the MENA region, international actors have played a prominent role, both in the realm of security through Western military interventions, and in setting policy agendas by development actors such as USAID, the World Bank, the EU and IMF (Jawad et al., 2019).

Overall, after more than a decade of global policy and academic consensus around the need to better integrate peace and development efforts, scholarship and policy practice still lack clear articulation of the factors which can facilitate this convergence (Sharifi et al., 2021). As authors in this issue argue, both sectors can be strengthened by drawing on a broad understanding of positive peace as the movement away from a security-oriented notion of peace to one that mobilizes a range of social and economic sectors that can provide the building blocks for longer-term just and equitable peace (United Nations and World Bank, 2018). This view locates social protection as a central policy space, but also recognises that its processes and norms of social production and reproduction can be a tool both for social cohesion or social repression. Ensuring that key ingredients for positive peace come into play has several implications for social protection policy in order for it to helpfully navigate the fine balance between stability and violence which many societies face. These include that: social protection (1) involves *legislation* to protect citizen rights and rule of law; (2) is a field of policy-making that requires political *participation* in decision-making around who gets what benefits and how; (3) requires a multi-dimensional approach which involves the analysis of human wellbeing and incorporates not only money-metric definitions such as poverty, but also psycho-social ones such as dignity, and environmental ones, such as access to sustainable livelihoods and protection of natural resources.

The aims of the special issue are to:

1. Cast new light on the debates around peace and conflict in the MENA region by contextualizing issues surrounding social protection and peacekeeping in empirical policy-focused articles covering social cash transfers, climate change polities, institutional analysis, and discourse analysis
2. Based on the range of articles provided, synthesize interdisciplinary literature on the different aspects of ‘security’ and on the connections between social protection and the promotion of peace, building an understanding of the complex interconnections between compound risk, social rights, structural inequality, and social vulnerability to inform social protection policies that foster positive, sustainable peace
3. To understand to what extent the political and institutional processes that underpin social protection systems across state and non-state sectors enhance or impede social cohesion, resilience, and peace building efforts in a context of complex risk and rapid environmental change
4. Propose a new research agenda/policy lessons on how social protection can inform positive peace initiatives in MENA both conceptually and as a policy tool based on case study research (published as papers here)
5. Discuss a number of indicative policy areas in relation to positive peace: social cash transfers, climate change politics, migration and refugees and governance.

The special issue draws on the expertise of social protection and security studies scholars who are part of an on-going research project funded by the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council through the Global Challenges Research fund ‘GCRF-AHRC Network Plus: Social protection and sustainable peace in the Middle East and North Africa Region: Building a new welfare-centred politics (MENASP-CP)’ (<https://www.menasp.com/>). Reflecting the broad membership of this network, the special issue, which also invites contributions from beyond the network, is intentionally interdisciplinary, drawing on diverse perspectives on conflict prevention and peace building from disparate academic disciplines which have traditionally remained distinct, including international relations, climate change, social development, humanitarian practice and peace studies. The approach is in line with an understanding that interdisciplinary and intersectoral dialogue can cut across competing established and emerging narratives regarding the nature of conflict, making the way for a deeper and contextualized understanding of pathways to lasting peace.

**Keywords:** social protection, cash transfers, social policy, peace, social assistance, security, climate change, conflict, inequalities, migration, MENA region.

**CALL FOR ABSTRACTS: Special issue possible themes**

For this special issue we welcome a broad range of abstracts including critical, conceptual, and empirical perspectives. In exploring the relationship between social protection and positive peace, we invite conceptual contributions that may extend beyond the MENA region as well as empirical work and case studies focused on the region. Themes of interest could include:

1. Interdisciplinary definitions/concepts of positive peace, sustainable peace, security, and how they relate to social protection
2. Theoretical and empirical studies of the linkages between social protection and peace, conflict and social cohesion. What lessons can be applied to the design and implementation of social protection in order to pursue sustainable peace? What lessons can be learned from the responses to Covid-19 which relate to the pursuit of peace-oriented strategies?
3. Institutional influences of different social protection paradigms, intended to achieve social control outcomes or to address underlying drivers of inequality and conflict
4. Actors of peace and social protection beyond the state; political mobilisation involved in claims-making and the resulting mechanisms of entitlement that impact social organisation and cohesion
5. Environmental perspectives on positive peace and social protection. How are climate change considerations being featured (or not) in relation to social policy and peace-building initiatives in the MENA region?
6. Social protection as a humanitarian response to migration, and the promotion of intra-group and inter-group social cohesion

### **How to apply**

### Abstracts should be 500 words maximum in length and need to include an explanation of the conceptual and methodological basis of the paper. Please submit abstracts to MENASP\_network@bath.ac.uk.**Deadline for abstract submission: 26 November 2021.**

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