MENASP Network 2026 Online Conference

Social Policy and Social Protection in the Middle East and North Africa:

Innovation, Adaptation or Business as Usual?

25 - 26 November 2026 | Online

Hosted by the University of Birmingham, in partnership with the ILO

Agenda

Time (UK)	Session / Theme
	Wednesday, 25 November 2026
09:00 – 09:10	**Welcome and Opening Remarks** **MENASP Network, University of Birmingham** **Rana Jawad** Professor of Global Social Policy (University of Birmingham) **ILO Stream Programme** **Luca Pellerano** Sr. Social Protection Specialist & ILO STREAM programme manager (ILO) **Cross-Regional Knowledge Hub** **S. Irudaya Rajan** Chair (International Institute of Migration and Development - IIMAD)
09:10 – 10:40	**Special Session (Panel 1)** **Between Crises and Reforms: Wage Protection, Social Security, and Labour Migration along South–South Corridors to the GCC** Led by the ILO-STREAM Programme and the Cross-Regional Network Hub on Social Protection for Migrant Workers **Chair: Michele Scala** (Knowledge Management Consultant, ILO STREAM Programme) **Discussant: Françoise de Bel Air** (Gulf Labour Markets, Migration and Population (GLMM) Programme) **Presenters:** • **Sabreen Mervat** (Independent Social Protection and Pension Reform Consultant) "*The Emerging Pension Protection Gap in the GCC Labour Migration Corridors: Reform Progress, Portability Challenges and Policy Options*".

	• **Idil Akinci** (University of Edinburgh) "*Retirement as a new frontier of temporary migration governance: financialisation and later life in the UAE*". • **Froilan Malit** (SOAS University of London & Gulf Labor Markets and Migration) "*Insuring the Precarious? How Geopolitical Conflicts Drive Multi-Tiered Exclusion on the Gulf Unemployment Insurance Scheme for Migrant Domestic Workers*". • **Douglas MacLean** (University of Birmingham) "*Opening the Black Box of Bilateral Policy Systems: Labour Migration Governance Along South-South Corridors*".	
	Break	
10:50 – 12:10	**Labour Migration, Displacement and Portable Social Protection** **Chair: Markus Loewe** (German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS)) • **Ahmad Addam** (Threads of Peace / House of Peace), **Maya Al-Farran** (Threads of Peace / House of Peace), **Maia Sieverding** (Independent Consultant / Salamanca), **Sawsan Abdulrahim** (American University of Beirut) "*Can Peacebuilding Strengthen Social Cohesion amid Protracted Displacement? A Longitudinal Quasi-Experimental Study from Lebanon*". • **Margherita Cordellini** (Sciences Po Paris) "*Precarity and Mobility: Syrian Workers Navigate the Jordanian Labour Market After the Jordan Compact*". • **Simon Roberts** (University of Nottingham) "*Promoting Financial Independence of Women Migrant Workers through*	**Social Protection Coverage, Financing and Institutional Innovation** **Chair: Walaa Talaat** (Ain Shams University) • **Muntasser Majeed Hameed & Roz Nazar Ahmed** (University of Baghdad) "*Child Labour in Iraq: Poverty, Informal Work, and Social Protection Gaps*". • **Samar Abdelmageed** (Ain Shams University) "*Can Financial Markets Contribute to Social Protection Financing in MENA? An Empirical Evidence*". • **Ali Mohamed Aliraqi** (King Saud University) "*Climate Vulnerability, Compound Fragility, and the Limits of Adaptive Social Protection: Evidence from Sudan*". • **Zina S. Nimeh** (Maastricht University and United NaBons University), **Tamara A. Kool** (Verwey-Jonker InsBtuut), **Guido Heins** (ILO Europe) "*Coverage and Adequacy of Social Insurance in Arab*

	Skills and Social Security: A Case Study of WAFIRA". • **Katharina Lenner** (University of Bath) "*Transnational Social Protection and Displacement in the Context of Partial Return: Towards a Research and Policy Agenda*".	*Countries: A Quantitative Comparison of Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia*".
12:10 – 13:00	**Lunch Break**	
13:00 – 14:20	**Labour Migration, Mobility and Transnational Social Protection** **Chair: TBC** • **Maye Ehab & Lidwina Gundacker** (Institute for Employment Research) "*The Exported Employment-Education Paradox? The Gendered Labour Market Integration of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, Turkey, and Germany*". • **Abdulrahman Mohammed Dawood Al-Nuaimi** (Affiliation to be added) "*Between Crises and Reforms: Wage Protection, Social Security, and Labour Migration along South–South Corridors to the GCC*". • **Rawan AbuJulia** (Independent policy consultant) "*When Mobility Stops: Wage Protection and Social Security Portability in Conflict-Affected Labour Markets*". • **Damla B. Aksel** (Bahçeşehir University), **Gülece Şenel** (Ahmet Yassawi University) *"Beyond Durable Solutions: Portability of Social Protection and Syria as a Potential Test Case*".	**Social Protection Reform, Digitalisation and Coverage** **Chair: TBC** • **Markus Loewe** (German Institute of Development and Sustainability) "*Have Social Protection Reforms in Jordan Increased Effective Coverage Rates?*". • **Teresa Janz & Zina Nimeh** *(UNU-MERIT)* "*From Crisis to Recovery: Tracing COVID-19's Welfare Effects through Jordan's Social Protection System*". • **Mohamed Nasr** (Affiliation to be added) "*From Data Literacy to Digital and AI Readiness: Bridging the Digital Divide in Arab Social Protection Systems through Capacity Development*". • **Reihaneh Saremi** (University of Kassel) "*Fragile Punitive Welfare: The Governance of Social Pathology in Iran*".
14:20 – 14:30	**Break**	

14:30 – 15:50	**Gender, Education, Families and Welfare Institutions** **Chair: TBC** • **Jana Abdel-Jawadova** (University of Essex) "*Amid Funding Cuts: Lebanon's Humanitarian Everyday Child Protection Sector*". • **Maria Makhmutova** (University of Göttingen) "*From Student Welfare to Religious Authority: Al-Azhar and IUM Compared*". • **Neil Russell** (Glasgow Caledonian University) "*Reconfiguring the "Mixed Economy of Charity": Official Islam and the Rearticulation of Social and Humanitarian Assistance after USAID Cuts in Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia*". • **Idil Akinci** (University of Edinburgh) "*Old age security for migrant workers and their families in Gulf*".	**Labour Markets, Social Rights and Political Economy** **Chair: Walaa Talaat** (Ain Shams University) • **Zahra Yavand Taheri** (London School of Economics and Political Science) "*Marketisation without Decentralisation: The Experience of Privatisation of Education under an Authoritarian State*". • **Hossein Rajab Pour** (Allameh Tabataba'i University) "*Economic Shocks and Labour-Market Dualism in Iran: Implications for Social Protection, 2024–2026*". • **Hasti Shokoohi** (Independent) & Yaser Bagheri (University of Tehran) "*Between War and AI: Job Insecurity among Iran's Professional Middle Class*" • **Ehsan Mardoukh Rohani** (University of Kurdistan) "*Logic of Change in Iranian Higher Education Policy: A Distinctive Historical Path*"
15:50 – 16:00	First Day Closing Remarks	
	Thursday, 26 November 2026	
09:00 – 09:10	**Welcome** **MENASP Network, University of Birmingham** **Rana Jawad** Professor of Global Social Policy (University of Birmingham) **ILO Stream Programme** **Michele Scala** Knowledge Management Consultant (ILO STREAM) **Cross-Regional Knowledge Hub** **Md. Ekhtekharul Islam** Research Fellow (Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit - RMMRU)	
09:10 – 10:30	**Special Session (Panel 2)**	

<table>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="2">Between Crises and Reforms: Wage Protection, Social Security, and Labour Migration along South–South Corridors to the GCC
Led by the ILO-STREAM Programme and the Cross-Regional Network Hub on Social Protection for Migrant Workers

Chair: Imco Brouwer (Gulf Labour Markets, Migration and Population (GLMM) Programme)
Discussant: Jeevan Baniya (Social Science Baha)

Presenters:

• Jeevan R. Sharma (University of Edinburgh)
“Health and access to healthcare of Nepali migrant workers across the GCC–South Asia corridor”.

• Anurag Devkota (Law and Policy Forum for Social Justice (LAPSOJ))
“Beyond Repatriation: Migrant Worker Work-Related Injuries and the Crisis of Transnational Social Protection in the Nepal-GCC Corridor”.

• Fatema Al Hashemi (Independent researcher)
“Integrating Domestic Workers into Bahrain's End-of-Service Social Insurance Reform”.

• Miriam Bonzo (Onestop Career Agency Ltd)
“Uninsured by Design: Employment Injury and Health Protection for Kenyan Domestic Workers in Saudi Arabia”.</td></tr>
<tr><td>10:30 – 10:40</td><td colspan="2">Break</td></tr>
<tr><td>10:40 – 12:00</td><td>Gender, Informality, Education and Social Rights

Chair: TBC

• Saba Ghadimi (Independent)
“Progressive on Paper: Why Inclusive Education Policy Fails Afghan Children in Iran”.

• Mohammad Abuhelweh (Independent Researcher)
“Social Protection Gaps as Constraints on Lifelong Learning Effectiveness in MENA”.

• Laila Mourad (York University)
“Social Protection Beyond Formalization: Informal Women’s Work in Egypt”.</td><td>Employment, Social Protection Coverage and Welfare Reform

Chair: Rana Jawad (University of Birmingham)

• Ibrahim Mahajne (Zefat Academic College)
“Top-Down Welfare Reforms for the Arab Minority in Israel: Innovation, Adaptation, or Business as Usual?”.

• Youssef Hatem (Social Sciences Lab – MENA)
“Recognized but Unprotected: Independent Media Workers and Social Protection in Egypt”.

• Alfonso Casani Herranz (University Complutense of Madrid)</td></tr>
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	• **Yaser Bagheri** (University of Tehran) "*Social Rights without Enforcement: The Recognition–Realization Gap in Iran*".	"*Reconfiguring the Social Contract in Morocco: Social Protection and Governance Challenges*". • **Vanessa Fraga** (University of València) "*Rural Social Protection Exclusion: Comparative Lessons for Welfare Reform in MENA*".
12:00 – 13:00	**Lunch Break**	
13:00 – 14:20	**Inclusion, Access and Emerging Challenges in Social Protection** **Chair: TBC** • **Shatha El-Sherif** (UNICEF Oman Country Office) "*Measuring What Matters: Rethinking Social Protection Success through a Disability Lens in MENA*". • **Khaoula Bouchebka** (MECi Group International) "*The Middle East at a Strategic Crossroads: Geopolitical Transformation and the Future of Social Protection Systems in the MENA Region*". • **Zahra Memarianpour** (University of Tehran) , **Shiva Aghaee** (Saba Pension Strategies Institution) "*Platforms as Collection Agents: Pension Coverage for Ride-Hailing Drivers in Iran*".	**Welfare Reform, Insurance and Institutional Governance** **Chair: TBC** • **Mohammad Abuhelweh** (Independent Researcher) "*Closing the Gap: Social Protection for Agricultural Workers in Jordan*". • **Farouk Nouri** (Universite Mohammed VI Polytechnique) "*Universal Insurance, Partial Protection? Evidence from Egypt's UHIS Rollout*". • **Shaymaa Alotaibi** (University of Birmingham) "*Welfare Restructuring and Organisational Readiness: PPP Governance in Saudi Healthcare*". • **Amir H. Sadat** (Independent) "*The Shortcomings of Social Assistance Expansion Literature: Lessons from Iran*"
14:20 – 14:30	Conference Closing Remarks	