Social Sector

Under the Auspices of H.E. the Prime Minister of Egypt

MOST (Management of Social Transformations) Forum of Arab Social and Health Ministers on

“Multi-Dimensional Social Protection Policies in Conflict and Conflict-Affected Arab States”

Sharm El-Sheikh – Egypt, 4 December 2018

Concept note

Within the framework of the United Nations - League of Arab States cooperation and UNESCO’s MOST (Management of Social Transformations) Programme, the MOST Forum of Arab Social and Health Ministers on “Multi-Dimensional Social Protection Policies in Conflict and Conflict-Affected Arab States” will be co-organized by the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science in the Arab States and LAS (Social Sector) on the 4th of December 2018 in Sharm El-Sheikh.

1. Context and Rationale

Social protection systems are essential for ensuring a basic standard of living and wellbeing for all, protecting the most vulnerable, and building resilience to shocks. Articles 22 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stress on the right of everyone, as a member of society, to an adequate standard of living and to social security. The importance of social protection is highly acknowledged in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) having social protection-related targets, such as SDG 1 (poverty), SDG 3 (health), SDG 5 (women empowerment), SDG 8 (employment), and SDG 10 (inequality). Social protection is also a core contributor to the achievement of all the SDGs, including SDG 4 (education) and SDG 16 (peaceful and inclusive societies). The UN-DESA 2018 Report on the World Social Situation shows the potential of social protection systems “to prevent poverty, reduce inequality and promote social inclusion”, while the Commission for Social Development will devote its 2019 session to the theme of “Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies”.

Social protection systems play an even more crucial role in situations of conflict and fragility, in humanitarian, developmental and political terms. Indeed, in addition to economic and social benefits, well designed social protection systems can further contribute to social cohesion, peacebuilding and state-building in post-conflict periods. The positive impact of social protection systems

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2 Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1).
programs on education outcomes in conflict is also well documented. Moreover, there is a growing concept linking social protection to migrant flows, along with the critical concern of social protection and inclusion of non-national vulnerable populations. Social protection programs adapted to the needs of women can play a significant role in addressing the greater vulnerability they face in conflict situations, such as increased incidence of sexual and psychological violence.

Unfortunately, social protection systems face much greater operational and capacity constraints in contexts of conflict and fragility, which are typically characterized by disruptions in the supply of basic services and multiple deprivations including higher incidence of poverty. Furthermore, social protection interventions in conflict situations tend to fail to assure access to basic social and health services to all vulnerable people in the country. Social protection policies – and indeed the whole concept of social protection – need to be rethought and adapted to the conditions prevailing during situations of conflict and fragility. In particular, there is a need to re-orient social protection towards durable solutions that are comprehensive, flexible enough and ‘mobile’ to address the challenges of people on the move.

Conflicts have been escalating in the Middle East and North Africa region, and since 2015, the region has become the least peaceful region in the world, according to the Global Peace Index. Many Arab countries are affected directly or indirectly by conflict. In 2017, the region was home to around 9 million refugees and 15 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), placing considerable pressures on host governments and communities. Many refugees and IDPs live in conditions of multiple deprivation and absence of adequate protection. Renewed conflicts in some Arab countries over the past few years have pushed populations that were already suffering from multidimensional poverty into an utter humanitarian crisis, with children being particularly affected.

Arab countries are determined to improve the quality of life of their populations and to achieve sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda. During Arab Ministerial Conference in April 2016, Ministers of Social Affairs in the Arab States have considered social protection as a priority for the Arab region. Indeed, there has been a number of positive developments in several Arab countries in this area; However, the extension of social protection floors to vulnerable groups remains a critical regional priority, particularly in conflict affected countries. It is essential, notably in conflict and

conflict-affected Arab countries, to re-design social protection policies in order to enhance their transformative and peacebuilding potential, and to better address entrenched and emerging challenges while leaving no one behind.\textsuperscript{14}

Research on social protection in conflict and conflict-affected Arab states is gaining more interest,\textsuperscript{15} but remains relatively limited, with weak linkages to policymaking and action on the ground. While quantitative and qualitative research with reliable data is an important prerequisite for efficient and effective policymaking and action in all areas, including in the realm of social protection, the research – policy – action link remains weak, notably in the Arab region.\textsuperscript{16} Since 1994, UNESCO, through its inter-governmental Management of Social Transformations (MOST, See Box below) seeks to reinforce linkages between social science research and policy formulation in a comprehensive and coherent manner.

2. Objectives, Thematic Scope, and Outcomes

The overall objective is to launch a regional dialogue between Arab Ministers of Social Affairs, Arab Ministers of Health, UN Agencies, social scientists and other concerned stakeholders on multi-dimensional social protection policies in conflict and conflict-affected countries that best respond to the challenges of the Arab region.

Specific objectives include:

- Exchange best practices on multi-dimensional social protection policies in situations of conflict and instability in the Arab region and other world regions;
- Identify research and policy gaps in the area of multi-dimensional social protection in conflict and conflict-affected countries in the Arab region, and discuss means of strengthening research-policy linkages;
- Discuss possible actions at the national and regional levels to strengthen multi-dimensional social protection systems in the Arab region, and enhance their transformative and peacebuilding potential, for inclusive societies and leaving no one behind in conflict and conflict-affected Arab countries.

The choice of “Multi-Dimensional Social Protection Policies in Conflict and Conflict-Affected Arab States” as the theme of the Forum reflects fully the spirit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of leaving no one behind. This new developmental paradigm has placed the concept of social protection at the center-stage of policy discourse for affluent and developing countries alike.


\textsuperscript{15} In addition to the various references cited above, examples of recent research projects on the topic include and is not limited to:


The theme of the Forum is also responding to the comprehensive MOST Strategy which was endorsed by UNESCO’s Executive Board at its 199th session in April 2016.17

As a result of the Forum, it is expected that Ministries of Social Affairs and Ministers of Health in the Arab States will develop a strong engagement to review their national multi-dimensional social protection policies, in collaboration with social scientists and other concerned stakeholders. Ministers or their representatives are expected to adopt a **Joint Ministerial Declaration** highlighting the identified challenges and suggested recommendations for strengthening multi-dimensional social protection policies in conflict and conflict-affected Arab countries.

It is suggested to present the outcomes of the Forum during a side-event to be organized during the Commission on Social Development’s 2019 session, which will focus on social protection policies, thus contributing to South-South and South-North knowledge exchanges.

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**Box. What is MOST and what are MOST Ministerial Forums?**

Launched in 1994, MOST (Management of Social Transformations) is UNESCO’s intergovernmental science programme on social transformations. MOST works with governments, social and human science communities and civil societies to improve connections between research, policy and practice, connections that are key to positive social change. MOST supports countries to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, with particular focus on its social pillar, notably the eradication of poverty, inclusive and sustainable responses to environmental change, women empowerment, and the promotion of inclusive, effective and accountable governance.

MOST Ministerial Forums constitute a main pillar of the MOST programme. They provide:

- A space for regional dialogue at ministerial level on regional and national social policy, and with the participation of social scientists and other stakeholders, particularly the UN system and civil society;
- A platform enabling the exchange of experiences and successful practices in national policies on the theme of the forum;
- Opportunities for co-production of knowledge through presentations by, and discussions among, several key stakeholders;
- Opportunities to identify research gaps needed for social policies;
- Opportunities to influence international debate and policy formulation.

MOST Forums typically result in the adoption of a Ministerial Declaration with policy recommendations related to the theme of the Forum and supported by research findings.

Twenty-three regional and sub-regional MOST Ministerial Forums have been organized since 2001 in different parts of the world. More than 200 Ministers and Ministerial representatives have so far participated in the MOST forums. In the Arab region, two MOST ministerial forums have been organized to date. The first was hosted by the Government of Morocco in Marrakech in 2007 on the theme of “Social Policies”. The second Forum was hosted by the Government of Jordan in Amman in 2008 on the theme of “Corporate Social Responsibility for Development”.


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3. **Format and proposed agenda**

The Forum will be co-organized by the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science in the Arab States – Cairo Office and the League of Arab States (Social Sector) on the 4th of December 2018 in Sharm El-Sheikh – Egypt, from 9:30 to 12:00 am (Hyatt Regency Hotel).

Participants will include Arab Ministers of Social Affairs or their representatives, Arab Ministers of Health or their representatives, UNESCO and UN agencies’ representatives, researchers, and civil society.

**Simultaneous interpretation** between Arabic and English will be provided.

The agenda of the Forum is expected to include the following:

- Opening statements (Council of Social Affairs, Council of Health, Governor of South Sinai, LAS, UNESCO);
- Presentations by UNESCO, WHO and other UN organizations;
- Interactive discussion on multi-dimensional social protection policies in conflict and conflict-affected Arab States, with focus on social and health issues;
- Discussion and adoption of Ministerial Declaration.