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***Sustainable Development Goals and External Shocks in the MENA region:***

***From Resilience to Change in the wake of COVID-19***

ERF 27th ANNUAL CONFERENCE

May-June, 2021| Online

ERF annually holds a highly visible conference that concentrates on issues relevant to economic policy in the region. This flagship event draws on the contributions of senior policy makers, high profile academic researchers as well as referred open call papers to promote region-wide and international knowledge and evidence-based development and public policy debates and mentorship of promising researchers.

The ERF Annual Conference, a tradition maintained since 1995, has become the premiere regional event for economists of the Middle East, where new ideas are created and disseminated; where the community of researchers meet and where excellence is celebrated. Established in 1993, ERF was created to build strong research capacity in the region. It was one of the first, if not the only, institutions to connect economic researchers from across the region.

 The Arab Fund has been gratefully generously sponsoring the ERF Conference for some 18 years. Thanks to this un-wavered commitment, ERF has been able to successfully deliver against its core mission and continue to convene this flagship event.

This year the conference is held under the theme of “*Sustainable Development Goals and External Shocks in the MENA region: From Resilience to Change in the Wake of COVID-19”.* This is a timely topic in the light of the significant political, social and economic transformation in the region.

There will be three main plenary sessions and three special panels, which will feature world-renowned economists, social scientists and policymakers and the results of three major projects recently completed. The conference sessions will feature a larger number of diverse papers across cross-cutting themes selected on the basis of rigorous refereeing process in response to an open call for papers. Following the last special panel, a closing plenary session will celebrate winners of what has become a regional certificate of excellence: The Best Paper Award.

**Conference Theme**

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic represents an unprecedented shock for the world economy. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) described this shock as the "Great Lockdown" that will reduce global GDP by 3% in 2020. In addition to this, oil prices have reached the lowest record in modern history. With the pandemic sweeping across the oil-rich Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the latter has to face two concomitant shocks. Obviously, the response to these two external shocks cannot be dissociated from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While several MENA countries were making a relatively good progress in these goals, they will have now to re-organize their priorities and adopt active economic and social policies at both the short and the long-term horizons.

Indeed, given the transformational nature of the current period, the future will chiefly depend on how countries of the region will adjust their policies and strategies, and on how they respond under their respective constraints. Both active stabilization policies (targeting the short term) and structural ones (aiming at changing the structure of economies in the long run) will have to be adopted. Such policies, and consequently research priorities will differ depending on the country characteristics in the MENA region. The latter can be divided into groups of countries with relatively close features: the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, countries with political unrests, countries with internal or external conflicts, and the other middle-income countries. Despite the significant interdependences between their economies, these groups have become more distinct than in the past, and the impact of the shocks is likely to make them diverge even more which requires different policy responses when it comes to SDGs.

More specifically, with the pandemic and lower oil prices, economic growth will be negatively affected, hence poverty rates (SDG1), social protection and inequalities (SDG10), even hunger (SDG2), are likely to increase. This slowdown will also exert a negative impact on demand, production and thus job creation (SDG8 and SDG9). Moreover, with various countries in some kind of lockdown, while many scholars assume that this will be beneficial for the environment at least in the short term (SDG7, SDG13 and SDG14), carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere are still at high levels.

At the human capital level, the COVID-19 raised also several questions in terms of education and health. First, at the education one, schools, public and private universities moved to e-learning. It is important to analyze to what extent the long-distance learning is efficient (SDG4) and feasible with limited technological infrastructure in MENA countries. Second, the pandemic has made clear many of the problems facing the countries health care system in particular equipment, trained staff and infrastructure (SDG3).

Therefore, regional and multilateral collaboration (SDG17) is clearly required to curb the negative effects of these shocks. This can be justified by the need to accelerate the development to new COVID-19 diagnostics and vaccines and to help countries overcome its negative effects (such as the rapid financing instrument provided by the IMF).

**Main Questions:**

Against this background, and since every crisis brings opportunities, the conference, through plenary sessions and panels, will feature world-renowned economists, social scientists and policymakers in order to discuss the following questions:

1. For how long and how deep the impact of these unprecedented shocks is going to be? What will be the medium and long run effect, especially with regards to SDGs?
2. For the post-COVID19 period, how national policies have to be adjusted in order to re-prioritize development goals and make the economies more resilient in the short term and more developed in the long term? How to manage the tradeoff between deeper stabilization as a short-term requirement with optimum resource allocation as a long-term goal?
3. At the social level, how will the MENA region combine finance stabilization programs that are often accompanied by targeted short-term relief for a few of the vulnerable people with more systemic long-term solutions?, and, in view of the shrinking fiscal space and looming debt burden, how much support could be expected from the regional and international development communities for MENA and other developing regions?
4. The underlying issue to all of the above is what will be the emerging role of the state in response to the changing technological and regulatory capacities that are likely to shape the economic policy making in the aftermath of Covid-19?

**Plenary Sessions – effective Monday 17 May, 2021**

**Plenary 1: A Global Economic System in Turmoil: What is at Stake for the MENA region?**

While the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a severe economic crisis and recession at the world level, there is a higher-than-usual degree of uncertainty related to recovery. This is particularly more pronounced for the Middle-East and North Africa (MENA) economies that are more dependent on oil exports and have a lower fiscal space. Thus, with decreasing oil prices, these two external shocks are likely to have a deep and long-lasting effect on the MENA countries and will put a halt on their progress in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Therefore, this first plenary session will discuss several questions related to these shocks:

1. First, for how long and how deep the impact of these unprecedented shocks is going to be? What will be the medium and long run effect, especially with regards to SDGs?
2. What are the main challenges faced by the MENA region to move forward despite this uncertainty?
3. How the world will look like in the post-COVID-19 era? What will be the role of MENA region?

**Date and Time**: **Monday 17 May @ 4:00 pm**

Session Chair and Moderator: [*Prof. Samir Makdisi*](https://erf.org.eg/affiliates/samir-makdisi/)*, Chairman, ERF Board of Trustees*

Welcome Remarks: [*H.E. Dr. Ibrahim Elbadawi*](https://erf.org.eg/affiliates/ibrahim-elbadawi/)*, Economic Research Forum*

Keynote Speaker: [*Dr. Mahmoud Mohieldin*](https://erf.org.eg/affiliates/mahmoud-mohieldin/)*, Executive Director, IMF & ERF*

Panelists: [*H.E. Dr. Hala Elsaid,*](https://mped.gov.eg/DynamicPage?id=73&lang=en) *Minister of Planning, Monitoring and*

 *Administrative Reform, Egypt*

[*H.E. Mr. Bader AlSaad*](https://www.daimler.com/company/corporate-governance/supervisory-board/al-saad.html)*, Arab Fund for Economic & Social Development – TBC*

[*H.E. Dr. Rola Dashti*](https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/profiles/rola-dashti)*, UN-ESCWA (TBC)*

[*H.E. Dr. Ibrahim Elbadawi*](https://erf.org.eg/affiliates/ibrahim-elbadawi/)*, Economic Research Forum*

[*Dr. Kamiar Mohaddes*](https://erf.org.eg/affiliates/kamiar-mohaddes-3/)*, University of Cambridge & ERF*

**Plenary 2: Social Protection, Inclusion and Inequality: A Pipeline of Policies**

The adverse impact of the current economic shocks on vulnerable categories is particularly acute. These categories include, but not limited to, poor, women, youth, low-paid jobs, informal and irregular workers and working poor. Thus, both the pandemic and oil prices will not only imperil the significant progress made in reducing extreme poverty and achieving SDGs, but will increase inequality levels that are already surpassing Latin America and other regions in the Global South. Moreover, it is worthy to note that the current economic model adopted by MENA countries is characterized by two main features that amplify their weakness. First, they chiefly rely on services, construction and oil, that have a limited value-added and low potential for job creation. Second, with regard to vulnerable people, stabilization programs are often accompanied by targeted short-term safety nets. As a consequence, this economic model failed: on the one hand to generate sufficient and decent jobs and on the other to have a pipeline of social policies with more comprehensive long-term solutions.

Hence, this third plenary session will address the following questions.

1. How Arab governments can change their sectoral specialization to create more decent and less precarious jobs?
2. At the social level, how will the MENA region combine finance stabilization programs that are often accompanied by targeted short-term relief for a few of the vulnerable people with more systemic long-term policies?
3. To what extent universal social protection is feasible in the Arab world? How to sustainably finance this universal social protection while most of these economies register high levels of informality?

**Date and Time**: **Monday 24 May @ 4:00 pm**

Session Chair and Moderator: [*Dr. Noha El-Mikawy*](https://erf.org.eg/affiliates/noha-el-mikawy/)*, Ford Foundation & ERF*

Keynote Speaker: [*Prof. Martha Chen*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martha_Chen), Harvard Kennedy School – TBC

Panelists: [*H.E. Dr. Mary Kawar*](https://erf.org.eg/affiliates/mary-kawar/) – TBC

[*Dr. Zahra Ali*](https://www.lse.ac.uk/middle-east-centre/people/zahra-ali)*, London School of Economics*

[*Dr. Sami Atallah*](https://erf.org.eg/affiliates/sami-atallah-2/)*, Economic Research Forum*

[*Prof. Touhami Abdekhalek*](https://erf.org.eg/affiliates/touhami-abdelkhalek-3/)*, National Institute of Statistics*

*and Applied Economics & ERF*

**Plenary 3: Political economy challenges to diversification strategies**

Panelists will interrogate the possibilities of reforms that increase productivity, create jobs, and allow for a progressive diversification of the economy, in an environment characterized by fiscal tightness and popular unrest. What is the 2020s version of reforms with a human face for the various parts of the MENA region? Can markets but not the polity be liberalized, as in the 1990s? What formulae can be considered in the various political environments, and should they be of the big bang of gradual type?

**Date and Time:** **Monday 31 May @ 4:00 pm**

Session Chair and Moderator: [*Baroness Minouche Shafik*](https://www.lse.ac.uk/about-lse/meet-the-director), Director LSE & ERF; TBC

Panelists: [*Dr. Ishac Diwan,*](https://erf.org.eg/affiliates/ishac-diwan-3/) *Paris Sciences et Lettres & ERF – The*

*2020s vs the 1990s*

 [*Dr. Mustapha Nabli*](https://erf.org.eg/affiliates/mustapha-nabli/)*, North Africa Bureau of Economic*

*Studies (NABES) & ERF -* on the Maghreb

[*Dr. Omar Razzaz*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omar_Razzaz)*, former Prime Minister, Jordan -* on Jordan and Lebanon

 [*Dr. Nader Kabbani*](https://erf.org.eg/affiliates/nader-kabbani/)*, Brookings Doha Center & ERF – on*

*the Gulf*

**Special Session – Meeting with the ERF Managing Director**

**Date and Time:** **Monday 7 June @ 4:00 pm**

* Setting the ERF Future Research Agenda
* Participating in ERF Network Services

***Placeholders to develop with Principle Project Investigators***

**Special Panel 1 – The Impact of COVID-19 on Middle Eastern and North African Labor Markets**

**Principal Investigator:** *Ragui Assaad*

**Date and Time:** **Thursday 27 May 4:00 pm**

**Chairman & Moderator:** *May Gadalla, ERF Data Manager*

**Panelists:** *Ragui Assaad; Mohamed Ali Marouani; Caroline Krafft - TBC*

**Special Panel 2 – Conflict and Post Conflict Economic Reconstruction Agenda**

**Principal Investigators:** *Samir Makdisi & Raimundo Soto; Semih Tumen & Tilmen Brook;*

*Ahmed Ghoneim*

**Date and Time:** **Thursday 10 June 4:00 pm**

**Chairman & Moderator:** *TBD*

**Panelists:** *TBD*

**Special Panel 3 – Digital Transformation and Implications for Growth, Employment, Poverty and Inequality in the Arab Region**

**Principal Investigators:** *Mustapha Nabli & Shahrokh Fardoust*

**Date and Time:** **Wednesday 7 July 4:00 pm**

**Chairman & Moderator:** *Shahrokh Fardoust - TBC*

**Panelists:** *TBD*

**Conference Papers & Sessions – effective Tuesday 18 May**

ERF conference papers are subject to a carefully designed two-staged refereeing process, in which papers are selected on competitive basis to ensure the topic is timely, relevant and of interest to the region, research is built on a robust research methodology, paper is of policy relevance. Total number of submissions amounted to 156, of which 75 papers have been selected and subjected to stage two of the refereeing, of which 55 papers are under final consideration for presentations as listed in Annex 1. Upon final confirmation, the conference agenda will be set up according and the calendar of the webinars developed.

The plan is to convene related webinars effective week commencing Monday 17 May. The conference webinars will all be held and completed by July 7, 2021. Webinars will be shared on social media for further outreach and will be recorded and archived for reference on the ERF You-Tube Channels and ERF conference page on the ERF website, e.g. [ERF 26th Annual Conference](https://erf.org.eg/events/erf-26th-annual-conference-sustainable-development-goals-sdgs-as-a-framework-for-menas-development-policy/). A full conference agenda is currently being prepared to be circulated soon.

**Annex 1. Conference Submissions (subject to final confirmation)**

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| **Theme**  | **Papers & Number of Papers Accepted** |
| **Macro**  | **Total Number of Papers (6)*** On the Economics and Politics of IMF Lending: Where Does the MENA Region Stand?
* Banks’ performance amid oil price shocks: Empirical evidence from GCC countries
* Indirect Effects of a Large-Scale Cash Transfer Program for Refugees
* The effect of COVID-19 lockdown and the subsequent re-opening on consumption in Iran
* Monetary-Fiscal Policy Interactions during Uncertainty Shocks: Evidence from Egypt
* Impact of tax reforms in micro-simulated models: which functional forms should be chosen for the demand system and how should it be estimated? An application for Morocco
 |
| **Finance**  | **Total Number of Papers (8)*** Market Power, Spread, Switching Costs and their Relationship: The Case of MENA Banking System
* Favoring the small and the plenty: Islamic banking for MSMEs in an Emerging Market
* Survival of the Fittest: A Natural Experiment from Crypto Exchanges
* Hedging in gold and stock markets with basis risk for MENA countries: evidence from the spectral approach
* L’inclusion financière et la stabilité macroéconomique : Cas de la région MENA
* Oil, Monarchies, and Bank Concentration: Evidence through the 2008 Global Financial Crisis
* Financial Integration, Inclusion, and Stability during Crises: Insights from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region
* Are Negative Yields Good for The Economy?Implications on MENA Countries with Heavy Public Debt
 |
| **Trade**  | **Total Number of Papers (5)*** On the Political Economy of Trade Agreements: A De Jure and De Facto Analysis of Institutions
* Worth the pain? Firms’ exporting behaviour to countries under sanctions
* Tunisia’s trade with Sub-Saharan Africa: large room for growth?
* Potential Effects of the EU’s Border Carbon Adjustment Mechanism on Turkish Exports to the EU Market: An Input-Output Analysis
* Trade Vulnerability to External Shocks: the Tunisian case
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| **Labor**  | **Total Number of Papers (8)*** Trade unions, wages and inequality in the Middle East: Longitudinal evidence from Egypt
* The Impact Of Primary School Construction On High School Attainment & Labor Force Participation
* Impact of Fertility on Female Labor Supply in Algeria
* Wages and wage inequality among vocational secondary graduates in Egypt formal and informal areas
* Lives versus Livelihoods: Who can work from home in MENA?
* Overeducated employment in developing countries: Evidence from the Egyptian labor market 1998-2018
* Incentives and Exit Behavior from Unemployment Insurance in Turkey
* Between hope and despair: Egypt's Arab Spring and migration intentions
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| **Economic Growth** | **Total Number of Papers (5)*** Capital Flight, Political Stability and Economic Growth in MENA Countries
* Envois de fonds, gouvernance et croissance économique dans les pays MENA: Une analyse en données de panel.
* Economic Entrenchment and Growth Impediments in Jordan
* Are GCC countries qualified to move for industrialization to achieve sustained Growth? Analytical Framework in the context of present Challenges
* The externality from public housing projects: the case of Mehr project in Iran
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| **Natural Resources (Food Supply & Climate Change)**  | **Total Number of Papers (5)*** COVID-19 and Food Security in MENA Countries: Challenges or Opportunities?
* Risk perception and determinants in agrifood small & medium-sized enterprises amidst the COVID-19 pandemic: Evidence from Egypt
* Assessing the Impact of the Southeastern Anatolia Project on PKK Recruitment
* The Impact of Rural Electrification on Female Empowerment: Evidence from Rural Iran
* Long-term Macroeconomic Effects of Climate Change: Evidence from MENA
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| **Inequality** | **Total Number of Papers (3)*** Gender and multidimensional poverty in Tunisia: An individual based Approach
* Wage Inequality Dynamics in Turkey
* Inequality of Opportunities in Access to Basic Services among Children in Host Communities in Jordan and Lebanon: A Comparative Analysis
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| **Education** | Total Number of Papers (2)* Do Educational Mismatches Influence Job Satisfaction & On-The -Job Search In Algeria?
* The Impact of Twin Shocks on Education Financing and Learning Outcomes in Sudan
 |
| **Health**  | **Total Number of Papers (4)*** Estimation of Reliability Index For Pandemic Policies in Tunisia
* Policy Responses, Behavioral Change, and Pandemic Containment: Evidence from COVID-19
* High rate of C-section & its consequences for the timing of birth
* Maternal scholling & female gentile cutting : Evidence from a natural experiment in Egypt.
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| **Political Economy & Conflict** | **Total Number of Papers (9)*** Civil Conflict and Exchange Rate Misalignment: Evidence from MENA and Arab League Members
* How Does Political Risk Matter for Foreign Direct Investment into Arab Economies?A Gravity Model Analysis
* Economic, Social, and Institutional Determinants of Domestic Conflict in Fragile States
* Testing the external shock narrative of the conflict impact on transition towards knowledge economy in Syria.
* Corruption: A Brutal Enemy of Economic Diversification in MENA Oil Exporters
* The Arab Spring: A New Dividing Line of (Dis-)Trust and (Un-)Fairness
* Humanitarian aid at scale: how do unconditional cash transfers impact refugees?
* The Gender Gap in Political Participation: Evidence from the MENA Region
* Revisiting the Politics of Discontent in the Arab World
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