

THIRD ANNUAL REGIONAL POLICY FORUM

THE FUTURE OF WORK AND SOCIAL PROTECTION IN THE ARAB REGION



Beirut, Lebanon
(Hybrid / English - Arabic
interpretation available)



February-12-2026
9:00 A.M - 6:00 P.M Beirut Time



ISSAM FARES INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC
POLICY & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
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Arab Reform Initiative



Arab Region Hub
for Social Protection

The world of work is undergoing profound and rapid transformations driven by global trends such as the green transition and de-carbonization, digitalization and the expansion of the digital economy, and the continued implementation of neoliberal economic policies – all of which are interconnected. In the Arab region, these trends are interacting with pre-existing vulnerabilities, conflict and fragility, and structural imbalances, leading to labor market shifts, eroding social protection systems, and deepening multidimensional inequalities. These shifts are evident in how jobs are being created, lost, displaced, and redefined; in the widening gap between high- and low-skilled workers; and in the rising informality and precarity of employment. They are therefore shaping the contours of access to social protection by affecting its financing, adequacy, coverage, and sustainability.

The most affected are vulnerable and marginalized social groups, including those characterized by lower skills, poor education, mobility difficulties, and less access to jobs, telecom infrastructure and technology because of digital divides. People facing additional barriers to entering the labor market and those traditionally excluded from formal social protections are likewise disproportionately affected. The livelihoods and wellbeing of informal and precarious workers, rural populations, youth and older persons, segments of women and LGBTQ+ communities, migrants, refugees, displaced persons, and people with disabilities are therefore put at stake. As transitions unfold, these social groups, which largely intersect, risk falling further behind unless reforms ensure that social protection systems are universal, adaptable, and effective.

In this context, the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI)'s [Social Protection Program \(SPP\)](#), this year in partnership with the [Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs \(IFI\)](#) at the American University of Beirut (AUB), is organizing its third Annual Regional Policy Forum to unpack the implications of the Future of Work (FoW) for social protection systems and subsequently vulnerable populations in the Arab region. The Forum will explore the policy reforms needed to safeguard social security and decent work in light of the three major and interacting drivers of change – the green transition, digitalization, and neoliberalism – while examining how they interact with structural issues like conflict, displacement, and fragility. It will offer a space to reflect on successful international experiences that could help find tangible and feasible solutions and guide national strategies.

The Forum will bring together researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and activists to assess emerging trends, share lessons learned, and collectively envision a rights-based and inclusive approach to work and social protection in the region. The needs vulnerable groups will be central, and discussions will feature the latest research findings from ARI, partners of the SPP's [Arab Region Hub for Social Protection](#), members of the [Global Campaign for the Right to Social Security](#), as well as independent civil society actors at large.

Simultaneous interpretation in Arabic and English will be available in-person and online.

Forum's Agenda

(Set to Beirut time)

9:00-9:15

WELCOME AND REGISTRATION

(refreshments served)

9:15-10:00

OPENING SESSION:

Welcoming Remarks
Keynote Speeches

10:00-11:15 **PANEL DISCUSSION 1:**

A Green and Just Transition: The Impact of the Energy Shift and De-carbonization on Labor Markets and Social Protection Systems

This session will explore how the global shift toward green economies and de-carbonization is impacting employment and social security in the Arab region. While the green transition offers potential for new job creation, it also poses risks of job displacement in traditional energy sectors and in energy-intensive industries. The session will examine how related shifts interact with technological advancements and neoliberal reforms, namely labor market flexibilization, deregulation and liberalization, privatization, and austerity; how they disproportionately affect already vulnerable groups; and how they create new forms of vulnerabilities. Panelists will mainly investigate the impact on social protection systems as a channel and will discuss the social protection policy reforms that are required to ensure a just and equitable transition.

11:15-11:45 **Coffee Break**

11:45-13:00 PANEL DISCUSSION 2:

Digitalization and the Digital Economy: Risks and Opportunities for Decent Work and Inclusive Social Protection

This panel will analyze the labor market disruptions and opportunities arising from digitalization and the enlargement of the digital economy. From automation and AI to platform-based and gig work, digitalization is reshaping employment relations and labor market choices and dynamics. Vulnerable groups, such as agricultural workers, underprivileged women, persons with disabilities, migrants, and rural communities, face higher barriers to access digital infrastructure and skills. Panelists will explore how these changes interact with the green/ energy transition and neoliberal policies, contributing to increased precarity, informality and non-standard forms of work, and weakening social protection systems and their financing models. They will propose ways to counter the anticipated socioeconomic impact of rapid digital transformations through more inclusive and equitable social protection.

13:00-14:00 Lunch Break

14:00-15:15 SPECIAL TECHNICAL SESSION 1:

Education and Labor Market Transformations

This session will look at education's role in labor markets and social protection systems – beyond direct channels like the issue of skills mismatch. It will connect education to employability and wages, exploring how inequitable and inadequate education systems produce low-skilled labor, limit decent work opportunities, and are correlated with poor social protection. In doing so, the session will also challenge the link between vulnerability and low skills.

SPECIAL TECHNICAL SESSION 2:

Vulnerabilities and Intersectionality

This session will unpack how overlapping forms of marginalization and vulnerability shape people's access to work and social protection amid current labor market shifts. It will challenge mainstream debates that often treat “vulnerable groups” as a single, homogenous category, exploring how these different groups are affected in distinct and intersecting ways. It will emphasize the fluidity of vulnerability and the need to think beyond gender-essentialist narratives.

15:15-16:30 SPECIAL TECHNICAL SESSION 3:

Data and Methodology

Addressing gaps in reliable labor and social protection data in the Arab region, this session will reflect on bridging research and policy, data transparency, and methodological innovations. It will delve into the strengths and weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research methods, proposing techniques that can optimize the use and results of various tools to produce evidence that can best inform effective policy reforms for a better Future of Work.

16:30-17:00 Coffee Break

SPECIAL TECHNICAL SESSION 4:

Disability and Care Work

Focusing on persons with disabilities, as one of the impacted vulnerable groups, especially those with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and looking at gaps in labor markets and social protection/care systems, this session will tackle stigma-related issues in the world of work, highlight regional success stories, and offer feasible solutions to curb exclusion as well as rights-based alternatives that can rather promote equity and social justice.

17:00-18:00 CLOSING PLENARY SESSION:

The Path Forward: Success Stories and Lessons Learned from Global Experiences

This session will offer a dynamic and interactive conversation in which the special session rapporteurs will reconvene, alongside global experts to highlight key takeaways from their sessions, focusing on successful experiences from both the Global North and Global South in navigating the Future of Work while advancing universal, adaptable, and shock-responsive social protection systems. The discussion will highlight inclusive models that effectively addressed the differential impact on vulnerable populations and catered to their specific needs. It will explore how Arab countries can adapt such strategies to their contexts, considering the challenges and opportunities to that, and the importance of integrating the needed social protection reforms within a broader socioeconomic vision that can create jobs, guarantee decent work, and protect everyone from income insecurity and life/ life-cycle contingencies.

Closing Keynote Address