



Report from the in-person meeting of the Mutual Mentorship Program (MMP)

Summary

In May 2025, the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa held a two-day in-person meeting in Amman, Jordan—the third gathering of the Mutual Mentorship Program (MMP). The event brought together 35 mentors from Europe and the MENA region to foster dialogue across generations and cultures. (See attached programme).

The two-day meeting created a “brave space” for open, respectful conversations rooted in mutual exchange, storytelling, and lived experience. The gathering aimed to break down generational and regional silos, promote mutual learning, and build lasting connections. Mentors shared their expertise through mini-TED talks and moderated sessions on topics such as the green transition and water cooperation, EU-MENA institutional relations, youth participation, peace and security, disarmament, and intercultural dialogue. The meeting concluded with participants presenting joint project ideas and reaffirming the MMP as a unique platform for collaboration. The Institute’s Director underscored the importance of continuing this momentum ahead of the final meeting in November, celebrating the creation of honest, forward-looking conversations.

Detailed Report

On May 19th – 21st the Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa (SDI) hosted an in-person meeting for the participants of the Mutual Mentorship Program (MMP) – *Between Europe and the MENA Regions and Across Generations*. 35 mentors participated in, and partly led, the two-day program.

Day 1

The meeting commenced with opening remarks by Ann Måwe, director of the SDI, who recalled the journey up until this meeting, from program idea to open call, pairing, and the first meetings. Måwe also emphasised the challenging times in both the MENA region and Europe and highlighted the importance of people-to-people dialogue going forward. It was explained

that the program had been tailored after the comprehensive feedback from participants on each step and that the meeting follows Chatham House Rules.

Aseel Sha'ban, Program Officer at SDI and MC for the meeting, walked through the program of the two days and asked participants to write down their expectations for the meeting, and rules for creating a dialogue-conducive environment in the group. Active listening, mutual respect, understanding and co-creation, were among the rules set up, and expectations included sharing experiences and learning from the other, in addition to providing brave spaces for dialogue and exchange of knowledge. This was followed by a round of introductions whereby the mentoring pairs introduced each other.

The meeting continued with a session on the methodology of mutual mentorship titled “Mentorship as a Methodology – A Joint Reflection”, led by MMP members Charles Petrie, Ahmad Kahttoub, Salma Badda, and Edgar Mannheimer. From this session a few key takeaways were:

- Maintain respect at all times. Avoid intentionally misinterpreting others' statements. Instead, ask clarifying questions to ensure mutual understanding.
- Establish clear goals. Mentorship without defined objectives remains merely a conversation.
- Foster generosity by actively including one another in your work and professional networks, and by embracing each other's unique traits and imperfections.
- Remain flexible with your time and open to where discussions may lead.

Adan Anwar, MMP member, then led an interactive quiz focused on EU-MENA relations as an introduction to the next session, “Breaking Silos & Challenging EU-MENA & Generational Narratives”. In this session, mentors were divided into groups to do a “Cross-Generational and Cross-Cultural Reverse Roles Exercise” led by Teresa Pallarés-Ramos, Martin Caforio, Imane Lakbachi, and Carmen Geha. Group leads took responsibility to structure the discussions.

Questions included reflections on interregional and intergenerational learning, such as: what would you like to learn from the other region? And what would you like to learn or take from other generations as individuals? Participants also explored how to counter polarization and misunderstanding between the two regions, as well as addressed common stereotypes associated with both older and younger generations. Discussions highlighted justice as a fundamental basis for dialogue on climate change from both EU-MENA and intergenerational perspectives. While there is often disagreement on the definition of justice within the climate sector, there is broad consensus on what constitutes injustice, making it a powerful catalyst for mobilization. Participants also reflected on the younger generation's frustration and distrust toward inherited systems and emphasized the global nature of the issue as an opportunity for cross-regional cooperation. Additionally, the need to foster proximity and break down barriers at both the people-to-people and political levels between the EU and MENA was underscored. The significant potential of the diaspora in Europe to raise awareness and generate greater interest in the MENA region was also recognized as a key asset.

In the afternoon, six MMP members held mini TEDtalks followed by Q&As within their area of expertise. Anders Jägerskog held a talk about water issues in the MENA region in the context of climate change and the green transition, which discussed both problems, good examples, and potential for solutions. Building on regional perspectives, Ajwad Maskari spoke on youth engagement and participation, providing a Gulf perspective on the issue and highlighting shifts in mindsets within the younger generation. Continuing the theme of cross-regional understanding, Manal Ataya gave a talk on cultural cooperation across regions, emphasizing the importance of museums and cultural institutions in expanding perceptions and promoting better understanding between Europe and the MENA region. Ruby Haji Naif followed with a talk and quiz on the environmental nexus and peace & security, focusing on Syria, which illustrated the gendered effects of insecurity and the role of women in peace and security. Further exploring regional dynamics, Fotini Zarogianni addressed EU-MENA relations, with a focus on intercultural dialogue and the Pact for the Mediterranean. Finally, Dina Tawfiq concluded with a talk on disarmament and non-proliferation, particularly addressing the cultural reproduction of proliferation narratives.

Martina Berglund, Deputy Director of SDI summed up the day with a few takeaways. Participants then shared a dinner in Mar Yohanna, an Italian restaurant and project initiated by the church to create jobs for migrants. During the evening, Erna Stintzing, intern at the SDI led an EU-MENA quiz.

Day 2

The second day started by external activities focused on culture, expression, and storytelling. The external activities included a visit to Darat al Funun, an art space dedicated to uplifting contemporary Arab artists, stimulating critical discourse and artistic exchange, and researching, documenting and archiving Arab art. While one group was at Darat al Funun, the other joined artist Alaeddin Rahamneh from Underground Amman for a street art tour giving context to the state of culture, expression, and thought in Amman and beyond. Both groups convened at Beit Sitti in Jabal al Weibdeh for a dynamic cooking class which involved learning how to cook traditional Jordanian dishes.

After lunch, the participants returned to the Residence for a session on storytelling convened by Martina Berglund. MMP members Mohamed Abdel Dayem, Salah Bounouh, Hadeer S. Dahab, and Salma Badda led one group each in the thematic areas of: peace and security, sustainable development, inclusive participation, and EU-MENA relations. At the end of the session, the leader of each group presented key parts of the discussions, displaying a variety in approaches and discussion points across the thematic areas.

Wrapping up the meeting, Aseel Sha'ban held a session which invited participants to reflect on the program and the outcomes from the two days. Participants were asked what they saw as the strengths of the program, and what they found as the Institute's added value. Highlights included creating a strong network, working beyond pairs — as a group, building on each other's expertise as well as providing a unique platform that fosters connections between the EU and MENA regions, and covers a wide range of thematic areas. Sha'ban asked participants to keep these things in mind as they started the final session of the meeting, dedicated to the mutual mentor-pairs to work on their collaborative projects to be developed together until the end of the program in November. Projects included but were not limited to:

- A project to promote the idea that health is the most important human right by telling untold stories and examining how technology and artificial intelligence can be leveraged to find solutions in this field.
- A joint exploration of how to facilitate art exchanges between Europe and the MENA region, and how that can be utilized to create a more unified region.
- A project aimed at documenting alleged human rights violations in Syria, with the intention of sharing the findings with relevant authorities and institutions.
- A two-pair project within the energy and water nexus, aiming to ensure that information from academia reaches practitioners.
- Work on the new pact for the Mediterranean and a potential panel discussion during the November conference.
- An ambition to create a toolkit for promoting and facilitating dialogue across generations and cultures, based on the site of the museum and public space in cities, and enabling/improving the mobility of artists and cultural practitioners.
- A draft for a research paper on psychological warfare and nuclear warfare, with Iran as an example.
- An EU-MENA policy brief and cross-regional workshop on climate and youth engagement.
- A project inspired by the MMP but for a larger crowd across Europe and MENA.

Director Ann Måwe closed the meeting by thanking participants for their active contributions to the programme. She was also encouraged by the "brave spaces" mindset and frank discussions that participants had created during these two days. The projects presented by the pairs would constitute building blocks for the continued development of the programme.

Building on this and going forward, Måwe encouraged participants to keep up their mentoring meetings and continue contributing to the planning ahead of and during upcoming online meetings, as well as the next and final physical meeting in November. She thanked everyone involved in organizing the programme, including SDI staff.