

Report from the Third Mutual Mentorship Programme (MMP) Meeting:
Enhanced Learning Through Shared Perspectives

The third meeting of the Mutual Mentorship Programme (MMP) 2026, and this year's programme's first in-person gathering, was held in Stockholm on 19–20 May 2026 under the theme "*Enhanced Learning Through Shared Perspectives*". The 2026 MMP cohort consists of 50 participants from Europe and the MENA region, including the Gulf. The Stockholm meeting convened nearly the full cohort for two days of dialogue, peer exchange, comparing narratives through storytelling, policy engagement and a practical workshop on AI.

Day 1

Comparing narratives across Europe and the MENA region through storytelling

A central part of the first day focused on comparing narratives from Europe and the MENA region through storytelling as a tool for dialogue in times of polarisation. The themes covered were peace and security, migration, climate change, cultural relations, the inclusion of women, the inclusion of youth, and AI for Good. The session built on the previous online meeting, where Dr. Brian Palmer, social anthropologist and scholar of religion at Uppsala University, had delivered a mini session on storytelling techniques. Dr. Palmer briefly presented key elements from that session, including the importance of specificity, lived experience, narrative detail and active listening, before participants moved into thematic group-based storytelling exchanges.

The session invited participants to share stories on several thematic areas, including peace and security, migration, climate change, cultural relations, the inclusion of women and youth, and AI for Good, where relevant in the context of Europe–MENA relations. Participants worked in smaller groups and were encouraged to focus on lived experience, active listening and reflective exchange.

The thematic exchanges generated several reflections on EU–MENA relations. In **the peace and security group**, participants focused on the human consequences of war, conflict and forced displacement, alongside concerns about the weakening of the rules-based international order. **The migration group** highlighted the need for more humane and balanced approaches that recognize the experiences and contributions of people on the move. **Climate discussions** emphasized the need for joint action combining resources and expertise with local knowledge. In **the cultural relations group**, participants stressed that meaningful cooperation required cultural sensitivity and respect for the complexity of different histories and identities. The importance of documenting and preserving cultural heritage in conflict-affected countries was also highlighted. **Discussions on the inclusion of women and youth** focused on the social and cultural barriers women face in pursuing opportunities equal to those of their male peers, and the importance of recognizing these challenges as an ongoing reality across both regions. Participants also highlighted the need to create meaningful spaces for young people to take initiative, contribute to dialogue and influence decision-making. **AI**

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for Good was identified as a promising area for responsible EU–MENA co-creation, grounded in ethics, local knowledge and regional ownership.

The storytelling approach emphasized the importance of specificity, detail, and human experience. Rather than speaking only in abstract terms, participants were encouraged to identify concrete examples, individual experiences and moments that could make broader political and social questions more tangible. The session also highlighted the importance of narrative structure, timing, delivery and ethical awareness when using people's experiences in public communication.

A key message from the storytelling workshop was that powerful stories are not invented but found. Participants reflected on how personal narratives can help bridge polarized debates, create empathy and open space for more nuanced policy conversations. The exercise also helped participants identify common ground across regions, while acknowledging different political, social and professional realities. Drawing on the thematic discussions, participants formulated eight questions to guide their exchange the following day with Mikael Lindvall, Political Director for Global Affairs at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Day 2

Meeting with the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Participants met with Mikael Lindvall, Political Director for Global Affairs at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, for a discussion on Europe and the MENA region in a changing geopolitical landscape. The meeting created a two-way exchange between the MMP cohort and the Ministry. Participants gained insight into Swedish and European engagement with the MENA region, while the Ministry had the opportunity to hear reflections from a diverse group of young and mid-career professionals from both regions.

During the exchange, participants raised questions on regional stability, Syria, migration, climate change, youth participation, women's rights, AI for Good, and Sweden's role within the EU. Several interventions emphasized the need to move beyond short-term, security-driven approaches to the MENA region. Participants underlined that sustainable stability requires long-term peacebuilding, good governance, human rights, inclusive institutions, local ownership and gradual reform.

In relation to Syria, participants asked how Sweden and the EU could ensure that renewed engagement remains value-based and linked to national dialogue, reconciliation, accountability, minority inclusion and diaspora engagement. The discussion also touched on Sweden's broader credibility as a principled actor, including how Swedish and European positions on Palestine, international law and trade relations are perceived in the region.

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Youth participation, women's rights and AI for Good were also raised as key areas for deeper EU–MENA cooperation. Participants stressed that young people should move from being consulted to being meaningfully involved in decision-making, including through more structured mechanisms such as an EU–MENA Youth Advisory Council linked to the MMP network and its alumni. They also asked about concrete measures to support women's economic participation and female entrepreneurship, as well as how Sweden could develop responsible and mutually beneficial AI-focused cooperation with the MENA region.

Overall, the discussion connected the programme's thematic priorities to current foreign policy questions and demonstrated the value of creating direct channels between policymakers and emerging voices from Europe and the MENA region.

In response, Lindvall situated the issues within Sweden's broader foreign policy and EU cooperation, highlighting both the opportunities and constraints shaping engagement with the MENA region. He acknowledged the relevance of the themes raised and stressed the importance of continued exchange between policymakers and professionals from both regions.

AI for Good in practice

The second day opened with a hands-on workshop on “*AI for Good in Practice — EU–MENA Cooperation*”, led by Dr. Mona Demaidi, AI expert, entrepreneur and women's rights advocate. The workshop focused on how artificial intelligence can be used as a tool for public good in conflict analysis, policy development and responsible innovation. Participants were introduced to practical ways in which AI can support early warning, stakeholder mapping, scenario modelling, evidence synthesis and policy option generation.

Rather than treating AI as a purely technical topic, the session framed it as a question of governance, leadership and regional co-creation. A central message was that leaders from the MENA region and Europe should not be passive consumers of AI systems, but active co-creators of AI-supported solutions to shared regional challenges.

Participants worked with prompt engineering tools, including the R-C-T-O framework: Role, Context, Task and Output. They explored how clearer instructions can improve the quality and relevance of AI-generated analysis, and how AI can support policy work when used critically and responsibly.

The session also addressed governance tensions linked to AI, including the balance between innovation and regulation, data sovereignty and cross-border cooperation, speed and safety, and the risks of reproducing bias or excluding local knowledge. Participants discussed the need to integrate ethical reflection and responsible design into any AI-supported policy process.

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Visit to the Swedish Parliament

As part of the Stockholm programme, participants visited the Swedish Parliament. The visit provided an opportunity to learn more about parliamentary work in Sweden and to situate the MMP discussions within a broader institutional, democratic and party-political context.

The guided tour was followed by a lunch meeting with members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs: Alexandra Völker, Olle Thorell, Johan Büser and Azra Muranovic (Social Democratic Party); Stefan Olsson and Margareta Cederfelt (Moderate Party); Håkan Svenneling (Left Party); Jacob Risberg (Green Party); and Magnus Berntsson (Christian Democratic Party). A general invitation had been extended to all political parties represented on the Committee, with these five parties represented by those who were able to attend.

Participants were seated in mixed groups to encourage direct exchange between the cohort and the elected representatives. The conversation provided space to discuss Europe–MENA relations, international cooperation, parliamentary engagement and current geopolitical developments.

The visit was particularly valuable in connecting the people-to-people dimension of MMP with institutional dialogue. It gave participants an opportunity to bring regional and professional perspectives into conversation with Swedish political actors, while also deepening their understanding of Sweden's parliamentary system and international engagement.

Concluding remarks and way forward

The Stockholm gathering marked an important milestone in the 2026 MMP journey. It deepened relationships within the cohort, strengthened the link between personal narratives and policy dialogue, and introduced practical tools for responsible AI-supported cooperation. The meeting also demonstrated the added value of combining structured workshops, institutional meetings and informal exchange. Through storytelling, AI practice, parliamentary engagement and dialogue with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, participants were able to connect individual experiences to broader questions of Europe–MENA cooperation.

Looking ahead, the insights from the Stockholm meeting will inform the next stages of the programme, including continued bilateral mentorship meetings, upcoming online sessions, the second in-person gathering in Amman, and possible participation in SDI's Annual Dialogue Forum. The cohort will be encouraged to carry forward the themes, questions and relationships developed in Stockholm, and to continue contributing to a more reciprocal, inclusive and future-oriented dialogue between Europe and the MENA region.