

Mutual Mentorship Program – Sixth Meeting Report

Background and Purpose

The sixth meeting of the 2025 Mutual Mentorship Program (MMP) was held virtually on 14 October 2025 and focused on the theme “AI & Cybersecurity Through Cross-Sector and Cross-Generational Dialogue in the EU–MENA Region.” The session explored how artificial intelligence (AI) and cybersecurity are reshaping peace, human security, and societal resilience across Europe and the Middle East and North Africa.

The discussion took place amid rapid technological developments, heightened geopolitical tensions, and the growing influence of digital ecosystems on diplomacy, public trust, and conflict dynamics. Participants examined ethical, regulatory, and data-related challenges linked to AI, while also reflecting on its potential contributions to humanitarian action and peacebuilding. A recurring emphasis was placed on the need for stronger regional representation in global AI systems and closer cooperation across sectors and generations.

The session featured expert contributions from Dr. Mona Demaidi (Vice President of AI, Arab American University in Palestine), Adan Anwar (doctoral candidate at the Swedish Defence University and KTH), Victoria Lind Smith (lawyer specializing in cybersecurity and AI ethics), and Felicia Fazzi (business developer and private-sector strategist).

Key Messages

A central takeaway from the session was the critical importance of representation. Current AI models insufficiently reflect Arabic-language data and region-specific realities, resulting in structural biases and limiting their usefulness for peace and security efforts in the MENA region. Participants stressed that without locally grounded data, AI risks reinforcing existing inequalities rather than mitigating them.

AI and cybersecurity were also discussed as strategic domains in their own right. Influence operations, disinformation, and perception-based threats increasingly shape geopolitical environments, shifting security concerns from physical infrastructure toward narratives, trust, and information integrity. In this context, resilient information ecosystems and cybersecurity were identified as essential components of regional and international stability.

Responsibility for ethical AI development was widely seen as shared. Governments, private companies, academia, civil society, and international organizations all have roles to play in shaping accountable and transparent innovation. Ethical principles, clear governance frameworks, and public trust were highlighted as prerequisites for sustainable technological progress.

Inclusion emerged as a cross-cutting theme. Ensuring that women, youth, and older generations have meaningful access to digital tools and literacy is vital for strengthening resilience and avoiding deepened inequalities, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

Despite significant challenges, participants recognized AI's positive potential. When guided by ethical frameworks and supported by local data, AI can contribute to humanitarian response, early warning systems, risk mapping, and community-based peacebuilding.

Discussion Highlights

AI Bias, Data Gaps, and Underrepresentation

Participants raised concerns about the persistent lack of Arabic-language and MENA-specific data in global AI models. Examples from conflict-affected contexts, including Sudan, illustrated how biased or incomplete systems can undermine humanitarian response and informed decision-making. Strengthening regional datasets and building local expertise were identified as urgent priorities.

Governance, Regulation, and Accountability

Diverging views emerged regarding responsibility for AI governance. While some participants emphasized the role of governments in setting standards and raising awareness, others highlighted the importance of private-sector accountability, international legal frameworks, and informed consumer demand. There was broad agreement on the need for clearer principles on ownership, verification, and responsible innovation, particularly given increased private-sector investment in AI.

Information Ecosystems and Strategic Influence

AI was seen as accelerating both information and disinformation flows, amplifying risks to public trust. Participants noted that contemporary security threats increasingly target perceptions rather than territory, underscoring the importance of digital literacy, psychological resilience, and trustworthy information environments across the EU-MENA region.

Humanitarian and Peacebuilding Applications

Concrete examples demonstrated how AI can enhance human security, including landmine risk reduction, satellite-based disaster analysis, early flood forecasting, disease outbreak prediction, conflict mapping, and digital learning initiatives in contexts such as Gaza. These cases illustrated AI's potential when deployed responsibly and with appropriate safeguards.

Inclusion, Access, and Human Oversight

Limited digital infrastructure in parts of the MENA region, including Yemen, continues to constrain participation in the digital space. Participants stressed the importance of human oversight in AI-driven decision-making, protection of intellectual property, and the meaningful inclusion of women, youth, and underrepresented groups. As one participant noted, “AI is our newborn — we teach it our values, and it becomes what we raise it to.”

Looking Ahead

Participants identified several priorities for strengthening an inclusive and secure AI ecosystem across the EU–MENA region. These include advancing shared ethical and regulatory frameworks, expanding Arabic-language and region-specific AI models, building regional capacity, and promoting cross-generational digital literacy. Keeping human security at the center of technological development and strengthening cooperation among policymakers, academia, civil society, and the private sector were seen as essential next steps.

The Swedish Dialogue Institute thanked participants for their active engagement and looks forward to continuing the dialogue at the upcoming in-person MMP meeting in Amman on 25 November 2025.