



Swedish Dialogue Institute
for the Middle East and North Africa

Annual Report 2026

Covering June 2025 – June 2026

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Introduction

The Swedish Dialogue Institute for the Middle East and North Africa is a Swedish diplomatic mission based in Amman, Jordan with a general mandate to foster dialogue between Europe and the Middle East & North Africa. It does so through conferences, seminars, workshops and roundtables on various prioritised and timely topics engaging representatives of government, academia, civil society, and the private sector from both regions. Activities result in positive Swedish visibility in building and deepening cross-regional connections, as well as in concrete ideas and recommendations on how to deepen these ties, owned and taken forward by participants.

The reporting period (June 2025 – June 2026) was marked by turbulence across the MENA region.

In particular, the United States- Israel -Iran war launched in February, and its extensive spillover effects across the Levant and the Gulf impacted planning, execution and opportunities for dialogue. Its course of action has highlighted the lack of comprehensive solutions to the region's protracted conflicts, as well as the absence of regional security arrangements capable of preventing the recurrence of conflict and humanitarian crises. While the war has meant far-reaching security, economic and humanitarian consequences for most countries in the region, disruptions to the Strait of Hormuz and growing risks around Bab el-Mandeb have transformed a regional security crisis into a significant challenge to global trade, energy supplies and food security. What began as a war centered on Iran's nuclear programme, its destabilising role through proxy networks, and the future of the regime evolved into a broader struggle over regional deterrence and, ultimately, control over the security of the region's strategic maritime chokepoints. More broadly, developments in the region point to a trend of global and regional actors turning away from rules-based solutions and international law, not just as relates to the use of force and transit passage, but also in relation to protecting humanitarian staff and non-combatants in conflict. In parallel to this, Syria's bumpy road towards a peaceful and inclusive, political and economic transition has continued throughout the reporting period and has become a priority for international actors, and in particular for Türkiye, the Gulf states, Europe and the US.

Against this backdrop, the Swedish Dialogue Institute (SDI) has continued its core work on deepening EU-MENA relations through dialogue. Applying a flexible approach that corresponds with developments on the ground, SDI has covered a wide range of issues of peace and security, sustainable development, and inclusive participation.

Through high-level roundtables and policy discussions, SDI has brought together European and regional policymakers, experts and civil society actors to examine current developments and generate practical recommendations for regional stability and constructive European engagement. SDI has also facilitated discussions on an inclusive political and economic transition in Syria, addressing potential diaspora engagement and returns. Across these engagements, SDI has expanded its direct engagement with the Arab

Gulf states— namely Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE -and developed partnerships with Gulf-based partners including with the Doha-based Center for Humanitarian Studies, UAE-based Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy, and King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology in Riyadh.

With a continued focus on sustainable development, SDI has sought the opportunity to engage public and private actors alike, providing spaces for cross-sectoral dialogue and cooperation between Europe and the MENA region on issues of climate action and renewable energy. The role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has also emerged as an important cross-cutting theme, with SDI exploring its potential to support sustainable social and economic development, including in societies that have experienced severe conflict and destruction.

The meaningful inclusion of women, youth and other potentially vulnerable groups has remained a priority in all aspects of SDI's work. Dedicated sessions have been arranged on women's economic empowerment, the WPS-agenda, and the role of youth and civil society.

The signature event of the year, SDI's Annual Dialogue Forum, brings together all workstreams under one umbrella. In November 2025, around 160 participants attended the two day forum with six thematic sessions: "EU-MENA relations: a Reflection on Security and Institutional Development amidst Geopolitical Turmoil", "AI and Peacebuilding", "Humanitarian Diplomacy and the Role of State and Non-state Actors", "Comparative Approaches to the Green Transition", "Prospects for an Inclusive Transition in Syria" and "Intercultural Dialogue through Museums, Film and Community Heritage".

Since 2025, SDI organises a Mutual Mentorship Programme between Europe and MENA (MMP). Following an open call, around 50 participants—selected from several hundred applicants—are now engaged in a year-long programme that combines online and in-person meetings. The mentorship pairs focus on topics such as EU–MENA relations, peace and security, AI and peacebuilding, migration management, green transition, as well as intercultural dialogue. As a pilot initiative, the programme is under continuous assessment and may be extended beyond 2026 if evidence shows it to be an effective tool for strengthening EU–MENA dialogue.

Alongside these initiatives, SDI has carried out a wide range of other activities aligned with Swedish and EU's interests. A full account of activities undertaken during 2025–2026 follows below.

Peace and Security

11 September 2025: Roundtable on Regional Developments and EU–MENA Relations

SDI convened a roundtable on regional developments and their implications for EU–MENA relations. The discussion featured Dr. Marwan Muasher, Vice President at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Jordan), Dr. Noha El-Mikawy, Dean of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the American University in Cairo (AUC) (Egypt) and Nadim Houry, Executive Director at Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) (Lebanon), as well as the Heads of EU Delegations, and representatives from the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Commission (EC) and the European Investment Bank (EIB).



Discussions focused on the implications of conflict in Syria, Palestine and Lebanon for EU–MENA relations, and generated recommendations on how the EU should engage to uphold a constructive role regionally and internationally. The roundtable was organised upon the request of the EU Delegation to Jordan and took place on the margins of the EU’s annual regional meeting held in Amman.

21 September 2025: Workshop on an Inclusive Political Transition in Syria

In cooperation with the Swedish International Liberal Centre (SILC) and the Olof Palme International Centre (OPC), SDI convened a workshop bringing together Syrian stakeholders from inside the country and the diaspora to explore pathways towards a peaceful and inclusive political transition. Discussions focused on mechanisms for political participation and inclusion, informed by comparative experiences from South Africa, Sweden and Jordan.



4 May 2026: Roundtable on the Implications of the US–Israel–Iran Conflict for Regional Security and Stability

In conjunction with an official visit to Jordan by Mikael Lindvall, the Director General for Global Affairs at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, SDI brought together regional analysts from leading think tanks in the Middle East, including GCC countries, with the aim to discuss the implications of the war between the United States, Israel and Iran, for the region, assessing both developments domestically in the Levant,



the Gulf region, and Iran, as well as likely trajectories when it comes to security arrangements, regional integration and future alliances.

The roundtable included a candid discussion on the EU's potential role in contributing to regional security and stability. Participants included Dr. Zeidon Alkinani, Head of Programmes at the Qatar Foundation (Qatar); Dr. Bader Al-Madi, Professor of Political Sociology at the German-Jordanian University (Jordan); Dr. Mansour Almarzoqi, Director of the Centre for American Studies at Prince Saud Al-Faisal Institute for Diplomatic Studies (Saudi Arabia); Farah Bdour, Political Analyst at Israel Policy Forum (Jordan), Dr. Ammar Kahf, Executive Director at Omran Centre (Syria); Adnan Tabatabai, CEO of the Centre for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient (CARPO) (Germany-Iran), Dr. Maha Yahya, Director of the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Centre (Lebanon); H.E. Pierre-Christophe Chatzisavas, Ambassador of the EU Delegation to Jordan; and H.E. Hans Grundberg, UN Special Envoy for Yemen. The visit was concluded with a reception at the SDI Director's residence for regional guests as well as Jordanian high-level guests and Jordan-based ambassadors.

8 May 2026: Bologna Peacebuilding Forum Session: *Ending Wars: Challenges and Dilemmas from Ukraine to Syria*

In partnership with the annual Bologna Peacebuilding Forum, SDI convened a session examining what it means to end wars, with a focus on Ukraine and Syria. The discussion explored the difficult trade-offs between short-term security needs and longer-term demands for social justice, accountability and political reform. Speakers reflected on the Ukraine War, defence capacities, societal resilience and laying the groundwork for transitional justice. The discussion also addressed Syria's fragile post-conflict reality, underlying grievances, accountability and support an inclusive political transition. The session brought together contributions from Vyacheslav Likhachev, Specialist at the Centre for Civil Liberties (Ukraine); Sawsan Abou Zainedin, Senior Advisor at the Institute for Integrated Transitions (Syria); Helena Sancho First Secretary Development Cooperation at the Swedish Embassy in Kyiv; and Schams El Ghoneimi, Advisor at the EU Parliament (Belgium).



18 June 2026: Panel on State Actors, the Iran War and Its Multiple Fronts

Organised by the Jordanian Centre for Strategic Studies and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), SDI was invited to moderate a panel named: *State Actors, the Iran War and Its Multiple Fronts*, organised as part of a broader conference on regional security. The session examined rapidly evolving regional developments, including the implications of a memorandum of understanding aimed at ceasing hostilities between the United States and Iran, its potential effects on the Israel-Hezbollah front, and wider security and stability in the Gulf states. SDI's participation contributed to a timely expert discussion on the regional consequences of the conflict and prospects for de-escalation.



Sustainable Development

27 August 2025: Webinar on Cross-Regional Cooperation for Climate Action

In collaboration with the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI), SDI convened a webinar on cross-regional cooperation in addressing climate change. Bringing together representatives from the public and private sectors, civil society and youth, the discussion provided a platform to exchange perspectives and practical examples, and to explore how collective action can support effective climate solutions across Europe and the MENA region. The session featured contributions from Sarine Karajerjian, Programme Director of the Environmental Politics Programme at ARI (Lebanon); Salah Bounouh, Renewable Energy Engineer at Sungy SAS (Algeria); Monia Benbouzid, Director at Clavister (Sweden); and Brendan R. Joseph, Youth Representative to UNESCO (Sweden).



6 November 2025: Roundtable on Scaling Renewable Energy in the Euro-MENA Region

In collaboration with King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST) and the Embassy of Sweden in Riyadh, SDI convened a roundtable on *Scaling Renewable Energy in the Euro-MENA Region* in Riyadh.

Government representatives, innovators and private-sector leaders examined how policy cooperation, technological innovation and cross-regional partnerships could accelerate the green transition. Discussions addressed areas including solar energy and sustainable cities, as well as the MENA region's potential to become a global centre for renewable energy.



Speakers included Dr. Anwar Al-Anzi, Scientific Researcher at KACST (Saudi Arabia), Kristijan Jordanov, CEO of Net Zero Build (Sweden), Jessica Obeid, Founding Partner of New Energy Consult (Lebanon), and Salma Haddad, Programme Director at Flat6Labs (Tunisia).

11 May 2026: Dialogue on Syria's Economic Outlook and Recovery

The roundtable discussion convened by the SDI in Stockholm brought together economic experts, representatives from Swedish companies and government agencies, and Swedish-Syrian diaspora entrepreneurs to discuss prospects for engagement with the Syrian market.

The meeting was introduced by Camilla Mellander, Director General for Trade Policy at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, who outlined the Swedish interest in engaging on the topic. The discussion explored market opportunities and risks, potential support instruments, diaspora entrepreneurship, and lessons learned from other MENA and conflict-affected contexts, with the aim of identifying practical recommendations that could contribute to Syria's economic recovery and development.



8 - 9 June 2026: Discussion on Implementing the EU's Pact for the Mediterranean in the Levant with Local Actors

In collaboration with American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA), SDI convened representatives from the European Union, United Nations agencies, civil society and the private sector for a joint discussion on how the *EU's Pact for the Mediterranean* can be translated from ambition into action across Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine.



The discussions focused on expanding opportunities for decent work, strengthening skills development, supporting entrepreneurship, and fostering inclusive economic growth for youth, women and communities affected by displacement and fragility. The activity also included field visits, which provided a closer perspective on locally led initiatives, reinforcing a key message: "The success of the Pact will depend not only on policy commitments, but also on effective implementation through strong partnerships, local ownership and solutions that are responsive to community needs."

15 June 2026: Fireside Chat on IMEC and the Future of Regional Connectivity

Organised in conjunction with the conference, *Beyond Hormuz: Jordan as an Anchor of Broader Middle East Integration*, this fireside chat brought together a group of senior European and Middle Eastern stakeholders to examine the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) from a geopolitical perspective. The conversation titled: *Navigating Geopolitical Headwinds: IMEC and the*



Future of Regional Connectivity explored IMEC's strategic significance amid regional conflicts, shifting alliances, trade and supply-chain disruptions, and growing competition over regional connectivity. Key themes included the challenges and opportunities facing IMEC, its potential role in fostering economic integration and resilience, and the importance of inclusive regional cooperation in an uncertain geopolitical environment.

Speakers included H.E. Luigi Di Maio, EU Special Representative for the Gulf Region; Rona-Marie Panteli, IMEC Representative (Cyprus); Omar Razzaz, Former Prime Minister (Jordan); and H.E. Pierre-Christophe Chatzisavas, Ambassador of the EU Delegation to Jordan.

Inclusive Participation

10 September 2025: Fourth Meeting of the Women, Peace and Security Working Group in the Arab States

SDI participated in the fourth meeting of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Working Group in the Arab States, held in Abu Dhabi ahead of the WPS agenda's 25th anniversary. Co-
led by the Issam Fares Institute (IFI) and UN Women, the meeting brought together regional peacebuilders, civil society representatives, researchers, policy experts and government officials.



A key outcome was the finalisation of a white paper presenting MENA perspectives and priorities for the UN Security Council Open Debate on WPS. SDI also co-facilitated a session on national action plans, which addressed financing, accountability and the intersection of WPS with climate change.

9 October 2025: Dialogue on Men, Militarisation and Masculinities in the MENA Region

In cooperation with Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), PAX, ABAAD and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and to mark the 25th anniversary of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, SDI convened a discussion on men, militarisation and masculinities in the MENA region, attended by more than 55 participants. Featuring Fidaa Barghouthi, Gender Consultant at Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy (Palestine); Anthony Keedi, Masculinities Technical Advisor at ABAAD (Lebanon); Reem Ghassan, Gender Programme Lead at Peace & Freedom Organisation (Iraq); and Dr. Rahaf Aldoughli, Lecturer in MENA Studies at Lancaster University (Syria).



The session examined how engaging men and challenging harmful gender norms can strengthen regional peacebuilding efforts.

22 October 2025: Building Trust: Youth Stories of Change from Civil Society Organisations

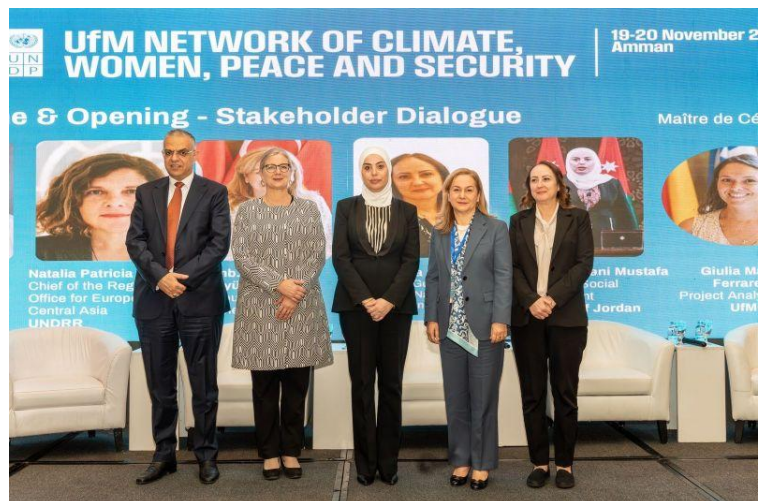
As part of the Anna Lindh Foundation Swedish Network's seventh *Celebrating Our Diversity Forum*, SDI convened a panel titled *Building Trust: Youth Stories of Change from Civil Society Organisations*. The discussion featured civil society representatives, Rashed Alrashed, peacebuilding practitioner and Civil Society Advocate (Syria); Sulaima Ramadan, CEO of Ibtikar for Empowerment and Social Entrepreneurship (Palestine); and Yazeed Al Jeddawy, researcher with Sanaa Centre for Strategic Studies (Yemen).



The panel examined challenges facing civil society in conflict-affected communities, including limited funding, social fragmentation, weak legal frameworks and insufficient coordination. It highlighted the role of youth, local organisations and cross-regional partnerships in building trust, creating safe spaces, advancing advocacy and amplifying local voices through diaspora networks.

20 November 2025: Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Regional Dialogue on Climate, Women, Peace and Security

SDI represented Sweden at the Union for the Mediterranean Regional Capacity Workshop and Stakeholder Dialogue on Climate, Women, Peace and Security, held under the patronage of H.E. Wafa Bani Mustafa, Jordan's Minister of Social Development. The event marked the launch of a regional network and platform addressing the intersection of climate change, conflict and gender inequality.



In her opening remarks, SDI Director, Ann Måwe emphasised the need to translate commitments into strategic action and promote more integrated, inclusive and climate-responsive approaches to peacebuilding.

29 January – 11 February 2026: Media Lunches with Jordan-Based Journalists and Media Professionals

SDI hosted two media lunches in Amman with Jordan-based journalists, editors and media professionals from local, regional and international outlets. The meetings provided an opportunity to introduce the Institute's mandate, listen to media professionals' perspectives on the current Jordanian and regional media landscape, and exchange views on challenges related to media freedom, methodologies of



reporting on regional developments, digital transformation, and the evolving role of artificial intelligence in journalism. The discussions also aimed to strengthen relations with key media actors and explore opportunities for continued engagement with media professionals across the region.

12 February 2026: Online Dialogue on Women's Economic Empowerment and the Role of the Private Sector

SDI convened an online dialogue for the Informal Women, Peace and Security Network under the title *Women's Economic Empowerment: The Role of the Private Sector in Conflict and Non-Conflict Settings*. The session brought together practitioners, experts and network members to discuss how women's economic empowerment and access to the labour market intersect with peacebuilding, resilience and private-sector engagement across diverse contexts.



Speakers included Hala Bugaighis, Founder of Jusoor Centre for Studies and Development (Libya); Tarik Solomon, Chairman of American Chamber of Commerce (United States-Saudi Arabia); Reem Albaghdadi, President of the Jordan Forum for Business and Professional Women (Jordan); and Reem Aslan, Gender Technical Specialist for the International Labour Organisation (Jordan).

The discussion highlighted practical approaches, challenges and opportunities for advancing women's economic participation through inclusive, sustainable and context-sensitive private-sector engagement.

7 April 2026: Online Dialogue: *Give to Gain: Building Alliances Across Faiths to Advance Women's Rights*



This online dialogue brought together voices from across the MENA region and Europe. The discussion examined how meaningful engagement with religious leaders and faith-based actors can advance women's rights in context-sensitive, inclusive and sustainable ways. It reflected on key challenges and opportunities, including misinterpretations of religious texts, discriminatory social norms and traditions, legal gaps, and persistent forms of men's violence against women. At the same time, the discussion highlighted promising entry points for change through dialogue, collaboration, the identification of common ground, engagement with religious leaders to end violence, and advocacy for legal reforms. It also underscored the role of religious institutions in peacebuilding and women's political participation.

Speakers were Dr. Amer Al-Hafi, Academic Advisor for The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS) (Jordan); Dr. Linda Vikdahl Gunséus, Associate Professor, Senior Lecturer and Head of School at Södertörn University (Sweden); Fr. Rifat Bader, General Director of the Catholic Centre for Studies and Media (Jordan); Asmaa Kftaro General Manager at Kftaro EST. (UAE-Syria); and Anthony Keedi, Masculinities Technical Advisor at ABAAD (Lebanon).

8 May 2026: *Empowering Jordanian and Syrian Women Parliamentarians for Dialogue and Inclusive Transition*

Alongside the *Empowering Women Syrian Legislators* workshop in Amman, SDI hosted approximately 20 women parliamentarians from Syria and Jordan for an exchange on legislative leadership, women's political participation and Syria's inclusive transition. The wider workshop was organised by the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA), the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Stabilisation Support Unit (SSU). SDI also led a session on building a women's parliamentary caucus. The activity strengthened connections between Syrian and Jordanian parliamentarians and supported continued cooperation towards an inclusive transition in Syria.



Scoping Missions

1 - 3 February 2026: SDI Visit to Beirut

SDI conducted a working visit to Beirut for bilateral consultations with existing and potential new partners, including United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Carnegie Institute, Issam Fares Institute (IFI), Adyan Foundation, and the Chairman of the SDI's Advisory Committee, H.E. Dr. Nassif Hitti. The purpose of the visit was to take stock of regional and global developments at the beginning of the year to inform SDI's strategic engagement moving forward.



Discussions with counterparts covered a broad range of issues, including EU-MENA relations, regional political dynamics (with a focus on Lebanon and Syria), regional economic recovery, women's economic empowerment, and inclusive citizenship based on civic identity rather than religious or ethnic affiliation.

4 – 5 February 2026: SDI Visit to Damascus

This working visit to Damascus brought together SDI with a broad range of Syrian and international partners across the policy, humanitarian, economic, private-sector and civil-society spheres. The purpose of the visit was to inform upcoming programme activities related to Syria's economic transition and reconstruction, and to explore areas for collaboration with Syrian partners and counterparts.



Meetings included exchanges with the Omran Centre for Strategic Studies, the EU Delegation to Syria, UNDP Syria, Action for Humanity, The Syria Report, Bahar Organisation, Mobaderoon, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, the Swedish Red Cross, DeFacto Platform for Dialogue and Development, and Syrian-Swedish private-sector representatives. Key discussions focused on current political and economic dynamics, recovery and resilience, humanitarian diplomacy, mediation initiatives, women's inclusion, civic engagement, locally driven initiatives, and the role of the private sector and diaspora in supporting inclusive and sustainable economic recovery.

23–24 June 2026: SDI Working Visit to Istanbul and Exchange with Nordic Institutes in the MENA Region



This working visit to Istanbul served to exchange perspectives with Turkish counterparts, Istanbul-based experts and Nordic research institutes on regional developments across the Middle East and North Africa, Türkiye’s role in the region, and issues linked to dialogue, cooperation, peace and security, sustainable development and inclusive participation. The visit included meetings with, among others, Özge Genç, visiting fellow at the Qatar-based Middle East Council on Global Affairs and representatives of the Istanbul Policy Centre as well as other academics. The discussions formed part of SDI’s broader efforts to expand its network, deepen its understanding of Türkiye’s regional perspectives, and explore possible areas for future engagement and cooperation.

The visit also included an exchange with Nordic research institutes based in the region, including the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, the Finnish Institute in the Middle East and the Danish Institute in Damascus. This provided an opportunity to share experiences on institutional mandates, operating models, field presence, research and dialogue work, and possible future cooperation between Nordic actors working on the MENA region.

SDI's Annual Interactive Conference

26 – 27 November 2025: Fourth Annual Interactive Conference



SDI's Annual Interactive Conference brought together approximately 160 participants from 35 countries, including policymakers, diplomats, researchers, civil society representatives, practitioners and members of the Mutual Mentorship Programme, for two days of exchange on shared priorities across Europe and the MENA region.

The first day examined the evolving political and security landscape of EU–MENA relations, alongside the implications of AI and digital transformation for peacebuilding.

Interactive sessions encouraged participants to exchange perspectives, identify common ground and develop new connections across sectors and regions. An intercultural evening featured an address on the importance of interactive dialogue, the presentation of diplomas to participants in the Mutual Mentorship Programme 2025 and cultural performances celebrating the diversity of the attending community.

The second day featured parallel discussions on humanitarian diplomacy and the roles of state and non-state actors; comparative approaches to the green transition; prospects for an inclusive transition in Syria; and intercultural dialogue through museums, film and community heritage. Across these discussions, participants examined common challenges facing Europe and the MENA region and considered practical responses related to governance, peacebuilding, emerging technologies, sustainability and social inclusion.



Mutual Mentorship Programme (MMP)

The Mutual Mentorship Programme (MMP) is an SDI initiative that brings together emerging and established professionals and practitioners from Europe and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Participants were matched in cross-regional, cross-generational and cross-sectoral pairs, with each person serving as both mentor and mentee. This reciprocal model promotes mutual learning, professional exchange and lasting connections, while encouraging participants to explore shared challenges and opportunities across the two regions.

The programme combines pair-based collaboration with thematic meetings, expert contributions, workshops and in-person gatherings. During the reporting period, SDI concluded the 2025 cycle and launched the 2026 programme. The latest cycle attracted more than 700 applications, from which 50 participants were selected to form 25 mentorship pairs. Together, these activities supported people-to-people cooperation and dialogue across sectors, regions and generations.

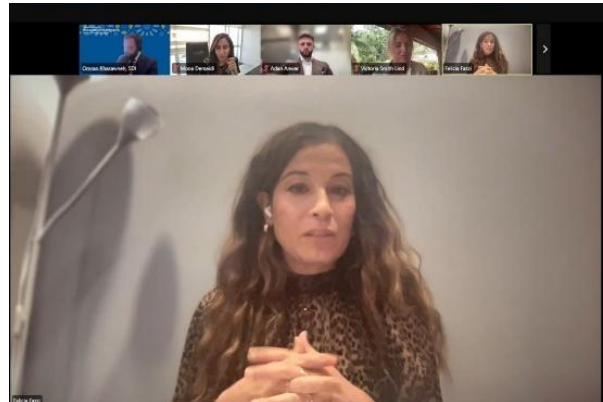
17 September 2025: 5th Mutual Mentorship Programme (MMP) 2025 Meeting on the Green Transition



The 5th meeting of the MMP 2025 explored the green transition through cross-sectoral and cross-regional dialogue between Europe and the MENA region, it included contributions from Sarine Karajerjian, Programme Director of the Environmental Politics Programme at ARI (Lebanon), as well as MMP 2025 participants, Anders Jägerskog (Sweden) and Kareem Ayman Nour (Egypt). These interventions addressed the urgency of climate action, water diplomacy, green fuels, youth leadership and the role of public-private partnerships in advancing sustainable change.

19 October 2025: 6th Mutual Mentorship Programme (MMP) 2025 Meeting on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Cybersecurity

The 6th meeting of the MMP 2025 examined the intersection of AI, cybersecurity, peace and cross-generational cooperation in the EU-MENA region. The session featured contributions from Dr. Mona Demaidi, Vice President of AI and Director of International Relations at Arab American University (Palestine) and three MMP 2025 participants from Sweden: Adan Anwar, Victoria Lind Smith and Felicia Fazzi. The discussion translated complex technological challenges into practical considerations, including strengthening personal cybersecurity and promoting the ethical and responsible use of AI in professional settings.



25 November 2025: 2nd In-Person of the Mutual Mentorship Programme (MMP) 2025

The 2nd in-person meeting of the MMP 2025 was held in Amman. Participants took part in collaborative workshops, project presentations and interactive discussions aimed at strengthening dialogue and partnerships between Europe and the MENA region.

The programme also included a participant-led workshop, reflections on the future of the MMP network and an evening reception with external stakeholders. The meeting concluded a year of mutual learning, exchange and cross-regional collaboration.



4 March 2026: Launch of the Mutual Mentorship Programme (MMP) 2026

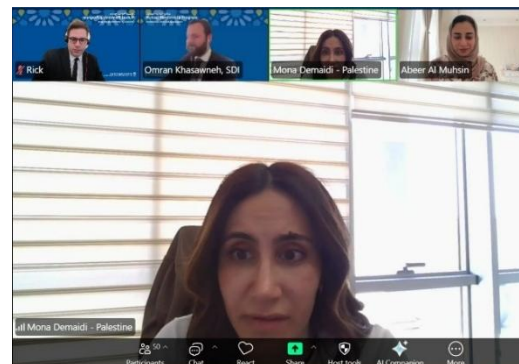


The 1st meeting of the Mutual Mentorship Programme (MMP) 2026 marked the official launch of 2nd edition of the programme, bringing together 50 participants from Europe and the Middle East and North Africa for a year of exchange, collaboration and cross-regional learning.

The meeting featured an expert panel under the theme: *EU–MENA in Focus: Opportunities and Challenges for Euro-Mediterranean and EU–GCC Cooperation*, with contributions from Dr. Noha El-Mikawy, Dean of the School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the American University in Cairo (AUC) (Egypt); Patrick Costello, Special Advisor at Kofi Annan Foundation (United Kingdom); Dr. Ahmed A. Sager, Vice President of the Gulf Research Centre (Saudi Arabia); Fotini Zarogianni, Research Officer at the Anna Lindh Foundation, and former MMP 2025 (Greece); and Salma Badda, President of the Mediterranean Youth Council, and former MMP 2025 (Morocco). The discussion explored current dynamics shaping cooperation between Europe and the MENA region, while participants also introduced their co-mentors and began building relationships across the cohort.

26 April 2026: 2nd Mutual Mentorship Programme (MMP) 2026 Meeting: *The Pact in Practice: II.3. Digital Infrastructure and Cybersecurity, with a Focus on AI for Good*

The 2nd meeting of the MMP 2026 examined the risks and opportunities associated with AI and its responsible use in support of positive change. Dr. Maja Fjæstad, Expert Coordinator at the Centre for Health Crises at Karolinska Institutet (Sweden), and Dr. Mona Demaidi, Vice President of AI and Director of International Relations at Arab American University (Palestine), contributed perspectives on AI policy, ethics and responsible innovation, while Dr. Brian Palmer, Social Anthropologist and Scholar of Religion at Uppsala University (Sweden), introduced human-centred storytelling. Participants also reflected on their work in pairs and their experience of the programme’s mutual mentorship model.



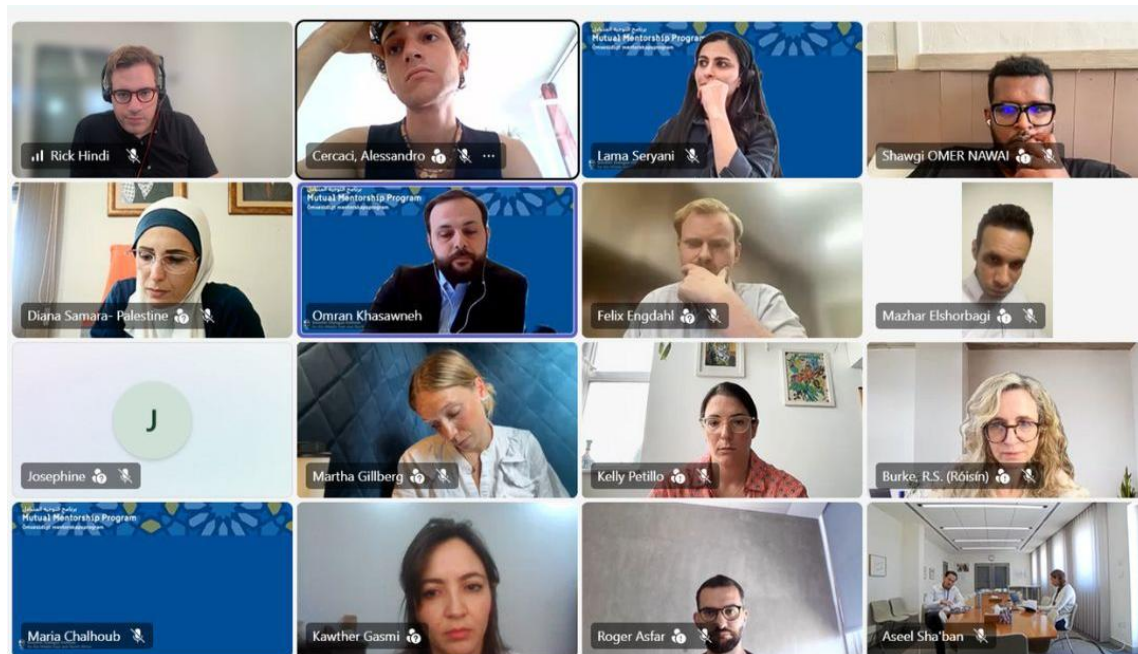
17 – 21 May: 3rd Mutual Mentorship Programme (MMP) 2026 Meeting in Sweden



The meeting was held in Runö and Stockholm, bringing together the cohort for two days of dialogue, peer exchange and practical learning. Internal sessions explored narratives of development in Europe and the MENA region, as well as the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in strengthening EU–MENA cooperation. Participants also reflected on their mentorship partnerships and exchanged perspectives drawn from their respective professional and regional contexts.

The external programme provided participants with opportunities to engage directly with Swedish institutions and policymakers. The cohort visited the Swedish Parliament for a guided tour and an introduction to Sweden’s democratic institutions, followed by a lunch with members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. Participants also met with Mikael Lindvall, Political Director for Global Affairs at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, for a two-way exchange on Swedish and European engagement with the MENA region amid a changing geopolitical landscape.

18 June: 4th Mutual Mentorship Programme (MMP) 2026 Meeting on *Migration Management and Lived Realities*



The meeting's title and focus were *Migration Management and Lived Realities*; it explored current EU–MENA policy frameworks, including the *EU Pact on Migration and Asylum*, and the *Pact for the Mediterranean*, and reflected on how migration governance is shaped through cooperation between Europe and the MENA region.

The discussion addressed migration categories and legal frameworks, external partnerships, transit-country realities, responsibility-sharing, border procedures, return, protection and implementation challenges.

Contributions were provided by Justin MacDermott, Deputy Regional Director Operations in the MENA Regional Office (IOM); Kelly Petillo, MENA Programme Manager at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR); and MMP 2026 participants, Balkees K. Mgadami (Libya) and Martha Gillberg (Sweden).

The conversation underscored the importance of informed dialogue on one of the most complex issues in EU–MENA relations, involving policy needs, legal obligations, regional cooperation, operational realities and the lived experiences of people on the move.