

Call for Abstracts

Land and property rights in the Middle East's contemporary conflicts

Project theme

The visible manifestations of armed conflicts are typically those that appear most urgent to resolve once the violence abates. But beyond the destruction and human suffering, conflicts also cause initially less visible repercussions that can profoundly change the structure of and social relations within affected societies. While the physical rehabilitation of civilian infrastructure and homes becomes the focus of post-conflict reconstruction activities, underlying practical and regulatory issues around housing, land and property (HLP) remain difficult to resolve. However, contested HLP issues – often complex and subtle in nature – entail lasting grievances in society and pose a primary obstacle to sustainable peace and reconciliation processes.

Different parties to the conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya – be they governments, extremists or opposition groups – have been purposefully manipulating aspects of the land and property rights system for strategic ends, creating facts on the ground that will be difficult to reverse after the fighting has ended. Apart from widespread physical destruction, conflict-affected populations in the region are confronted with looting and unlawful property occupation by others, informal and coerced transactions, property confiscation, lost documents, destroyed or manipulated registration records, uncertain property ownership, and so on.

Military-strategic considerations behind HLP violations during conflict intersect with economic intentions for the post-conflict phase. The real estate and construction sector typically absorbs the bulk of reconstruction funding, and questions around land and property ownership lie at the heart of its profit-making logic. Likewise, investment law reforms and urban development policies are intimately linked to the nature of the land and property rights system. In the absence of a substantive political transition, however, the risk of the perpetrators remaining in power and using HLP-related policies as a tool to reward their clients and patrons instead of working towards socially-just solutions to economic problems is high.

Research objective and scope

The objective of this research project is to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how the land and property rights systems has been intentionally violated and manipulated in the Middle East's contemporary conflicts. It builds on the premise that addressing HLP issues post-conflict requires a

thorough analysis of its historical and practical complexities in the countries at question, as well as of the ways HLP issues link to socio-economic exclusion, clientelism, and gender equality.

The project brings together research from urban and development studies, sociology, economics and political science. Based on case studies of specific localities, perpetrator groups and HLP aspects, the final publication seeks to highlight how HLP issues relate to the struggle for social justice, and therefore how important it is to position discussions on restitution and compensation mechanisms at the center of the reconstruction debate(s) in the MENA region.

Suggested contributions could, for example, follow a thematic focus at the country level, study HLP violations in a specific locality experiencing armed conflict, look at the interaction between international/transnational actors with local HLP dynamics, or analyse interlinkages between HLP and questions of social justice more broadly.

A (non-exhaustive) list of **questions for possible contributions** in the context of the political economy of HLP in conflict are

- What forms of HLP violations and manipulations have occurred in different localities and to different social/ethnic groups during the conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya?
- What logic do the perpetrators follow in committing HLP violations? And regulatory bodies in initiating HLP policy changes during conflict?
- How were HLP rights governed in the four countries prior to the conflicts, and how have the conflicts altered the legal framework(s) underpinning the land and property rights system(s)?
- In what ways are different segments of the population, and particularly women, adversely affected by HLP violations?

Project framework

Participants are expected to conduct original research and eventually produce a paper of 5,000 – 6,000 words. The collection of papers will be published by FES, in English, in the spring of 2019.

A workshop will be held in late-November in Tunis at which all participating researchers will present the first drafts of their papers, receive feedback from the group, and discuss policy recommendations. Papers can then be revised, before going through an external peer review and editing process.

FES is paying an honorarium to each participating researcher, and will cover the transport and accommodation costs for the workshop in Tunis. Researchers will be asked to sign a Terms of Reference agreement outlining their tasks and responsibilities within the project.

The project is administered by the FES Regional Project on “Economic Policies for Social Justice” based in Tunis (<http://www.fes-mena.org/topics/economic-policies-for-social-justice/>).

Preliminary timeline

8 August 2018	Deadline for submissions of applications (abstract and CV)
17 August 2018	Acceptance notice, Skype calls to discuss research details
3 September 2018	Beginning of project: Development of research outline and

	methodology, data collection, analysis, etc.
11 November 2018	Submission of first draft (3,000 – 3,500 words)
Late-November 2018	1,5-day meeting of all researchers and project team in Tunis
December 2018 – January 2019	Revision and writing of second draft
End of January 2019	Submission of second draft, peer review
February 2019	Finalisation of paper
March 2019	Editing, proofreading, publication

Submission of abstracts

Please send your abstracts (PDF) of max. 400 words including a tentative title, key references, and 3-5 keywords, along with a CV, to hlp@fes-mena.org. Enquiries on the project and application process can be directed to the same address.

Applications are open for independent researchers and analysts, and we particularly encourage PhD students and Post-Doc researchers to apply.

Deadline for submissions of abstracts and CVs is 8 August 2018.