



## The Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights

“Social Protection in (post)Covid MENA” project

### The Right to Housing Call for Proposals

#### Context: the “Social Protection in (post)Covid MENA” project

Social protection is broadly defined as a pillar of state-led social policy. It consists of programs and mechanisms that aim at supporting individuals and households to face economic risks and consequent exposure to vulnerability and poverty throughout the life cycle. The discussion of social protection and related toolkits is based on socio-economic indicators that define forms of response varying from health insurance to labor market regulations and so on. These responses mainly focus on the most vulnerable groups as defined by the state and include direct and indirect cash subsidies and the conditional provision of some basic services such as health and education. With the persistence of socioeconomic crises and their local, regional, and global interconnectedness, including the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a growing consensus on the limits of such programs and approaches and the need to rethink key notions to set new grounds for the debate. Emerging arguments advocate for a rupture with dependency-based schemes and the establishment of mechanisms that would enable individuals from thriving in dignity beyond elite-based definitions of their needs and vulnerabilities. Indeed, these definitions fail to guarantee genuine opportunities of economic independence from the state aid rationale and do not address the root causes of vulnerability as an entry point to social justice.

To pinpoint but one aspect of the debate, the promotion of state-led support as partly offering “free access to services” to the destitute is one of the many shortcomings of the overall rationale of social protection. It implies that the commodification of health, for example, is an unquestioned fact and it discursively negates health as a human right by promoting it as “a service”. This applies to other rights such as education and housing. In this regard, data collected from a survey initiated by the FTDES<sup>1</sup> showed that 93% of respondents consider the current social protection toolkit in Tunisia inefficient and unsustainable. Equally, almost 82% of respondents agreed that a better approach should be built on a comprehensive, cross-categorical, flexible, and adaptable social protection policy that goes beyond economic indicators to embrace and guarantee rights and freedoms indiscriminately.

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<sup>1</sup> conducted between April and June 2021. Total number of respondents: 545.

In this context, and as part of its membership in the “Arab Hub for Social Protection” created to work on the “Social Protection in (post)Covid MENA”<sup>2</sup> research project, The FTDES seeks to participate in a rights-based comprehensive debate around social protection, and social policies more broadly, by shedding light on different related aspects while considering the imminent and future consequences of the pandemic on social and economic rights. The FTDES invites researchers to submit proposals that adopt a critical outlook and address public policies to generate evidence-based recommendations destined to policymakers, social actors, and the public sphere at large.

## Introduction to the topic

The topic is dictated by the context of the Covid-19 pandemic that shed light on the right to housing as a central question, especially under measures such as lockdowns, schools’ closure, remote work, and the consequent transformations of daily habits and their shift from public to exclusively private spaces. These measures exposed disparities on uncountable levels, including housing conditions, access to and quality of basic services (electricity, water, internet, etc.), and the unequal financial burdens between tenants and landlords, etc. In recent months, cases of eviction and harassment of tenants, especially migrants, were documented in addition to forced displacements of individuals and families due to their incapacity to meet the financial burdens of rent amid inflation and as their revenues decrease. These cases do not summarize all the consequences of the exclusion of the housing question from public policies and the state-led management of the pandemic. They do, however, reveal a structural failure to guarantee a basic right and the need to examine root causes and not to address such cases as isolated and ‘quantitatively insignificant’ and hence provide mere surface-scratching solutions.

The FTDES is pleased to open a call for proposals on **the right to housing** as a pillar of social justice. Applicants are invited to define the main question of their proposals freely with consideration of the following entry points:

- the paper could be a general introduction to the right to housing in Tunisia (from a legal, historical, sociological, economic viewpoint) in the context of the pandemic and considering current public policies and the social role of the state, and/or its visualization in the post-pandemic, and post-July 25<sup>th</sup> context, from a state-society perspective

and/or

- the paper could focus on one specific aspect (e.g. presence of the right to housing in social movements/demands, urban transformations and inter- and intra-regional mobility, the link(s) between the right to housing and the right to land, the commodification of housing, the right to housing and state response to the pandemic, housing and the political economy of the real estate sector, etc.) with consideration of a form of vulnerability (be it pre- or post-pandemic) such as the situation of the homeless, migrants and refugees, victims of domestic violence, the elderly, etc.

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<sup>2</sup> Link to the project’s platform <https://arabsocialprotectionhub.net/en/>

## Eligibility Criteria

The FTDES urges *all Tunisian researchers and social scientists* to submit their proposals, and encourages:

- Young and early career researchers including graduate students enrolled in Tunisian universities and Tunisian students currently pursuing their graduate studies abroad
- Proposals with an interdisciplinary approach
- Qualitative or mixed research methods
- Gender-sensitive approaches
- Proposals for papers that aim at issuing recommendations addressed to policymakers, social actors, and the public sphere at large

Interested applicants can also form **research groups** of three members maximum and submit collective applications (one co-authored proposal / paper per group).

If selected, researchers are expected to commit to the following:

- Coordination and collaboration with the Forum's Research Department throughout the research process
- Deadlines (to be communicated with further details at a later stage)
- Full knowledge of and commitment to research ethics
- Excellent language proficiency. The researcher is free to choose English, Arabic, or French for writing and communication throughout the process. The FTDES will ensure the translation of the paper's final version for dissemination purposes
- Non-disclosure of data and findings before completion and publication of the paper by the FTDES

The final version of the paper should not exceed **20 pages**, excluding the bibliography.

## How to apply

Applicants are invited to send the following documents **by November 30, 2021**:

- **A proposal** (2000 words) that states the main question/argument of the paper and how it will be approached/discussed (theoretical framework, methodology, etc.) along with a provisional list of key references.
- **A résumé / CV**
- **A writing sample**: samples can be extracts from published or unpublished work (link to an article, contribution to a report, introduction of a thesis, abstract of a research paper, etc.). This item is optional and could be replaced by a research portfolio (listing of previous research works).
- Applications / proposals that include **field research** as relevant to the paper's question/argument should provide a tentative **budget** in addition to the documents listed above. The budget should clearly state field research methods to be used and

related human and material resources. The FTDES will ensure financial support to conduct field research as well as logistical support if/when needed.

- Only one proposal per applicant / research group is accepted.
- Applications from research groups should include one CV and one writing sample per group member, and one co-authored proposal per group.
- Review and selection of proposals will be conducted by FTDES team members in consultation with the Forum's partners from the Tunisian academic realm and members of the scientific committee of the Arab Hub for Social Protection.
- Applications should be submitted to the FTDES via **the following email address:** [recherche@ftdes.net](mailto:recherche@ftdes.net)
- Email subject: **SPP - Application - RTH**
- 🕒 Deadline to submit: **November 30, 2021**
- 🕒 Start date: upon reception of notification from the FTDES
- 🕒 End date / Final submission: **three months** from start date