

AULA MEDITERRÀNIA INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH SEMINAR

The 10th Aula Mediterrània Interdisciplinary Research Seminar took place in the historic building of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans (IEC) on 24 and 25 February 2025. Organised by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), with the involvement of the [Union for the Mediterranean \(UfM\)](#), and the collaboration of 17 Master's Degree programmes, this year's event commemorated the 30th anniversary of the Barcelona Process (1995) by fostering dialogue and debate in a convulsive time for the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Aula Mediterrània, the interuniversity programme promoted by the IEMed, has over the years become a meeting point and a reference space for the study and understanding of the Mediterranean and the Arab region. Its core mission is to foster academic research and understanding of Mediterranean affairs while promoting the international exchange between academic institutions. By bringing together influential scholars, specialists, and professionals in Mediterranean studies, the initiative offers participants the chance to engage with academic networks.

With more than 60 speakers, this tenth edition aimed to consolidate the Aula Mediterrània Interdisciplinary Research Seminar as a reference space in the development of the Euro-Mediterranean agendas of academic cooperation and research in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Moreover, it facilitated the exchange between academics and research groups to identify those instruments, programmes, and methodologies that allow the Mediterranean to be strengthened as an object of research, to position it in the academic programmes, and to promote collaborations in European projects.

The second day of the Seminar was devoted to the thematic sessions organised by the Master's Degree programmes of Aula Mediterrània and to the promotion of

interdisciplinary research in the Mediterranean to facilitate the dissemination of renewed ways of looking into the Mediterranean, and better deal with the extremely complex issues that currently affect it.



From left to right: Senén Florensa, Teresa Cabré, Lorena Elvira and Joan Borrell during the Aula Seminar welcoming remarks

Welcoming remarks

“The Mediterranean Sea can be both a bridge and a wall for those who live around it.” With this sentence Teresa Cabré, President of the IEC, opened the welcoming remarks of the 10th Aula Mediterrània Interdisciplinary Research Seminar. This “bridge” is based on collaboration in terms of research and higher education, as well as the flow of students between Mediterranean universities, not only to share perspectives but also to promote cultural exchange in times of exclusionary populism and Islamophobia. Conversely, the “wall” represents the obstacles that hinder the northward movement of migrants fleeing socioeconomic crises and violence in Africa. The preponderance of either of the two versions of the Mediterranean depends on everyone that lives on its shores and relies on the institutions and initiatives that strive for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, such as the IEMed and the UfM.

Senén Florensa, Executive President of the IEMed, outlined how these last three decades have been turbulent, with the failure of peace processes between Israel and Palestine, the terrorist attacks of 2001, and the authoritarian shift towards the far right in several European countries. In response to these new challenges, “Barcelona més que mai” (Barcelona more than ever) is a motto that exemplifies the pride of the Barcelona Process.

Following Florensa's speech, Joan Borrell, Deputy Secretary for Higher Education and Research of the UfM, highlighted the symbolic significance of 2025, which marks 30 years since the Barcelona Process, 10 years of the Aula Mediterrània project, and 15 years since the founding of the UfM, to deliver a critical assessment of the achievements and challenges of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation since 1995.

Mr. Borrell offered two remedies: to situate PRIMA as the top Mediterranean priority, to increase its resources, and to establish a Euro-Mediterranean university alliance

Mr. Joan Borrell evaluated the success of the UfM department he leads: research and higher education. To do so, he used the metaphor of “yin and yang”, associating the positive side with research, and the negative with the area of higher education. [Horizon](#) programmes in Israel, Tunisia, and Egypt have yielded significant results in data collection. He also described the [PRIMA \(Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area\) project](#) as “a success story in itself.” With a budget 10 times greater than that of the UfM, it serves as a major instrument for achieving real cooperation, particularly in agriculture and water, its two priority areas. In contrast, he admitted that the last ministerial-level meeting on higher education took place in 2007, meaning that there has been no dialogue on the subject for nearly 20 years.

He warned that the “generous European Union will not be there forever” and stressed that “we must defend the UfM if we want it to remain a key player in North-South dialogue.” He proposed reorganising the UfM’s working methods over the next 30 years by seeking concrete solutions. He offered two remedies: to situate PRIMA as the top Mediterranean priority, to increase its resources to also tackle energy and health issues, and to establish a Euro-Mediterranean university alliance, following the model of the 16 university alliances currently existing in Europe, emphasising the essential role of mobility and academic cooperation. All this, he noted, must be done before the next [European Commission Multiannual Financial Framework](#) is drawn up, as influencing the allocation of funds is crucial.

Informed decision-making is essential to making wise decisions in our current times of uncertainty

Ms. Lorena Elvira, Secretary General for European Union and International Affairs of the Government of Catalonia (Generalitat), centred around a clear idea: “Barcelona is the centre of Mediterranean strategic thinking.” She explored the fundamental relationship between academia and public policy, referring to what is known as evidence-based policy-making. She argued that this is not just a theoretical concept, but rather that informed decision-making is essential to making wise decisions in our current times of uncertainty.

The Mediterranean region has an essential role in a changing international order, but it is also a region where inequalities, tensions, and humanitarian crises persist. She identified peace, stability, sustainable development, equal opportunities for youth and women, and social inclusion as the indispensable conditions for progress to transform the Mediterranean into a space of shared opportunities rather than one of permanent conflict. To face the current challenges – summarised in climate crisis, energy security, migration, food sovereignty, and access to housing – she proposed a renewed and effective response, in which “academic and research cooperation play a fundamental role” in seeking coordinated and informed solutions.

Finally, she recalled that Catalonia has historically been a key actor in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, hosting major institutions involved in dialogue such as the UfM or the IEMed, and promoting initiatives like the [MedCat 2030 Mediterranean Strategy](#) (the Government's roadmap for fostering cooperation mechanisms to address new socioeconomic and geopolitical challenges), or the proposal to create a macro-regional strategy for the Mediterranean. In closing, she urged attendees not to miss the opportunity to “jointly build an academic agenda that drives a more effective and pragmatic Euro-Mediterranean policy.”

30 Years of Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation in Research: Past Perspectives and Future Trends



From left to right: Ali Rhouma, Rafael Rodríguez Clemente, Giuseppe Provenzano, Mariena Rossano and Yoran Beldengrün during the session

As the Euro-Mediterranean region marks three decades of cooperation in research and innovation, a thorough reflection is demanded on the successes achieved in this field, or lack thereof.

The foundational milestones of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation include the Barcelona Process, launched in 1995, signalled a major policy shift, anchoring science and innovation within broader efforts to foster economic, social, and cultural ties across the Mediterranean. The Process, additionally, paved the way for platforms like [EuroMeSCo](#), [Dialogue 5+5](#), and the [Monitoring Committee for Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation in Research and Innovation \(MoCo\)](#).

Initiatives such as MIRA ([Mediterranean Innovation and Research Coordination Action](#)) and [MedECC \(Mediterranean Experts on Climate and environmental Change\)](#) Environmental helped institutionalise collaboration, focusing on shared environmental threats like climate change. These culminated in the creation of PRIMA, a structured framework that has supported cooperative research in critical areas like agriculture, water management, and sustainability.

As PRIMA moves into its next phase, it must expand both its thematic reach and its network of stakeholders. That includes increasing engagement with the private sector and ensuring funding instruments like [Erasmus+](#) and [ARIMNet \(Agricultural Research in the Mediterranean\)](#) continue to strengthen research capacity and mobility across borders.

Scientific cooperation is not optional, it is fundamental to our survival in the face of climate change, water scarcity, and biodiversity loss.

The implications are significant. Scientific cooperation is not optional, it is fundamental to our survival in the face of climate change, water scarcity, and biodiversity loss.

Shared environmental vulnerabilities in the region — frequent droughts, wildfires, floods, and overfishing — illustrate that Euro-Mediterranean countries must act together. Yet cooperation is often prevented by mismatched funding priorities, weak political coordination, and significant disparities in research infrastructure, particularly between Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries. One of the most pressing needs is a unified research agenda focused on regional challenges like renewable energy, water governance, and ecosystem protection.

The role of science in shaping inclusive, forward-thinking policy must also be highlighted — especially on interconnected issues like migration, climate change, and public health.

Programmes that allow scientists and students to move between countries help build networks of trust and collaboration.

The strength of the Euro-Mediterranean research community lies in its diversity and mobility. Programmes that allow scientists and students to move between countries help build networks of trust and collaboration. Disparities persist and limited institutional coordination still threaten the scalability of bilateral initiatives.

The financial landscape offers some hope. Horizon Europe has allocated €320 million for Mediterranean research, with specific funding lines for the green transition, job creation, and education. However, this is just a start. Institutional investment — particularly in the Global South — is still delaying the region's ambitions.

At the same time, adopting a more realistic perspective also seems reasonable. While the ideal of science as a neutral, diplomatic tool endures, the practical landscape is more complicated. In areas of political conflict, such as the Israeli Palestinian context, research collaboration often falls victim to broader geopolitical tensions. Asymmetries in scientific capacity, access to funding, and mobility remain major obstacles to equitable cooperation. Nonetheless, science diplomacy remains a relevant tool, especially when framed pragmatically. Science can foster regional integration, support crisis responses, and even contribute to peace-building, provided that collaborations are built on mutual understanding and sustained investment.

The critical role of third-party actors such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international donors in sustaining collaboration amid political uncertainty must also be underscored. Yet this dependency creates a paradox: external funding brings opportunities, but also fragility. Long-term infrastructure and homegrown partnerships are needed to ensure continuity. Therefore, the next phase of Euro-Mediterranean research should prioritise private sector engagement, particularly with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to better align innovation with economic development.

Science communication also emerged as a core issue: translating complex research into accessible, actionable information is essential for engaging both policy-makers and the public.

Ultimately, ensuring scientific findings influence policy requires more than just good research; it demands active engagement with political institutions, economic actors, and civil society. Scientific research must guarantee both methodological rigour and practical applicability.

Science can foster regional integration, support crisis responses, and even contribute to peace-building,

Three decades into the Euro-Mediterranean research partnership, the region stands at a crossroads. The consensus in Mediterranean studies is clear: the promise of science diplomacy and cooperation is real, but it must now evolve to meet contemporary challenges.

Building mutual trust, bridging institutional gaps, and creating inclusive research ecosystems will be essential. If the Mediterranean can seize this moment — rooting its scientific ambitions in both shared interests and realistic strategies — it has the potential not only to advance knowledge but to build a more resilient, integrated, and peaceful region.

Promoting Shared Academic Values. Freedom, Integrity and Dialogue in the Mediterranean Region

Universities and research institutions are a source of soft power, but for it to be effective, unity and collaboration around key values are needed. In the case of Europe, soft power is essential if we consider its relative lack of “strong power”. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance to define clearly those key values around which the university institution should pivot. Values are those ideas that give ultimate meaning to our actions; even though some values are more obvious than others, we must not forget that universities cannot fulfil their mission without them.

In universities, key values should be, first and foremost, academic freedom and scientific integrity. Despite sounding like broad and unspecific concepts, the success or failure of universities depends on understanding them correctly.

Freedom is understood here as a qualified or positive freedom; that is, freedom to do things, and not only to abstain from doing other things. Positive freedom reflects the belief in working towards sharing research and not limiting data or methods except for scholarly purposes. Curiosity and openness are the basic notions of academic freedom and, although academia is going through difficult times, overall indexes of academic freedom have increased everywhere except in Afghanistan, the UK, the US, and the Netherlands. Yet freedom, as conceived in these lines, is also about being responsible for one's own influence on others. To bear the responsibility to help improve our own societies.

Scientific integrity, such as the fairness and rigour in presenting proposals and publishing papers, is another fundamental value. PhD students are the most

vulnerable in this field, mainly due to the imperative “publish or perish”. While there are initiatives like [CoARA \(Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment\)](#), which fights for reversing the negative effects of current research assessment, these ideals are still not fully embedded in research institutions.

Precisely because of their soft power, universities need to set an example to shape the values of their ecosystem. They should pursue public and societal goals and not be limited to only one part of society. However, this is not an easy task: external pressures such as political meddling or persecution, alongside internal pressures, like international rankings, divert them from this purpose.

Universities need to set an example to shape the values of their ecosystem. They should pursue public and societal goals.

A university with integrity spans the prioritisation of its own students, the research programmes it chooses, or its relationship with businesses. This conception gains importance in the Southern Mediterranean, where knowledge through research and creativity is threatened by constant aggression from politicians, trustees, and other external actors. Thus, educating students with autonomous thought to seek facts, test them, and push for controversial but transparent ideas is crucial.

The changes mentioned are necessary and urgent, since universities may already find themselves in a crisis of trust. For instance, in the US, 50% of people claim not to trust colleges as a social institution. Universities should be self-critical of the model they have embraced over the last 40 years. While in the 1960s, universities were conceived as contested and innovative institutions, today they are seen as sacred and beyond change. A stronger critical approach



From the right: Othmane Benmoussa, Joan Borrell, Pastora Martínez Samper and Sijbolt Noorda

In order to achieve social impact, knowledge should not be conceived as the patrimony of universities; quite the opposite, they should act as nodes that disseminate it.

is needed to challenge their *modus operandi*. An example of good practice is the US community colleges, which support their students, are not dependent on donors, and produce real change and development for individuals and communities. However, or precisely because of this, they do not appear in the rankings. Hence, the question of what universities are for should be central. In order to achieve social impact, knowledge should not be conceived as the patrimony of universities; quite the opposite, they should act as nodes that disseminate it. Universities know what problems are to be faced; now they need to act, do better, and do more – from small things, like reshaping buildings so they are welcoming rather than intimidating to ensuring a long-lasting impact education.

Concerning the challenge of multiculturalism, there are two main rationales for cooperation in higher education policies. On the one hand, the influence it has on the economy since education drives economic development. On the other hand, the promotion of mutual understanding. While the former is also important, the international increase in intolerance should be seen as a major challenge for universities, given that they need a social context to exist. Several actions, such as diversifying staff members by incorporating researchers from abroad, building a more diverse network of universities, or achieving greater North-South mobility, are necessary but often frustrated by scarce resources, instability in collaboration policies, and lack of knowledge among northern students. Empathy and modesty are crucial for research – to understand how others feel and act – but also for human relations. Tolerance needs to be promoted by universities, beyond its character as a universal value, as an instrument to accomplish dialogue between communities.

Tools to Promote Research and Higher Education on the Mediterranean

The academic community of the Mediterranean region cannot escape the need to reflect on how the Mediterranean is perceived. Only then will it be able to lead a successful and holistic promotion of its research and knowledge production: “What do we want this region to become? What does it truly mean to be Mediterranean?”

Trying to define the Mediterranean’s identity and its potential has proven a challenging yet stirring task.

While it is often described as a shared space that unites its citizens, the comprehension of the *Mare Nostrum* profoundly differs across the region.

One of the most prominent issues when talking about the Mediterranean region revolves around the paradox between its commonalities and differences. The perception of the Mediterranean often raises fundamental tensions. While it is often described as a shared space that unites its citizens, the comprehension of the *Mare Nostrum* profoundly differs across the region. The common history, future and concerns of the Mediterranean have been problematised in very different ways by academics. Scholars across the region may misguidedly assume that they have a universal understanding of the Mediterranean. Therefore, good research must acknowledge the distinct realities of the Northern and Southern Mediterranean to foster genuine approaches. Conversely, they also must focus on the shared challenges of the Mediterranean, such as peace, gender, democracy, education, water stress, and migration, which clearly demand academic collaboration. A more cooperative academic approach will ensure that Mediterranean studies reflect the diversity within the region.

In that vein, and not forgetting the above-mentioned challenges, attention should be given to the creation of a broad network of universities, laboratories, and institutions, which serve as drivers of research and innovation. Notwithstanding, further collaboration requires universities to better embrace diverse sociopolitical and economic landscapes, and to adapt their strategies to sustain and strengthen partnerships.

The creation of Euro-Mediterranean alliances, which strengthen cross-border collaboration by fostering joint educational programmes and research projects, must be granted priority. Organisations such as the IEMed and the UfM may play a crucial role in connecting universities across the region, contributing to an already promising trend of Mediterranean university networks.

For this to be successful, well-planned and efficiently implemented funding mechanisms are of the utmost importance. Education, research, and scientific diplomacy are essential tools for strengthening Mediterranean cooperation and addressing these issues. However, differing geopolitical factors significantly influence the success and sustainability of these collaborative efforts. Access to funding and institutional partnerships often depend on broader political conditions, making financing mechanisms a crucial but complex aspect of international research cooperation.

The creation of Euro-Mediterranean alliances, which strengthen cross-border collaboration by fostering joint educational programmes and research projects, must be granted priority.

Several key barriers should be overcome to enhance research and academic collaboration in the region, ranging from linguistic barriers and legal divergences up to resource disparities. These challenges must be considered when designing and implementing effective funding instruments for Mediterranean research cooperation to ensure sustainable partnerships.

As some Spanish universities, like the [Universidad Autónoma de Madrid \(UAM\)](#), have reported, insufficient funding is currently a major structural problem for Mediterranean academic cooperation. Consequently, public-private partnerships and European programmes are essential sources of support, with Banco Sabadell and the Erasmus+ programme being two of the most important sources.

Furthermore, alliances are a flexible and cost-effective tool to enhance international engagement, since they increase efficiency, reduce costs, and amplify impact by reaching a broader audience and attracting more stakeholders. As a result, they enable universities to coordinate joint international missions and expand their global presence. Similar alliances in the Southern Mediterranean are imperative to further enhance collaboration and balance regional disparities. While cooperation between Northern and Southern Mediterranean universities prevails, there is a clear lack of South-South collaboration. To address this issue, Northern Mediterranean



From left to right: Irene Martín, Aïda Díaz Sáez, Camille de Garidel Thoron and Mònica Rius Piniés during Fatima Zohra Iflahen's speech

Alliances in the Southern Mediterranean are imperative to further enhance collaboration and balance regional disparities. While cooperation between Northern and Southern Mediterranean universities prevails, there is a clear lack of South-South collaboration.

universities and institutions can facilitate connections between Southern institutions, serving as knowledge hubs where true academic collaboration occurs.

This could be achieved, for instance, by creating a comprehensive map of Mediterranean cooperation (listing projects, publications, and partnerships to increase visibility and access) or conducting intersectional research that connects policy, business, and community, taking community impact as a priority.

Some successful initiatives to emulate may be: the [TETHYS Consortium](#) approach and [the CIVIS Alliance](#), which has mapped and disseminated Mediterranean and African funding opportunities, incorporating programmes such as Erasmus+, [Horizon Europe](#), PRIMA, and Interreg NEXT MED.

A centralised platform for funding initiatives is also needed: having all funding initiatives consolidated in one place would make funding opportunities more accessible and effective.

Platforms like the [COST \(European Cooperation in Science and Technology\) programme](#) support research networks within the Mediterranean region. This programme is aimed at researchers without formal academic positions, such as those in pre-doctoral stages or early-career scholars looking to engage in Mediterranean-related work.

Nonetheless, visa facilitation as a major barrier to collaboration must not be ignored, considering that it disrupts the flow of international academic exchanges. This unjust obstruction has a tangible impact on international collaboration and constitutes corporeal violence directed towards non-EU experts. Hence, the visa process is a significant barrier within the academic sector, creating unnecessary challenges for scholars and students seeking to engage in collaborative work. This bureaucratic hurdle is identified as a major obstacle to the smooth flow of academic mobility across the Mediterranean, especially when visa delays or denials disrupt planned research, conferences, and other academic activities.

In conclusion, there is an urgent need for concrete political actions. The ideas presented in these lines must be translated into actionable goals and resolutions, which can be aligned with European initiatives, such as the Pact for the Mediterranean.

The present moment must be seen as an ideal opportunity for political engagement, and for stressing the necessity of policy-driven solutions to foster collaboration and growth within the region.

Best Master's Thesis Awards Ceremony

The Aula Mediterrània Master's Thesis Awards attempt to recognise outstanding theses in academic fields broadly related to the Mediterranean region. The finalists of its 5th edition have been: Chaima Ben Ahmad, who ended in the 3rd place with her work entitled "The Resistance of Palestinian Women Through Sumud"; Iman Soliman, 2nd place winner with "Disengagement from ISIS: A Case Study. Exploring Variations Based on Gender and Origin"; and, finally, in first place, Ismael Smaq Molina with his thesis entitled "Slavery, Mentality, and Punishment: Conflict and Repressive Practices Against Enslaved Individuals in the Crown of Aragon During the Early Modern Period (16th-17th Centuries)".

Following the announcement ceremony, an interesting dialogue between Ismael Santos Smaq Molina and Iman Soliman took place.

Regarding the motivations behind both authors' topic selection, Soliman, whose thesis explores the disengagement dynamics of formerly active members of ISIS, particularly through the gender and place of origin variables, shared that she wanted to challenge some uncontested narratives in the terrorism and security studies circles, which she considers to be notoriously male-dominated. One of these was the taken for granted assumption that radical violence inherently manifests itself in a totally distinct manner depending on gender, usually limiting to men the agency of radical violence. This is one of the statements that she tries to debunk in her work, claiming that women can be active actors in the exertion of violence. Moreover, she wanted to add a new concept to the well-established radicalisation and deradicalisation models, that of engagement (and disengagement).

Smaq Molina, who has worked on slavery in the territories belonging to the Crown of Aragon, more particularly on the role of violence and conflictivity in perpetuating this constantly challenged practice, told the audience that his main motivations to focus on this area were, on one hand, the surprising gap in academia about slavery inside the Iberian kingdoms, and on the other, his personal background, which made him strive for a better understanding of the human factor underlying this utterly oppressive phenomenon.



From left to right:
Iman Soliman, Ismael
Santos Smaq Molina and
Jorge Luengo

Confronting the two works revealed some prominent commonalities shared by both of them, despite the tremendous distance that lies between their respective topics: the archive as a place both treacherous and creative; gender presumptions as an obstacle constantly shadowing over the research; and, finally, the cruciality of the role of violence when trying to explain human subjugation, whether in ISIS camps or in Early Modern Aragon palaces.

Aula Mediterrània Workshop Towards An agenda of Mediterranean Research

A platform for intercultural exchange, fostering dialogue between scholars and experts from diverse fields, is needed in the Mediterranean studies academia. Innovative proposals, open discussions of projects, and engagement in meaningful exchanges of ideas are all crucial elements for a more collaborative environment.

The importance of research in shaping Euro-Mediterranean policies should be capital. For this same reason, the fact that public institutions — like the Government of Catalonia (Generalitat) — adopt this policy as their own is something to be profoundly appreciated. But something more than institutional support is demanded. How can we facilitate knowledge exchange in these fields? What mechanisms are needed to enhance collaboration? What is the importance of the so-called knowledge hubs in that enterprise?

Maybe the best way to answer those questions is by elaborating on the concrete manifestations of research projects that try to challenge fixed truths about the Mediterranean experience, as well as by revising innovative ideas currently being envisioned by different scholars. In other words, by pointing out what is already being done and what can be expected to be done in the near future.

Analysing the Mediterranean: existing projects

The Mediterranean is interlinked by complicated relationships that cut-cross spatial and temporal frontiers. Correspondingly, one interesting way of looking into its multi-layered reality is by reconstructing the memory of Muslim communities established in, for instance, Catalonia. This is not about simply writing “a” history, but rather about rebuilding intergenerational memory, a perspective shaped by the Muslim communities themselves. Memory remains largely invisible in public discourse — partly because it pertains to a specific collective, not necessarily recognised by all in the same way.

Another salient research trend currently being implemented is the one that focuses on gender-related (or more specifically, anti-gender) policies in the SWANA (Southwest Asia and North Africa) region, a term some scholars prefer over the traditional Middle East and North Africa (MENA) designation. While extensive research exists on anti-gender policies in Europe, Latin America, and the US, little academic work has applied this category to the SWANA region thus far.

Additional noteworthy initiatives are those research projects that focus on the interconnection between scientific diplomacy and Mediterranean public policy, hence allowing academia and policy-making to be bridged more effectively. This is achieved by weaving together the two-fold dimension of science in international relations; first, as a diplomatic tool through which to enhance regional cooperation, and second, as a guiding factor with the capacity to shape policy-making in a more effective and responsible way.

We must also praise those initiatives that, in the extremely relevant field of migration, aim to connect researchers across the Mediterranean, fostering collaboration and consolidating knowledge in the field. In this regard we cannot go without mentioning the EuroMedMig Network, one of the most significant global research networks on migration, with a particular emphasis on the urban phenomenon. Cities across the Mediterranean face similar governance challenges, making them essential stakeholders in addressing migration issues. That is why the analysis of cities, as key actors in migration governance, must be seen as an academic priority in Mediterranean studies.

As is widely known, hostility towards migration has become one of the most prominent elements in the political agenda globally. Precisely, one of the most common misconceptions is the one that depicts Europe (and the Global North, generally speaking) as the sole receptors in the phenomenon of global migration. Thus, analysing anti-migration discourse, moving beyond traditional narratives that frame Europe as the exclusive receiving region, is critical. This is what some migration scholars are trying to do, seeking commonalities in global migration rhetoric across diverse contexts, such as Chile and Brazil (in relation to Venezuelan migration), and North Africa, where countries are shifting from transit zones to reception areas.

Additionally, some scholars are trying to integrate a local perspective into these “broader” approaches within migration studies. Understanding migration from a local perspective is key to building a more comprehensive global narrative. This entails, necessarily, a wider sample of cities, where not only the big cities are counted as relevant for this synthesis of migration and urban studies. This local perspective also contributes to more impactful studies that resonate with the lived experiences of those affected, offering valuable insights for broader Mediterranean research and future academic collaborations.

Therefore, alignment between all the relevant actors around some fundamental foundations upon which to establish a shared strategy is crucial. In pursuit of this goal, the European Commission entrusted the IEMed to support its reflections and consultations in developing the New Pact for the Mediterranean. The project, which



Habiba El Mouali Benomar,
Senén Florensa and
Gemma Aubarell during the
meeting with the
coordinators of the
Master's Degree
programmes

will last until June 2025, involves conducting consultations with a wide range of stakeholders across the region, including an open survey to gather feedback on the new priorities of the Pact and the perspectives of EU engagement in the Southern neighbourhood.

This survey is a key instrument for engaging the wider community and ensuring that the strategy aligns with regional needs. It includes gathering feedback from think tanks and academic circles, as well as civil society and other regional actors. The results of the survey will be further discussed through three physical consultation events, that will take place in Rabat, Cairo and Brussels to focus on strategic priorities for the region. Subsequently, the European Commission will release the new Pact for the Mediterranean in the autumn.

In the second phase, additional workshops will be held to disseminate the Pact and ensure that institutions at local, governmental and academic levels across Mediterranean countries are involved.

Finally, we must mention the very interesting initiative Aula Árabe Universitaria, launched by Casa Árabe. Inspired by Aula Mediterrània, Aula Árabe Universitaria has been active for six years and offers a dynamic platform for interdisciplinary training, stimulating dialogue and learning between students from various backgrounds. The programme nurtures academic collaboration, allowing students to engage in discussions and debates on cultural, sociological and ideological matters, while also considering political dynamics in Arab Mediterranean countries.

Thinking the Mediterranean: potentialities and ideas

All these examples illustrate the conscious vitality of the new perspectives currently emerging within Mediterranean studies circles. But we must not stop here. Calls for new approaches coming from scholars and institutions should always be respectfully responded, whether they end up crystallising into something tangible or not. It is in their ambition to grow that we will find the force needed for making our field go forward.

In this sense, bringing universities together to strengthen the Mediterranean dimension in knowledge management is also essential. Needless to say, this must be based on the principle of broadening the Mediterranean perspective beyond traditional Eurocentric approaches, incorporating regions such as the Balkans and parts of Africa, which are often overlooked in Mediterranean studies.

Broadening the Mediterranean perspective beyond traditional Eurocentric approaches, incorporating regions such as the Balkans and parts of Africa.

At the same time, there is also a need for developing a more systematic approach to documenting and analysing Mediterranean studies. Compiling existing data is not enough. We must insist on the introduction of analysis into the research agenda itself. Research agendas do not naturally emerge from the mapping of existing projects and must instead be driven by thematic analysis and the dynamics of research teams. This is an underexplored area in Catalonia and demands more attention. In this vein, we must look for a deeper integration of the different sectors and regions involved in the study of Mediterranean histories and identities.

Finally, in the field of Islamic and Arab studies, so important for the broader Mediterranean research field, some voices are rising about the need for a Maghreb re-focus; while much of the academic attention tends to be placed on Eastern Mediterranean countries like Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria, Maghreb countries, especially Morocco, its significance must be equally acknowledged.

Conclusion

Mediterranean studies should underscore the importance of promoting deeper exchanges of ideas and of facilitating knowledge mapping across diverse perspectives. We must emphasise the need to reinforce academic cooperation, positioning universities as key actors in both confronting current global challenges and crafting forward-looking solutions. We must ask for a more active university engagement in shaping foreign policy, alongside initiatives to connect with younger generations and involve them in future academic and diplomatic efforts. A call is to be made for more transversal, interdisciplinary approaches to research, recognising their value in addressing complex regional and international issues, granting particular attention to enhancing collaboration between Spain and North Africa by means of, for example, establishing a pilot Aula Mediterrània programme in Morocco as a tangible step forward.

10 ideas to highlight:

1. Keep promoting interdisciplinary cooperation and fostering collaboration in Mediterranean studies
2. Stress the importance of research in shaping Euro-Mediterranean policies
3. Create knowledge hubs to strengthen cooperation and accessibility
4. Reconstruct the shared memories of Mediterranean communities, rebuilding intergenerational (and intergeographical) connections

Reinforce academic cooperation, positioning universities as key actors in both confronting current global challenges and crafting forward-looking solutions.

5. Identify and categorise anti-gender policies in different countries of the region
6. Point out the tremendous potential of scientific diplomacy, both for researchers and policy-makers
7. Offer new frameworks for analysing anti-migration discourses
8. Understand migration from a local perspective to build a more comprehensive global narrative
9. Better integrate the whole Mediterranean subregions when researching
10. Establish a pilot programme of Aula Mediterrània in Morocco

Education, Gender and Migration.

Current Challenges of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

The Euro-Mediterranean partnership faces multiple challenges nowadays, especially regarding the development of societies and the construction of a more prosperous future for the region. Education, gender equality, and migration policies emerge as key topics that demand a strategic and coordinated approach.

First of all, education is a strategic tool by which to strengthen democracies and promote intercultural understanding. More particularly, the concept of citizenship education has been gaining relevance among the experts in the matter. This specific formation plays a fundamental role in fostering critical thought, social responsibility and civic commitment, providing local communities with those skills and values that favour active participation in society. It is what pedagogical scholars call “soft skills”, meaning those skills needed to face the day-to-day life of a (good) citizen.

Digitalisation plays a crucial role in the enhancement and expansion of citizenship education. Recently, digitalisation has drastically changed access to knowledge, but it has also deepened inequalities, particularly making the digital gap between the North and the South more notorious. For this reason, it is essential that digital education assists, and does not substitute, on-site teaching. In this respect, active learning must be promoted as an innovative approach, based on the resolution of problems, collaborative projects and roleplays, like the “United Nations Model” (UNM). These methodologies promote a more practical and participative education, adapted to the challenges of the contemporary world.



From left to right: Andrea Noferini, Alessia Chiriatti and Lorenzo Gabrielli during Hiba el Khamal's speech

Digitalisation has drastically changed access to knowledge, but it has also deepened inequalities, particularly making the digital gap between the North and the South more notorious

Another important question in the region is the brain drought in the Southern Mediterranean countries, fuelled by economic inequalities and the lack of job opportunities. To mitigate this phenomenon, we should consider some creative solutions, like mobility programmes or dual programmes in two or more universities, thus fostering talent retention within the region.

This civic education is essential for the stability and development of the region, and as such it should be conceptualised as a long-term strategic investment. It is crucial to join efforts to build a shared and resilient educative ecosystem in the EURO-MENA region that can guarantee equal opportunities and subsequently promote a committed civic society.

The next major issue for the Euro-Mediterranean partnership to address is the backlash faced by gender equality politics and the succeeding struggle against the regressive trends observed in the region. Since 2018, a global recession on gender equality has been documented, motivated by emerging narratives that question its legitimacy. To face this reality, it is important to monitor and document these regressive reactions through a “backlash map” that allows us to identify the political trends and civil rights at risk, as well as the key actors and tactics involved.

In the most recent period (2023-2024), diverse alarming tendencies have emerged: the rise of the far-right in Europe, which has adopted a clearly antifeminist discourse; Zionist violence against Palestinian women; electoral authoritarianism in Turkey and Tunisia, where gender rights restrictions have

become one of the main axis of the political agenda; criminalisation of human rights defenders; and, finally, the increase in anti-LGTBQ+ violence in countries like Egypt, Lebanon or Jordan.

Since 2018, a global recession on gender equality has been documented, motivated by emerging narratives that question its legitimacy.

For the near future we must emphasise the necessity of deepening our study of the anti-gender equality backlash, as well as the consequent analysis of the effects that funding cuts impose on the life of women, the so-called butterfly effects that these policy shifts can and do have on lives of real women. This is not only for its mere documentation, but for designing better and more pertinent categorisations of all the actors involved, thus bridging the gap between field activists and academia researchers.

Additionally, it is crucial to give renewed attention to the digital dimension in this repression dynamic by researching how the new forms of control affect solidarities inside the feminist movement. And, of course, it is also fundamental to imagine and develop collective care strategies to protect women activists in this hostile atmosphere.

Finally, another sociopolitical phenomenon that requires in-depth analysis is the securitisation of migration, a process that has transformed human mobility from a social reality into a security issue. This trend, which we may date back to the 1970s, presents the transnational movement of people as mainly a “security issue” that requires severe political responses. Once (undesired) migration has been problematised within the domestic political discourse, governments are demanded to protect the national interests against an impossible to control the “threat”, using border control as the main performative solution. Performative because border control, as such, is much more about showing that something is being done to tackle migration than about actual efficiency.

After the securitisation of migration has been firmly established in the public imagery, the next phase is the so-called externalisation of the problem, meaning the outsourcing of migration control to Southern Mediterranean countries, such as Libya, Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey, through bilateral and/or multilateral agreements. These measures include forced returns, cooperation on migration policies, and strengthening border control. In order to exert leverage, the EU and the sovereign states have exploited negative conditionality; that is, pending some aid funds or profitable investments on southern countries cooperation in border control. This kind of migration “cooperation” has expanded into Sub-Saharan Africa, with a crisis-reactive approach.

The securitisation and outsourcing of migration control have reshaped migration, but their adverse effects highlight the urgent need to review the current approach.

Although the security and migration control approach remains the pillar of European policy (see Frontex), its shortages, such as persistent migration flows, increased border violence, and the rise of human trafficking, have all intensified. On balance, the securitisation and outsourcing of migration control have reshaped migration, but their adverse effects highlight the urgent need to review the current approach.

Intercultural Coexistence in Medium-Sized Cities

Unlike large cities, which are typically the focus of such discussions, medium-sized cities face distinct challenges that make them a valuable object of study for a diverse range of disciplines. They are evolving examples of how interculturality and coexistence may come into form in a more or less successful manner. Therefore, it is essential to highlight this perspective and frame the discussion through an intercultural and multidisciplinary lens. Interculturality promotes peaceful coexistence, allowing each community to preserve its traditions while respecting those of others. Accordingly, medium-sized cities as they must navigate the challenges of intercultural coexistence in its sharpest form, should be granted the deserved attention by both scholars and public servants.



From left to right: Mazen Haidar, Laura Huici and Javier Martin Uceda. Janina Stuermer-Siovitz gave her soeech remotely.

There are countless examples of this phenomenon, where medium-sized cities are compelled to face the challenges emanating from their crystallising diversity. This can be seen in some Tunisian cities, like Sfax, in the Empordà region, which has experienced a thriving urbanisation process in the last decades, and in the Greater

Medium-sized cities, as they must navigate the challenges of intercultural coexistence in its sharpest form, should be granted the deserved attention by both scholars and public servants.

Beirut area, which, rather than being viewed as a singular entity, must be understood as a collection of neighbourhoods – both central and peripheral – in which each cluster adds its own layer of urban and identitarian particularity.

Public discourse on migration in Tunisia has evolved significantly alongside policy changes. Following the authoritarian shift in Tunisian politics, local governments have ceased to be elected and, subsequently, subject to electoral accountability. This dramatic development landed on an already tense situation, which we termed the “urban migration governance paradox”, particularly salient in African mid-sized cities deeply impacted by migration, and that refers to the sheer distance that separates the massive proportion of immigrants absorbed by these cities and the almost absolute lack of powers and resources to engage in public-led integration plans. Although local governments cannot directly shape migration policies, they are able to participate in partnerships and promote social cohesion through cultural events, recognising migration as an integral part of their communities.

The project “Equal Partnership. African Intermediary Cities as Actors and Partners in Urban Migration Governance”, for example, has two main objectives: building an evidence base, and promoting collaborative urban action to address human mobility and creating incubation spaces for local, national, and international actors to co-develop outcome-oriented ideas, addressing the lack of dialogue. They provide the example of Oujda, which is one of the few cities with a mandate to address migration. While the local government was engaged with migration-related issues, several challenges emerged, such as weak cooperation between national and local governments, overlapping responsibilities, an exclusive focus on regular migration, and a lack of trust between political actors and civil society.

Finally, another goal of the project was to provide recommendations for international organisations such as the IOM and UNHCR. The recommendations mainly focused on internationalisation efforts, which should actively involve local governments and organisations beyond just local implementation, or on the need for greater engagement to address climate migration challenges.

On the other hand, in the case of Beirut, much attention has been directed to investigate how urban spaces have been transformed and adapted, exploring demolition and conservation narratives anchored in the complex urban modernisation process that swept the city’s landscape in the 20th century.

The mid-1950s in Beirut marked a shift in the urban planning, with modern, tall buildings starting to be seen as a source of national effervescence by some actors in the thriving Lebanese scenario.

The mid-1950s in Beirut marked a shift in the urban planning, with modern, tall buildings starting to be seen as a source of national effervescence by some actors in the thriving Lebanese scenario. However, there were plenty of voices that initially rejected the arrival of “this” modernity in the shape of massive buildings for disrupting the perceived coherence of the ancient city. Despite this initial resistance, over time modern architecture gained acceptance, particularly after the 1956 earthquake, which forced mass relocations of people into the new (modern) suburbs that were sprawling alongside Beirut’s periphery. Thus, an association was created, linking old, ancient buildings with lower classes, and new, tall ones with the upper-middle classes. In addition to this, the emerging slum areas accentuated these differentiation and segregation dynamics.

Nowadays, however, modernisation is not clearly accepted across the city; for instance, some tenants blocked modernisation efforts in certain Ottoman buildings. Contrary to common narratives, modernity in Lebanese architecture was not solely introduced by Europe but also emerged from local architects trained in national universities. This legacy should be studied as another layer in the history of the city, with its own stories to tell.

As for the Empordà region, it has two main cities: Figueres, which has strong ties to France, and Palafrugell, an industrial hub. The area experienced economic changes and labour demands related to tourism and housing, which reshaped the urban landscape and led to migrants, particularly young people, facing high vulnerability.

This created significant urban challenges, such as the struggle for the integration of migrant communities — affected by inadequate urban policies —, the lack of coordination, and a unified approach among peripheral villages, and the fact that schools and high schools are starting to be built in peripheral areas, limiting social exchange and reinforcing segregation.

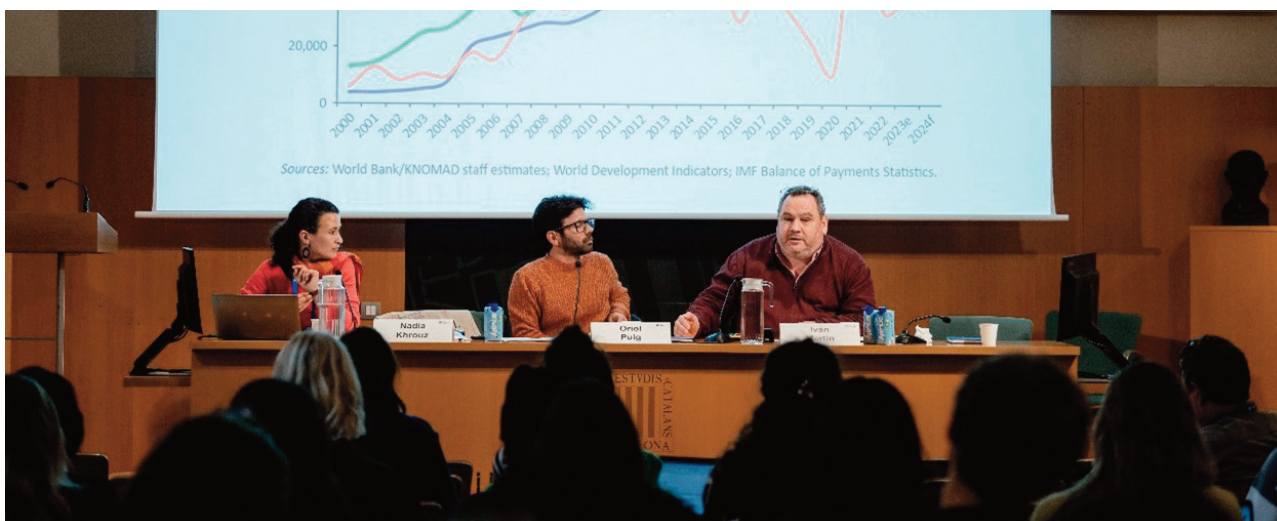
More comprehensive data collection is needed to address migration challenges in small and medium-sized cities. Potential solutions include greater public sector involvement to balance the neglect of social cohesion by the private sector.

Migrations in the Mediterranean: the African Perspective

The dominant narratives on African migration across the Mediterranean are in fact constructed by and for Europe, contributing to a partial and distorted understanding

of the phenomenon — one stripped of essential elements and shaped by European values and interests. Our main objective should therefore be to place the visions, priorities, and strategies of African countries regarding human mobility at the centre of the debate, challenging a paradigm that remains deeply orthocentric and eurocentric. This decolonial approach requires not only a shift in narrative but also a re-evaluation of the role of African countries in international cooperation frameworks, such as the African Union, where Morocco has regained a strategic position, using migration as a tool for political negotiation with Europe.

There is a widespread notion, felt by many researchers from the South, that it is natural for researchers from the North to theorise, while those from the South are relegated to fieldwork alone, as mere “experts” of the “local context”. This results in an epistemic division of labour that contradicts the very ethics of science and perpetuates the legacy of past asymmetries that still shape the present. This epistemic imbalance extends to the externalisation of migration policies, where international organisations like the IOM and foreign consultants draft entire national migration strategies for African states, revealing a clear imbalance of power.



From left to right: Nadia Khrouz, Oriol Puig and Iván Martín

One relevant case is that of Morocco, which is usually considered a “third country” or “country of transit”, although the very concept of “transit” is inherently political. It is not determined solely by the migrant’s plans, but by regulatory obstacles, legal traps, and ultimately by the economic and political climate of the spaces crossed by migration routes — especially those of destination. The case of Morocco clearly illustrates this dependency, with migration laws still influenced by those adopted during

There is a widespread notion, felt by many researchers from the South, that it is natural for researchers from the North to theorise, while those from the South are relegated to fieldwork alone, as mere “experts” of the “local context”.

the Spanish-French Protectorate (1912-1956) and with different legal regimes applied to citizens of different countries. This categorisation, deeply rooted in European migration policies, allows the EU to exercise political pressure while externalising its border control responsibilities.

Although Morocco formally signed the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families in 1993, its effective implementation had to wait until the adoption of the 2011 Constitution. Since then, Morocco has begun to invest in various areas related to human rights, has shown itself for the first time to be active in international organisations, and has rejoined the African Union. This visible shift in paradigm was driven by international pressure, security logic, and the need to respond to the post-Arab Spring. It is within this context that Morocco developed its National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum, adopted in 2014. However, migration and the country’s role as a “transit state” remain challenges for Morocco itself, and the Strategy does not eliminate inequalities, while the legal framework continues to preserve significant elements of discrimination.

From its very first documents, the Strategy distinguishes between irregular Sub-Saharan migrants — who reside and work in Morocco without a residence permit — and other ethnic groups, once again showing that, as in the past, not all migrants are treated equally. The stigma of difference, unsurprisingly, is attached to Sub-Saharan migrants: the regularisation operations of 2014 and 2017 primarily targeted this population, as it is visible, vulnerable, and easily exploited within the realm of political discourse.

There are plenty of regulatory barriers present within Morocco’s legislative framework, many provisions of which do not comply with international convention standards, despite Morocco having ratified numerous human rights treaties. Furthermore, the process of regularisation is heavily dependent on European cooperation and international funding, highlighting the role of external actors in shaping Moroccan migration policies.

Another key issue is the discretionary power enjoyed by the administration in granting or denying long-term residence permits. In theory, the criteria for permit renewal are clearly defined, but there is no legal guarantee that these criteria will be respected. The absence of reliable mechanisms and administrative arbitrariness contribute to the precariousness of migrants’ lives.

Today the dominant image of the Mediterranean is one of dangerous, chaotic, and dramatic migration. However, this narrative does not reflect the actual dynamics of migration to Europe: according to Frontex, in 2024 there were 200,000 irregular crossings in the Mediterranean, compared to 4 million new immigrants to the EU. Only 1 in 20 arrived via irregular Mediterranean routes, yet it is this dramatic image that dominates public and political discourse.

The absence of reliable mechanisms and administrative arbitrariness contribute to the precariousness of migrants' lives.

While we must acknowledge the significant diversity among African countries in terms of migration — some being countries of origin, others of destination (e.g., South Africa, Gabon, Côte d'Ivoire) — there are shared traits that allow for the outlining of an African perspective. The first of these is that migration is a normal process within the broader context of the continent's demographic transition. Of the global population aged 15 to 34, African regions have the highest percentages, reaching peaks close to 60%. Indeed, Africa has undergone a compressed demographic transition in less than 30 years: North Africa is nearing the end of the process, while Sub-Saharan Africa is still in its early stages.

The peak of the demographic transition, marked by the largest share of the population being of working age, is expected to occur between 2030 and 2035 for North African countries and around 2050 for Sub-Saharan Africa. This transition signifies a critical moment when the working-age population is at its maximum, potentially driving economic growth but also increasing migratory pressures if local economies fail to absorb this labour surplus. Today, Africa has a population of 1.5 billion, yet, the African migratory phenomenon toward Europe remains surprisingly limited.

Compared to the global average of 3.6%, only 2% of the Sub-Saharan African population has emigrated, and over half of them have moved within the African continent. However, Africa hosts a large number of internally displaced people (35 million IDPs) and refugees (over 10 million). These figures show that, for many Africans, migration is primarily a response to conflict and instability rather than an economic project aimed at Europe.

Another point around which the discussion should be focused is the European practice of punishing entire populations for the actions of their governments regarding migration cooperation — a form of collective punishment that generates deep resentment among the populations concerned, with prominent cases being Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. Two years ago, France unilaterally reduced the

Migration is a normal process within the broader context of the continent's demographic transition.

number of visas granted to citizens of these three countries in response to their lack of cooperation on readmission policies.

Overall, there is a stark divergence in political priorities between Europe and Africa in this regard. While for European countries migration has become the central issue that determines election outcomes, in Africa it is not a political priority, as there are far more pressing concerns. In countries where 80% of employment is informal and where part of the population lacks identity documents, the notion of “irregular migration” loses its meaning. Informal markets self-regulate, accepting or excluding foreign workers based on the economic context, making the formulation of large-scale state migration policies unlikely. How absurd it sounds that the IOM or foreign consultants draft entire national strategies on behalf of African governments. African governments prefer to focus their efforts on more pressing issues, such as illiteracy.

Transcultural Lives in the Ottoman World: Links and Flows in Early-Modern Istanbul and Beyond

In the traditional scholarship written in Europe, the Ottomans tend to be represented as the “others”, secondary actors of a narrative in which the Europeans – Venetians, Genovese, Frenchmen or Spaniards – are the dominating actor. This perspective should be substituted for an alternative one in which the history of the Mediterranean is recentred, so it can offer a version that faithfully embeds in it the Oriental side of the sea.

In the history of the Mediterranean there are wide transborder, transcultural and transnational aspects fuelled by the links and flows of ideas and population waves

When speaking of the history of the Mediterranean there are wide transborder, transcultural and transnational aspects fuelled by the links and flows of ideas and population waves that can help us to understand the present but also the historical perspective of the region.

When talking about the Ottoman Empire, the decision by Mehmet II to not destroy “The City” (Constantinople, Istanbul) after its conquest consolidated a multicultural *milieu*, where a mixture of Asian, African and European peoples converged. This city in ruins would take decades and decades to re-build and when incentives were not enough there was a major push to re-populate by bringing in waves of Italian merchants, war captives, slaves, Circassians, Spanish Jews refugees, Armenians, and even Christian boys from the Balkans for imperial services, and many other groups filled the social life of the city in its different strata. On top, the elites sought to bring in skilled individuals from far and wide in the Muslim world.



From left to right: Jorge Luengo, Denise Klein, Nausikää el Mecky and Sinem Eryilmaz. Nida Nebhat Nalçacı gave her speech online

First and foremost, the regions dominated by the Ottoman Empire during the 15th century were incredibly diverse, forming a true mosaic of cultures and religions. Migration also played a key role as the empire continued expanding, since big population groups moved to the new territories. These demographic movements favoured the creation of wide social networks, which in turn facilitated the expansion of trade, practices, and ideas. “The City” relied heavily on these migrant waves for cheap labour, but this did not come without the threat of unrest and crime.

In keeping with the major population waves, alongside the slave and captured populations, there was a significant migrant base that made Istanbul a great and vibrant city: by the late 16th century migrants made up 1/3 of the population and by late 18th half of the populations. “The City” was, in fact, described as a melting pot and almost as if “living inside the tower of Babel.” However, not every migrant was treated equally, since the Sultans only integrated those of economic or strategic importance, while imposing increasingly harsh regulations on refugees and migrants, where migrants were often threatened with expulsion and singled out as criminals or sex workers (in the case of women).

Not every migrant was treated equally, since the Sultans only integrated those of economic or strategic importance.

During the 16th century, mysticism started to take new forms and, eventually, an incredibly dynamic space for spiritual and intellectual dialogue was established. In this non-enclosed space, Sufism Islam enjoyed an influential role. For example, the musical tradition of Rumi illustratively embodies the cultural exchange characteristic of that period. In another instance, the production of these intellectual (mystics)

known under the *brethren of purity* produced an encyclopaedia of knowledge that potentially influenced Enlightened thinking. Beyond the intellectual (and mystic) dialogue between the different territories, the Ottoman conquests also involved some degree of Islamisation in the newly acquired lands (although this Islamisation process was very different depending on the region), thus widening the scope of Islamic thought. Not in vain, Ottoman culture has been defined with three words: pragmatism, synthesis, and obsession for order.

Ottoman culture has been defined with three words: pragmatism, synthesis, and obsession for order.

Two crucial events for the transformation of Mediterranean societies and states in the Early Modern era were the Siege of Cyprus and the Battle of Lepanto. These episodes have been studied through a myriad of perspectives, the story of its captives being one of the more interesting ones. The Ottoman arrival to Cyprus yielded 1,300 captives, a relatively high number, considering that the island's population at that time was, according to estimations, around 100,000 souls. For each captive an important sum was to be delivered to the empire in concept of taxation; it is thought that a total of 9 million akches were collected thanks to this. Ransom proved very complex and expensive, and for that reason many of those captured remained so for years. A similar story can be told about Lepanto.

Migration, be it forced, willing or incidental, transformed a deserted city after the conquest into a thriving metropolis by continually replacing its population. It changed the very own fabric of the city and played a key role in integrating the empire by building relations with the provinces and adopting the customs and tastes of these, attracting trade, knowledge and the elite into a buzzing hub of innovation and creation, turning Istanbul into an imperial capital and the most diverse city in history.

Linguistic Dissidence: Language as a Factor of Identity Expression in the Contemporary Maghreb

The linguistic landscape of the region, shaped by its colonial past, is complex and fraught with contradictions. Some mother tongues are widely spoken but seldom written, while others are written but rarely spoken. Some write in sacred languages, others in the language of the coloniser.

Colonisation has left deep scars on the linguistic domain. One of the most profound is the dispossession of native languages, to the point where the coloniser's language becomes the language of writing — or even of thought. This is particularly

evident among Maghrebi writers, especially Algerians, who have adopted French not out of conscious choice, but because it was the only viable medium for creative expression. Migration has further compounded this issue, leading to situations where grandmothers and granddaughters no longer share a common language, highlighting the intergenerational rupture wrought by these processes.

Due to its colonial connotations, French can never be officially recognised as a national language – nor can it be regarded as entirely foreign.

With the independence of the Maghreb countries, Arabic was established as the sole official language across Maghreb states, which, despite their linguistic diversity, were defined as monolingual. Institutional Arabisation, however, did not eradicate the use of French, which gained a de facto official status. Yet, due to its colonial connotations, French can never be officially recognised as a national language – nor can it be regarded as entirely foreign. In practice, French holds a more official status than Tamazight or Darija, though acknowledging this openly remains taboo.

Constructing national identity around Arabic while obscuring French and marginalising Amazigh and Darija has led to a profound dissonance. Despite clear processes of prioritisation of linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity, recent years have seen progress in the recognition of linguistic plurality. Morocco, for example, amended its Constitution in 2011 to recognise Tamazight as an official language; Algeria granted it the status of a national language in 2002 and an official language in 2016. Nonetheless, French remains the most commonly used language in Algeria, particularly on social media platforms like Facebook.



At the back of the image:
Asmaa Aouattah and
Gonzalo Fernández Parrilla,
during Neus Tirado's
speech

Despite clear processes of prioritisation of linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity, recent years have seen progress in the recognition of linguistic plurality.

These contradictions create a linguistically stratified environment, with multiple languages holding varying degrees of social prestige. Classical or Standard Arabic is the language of prestige, tied to literature, religion, and formal media. For some, it also represents a tool of decolonisation, owing to its use in anti-colonial movements. Alongside it there are the national Arabic vernacular languages (often labelled as “dialects”), which dominate oral domains such as theatre, film, and music. The adage “a dialect is a language without an army” reflects the widespread perception of these forms as impure or underdeveloped. However, the Arab uprisings brought dialects like Tunisian and Egyptian into the spotlight, especially on social media, broadening their written presence.

Languages inherited from colonialism, such as French and English, remain closely associated with modernity, class, and postcolonial power. The diglossia relationship between Arabic and these languages often grants the latter even more prestige than Standard Arabic. Among Tunisian youth, English is increasingly seen as the “language of the revolution”, symbolising openness to new ideas and opportunities. In Spanish academic circles, research on the Maghreb continues to be dominated by French, raising questions about the feasibility of rigorous scholarship without fluency in the region’s key languages.

Vernacular languages of diverse origins — such as Amazigh/Tamazight — remain central to the cultural identity of the Maghreb. According to Morocco’s 2024 general population and housing census, 25% of the population identifies Amazigh as their mother tongue and uses it daily, yet only 1.5% report being literate in it. Despite ongoing marginalisation, both Amazigh and Arabic vernaculars are gaining visibility in media and on social networks, reinforcing their cultural role and challenging linguistic hierarchies, contributing to a democratisation of the linguistic and cultural sphere.

Acknowledging the Amazigh reality is essential to this debate. Historically, Amazigh culture and language withstood numerous colonisations, aided by geographic isolation, agrarian lifestyles, and communal organisation. However, modern colonialism, rural migration, and nation-building efforts weakened its resilience.

Amazigh oral literature has long been a vehicle for expression, entertainment, and resistance. Within this tradition, poetry holds a special place. In the Rif region, the *izran* — a concise poetic form reminiscent of the haiku — stands as the most emblematic expression of oral poetry. These anonymously authored poems are created by both

men and women. Men's poetry was typically public and centred on religious, political, or historical topics. Women's poetry, often composed in private settings, dealt not only with romantic themes but also addressed social issues, serving as a medium for critique and resistance.

As social and economic dynamics evolved, traditional spaces for *izran* receded. Nonetheless, the modern music scene in the Rif – emerging in the 1970s and 1980s – drew heavily on the syllabic structure of Rifian oral poetry. Today, the revival of Amazigh cultural activism has sparked an identity awakening, with *izran* finding renewed life on social media, where people now widely share these poetic forms.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the challenges of translation in Tunisian theatre and film are situated on the border between written and oral forms. In Tunisia, most audiovisual productions are made in Tunisian Arabic and screened with French subtitles. This practice generates a debate about the dynamics of subtitling in a postcolonial context marked by strong linguistic stratification.

Subtitling Tunisian productions into French largely responds to the orientation of film distribution toward Francophone markets and reliance on foreign funding.

Subtitling Tunisian productions into French largely responds to the orientation of film distribution toward Francophone markets and reliance on foreign funding – particularly from the Institut Français. Tunisian cinema is mostly author-driven and intended for European audiences, contrasting with Ramadan TV series that lack subtitles and target local viewers.

Translating Tunisian Arabic raises serious challenges related to recognition and standardisation. The coexistence of different Arabic registers – Tunisian, Standard, and Classical – results in a significant loss of linguistic nuance when rendered into French. The problem is worsened by the absence of standardised Tunisian Arabic and a lack of specialised audiovisual translation training. A distinct feature of Tunisian cinema is that translation takes place in the source context rather than the target one. French subtitles are later used as the base for additional translations, compounding the loss of subtle meaning with each iteration.

Book presentation: Breve historia del conflicto entre Israel y Palestina. Ilan Pappé, Capitán Swing, 2025

After 7 October, many people were dissatisfied with the Western media's coverage of the events, as these were not properly contextualised. There was a clear division between those who held a pro-Israel position, which denied the context in which

Hamas' attacks took place, and those who emphasised the importance of the historical context. Once again, history books became crucial to understand what was (and still is) happening in Palestine. Ilan Pappé accepted the challenge of writing a short book to provide the missing detailed description of the context to a broad audience.

According to the author, the starting point for understanding the history of Palestine and Israel is the establishment of a settler-colonial project (Israel) and its clash with the indigenous people (the Palestinians). On the one hand, classical colonialism was the movement that created European empires by building colonies and sending their own people to those colonies. On the other, Israel was built by European Jews who had been persecuted and outcast, seeking to rebuild a new Europe in Palestine, a land already inhabited by indigenous people. In the encounter between the colonisers and the indigenous people, as early as the 1920s, the logic of the elimination of the natives was activated. This logic is a *sine qua non* condition of settler-colonial projects, as colonisers claim to be the natives of the colonised land. In short, settler-colonialism is not a one-year project; it lasts as long as it is not stopped or resisted, or until it fulfils its main objective: to take the homeland of the native people and eliminate them.

It is crucial to understand Zionism as an Evangelical Christian project long before a Jewish one. Especially in Britain and the US, important personalities, such as politicians, believed and asserted that the transfer of Jews to Palestine would be part of a divine plan which would lead to the return of the Messiah. Thus, we witnessed the instrumentalisation of the theological plan to get rid the world of the



From left to right: Cristina Mas, Ilan Pappé and Gemma Aubarell

Jewish people. It was only when modern antisemitism emerged, within the context of Romantic nationalist movements, when Jews were viewed as outsiders to the various European national identities, that Jewish intellectuals began considering the idea of building a Jewish state outside Europe. This strategic alliance between Zionism and antisemitism persists today, in the context of widespread Islamophobia in the West, as exemplified by far-right parties with a long history of antisemitism, and support to the State of Israel as a guarantor against Islam. On the other hand, nowadays, we face a weaponisation of antisemitism aimed to silence opposition to Israel's policies. But that equivalence of antizionism and antisemitism is academically and morally wrong, as well as invalid from a legal point of view. It is clear that lots of Jews do not see themselves as Zionists, and lots of Zionists are not Jews.

Although the biggest problem of the Zionist project is linked to the colonisation of Palestine, Jewish identity within the State of Israel is also problematic. Struggles against the Palestinians are delaying internal conflicts, but Israel's society is fundamentally divided between, on the one hand, an ethnocultural Jewish identity that we can call "liberal Jews", which sees Israelis belonging to Europe/the West and embraces European Secularism, and, on the other, which we can call "the State of Judea", mainly developed in the Jewish settlements in the West Bank, which understands Judaism as a religion and therefore thinks Israel, as a Jewish state, needs to be a theocracy. The latter have a dominant position in the army, the police

and other state institutions and consider liberal Jews "the donkey of the Messiah"; namely, they played an important role in riding the Messiah, but the ride is over, so they are obsolete.

When reflecting on the future of Palestine, although most international organisations advocate for a two-state solution, this proposal is no longer viable. Israeli plans are perfectly clear. In fact, Israel is currently replicating in the West Bank the destruction it caused in Gaza. In this context, the involvement of the international community is crucial: the more it acts, the less violence Palestinians will endure. And this is a duty, especially for Europe, since it created the problem.



Nevertheless, this is highly unlikely to happen. Not only because of the re-election of Donald Trump, but also because of the alliance between Israel and far-right parties and governments around the world, as well as economic institutions, which reinforces Israel's immunity.

Empowering Refugees and Migrant Children: from Vulnerability to Transformative Change

For positive change around migration and asylum policy to be possible, it is necessary to shift the narrative surrounding refugee and migrant children from vulnerability to shared agency, where co-production becomes essential. Discussions are currently taking place, focusing on fostering integration through education, mental health, and psychosocial support, while also recognising and valuing the resilience and strengths of migrant communities. Systemic change must go beyond inclusion to dismantle barriers preventing refugees from exercising power in decision-making processes. A resilience-informed approach to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) is essential, moving beyond trauma-focused models towards the recognition of the inherent strengths and adaptability of migrant communities. In an increasingly challenging global political context, refugee children's inclusion and creative expression remain crucial entry points for fostering solidarity and countering negative migration narratives.

Migration governance must shift from treating refugees and migrants as passive recipients of aid to recognising them as equal partners in shaping policies, programmes, and research. Traditional approaches that frame migrants solely through their legal status reinforce exclusionary practices, limiting access to education, employment, and full participation in society. A more equitable approach prioritises



From right to left: Adnan Abdul Ghani, Emilia Aiello, Teresa Sordé and Anna Krasteva

Traditional approaches that frame migrants solely through their legal status reinforce exclusionary practices.

co-production, in which people with lived experience of migration and displacement actively engage in the design and implementation of solutions that affect their lives, and where the principle of reciprocity is firmly centred within these initiatives.

This requires removing institutional barriers that prevent their agency rather than merely offering consultation opportunities that often serve as tokenistic, tick-box initiatives. Many self-organised initiatives led by migrant – including refugee – communities illustrate their inherent resilience and ability to build organised networks, yet they often lack the institutional backing or resources required to reach the full potential of their impact for and with the community. Ensuring that migrants have access to decision-making platforms is essential for meaningful participation, long-term integration, and, ultimately, effective migration policy-making and development.

Inclusive education and mental health initiatives must be integrated into migration policies to ensure long-term social cohesion. Evidence-based models show that a sense of belonging and well-being is fundamental to educational success. Schools that implement culturally responsive teaching, language support, and community engagement initiatives have seen improvements in attendance and academic performance among migrant – including refugee – children. Rather than imposing top-down approaches, community-led initiatives have proven effective in fostering both academic achievement and mental resilience. Co-created interventions, particularly in schools and community spaces, allow migrant children to regain agency and build meaningful social connections, and many of these successful models demonstrate that mental health support can be embedded in schools and informal learning settings without requiring significant financial investment, making them sustainable even in resource-constrained environments.

Performative creativity, including arts, storytelling, and intercultural initiatives, plays a crucial role in fostering inclusion.

Performative creativity, including arts, storytelling, and intercultural initiatives, plays a crucial role in fostering inclusion and overcoming psychological barriers for migrant children. Artistic expression allows children to process their migration experiences, express emotions, and connect with peers through shared creative activities. These initiatives challenge exclusionary narratives by offering migrant children a platform to share their lived experiences and interact with host communities through shared cultural and artistic experiences. In environments where

language barriers exist, creative approaches provide an alternative means of communication, fostering understanding and empathy.

A paradigm shift is needed from assimilation-based models of integration to dynamic, two-way integration processes that recognise and value the diversity and skills that go hand-in-hand with migration as inherent assets to any society. Policies must evolve beyond legal compliance and actively promote intercultural interactions that benefit both host communities and newcomers. Urban areas, where migration is concentrated, serve as key sites for innovative approaches, demonstrating that intercultural education, shared public spaces, and co-designed policies yield more sustainable integration outcomes. Community engagement efforts that bring together migrants and long-term residents through joint activities have shown success in breaking down barriers and fostering trust. Integration policies should encourage mutual adaptation and cross-cultural exchange.

Policies should focus on removing structural obstacles that hinder the safe and meaningful participation of migrants in policy-making, rather than seeking to “grant” migrants a voice within existing frameworks. Meaningful inclusion requires equitable access to information, funding, and leadership opportunities. The expertise of migrants — both lived and professional — should be recognised in shaping migration policies, service provision, and research. Effective co-governance mechanisms, where migrants hold decision-making power alongside local institutions, create policies that are more responsive to their needs and lived realities.

Creativity can be a powerful tool for fostering identity, agency, and social cohesion in migrant communities.

Education and mental health support must be holistic and community-driven, addressing both academic and psychosocial needs. Creativity can be a powerful tool for fostering identity, agency, and social cohesion in migrant communities. Integration policies should shift from assimilation to interculturalism, recognising migration as a mutual process of societal transformation. Migrants and refugees must be recognised as active partners, not passive beneficiaries, with policies removing structural barriers to participation rather than reinforcing dependency. Co-governance models that enable direct decision-making power for migrants, including refugees, contribute to more inclusive and effective policies, and through investing in self-organised migrant-led initiatives we can ensure sustainability and long-term impact beyond traditional funding cycles.

Patterns of Conflicts in the Early Modern Mediterranean (16th and 17th Centuries)

Conflicts between both states and non-state actors shaped and set the borders we are familiar with today, which are in no way defined by physical features. Rather, they are the result of a long process.

Conflict, both social and political, has become an increasingly pressing issue in the Mediterranean over the past decades. The study of the role of conflict dynamics in early modern societies, with a focus on its complexity and the attempts to address and defuse tensions, is particularly prescient when dealing with the Mediterranean space, given the long-standing nature of many currently existing disputes and its shared tradition in matters such as law and customs.

Taking Catalan society as a starting point, it is possible to draw conclusions relevant to other societies, since its territory was the stage of armed clashes, both on land and at sea, exemplary of those common throughout the Mediterranean world. Conflicts between both states and non-state actors shaped and set the borders we are familiar with today, which are in no way defined by physical features. Rather, they are the result of a long process to which the watchtowers along the coast bear witness. Taking a comparative and long-term view is also key when studying the history of law, owing to the common heritage of Roman law, which was partially shared with the Ottoman world as a result of its Byzantine past.

Despite the impact of international conflicts, it is paramount to understand how tensions cut across all social groups, even the privileged. For instance, the attempts by noble families to obtain privileges reveal the diversity and tensions within classes, while their resolution clarifies how disputes were handled. Although presenting the nobility's grievances through a legal framework helped reduce physical violence, matters were often settled through pacts before recourse to the



From left to right: Óscar Jané, Jaume Danti, Mariela Fargas Peñarrocha and Josep Capdeferro

It is significant to note how borders and laws evolved during the early modern period, before their definitive fixation in the 19th century with the rise of the nation-state.

courts. In fact, the law provided for the possibility of transactions between lawyers representing the parties to a conflict in the presence of a notary.

It is significant to note how borders and laws evolved during the early modern period, before their definitive fixation in the 19th century with the rise of the nation-state. Looking at previously existing solutions has become especially important at a time in which international disputes once again question established borders, and attempts to harmonise legal systems to allow for a more transnational and negotiated concept of the law are challenged.

The Disintegration of the Middle East Region

Conflict and the increasing role of non-state armed groups in governance had a profound impact on the Middle East. Groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza have not only reshaped political, economic, and social structures but have also filled the void left by weak or failing states. Deeply embedded in their communities, these groups are difficult to dismantle without disrupting the broader social fabric. Their evolution into autonomous governing entities, managing social services, healthcare, and welfare, challenges traditional state authority and necessitates alternative governance models. Many are no longer external to state structures but have become institutionalised through participation in elections, government offices, and parliamentary functions, complicating engagement efforts.

The failure of the social contract in the region has led to governance instability, political unrest, and recurring protests.

The failure of the social contract in the region has led to governance instability, political unrest, and recurring protests. Instead of serving as neutral providers of security and representation, states often function as power brokers among sectarian and tribal leaders. This mediation system perpetuates exclusive political movements — some armed, others not — that challenge the legitimacy of existing governance structures. Rather than fostering national unity, states have fractured into competing sectarian, tribal, and religious entities, deepening communal isolation and competition. This fragmentation weakens protest movements, as seen in Lebanon's 2019 protests, which lacked a unified political vision for dismantling sectarianism. Without a stable social contract, governance remains weak, and external actors exploit internal divisions to advance their own interests.

The rise of non-state armed groups is deeply intertwined with the governance structures of the Middle East. Historically, power in the region was not distributed



From left to right: Nancy Ezzidine, Aurèlia Mañé and Hiba Hassan during Andreas Krieg's speech

through an inclusive national process but allocated to various community patrons. The state became a bargaining tool for different factions, fostering exclusion and marginalisation, which enabled the proliferation of non-state armed groups. Even if groups like Hamas or Hezbollah were dismantled, new community-based organisations would likely emerge to fill the governance vacuum, highlighting the cyclical nature of the problem. These groups often provide essential services and security in ways that weak states fail to do, reinforcing their legitimacy among local populations.

A networked, rather than hierarchical, perspective offers a clearer understanding of governance in the region.

A networked, rather than hierarchical, perspective offers a clearer understanding of governance in the region. Traditional governance models fail to capture the complexity of the Middle East, where power structures function through decentralised and adaptable networks rather than rigid hierarchies. The assumption that “non-governance spaces” exist ignores the reality that failed states are often replaced by alternative governance structures, frequently in the form of networked entities. One of the most significant of these is the Axis of Resistance, a decentralised but interconnected system centred around Iran, which sustains influence without direct control over its allies.

These networks consist of interdependent layers – violent actors, financial backers, trade routes, information flows, and religious institutions. This interconnectedness explains why military interventions aimed at dismantling

groups like Hamas and Hezbollah remain largely ineffective. When one part of the network is targeted, the system adapts and regenerates. While Israel continues to employ a conventional military approach, Iran and its allies operate through a decentralised model, ensuring their continued influence despite external pressures. The Palestinian cause remains a central mobilising force within these networks, reinforcing their legitimacy and resilience.

The concept of “mowing the lawn”, or repeatedly degrading enemy capabilities, does not lead to long-term stability as it fails to address the root causes of mobilisation.

Israel's difficulty in defeating non-state actors stems from its reliance on conventional warfare tactics, such as leadership decapitation and direct confrontations. However, non-state actors do not function through top-down command structures, making them resistant to such strategies. Israel's approach results in tactical victories but fails to achieve strategic success. The concept of “mowing the lawn”, or repeatedly degrading enemy capabilities, does not lead to long-term stability as it fails to address the root causes of mobilisation. Instead of weakening Palestinian resistance, Israel's strategy has fuelled further mobilisation, reinforcing the legitimacy of non-state armed groups. In contrast, Iran employs a multidimensional strategic approach, using its Axis of Resistance network to maintain regional influence, prioritising endurance over outright victory.

The Israeli war on Gaza and the broader geopolitical transformations following the events of 7 October have further reshaped the Middle East. These events are perceived as another attempt to redraw regional boundaries, reminiscent of past efforts by external actors to reshape the region. Israel's actions in Gaza, including forced demographic shifts, have largely been resisted due to Palestinian resilience and the refusal of neighbouring countries like Egypt and Jordan to accept displaced populations. The broader regional power balance has also been affected by Israeli expansionist policies, which seek to reshape Arab regimes and shift regional dynamics in Israel's favour. The influence of pro-Israel lobbying on US foreign policy has ensured continued American support for Israeli military actions, further complicating diplomatic efforts.

The scale of destruction in Gaza has been compared to post-WWII Europe. However, while Europe received substantial aid through the Marshall Plan, no comparable commitment exists for Gaza. Neither the US nor Middle Eastern countries have pledged significant resources for reconstruction, leaving the region in prolonged instability. Washington's Middle East policy remains inconsistent, heavily influenced by Israeli and Gulf interests rather than a coherent strategic vision.

The international community must take urgent steps to ensure political actors are held accountable, encourage diplomatic solutions over military interventions, and recognise Palestinians' right to self-determination.

The continued normalisation of Israeli military actions without accountability sets a dangerous precedent. The reluctance of global powers to enforce accountability mechanisms for mass atrocities and war crimes not only emboldens further military actions but also weakens the credibility of international legal frameworks. If left unchecked, this impunity risks exacerbating not only the destruction of Gaza but also the broader unravelling of the global order. Failure to uphold international norms in this conflict will have long-term consequences, fostering further radicalisation and deepening regional instability.

Security continues to be prioritised over political solutions, perpetuating endless cycles of violence. Addressing the deeper political causes of conflict is essential for stability. The Palestinian issue remains a central factor in regional mobilisation, and without a meaningful resolution, armed movements will continue to draw legitimacy from the struggle against Israeli occupation. The international community must take urgent steps to ensure political actors are held accountable, encourage diplomatic solutions over military interventions, and recognise Palestinians' right to self-determination. Without such efforts, regional fragmentation will persist, exacerbating economic, political, and social instability while perpetuating cycles of conflict and reconstruction.

Editorial coordination: Elisabetta Ciuccarelli, Programme Manager, Department of Culture, Gender and Civil Society, IEMed

Editorial assistants: Victòria Aguirre, Nuria Calvo, Diletta Dini, Amira Elmasri, Paul Flores, Elli Klimathianakis, Ainhoa Pineda Rodríguez, Pau Pitarch, Índia Rodon Serrat, Martí Serra, Adrián Tellez, Aida Traidi, Maenda Tunkara, Daisy Vaughan, Violeta Villalba, Ferran Vilalta

