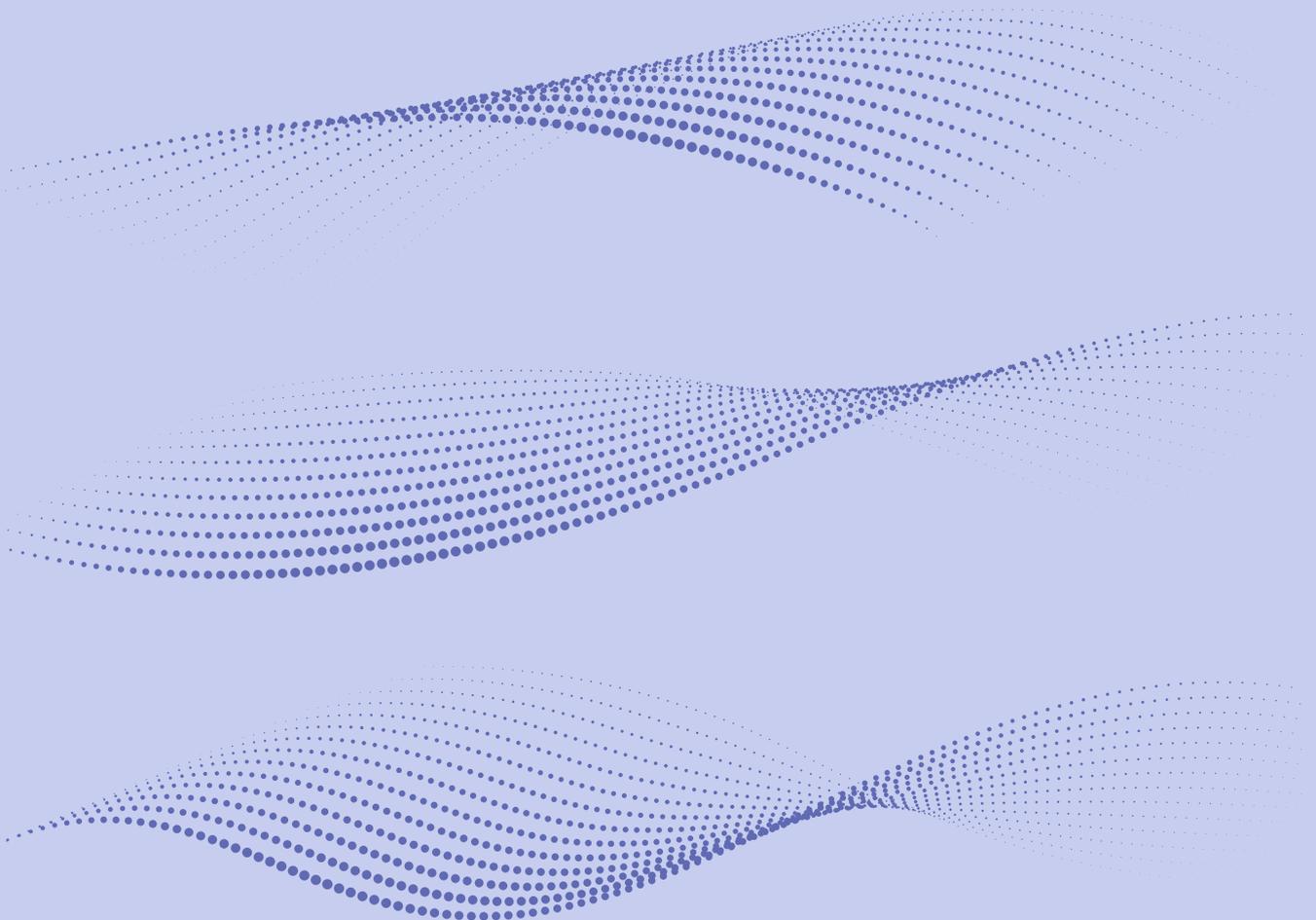


NatCen International Annual Report

August 2024



About NatCen International

Through rigorous research, training, advisory services and policy engagement, we work to empower societies to shape social policy and practice globally.

We are a multidisciplinary team with expertise in a wide range of international development and social policy areas. Supported by an eminent international advisory board, NatCen International draws on the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen)'s 50 years of social research expertise to work on a range of global issues including countering terrorism, violence and human rights; gender equality and social inclusion; global health; governance, sustainability and economic development; education and Global Britain. We have a strong track record in leading projects, large and small, and in consortium management.

We produce robust social research and in-depth analysis to address opportunities and challenges for key stakeholders including governments, multilateral and bilateral organisations and international NGOs, to be more responsive to local needs and priorities. Our work is global, and we work in partnership with local governments, organizations, universities and research centres to ensure that our research is rooted in the lived social, political and economic realities of the countries we engage in.

In March 2024, we launched the **NatCen International Academy** as a training and consultancy arm to our centre, dedicated to delivering tailored and contextualised training courses on a wide range of research methods and thematic areas.

We are a multidisciplinary team with expertise in a wide range of international development and social policy areas.

The primary focus for NatCen International is on three cross-cutting thematic areas: **health equity**, **migration**, and **climate change**. For the period 2025–2027, we envisage adding **digital societies** to our core thematic focus. We have four strategic objectives to expand our influence on key social policy issues, including:

- Acting as a hub for thought-provoking and stimulating conversations on global social policy through a commitment to equitable global-local partnerships;
- Developing impactful and original research across our workstreams and increased research co-authored with partners in the Global South;
- Acting as a go-to team for governments, multilateral and bilateral organizations for advisory support and guidance on global social policy and practice in key countries where we have expertise; and
- Through the NatCen International Academy, develop innovative tailored and contextualised capacity development courses on a range of research methods and social policy areas.

Our donors and partners are key to our success and they enable us to influence change around the world. Our key donors and collaborators for 2023–2024 are: the Wellcome Trust, the British Red Cross, Creative Confidence Consultancy & Training Institute (CCCTI), the National Bank of Kuwait, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Sana'a Centre for Strategic Studies, Shabaka, Busara, IDInsight (East and Southern Africa) and the Al Anood Foundation in Saudi Arabia.

We are also indebted to our academic partners including the University of Oxford, University of Westminster, University of Bath, University of Bristol, Newcastle University, University of Naples L'Orientale, the American University in Cairo, the Lebanese American University and the American University of Kuwait.

Welcome

I am delighted to present **NatCen International's second annual report for 2023–2024**. This past year has been a very difficult one globally. We are faced with uncertainties about the future of the rules-based international system, continued violations of human rights, threats of terrorism, concerns (ethical and practical) about Artificial Intelligence (AI) and rapid technological advancement as well as the existential risks of climate change among many other phenomena. In times of significant political, economic and social change, rigorous research and policy engagement play a critical role in reducing uncertainty and building resilient communities. As per last year, I am immensely proud of what we have achieved but even more so because, as a team, we have a strong commitment to being “disruptive” and brave in shaping the debate on social policy and practice around the world. As is evidenced in this report, we have expanded our work and impact on key global policy problems, notably on climate change, migration and health inequalities, and actively consolidated our engagement with key stakeholders and partners in the UK and the Global South.



Sherine El Taraboulsi-McCarthy

In 2023-2024, we have had several key achievements. We launched the NatCen International Academy to act as a training and consultancy arm to our centre, dedicated to developing tailored and contextualised training courses on a wide range of research methods and thematic areas. In collaboration with the Sana'a Centre for Strategic Studies, we delivered two training courses to over 40 members of the Yemen Peace Forum on qualitative research methods and micro and macroeconomic analysis. Both were delivered by a team of experts in Arabic and with contextualised examples from the Arab region. The feedback we received emphasized the value of localizing capacity development.

I am also incredibly proud of the progress we have made in our research projects. We successfully launched our three-year Wellcome Trust-funded research on the impact of climate change on the health of outdoor workers in Vietnam. This project will deliver a new robust evidence base on the nexus between climate and health in Vietnam, as well as other outputs designed to maximise reach and impact including an app and a documentary. In collaboration with NatCen's Centre for Evaluation, we delivered an independent evaluation of an innovative school intervention in Kuwait to enhance the financial literacy of primary school students. The initiative is led by an inspiring public-private partnership between the government of Kuwait, the National Bank of Kuwait and Creative Confidence Consultancy and Training Institute. Additionally, we delivered a rapid evidence assessment on the opportunities and challenges of humanitarian visas for the British Red Cross, and a study on the intersection between human rights and climate change for UNDP.

We have also strengthened and broadened our engagement with donors and research centres in the Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. Relationship building is at the heart of our ethos to expand our impact and deliver on our strategic objectives. This month, we will sign a memorandum of understanding with the Princess Alanood Foundation, a royal foundation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia dedicated to youth empowerment and social development. We have participated in and spoken at 20 events in 8 countries. We have also had the privilege of welcoming two new members to our advisory board: Molly Schultz Hafid, Executive Director of the ButlerFamily Fund and Dr Chaning Jang, Chief Strategy Officer at Irrational Labs. Molly and Chaning will help us think through the next stage of growth for NatCen International. They will also strengthen our reach to new partners, changemakers and donors dedicated to reducing inequalities globally.

Looking ahead to 2025, we will be refreshing our strategy, expanding our team and continuing to push ahead with our work in collaboration with our partners and donors. Thanks to our outstanding team of research leaders and experts, we are growing year on year, and I am thrilled to see how NatCen International is developing a new model for social research that is innovative, ambitious and dedicated to generating impact and bridging the gap between international and local expertise.



Dr Sherine El Taraboulsi-McCarthy
Director, NatCen International

Highlights of the Year

20

events in
8 countries



Launch of the NatCen International Academy



34 K

impressions across Twitter / X



3,000 report
downloads,
publications
and blogs

Governance, Sustainability and Economic Development

We examine how states, communities and the private sector can support ecological, human and economic development.

A primary focus of this workstream is our climate change thematic area. We have identified three key objectives for this research area:

- Identifying pathways to advance community-led adaptation, empowering local agency and fostering climate-resilient communities.
- Assessing the socio-economic impacts of net-zero transition policies to ensure fair distribution of benefits and to address concerns about justice.
- Emphasising the pivotal role of climate finance in global mitigation and adaptation efforts, identifying innovative and transformative financial mechanisms to achieve UN Paris Agreement targets and support sustainable development.



Key Projects

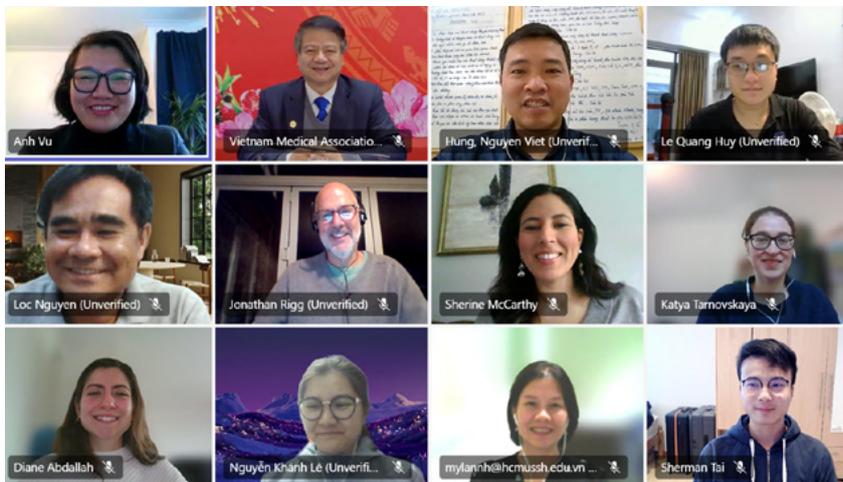
Health impacts of climate change on precarious outdoor workers in Vietnam (January 2024 – July 2026)

Funded by the Wellcome Trust, this £1.3m research project builds a new and robust evidence base on the impact of climate change on the health and wellbeing of precarious outdoor workers in urban areas of Vietnam, a country with rapid urbanisation and a large informal sector characterised by adverse working conditions. We will study the vulnerabilities and health exposures of workers in four major cities: Hanoi, Da Nang, Ho Chi Minh City, and Can Tho.

A systematic evidence review of the impacts of climate change on health in Asia

Under the Wellcome Trust-funded project, we are in the process of completing a systematic evidence review on the health impacts of weather extremes associated with climate change on outdoor workers in urban Asia. Conducted between February and June 2024, the review compiled research and evidence from peer-reviewed publications in English. This review aims at addressing the following research questions:

- What are the health impacts of weather extremes associated with climate change for outdoor workers in urban Asia?
- What types of extreme weather impact the health of outdoor workers in urban Asia?
- Which forms of outdoor work and categories of outdoor workers are most exposed to health risks from weather extremes in urban Vietnam?



Inaugural meeting for the project consortium.

Research findings will inform and influence policies that aim to mitigate climate change’s adverse health effects and develop interventions tailored to the needs of vulnerable workers, facilitated by an equitable partnership with government agencies, associations, informal worker networks and community organisations.

A long-term aim of the project is to integrate health into Vietnam’s climate action agenda, fostering urban climate resilience and bridging gaps in our understanding and policy responses.



Kick-off meeting with community partners in a commune in Can Tho, the Mekong River Delta province.



Children biking to school through a scenic path in a commune in Can Tho, the Mekong River Delta province.

Combatting the gendered impacts of climate change in the MENA region

The urgency to discuss the adverse impacts of climate change on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has never been greater, and yet there is a serious dearth of evidence and research on the region to allow for robust policymaking on climate action. NatCen International is collaborating with the University of Naples to bridge this evidence gap. In October 2023, NatCen International and the University of Naples L'Orientale held a two-day conference to examine the social, economic and political impacts of climate change in the MENA region, particularly the gendered impacts of climate change.

Sessions explored women's leadership in addressing climate change; considerations for climate financing; the role of international organisations in supporting communities' resilience and adaptation to climate change; and how data infrastructure on women and climate change can be strengthened. The conference culminated in a publication of conference proceedings and a special journal issue on gender and climate change to be published by the University of Naples L'Orientale.



Sherine introducing the conference at the University of Naples L'Orientale.

Inclusive Governance in the Context of Climate Change Impacts: a case study of the Mekong Delta region (June 2023 – June 2024)

This case study, extended from last year, aims to shed light on the vulnerabilities of populations in the Mekong Delta region in the context of a specific climate change impact. Commissioned by UNDP and in collaboration with the Dragon-Mekong Institute, it points out gaps in the national policy responses to this particular impact, to ensure the protection of populations in the region.



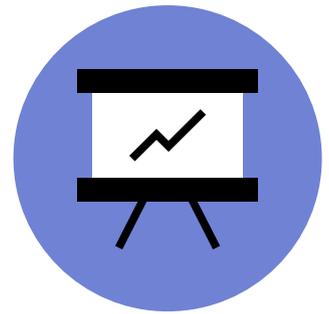
Local vendors engaging in trade on the bustling waterways of the Mekong River Delta.

Education

We examine opportunities and challenges to inclusive and equitable education globally.

Under this workstream, our key objectives include:

- Capturing the complex and context-specific nature of educational programmes, interventions and factors that affect equitable access to education globally with a focus on low-and-middle-income countries.
- Identifying pathways to addressing inequalities in accessing high quality education, enhancing curriculum adaptation, promoting sustainable development education and supporting the use of innovative pedagogical tools.
- Exploring how innovative research methodologies, qualitative and quantitative, can be adapted to address these complexities.



Team members Diane, Katya, and Sherman at the NatCen office.

Key Projects

Evaluation of the Bankee programme in Kuwait

(September 2023 – September 2024)

In collaboration with NatCen's Centre for Evaluation, we are currently conducting an independent evaluation of the Bankee programme in Kuwait for the Creative Confidence Consultancy and Training Institute (CCCTI). Developed in collaboration between CCCTI, the Ministry of Education, National Bank of Kuwait and the Anti-Corruption Authority, Nazaha, Bankee is a financial literacy programme in public and private primary schools.

The evaluation includes several components. First, a Theory of Change (ToC) to gauge the intended contributions and outcomes of the stakeholders involved. Second, a combined quantitative pre-post outcomes evaluation with a qualitative implementation process evaluation to assess the impact of Bankee and contextual factors on pupils' financial literacy, financial behaviour, and prosocial behaviour. The evaluation takes into consideration Kuwait's socio-economic diversity, customs, traditions and financial and anticorruption values. The research findings will guide recommendations aimed at enhancing future iterations of the programme. This includes improving perspectives on experiential learning within the Ministry of Education in Kuwait, expanding the programme's scope to encompass a larger number of schools, fostering anti-corruption measures and encouraging responsible financial and prosocial behaviour among Kuwaiti youth.

Evaluation of Let's Read Fluently! in Jordan

(July 2023 - November 2024)

Let's Read Fluently (LRF!) is an intervention in Jordan funded by Queen Rania Foundation (QRF). LRF! aims to support pupils in Grades 2 and 3 to become more fluent and confident readers. NatCen working with Integrated International are conducting a pilot clustered randomised controlled trial (RCT) of LRF! to assess the evidence of promise and readiness for an efficacy trial. NatCen International provided data collection training and advisory support for Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE) to the Jordanian partners to ensure the robust data collection.

Global Britain

We examine Britain's role in a changing world across policy areas such as armed conflict, migration, health crises, and climate change.

A primary focus of this workstream is our future of migration policy thematic area. Using an intersectional approach, we have identified three key objectives for this research area:

- To understand migrant decision-making including drivers for individuals leaving their home countries or deciding to stay, events that trigger moving, and the intrinsic and extrinsic factors which influence the decision-making process both before and during the journey.
- To examine opportunities and challenges to improving migration governance in line with international law, including migrant and refugee protection, access to justice, and pathways to combatting trafficking and smuggling networks.
- To explore how the quality of life for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers can be improved including examining the complexities of community integration, labour market access, working conditions and mental health.



Key Projects

Safe routes to asylum

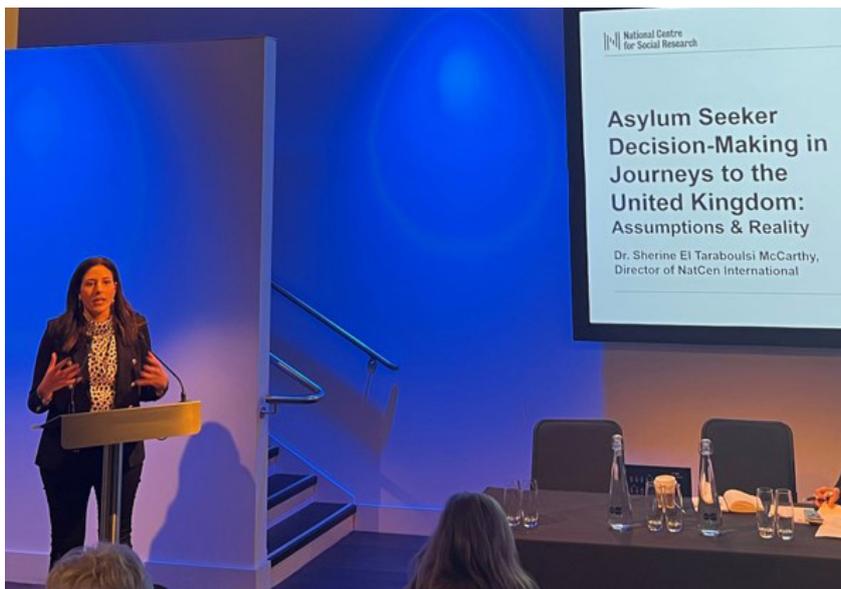
We were commissioned by the British Red Cross to conduct a rapid evidence assessment of the literature on the use of humanitarian visas to facilitate access to international protection globally. It explored which, why and how states have implemented humanitarian visas since 2000, including the operationalization, key successes and challenges of such schemes. On this basis, we provided recommendations for scaling up humanitarian visa schemes, including unifying the definition of humanitarian visas across actors and improving the data infrastructure through conducting and evaluating pilot schemes.

Syrian Refugee Teachers' Roles in Shaping Education Policy in Lebanon

This paper, written for NORRAG in collaboration with Watfa Najdi from the American University of Beirut, examined how refugee teachers in Lebanon are currently excluded from policy discussions on education and recommendations for key stakeholders to address this exclusion. It argued that international discourse should recognise refugees' expertise and the value this can bring to policy discussions, rather than solely framing refugees as vulnerable. The paper suggested that increased involvement from refugee teachers in education policy discussions has the potential to lead to more localised and relevant policies that are better attuned to teachers' needs and the barriers they experience.

Feedback from the
British Red Cross

“It’s a fantastic source of information on humanitarian visas. Thank you for all your work on the literature review, it is comprehensive and has given us a lot to consider in drafting our framework.”



Sherine presenting findings from the Asylum Seeker Decision-Making project at the conference 'Immigration After Brexit: Where are We Going?'.



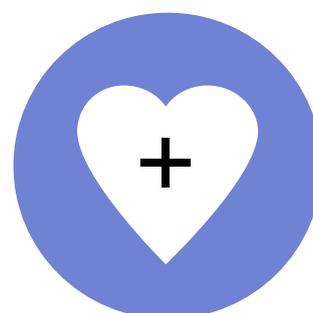
Sherine speaking on the 'Refugees and Asylum' panel at the conference 'Immigration After Brexit: Where are We Going?'.

Counter Terrorism, Violence and Human Rights

We explore how violence is experienced and perpetrated, and how it can be prevented in a sustainable and effective way.

Sudan Crisis and implications for neighbouring countries

In collaboration with Shabaka, a consulting and research organisation focused on diaspora and migrant's engagement in humanitarian action, we hosted an event on the nature and impact of the ongoing crisis in Sudan, responses to the conflict, resulting displacements to neighbouring countries, as well as what can be done to mitigate the crisis. It discussed the difficulties of accessing the most impacted areas to provide humanitarian assistance; the economic and security implications for neighbouring countries receiving refugees; the crucial role of Sudanese civil society actors in providing relief despite being excluded from formal humanitarian infrastructure; and the importance of providing a holistic cross-sectoral humanitarian response. Another discussion will be held in September with a focus on the role played by humanitarian diplomacy in navigating the Sudan crisis and what can be learned from other contexts such as Yemen, Ukraine and Myanmar.



NatCen International Academy

Leveraging our extensive experience in research methodology, the NatCen International Academy offers tailored training courses in research methods and policy areas with a focus on capacity building and contextualisation for low-and-middle-income countries and fragile or conflict-affected areas. We offered courses like Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods, Conducting Interviews, Focus Group Discussions, Introduction to Economics, and Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in Research, delivered in Arabic and English for audiences in Kuwait, Jordan, Yemen and Vietnam.

Yemeni Researcher Training Courses

Building on an ongoing collaboration with the Sana'a Centre for Strategic Studies, an independent think-tank that seeks to foster change through knowledge production with a focus on Yemen and the surrounding region, we delivered training modules in Arabic on qualitative research methods and economic analysis to Yemeni researchers, using practical examples from the country. The aim was to equip researchers and policymakers with the necessary analytical tools for conducting research, producing policy analyses, and drafting white papers. Our 'Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods' focused on research design with a conflict-sensitive approach, data collection, management and analysis, as well as ethical considerations in Yemen and conflict affected contexts more broadly. 'Introduction to Economics' concentrated on macro- and micro-economic principles applied to the Yemeni context. Both courses combine interactive sessions, workshops, and tutor feedback to enhance participants' understanding and application of the concepts.



One training course participant said:

“This was perfect. The content was excellent, and we appreciated the practical examples provided from the region as well as the engagement with the instructors.”

Publications

El Taraboulsi-McCarthy, S., Houssam Chahine and Anh Vu. (2023). Can Arab Philanthropy be a Game Changer in Climate Action in the Arab Region? *Alliance Magazine*. Available at: <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/can-arab-philanthropy-be-a-game-changer-in-climate-action-in-the-arab-region/>

El Taraboulsi-McCarthy, S. and Theodoros Papadopoulos. (2024). On “Rebuilding Trust”: Davos and Embedding Social Cohesion in Global Action. Available at: <https://natcen.ac.uk/rebuilding-trust-davos-and-embedding-social-cohesion-global-action>

Kersting, F. and Najdi, W. (2023). Towards an Inclusive Future: Syrian Refugee Teachers’ Roles in Shaping Education Policy in Lebanon. Policy Insights – Refugee Teachers: The Heart of the Global Refugee Response. Geneva Graduate Institute. Available at: <https://resources.norrag.org/resource/view/827/456>

Kersting, F. (2023). Why Compassion Matters in Asylum Policy. Centre for Policy Research, United Nations University. Available at: <https://unu.edu/cpr/blog-post/why-compassion-matters-asylum-policy>

Kersting, F. (2024). Why a Vulnerability Framing of Asylum Seekers can be Harmful. PPIRG Blog, University of Westminster. Available at: <https://blog.westminster.ac.uk/ppirg/vulnerability-framing/>



NatCen International and University of Naples L'Orientale. (2023). *Combating the Gendered Impacts of Climate Change in the MENA Region: Opportunities, Challenges and Trade-Offs*. Available at: <https://natcen.ac.uk/publications/combating-gendered-impacts-climate-change-mena-region>

Vu, A. and Nguyen, L. (2023). 'Hot weather wrecks my nerves' - *Climate Change and Workers' Rights in Vietnam*. National Centre for Social Research. Available at: <https://natcen.ac.uk/hot-weather-wrecks-my-nerves-climate-change-and-workers-rights-vietnam>

Vu, A. and Nguyen, L. (2024). *The Gig Economy: The Precariat in a Climate Precarious World*. *World Development Perspectives*, Volume 34. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S245229292400033X>



Sunset in Kuwait City from Diane's fieldwork.

Public Engagement

Over the past year, we organized and participated in a number of thought-provoking and stimulating conversations on global social policy.

Hong Kong

‘Population Changes and Social Inequalities’, Annual Conference

Hosted by the Hong Kong Sociological Association, November 2023

‘Resilience and Recovery’, Annual Conference

Hosted by the Society for Hong Kong Studies, June 2024



Italy

Combatting the Gendered Impacts of Climate Change in the MENA Region

In collaboration with the University of Naples L'Orientale, October 2023

Jordan

Palestine Refugees and International Law

Hosted by the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, March 2024

The Netherlands

Session on Gender-based Violence in Yemen, Yemen International Forum

Hosted by the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, June 2023

Saudi Arabia

Social Economy Forum

Hosted by the Alanood Foundation, October 2023

Taiwan

'When Hong Kong Studies Go Global' Conference

Hosted by Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, December 2023

United Kingdom

Immigration after Brexit: Where are we going?

Hosted by UK in a Changing Europe, King's College London, March 2023

Complexity Theory and Asylum Seeker Decision-Making

Hosted by the University of Bath, April 2023

Diaspora Humanitarian Exchange Group Retreat

Hosted by Shabaka, July 2023

Sudan Crisis and Implications for Neighbouring Countries

In collaboration with Shabaka, September 2023

Inaugural British Journal of Sociology Conference

Hosted by the London School of Economics, April 2024

'Co-producing Hong Kong in a Global Context' Annual Conference

Hosted by the Hong Kong Studies Association, May 2024

Vietnam

Youth for SDG16 Roundtable – Towards an Inclusive Climate Future

Hosted by UNDP, YECAP and the Embassy of Denmark, December 2023

'Localisation of Sustainable Development Goals'

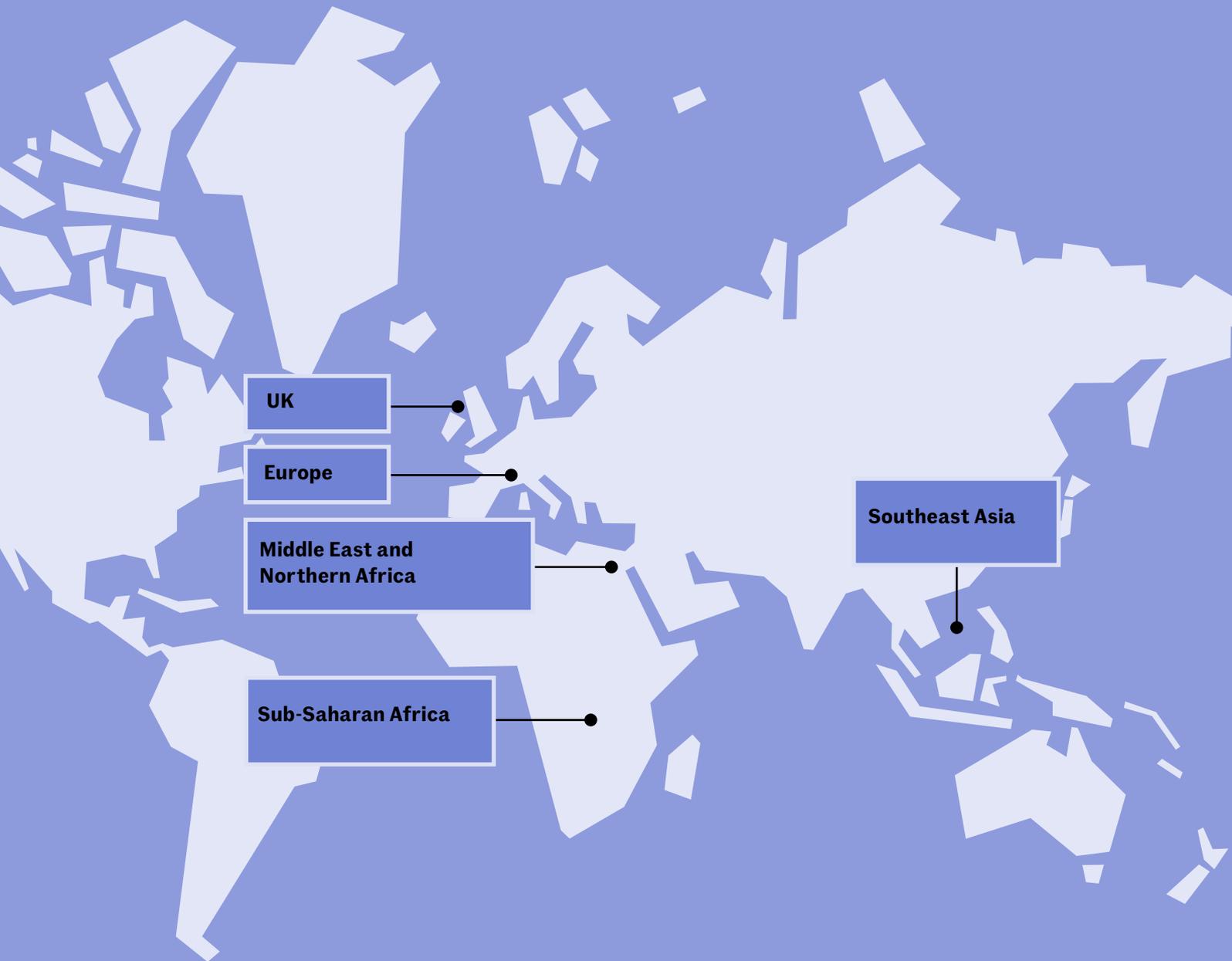
International Conference

Hosted by the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, November 2023

Climate Change, Freshwater ecosystems and health – Understanding evidence from local perspectives: the case of Vietnam

In collaboration with Newcastle University, Living Deltas Research Hub and General Statistics Office of Vietnam, June 2023

**The graphic below shows our areas of focus until 2025.
Looking forward into the 2030s, we will be expanding this to
cover additional regions.**



UK

Europe

**Middle East and
Northern Africa**

Sub-Saharan Africa

Southeast Asia

NatCen International Advisory Board



Elie Abouaoun
Independent Senior
Advisor and Peace and
Security Expert



Dr. Akwasi Aidoo
Senior Fellow,
Humanity United



Dr. Ali Awni
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Dr. Aida Essaid
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Chief Strategy Officer
Irrational Labs



Sir Michael Marmot
Professor of
Epidemiology, University
College London



Molly Schultz Hafid
Executive Director,
Butler Family Fund

NatCen International staff



**Sherine El Taraboulsi-
McCarthy**
Director, NatCen
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Diane Abdallah
Research Director



Anh Vu
Research Director



Felicity Kersting
Senior Researcher



Katya Tarnovskaya
Senior Researcher



Sherman Tai
Researcher

**We are expanding our collaboration globally.
If you are interested in finding out more about our work,
please email international@natcen.ac.uk**

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