

**ميكام**  
مركز ميريان  
للدراسات المتقدمة  
في المنطقة المغاربية



**MECAM**

**Merian Centre  
For Advanced Studies  
In The Maghreb**

# CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

**Deadline 15 March 2021; 24.00h CET.**

The Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb (MECAM) has recently been established at the Université de Tunis/Tunisia to strengthen cooperation in the Humanities and Social Sciences in and across the Maghreb, the Middle East, and Europe. The overall theme “Imagining Futures: Dealing with Disparity” guides MECAM’s research agenda on questions of Aesthetics & Cultural Practice, Inequality & Mobility, Memory & Justice, Resources & Sustainability, and Identities & Beliefs. These constitute the core issues of MECAM’s five thematic research clusters and Interdisciplinary Fellow Groups (IFGs). For its second Interdisciplinary Fellow Group (IFG) “**Inequality & Mobility**”, MECAM invites applications for **six short-term fellowships for early career researchers in the social sciences from September to December 2021**. This call for applications is open to researchers from all countries, including Tunisia.



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## CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

### MECAM-Fellowships for the IFG “Inequality & Mobility”

The Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb (MECAM), based in Tunis, is a new institutional framework for interdisciplinary, transregional, and intergenerational research. It focuses on complex social and political processes and issues that divide and connect the Maghreb, the Middle East and Europe historically and in our time – e.g. beliefs, distribution of resources, migration, rule of law, socio-economic conflicts, and (transitional) justice. MECAM aims to construct and strengthen scholarly networks between Tunisia and Germany, across the Maghreb, the Middle East, and Europe. From a vantage point in the Maghreb, MECAM’s guiding theme "Imagining Futures - Dealing with Disparity" addresses the complex processes of (re-)negotiating societal experiences into ideas for the future ('imagining futures') within the context of different forms and scales of disparity and unequal conditions ('disparity'). It explores the connection between multidimensional disparity and the possibilities of building and negotiating futures through five thematic clusters, each of which is developed in an International Fellow Group: “Aesthetics & Cultural Practice”, “Inequality & Mobility”, “Memory & Justice”, “Resources & Sustainability”, and “Identities & Beliefs”.

In this second call for short-term fellowships, **MECAM invites applications from early career researchers in the social sciences for the Interdisciplinary Fellow Group (IFG) “Inequality & Mobility”**. Four post-doctoral researchers and two advanced PhD candidates will be selected to form a fellow group at MECAM and will be required to take up residence in Tunis and to participate in an on-site scientific programme between September and December 2021. While developing and presenting their own research, fellows will also contribute to a joint working paper and events organised in the framework of the IFG.

The IFG “Inequality & Mobility” aims to examine the complex relationships between rising inequalities and diverse types of mobility in present-day Tunisia and the wider Maghreb. Ten years after the onset of mass protests that spread from Tunisia’s rural interior, resulting in “a revolution of the margins against the centre” (Ayebe 2011:470), inequalities have only deepened. This not only manifests in growing income disparities, but also in highly unequal access to public resources and enduring disadvantages for certain regions. Such inequalities are often structurally conditioned, as they date back to historical power imbalances and have become articulated in space. Multiple forms and scales of spatial divide (*fracture territoriale*, Belhedi 2012), between interior and coastal regions, rural and urban areas, as well as juxtaposed neighbourhoods within cities, thus characterise present-day Tunisia.

Rising inequality has often been a key trigger for different forms of mobility, resulting in the migration of people to cities, wealthier regions, or other countries (Boubakri and Mazzella 2005; Signoles 1987), the movement of goods across borders (Doron 2015; Meddeb 2012), and the circulation of expertise and investment (Boubakri 2002). Such mobilities can both mitigate or perpetuate existing disparities and often have transformative effects on diverse geographical locations. Finally, inequality can also curtail opportunities for spatial or social mobility, for instance by limiting access to public services for youth from lower social classes (Lamloum and Ali 2015; Melliti et al. 2018) or by enclosing the urban poor in toxic living environments (Bouhleb-Abid 2016).

Setting out from these issues, this MECAM Fellowship invites early career researchers investigating questions including, but not limited to:

- What are the forms of inequality that have historically shaped Tunisia and the Maghreb, and what new dimensions of inequality will determine its future?
- What are the variegated relationships between inequality and mobility that are crucial to comprehend present-day socio-economic and political challenges in Tunisia and the Maghreb?
- To what extent and in what ways can different forms of mobility impact inequality, and what decisions /politics/ or policies are needed to allow for mitigating effects?

## **ELIGIBILITY & MOTIVATION**

Applications are welcome from early career researchers, either advanced PhD candidates or postdoctoral researchers, in human geography, urban studies, sociology, anthropology, or a related field;

- You are interested in discussing your research in the framework of MECAM's main theme "Imagining futures – Dealing with disparity" with colleagues from the Maghreb, the Middle East and Europe.
- You are eager to do collaborative work, engage in debate and exchange within an interdisciplinary group of fellows on questions of "Inequality & Mobility".
- You are interested in revisiting your research from a different vantage point.
- You want to become part of a (new) network of interdisciplinary, intergenerational, and transregional exchange and debate on disparity and the competing models for the future that co-exist in the societies of the contemporary Maghreb, Europe, and other parts of the world.

## OUR OFFER

### MOBILITY

MECAM's resident fellowships are awarded to individuals for four months from 1 September to 31 December 2021 on the basis of an innovative and high-quality research proposal that addresses the IFG's thematic focus. MECAM will host the selected fellows for a three month on-site scientific programme in Tunisia between September 15<sup>th</sup> and December 15<sup>th</sup> 2021<sup>1</sup>. Only in exceptional cases due to the pandemic, fellowships can be arranged in a hybrid format, where the fellow remains at her/his place of residence for a part of the fellowship. Successful applicants will become 'MECAM fellows' with all relevant rights and obligations: Travel and relocation costs will be compensated according to a "no gain/no loss" principle. Furthermore, proven research costs can be reimbursed up to an amount of 500 EUR. A monthly living stipend will be awarded for the duration of the fellowship according to the same "no gain/no loss" principle.

### NETWORK

MECAM Fellows will become part of a network, which will be built up by subsequent groups of fellows over the next years, and by the scholars of the institutions that are involved in the institutional framework. In the initial phase, the IFGs include doctoral students, postdocs, as well as advanced researchers from Germany, Tunisia, the Maghreb, the Middle East, Europe, and other regions and countries. There are also networking opportunities via the specific networks of IFG representatives from MECAM's partner institutions, as well as with scholars that may be invited within the IFG as guests.

### EXCHANGE AND DEBATE

The primary aim of all fellowships is to create a high-quality and flexible setting for peer-to-peer exchange and debate between researchers from different countries, disciplines, and in different phases of their academic career: The IFG combines virtual and in-person forms of exchange and debate, and facilitates collaboration and engagement with scholars at MECAM partner institutions, students, and the wider public. An IFG coordinator will support the fellows during their stay at MECAM and will organise the on-site scientific programme; comprising research and writing seminars, public events and events at partner institutions, research excursions and a joint publication workshop.

### INDEPENDENCE

MECAM offers the freedom to pursue individual research projects, such as a particular component of field research, an academic article, an essay, a policy paper, a book, a report, etc.

### SUPPORT

MECAM provides its fellows with office workspaces equipped with digital infrastructure as well as publication facilities for open-access and peer-reviewed formats of publication through the infrastructures of its partners. It offers logistical support with travel, accommodation and field research in Tunisia. Moreover, the exchange between fellows is supported by a secure digital workspace (TrafoHub) and other digital tools.

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<sup>1</sup> The stay in Tunisia has been shortened to 3 months to account for current travel restrictions (especially the mandatory quarantine period).

## YOUR APPLICATION

MECAM assigns its partner institution, Forum Transregionale Studien in Berlin, with the processing of personal application data. Therefore, we kindly ask you to submit your application via the secure online application platform of the Forum Transregionale Studien **by March 15<sup>th</sup> 2021**, 24.00h CET: [application.trafo-berlin.de](https://application.trafo-berlin.de)

Applications by email will not be considered. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact MECAM's coordination team: [mecam-office@uni-marburg.de](mailto:mecam-office@uni-marburg.de)

As part of your application, you will be asked to prepare and upload:

- **Curriculum vitae including publications** (2-3 pages),
- **Research proposal:** Short abstract of your project (max. 1000 words),
- **Names and contact details of two referees** (university faculty members or practitioners in a field relevant to the applicant's project; no letters of recommendation required),
- One recent **writing sample:** journal article (published or forthcoming), book or thesis chapter.

MECAM kindly requests that applications are submitted in English or French. MECAM's working languages are English, French and Arabic. Applicants should be fluent in at least two of these languages, with a desirable ability to publish and present research in more than one working language.

The applications are evaluated by renowned international academics who are members of MECAM's International Advisory Board. All applicants will be informed of the outcome of the selection process in June 2021. The main selection criteria are academic merit, thematic and regional expertise, overall motivation, the quality of the proposed research related to the thematic frame of the respective IFG, and language proficiency.

Interregionalism, interdisciplinarity, and intergenerationality will be reflected in the fellowships: We therefore welcome academic cooperation between researchers from Germany, Tunisia, from the wider North African and Middle Eastern region, and the international academic community. We also want to promote diversity through interdisciplinary perspectives from various social science and humanities disciplines and contribute to strengthening academic cooperation between leading academics and young researchers. The latter is intended to help younger academics to integrate into research structures and thus build up sustainable interregional networks.

MECAM is closely monitoring the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, but is currently planning to maintain the fellowship as announced in this Call for Applications.

## INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK – WHAT IS MECAM?

The “Merian Centre for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb” (MECAM) was founded in April 2020 as an international centre for interdisciplinary research and academic exchange. It is located at the Université de Tunis/Tunisia with branches that shall be developed in Casablanca/Morocco and Beirut/Lebanon. MECAM is a joint endeavour of a consortium of renowned Tunisian and German research institutions: It is coordinated by the Philipps-Universität Marburg and the Université de Tunis and supported by the Universität Leipzig, the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) in Hamburg/Germany, the Forum Transregionale Studien in Berlin/Germany, the Institut Tunisien des Études Stratégiques (ITES) in Tunis/Tunisia, and the University of Sfax/Tunisia. During a three-year preliminary phase (2020-2023), this consortium is entrusted with the institutional development of MECAM and the preparation of the project’s main phase (2023-2032).

MECAM's partner institutions:

- **Philipps-Universität Marburg, Marburg:** The Philipps-Universität Marburg, with its 25,000 students, has a research focus on the Area Studies, which is reflected for instance in the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies (CNMS). The CNMS is involved in MECAM, alongside other interdisciplinary institutions and departments, including the Centre for Conflict Studies, the Department of History and Cultural Studies, the Institutes of Media Studies and Romance Philology, and the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science.
- **Université de Tunis, Tunis:** The Université de Tunis was founded in 1960 and is today, with some 20,000 students, one of the largest universities in Tunisia, boasting a wide-ranging research and teaching portfolio with an outstanding reputation for research excellence across the region.
- **Universität Leipzig, Leipzig:** The Universität Leipzig is a German university with around 30.000 students. Within the MECAM institutional structure the University is represented by the Institute of Geography, the Institute for Oriental Studies, and the Small Enterprise Training Program (SEPT). The Institute of Geography’s regional focus is the Mediterranean region.
- **German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA), Hamburg:** GIGA is an independent research institute based in Hamburg, Germany, which conducts research on politics, economics, and society in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East as well as on global issues. Within MECAM, the GIGA Institute for Middle East Studies (IMES) is particularly involved.
- **Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin:** The Berlin-based Forum Transregionale Studien promotes the internationalization of the humanities and social sciences. It provides scope for research, exchange, debate and communication across national, regional or cultural borderlines. In cooperation with universities and research institutes in and outside of Berlin, the Forum appoints Fellows from all over the world, develops formats of transregional communication, and engages in research programmes and initiatives such as EUME, Prisma Ukraina, or re:constitution.
- **Institut Tunisien des Études Stratégiques (ITES), Tunis:** ITES is a think tank based in Tunis. ITES prepares studies and analyses in the field of applied policy research, strategy development and policy advice on various current issues in Tunisia, the Maghreb and other MENA countries.
- **Université de Sfax, Sfax:** The Université de Sfax is located in Tunisia's second largest city and important economic centre in the south of the country. It is attended by 35,000 students.

The Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany sponsors the establishment of the international centre for research in the Humanities and Social Sciences with 1.7 million Euro in the first three years. The Université de Tunis offers complementary resources.

For further information on MECAM, please visit: [www.uni-marburg.de/en/cnms/mecam](http://www.uni-marburg.de/en/cnms/mecam)