MSCA MARIE SKŁODOWSKA-CURIE ACTIONS (MSCA) POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS 2025 APPLICATIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MACERATA

SUPERVISOR PROFILE

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Research themes proposed:

My main expertise lies in the analysis of economic disparities and poverty conditions, with a particular focus on developing countries. I am therefore interested in proposing three potential research topics:

1) INEQUALITY UNDERESTIMATION IN A CHANGING SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA
In discussions on economic inequality in the developing world, a consistent puzzle arises from the disparity between public discourse, emphasizing a perception of increasing inequality, and empirical evidence that often contradicts this view. The Arab Spring is a notable example attributed to escalating inequality, though data during that period did not support this claim.
One compelling argument suggests that household income surveys, which commonly fail to include the wealthiest segments of society, lead to downward-biased inequality measurements. To address this, a proposed method involves using tax records to gauge the incomes of the affluent, splicing this information with survey data for a more comprehensive income distribution. While this method is prevalent in developed countries, alternative approaches are needed for developing nations where comprehensive tax records may be lacking.
The research proposal, focusing on the sub-Saharan African region, acknowledges concerns about non-coverage of the rich but introduces an additional worry related to using consumption as the primary indicator of economic well-being. It argues that relying on consumption leads to biased estimates of inequality. Wealthier individuals often save significant portions of income, not reflected in consumption data. Additionally, the construction of a consumption aggregate overlooks priorities such as spending on consumer durables and housing.
To address these biases, the proposed methodology corrects the distribution of consumption by leveraging income distribution within the same household surveys. This approach aims to provide a more accurate estimation of inequality by selecting unbiased segments from both income and consumption distributions. The methodology is tailored to the dualistic structure of developing economies, where volatile, seasonal, and unequal incomes prevail, leading to higher inequality at the lower end of the consumption distribution. The research will be conducted on sub-Saharan African countries, where the Supervisor is already engaged in ongoing research.

2) FACTS AND PERCEPTIONS OF INEQUALITY
The proposed research delves into the nexus between welfare disparities and public perceptions, particularly focusing on the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region. Despite seemingly low and stagnant inequality, the region has experienced widespread dissatisfaction. Leveraging comprehensive public opinion surveys from the Arab Barometer, which gauges social, political, and economic attitudes across the Arab world, the research aims to demonstrate that absolute measures of welfare disparities, notably absolute polarization, are significantly correlated with perceptions of deprivation. These measures are deemed more suitable for explaining the growing discontent observed in the central and lower segments of the welfare distribution.

In the late 2010s, the MENA region stood out globally with a high incidence of significant declines in average subjective well-being. Notably, the top 60 percent, mainly representing the middle class, experienced steeper declines than the bottom 40 percent, representing the poor and vulnerable. However, this widespread dissatisfaction appears at odds with measures of inequality, which have remained stable or declined since the late 1990s. Similarly, despite being identified as a potential cause of social instability, polarization has shown moderate and stable trends over the period.

While existing studies in the MENA region have explored limited connections between relative welfare distribution measures and perception, the link between perception and absolute measures is less explored in welfare or development literature. Behavioural economics literature, however, has long examined this link, revealing that individual satisfaction is primarily influenced by absolute rather than relative inequalities. This unique finding suggests that individuals factor others' economic conditions into their utility functions to some extent, challenging the traditional *Homo Economicus* model. Additionally, it confirms that individuals, when evaluating their well-being, tend to consider absolute income differences rather than relative disparities.

The main goal of this proposal is to adapt the theoretical framework of "absolute differences" to the MENA context, enhancing our understanding of the Arab puzzle. Unlike relative measures, absolute measures unmistakably indicate a worsening situation in many MENA countries, reflected in a nearly 20 percent increase in the absolute Gini index. Focusing on absolute polarization reveals two notable effects: a general hollowing out of the centre of the distribution and a significant concentration in the lower tail. The key hypothesis to be tested is whether this growing absolute polarization is correlated with households' perception of their socio-economic status, making it more suitable for explaining the increasing discontent in the central and lower deciles of the welfare distribution.

3) CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACT ON INEQUALITY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Climate change is increasingly recognized as a key driver of economic inequality, particularly in vulnerable regions such as sub-Saharan Africa. While its effects on agriculture, labour markets, and livelihoods are well documented, the mechanisms through which climate variability exacerbates income disparities remain underexplored at the microeconomic level. Extreme weather events such as droughts, floods, and heatwaves disproportionately affect lower-income households, limiting their ability to invest in productivity-enhancing technologies, diversify income sources, or recover from economic shocks. This proposal aims to investigate how climate shocks influence income distribution within and across households in sub-Saharan Africa and to identify the coping mechanisms that shape resilience to environmental stressors.

Existing research highlights that climate change disproportionately harms smallholder farmers and informal workers, who often lack access to credit, insurance, and adaptive technologies. Studies have shown that climate variability can push households into persistent poverty traps, exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and limiting intergenerational mobility. While macroeconomic studies have examined the impact of climate change on GDP growth and national income disparities, less attention has been given to microeconomic dynamics, such as shifts in labour supply, migration patterns, and the role of informal safety nets in mitigating the effects of climate-related income shocks. By bridging this gap, this research will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how climate change influences inequality at the household and community levels.

The research will adopt a microeconomic approach to assess how different income groups experience and respond to climate shocks. It will examine variations in agricultural productivity, employment transitions, and access to financial services as key mediators of climate-induced inequality. Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing effective adaptation policies that support vulnerable populations, enhance economic resilience, and promote inclusive development. By generating empirical insights into the localized effects of climate change, this research aims to inform policy interventions that can mitigate the widening of economic disparities in sub-Saharan Africa.

Other info:

Fabio Clementi, Ph.D., currently holds the position of Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Macerata in Italy. His primary research areas include examining the size distribution of income, wealth, and firms, conducting business cycle analyses, and validating agent-based economic models using real-world data. Dr. Clementi has authored numerous papers published in peer-reviewed international journals and contributed chapters to books, all of which align with his scientific interests. He actively serves as a referee for various international journals and has participated in numerous national and international research projects in the field of agent-based computational economics. Dr. Clementi has presented his research at various international meetings, both as a regular participant and as an invited speaker. Additionally, he has contributed as a member of the scientific and/or organizing committees for several international

conferences. Notably, he has recently worked as a consultant for the World Bank, providing expertise on issues related to income distribution and inequality.