



2020 - 2021

Model Arab League BACKGROUND GUIDE

Council of Arab Social Affairs Ministers

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**National
Council
on US-
Arab
Relations**



Original draft by Alyssa Pascoe, Chair of the Arab Social Affairs Ministers at the 2021 National University Model Arab League, with contributions from the dedicated staff and volunteers at the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations

Honorable Delegates,

It is with great honor and excitement that I welcome you all to the 2020-2021 season of Model Arab League. My name is Alyssa Pascoe, and I will be serving as the Chair for the Council on Arab Social Affairs Ministers at both the National University Model Arab League and the Northeast Regional Model Arab League. I am a senior at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, double majoring in International Affairs and Politics, Philosophy, Economics, concentrating in Public & Economic Policy, with minors in Global Health, History, and Law & Public Policy.

I have been active in Model Arab League for the past three years, and have had such an incredible experience learning about Arab politics whilst working alongside motivating students from across the globe. Additionally, I have been an active participant in Model United Nations conferences since middle school, in the United States, China, and Malaysia. My experience with Model Arab League has cultivated skills that I use every day, and I cannot wait to see what it brings out in you. I participated with NCUSAR in their Qatar Exchange Fellowship, which was an incredible opportunity to visit the Middle East and develop a greater understanding of Arab policies and culture.

The topics this committee will be covering a wide range of issues relating to social challenges Arab League states are currently facing. These issues are critical to the lives of millions, and I expect all participants in this committee to approach these topics with respect and maturity. To achieve this, I hope you all explore your research in depth, utilizing this background guide and its suggested resources, in addition to the information you find yourselves.

I am looking forward to a phenomenal year as you collaborate with one another to draft policy solutions to these pressing challenges. I cannot wait for this committee to begin, and Please feel free to reach out with any questions you come across during your personal research.

All the best,

Alyssa Pascoe
Chair, Council on Arab Social Affairs Ministers

Topic I: Formulating solutions to improve epidemic resilience throughout the Arab League, in addition to strengthening health systems and infrastructure in states.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019 brought to the world's attention the need for better epidemic response systems. The pandemic was unprecedented and brought to light the flaws in the global healthcare system.¹ Organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) struggled to address the growing threats, especially with issues surrounding national sovereignty amongst states. Due to a number of factors, the global response to the pandemic was rather appalling, and a disease that could have been contained was instead spread to every corner of the globe.

Until a vaccine is released and distributed to the public, the danger of the pandemic will continue to impact the lives of everyone. The global economy has taken a pause from standard operations. Healthcare systems have been struggling from the overload in patients, and manufacturing facilities have struggled to keep up with the demand for personal protective equipment. It is evident that a stronger approach to healthcare and epidemiology is needed, or else the tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic is sure to occur in years to come.

B. History in the Arab World

When looking at the MENA region, one well-known example of pandemic response involves Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), also known by the public as “camel flu”. MERS is a type of coronavirus similar to COVID-19, with origins in camels.² The disease was discovered in 2012, with the first case confirmed in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.³ The disease spread throughout much of the MENA region, as well as to Europe, the United States, and South Korea, with the final country being host to an outbreak in 2015.⁴ Despite the spread globally, MERS

¹ McKay, Betsy and Hinshaw, Drew (2020). How Coronavirus Overpowered the World Health Organization. *The Wall Street Journal*.
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-who-was-built-to-guard-global-health-it-was-too-weak-for-coronavirus-11598625537>

² Killerby, Marie E., et al. (2020). Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus Transmission. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, Volume 26, No. 2. https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/26/2/19-0697_article

³ Al-Osail, Aisha M. and Al-Wazzah, Marwan J. (2017). The history and epidemiology of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus. *Multidisciplinary Respiratory Medicine*, Volume 12, No. 20.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5545842/>

⁴ World Health Organization Western Pacific (2015). MERS outbreak in the Republic of Korea, 2015. *World Health Organization*. <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/2015-mers-outbreak>

was very well contained, and to date there have only been around 2,500 cases. Still, the virus has a high case fatality rate rate of 35%, meaning that there were great fears about the impact the pandemic could have on populations until it was contained.

Many states in the MENA region took an excellent approach to combat the pandemic. The WHO encourages individuals to take precautions with travel to Hajj that year, and encourages elderly individuals or those with weakened immune systems to consider altering plans.⁵ Early intervention and a direct public health approach helped keep the virus contained, and fortunately MERS has not experienced significant resurgence in recent years.

Aside from viruses, there have also been significant epidemics that have impacted states within the MENA region. In October 2016, a deadly cholera outbreak hit communities through Yemen during the ongoing civil war.⁶ Challenges with sanitation and contaminated resources infected individuals, with the disease soon turning deadly for populations with vulnerable immune systems. While the cost of vaccination and treatment programs are rather affordable, the turmoil of war prevented individuals from receiving the care they needed. Oral cholera vaccines were not released until 16 months into the outbreak, and over one million individuals had already been infected by the time resources arrived.⁷ There have been several other epidemics that have hurt communities throughout Yemen, in a trend which demonstrates the relationship between conflict zones and disease.⁸

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

Ultimately, diseases hold no respect for borders and boundaries, meaning that a cooperative effort is needed to prevent future diseases from spreading. It will be important to look at how states can improve the capabilities of their healthcare systems to create effective solutions. Delegates should explore their state's policies surrounding vaccines and other public health measures, and be cognizant if these actions are supporting everyone within a community. Even with COVID-19 being a significant portion of this issue, it will also be necessary to look at other epidemics as well, and recognize ways that future diseases can be mitigated through better response capabilities.

⁵ World Health Organization (2013). World Health Organization interim travel advice on MERS-CoV for pilgrimages to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *World Health Organization*. <https://www.who.int/ith/updates/20130725/en/>

⁶ Federspiel, Frederik (2018). The cholera outbreak in Yemen: lessons learned and way forward. *BMC Public Health*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6278080/>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- How has my state responded to the COVID-19 pandemic? Have there been other diseases of concern in recent years?
- How is the healthcare system functioning within my state? Are there certain populations that struggle to receive access to healthcare, and are there areas of health that are overlooked?
- Is my state prepared to handle potential future epidemiological outbreaks? Are there sufficient reserves of vaccines and other necessary medical equipment?
- Does my state have a standard schedule for immunizations? Are there any populations within my state that are resistant or apprehensive about vaccinations?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- How can League members work with one another to improve pandemic preparedness and response?
- In what ways can League members cooperate with one another to increase epidemiological surveillance capabilities?
- How can members of the League of Arab States better combat pandemic outbreaks in areas of conflict?
- How can the League of Arab States work to build partnerships with other organizations focused on epidemiology and global health?

IV. Additional Resources

- [COVID-19 Dashboard](#)

A frequently updated infographic from Johns Hopkins University, which delegates can use to find their country and its development of cases of COVID-19.

- [Global Health Research and Policy - Health status and health systems financing in the MENA region: roadmap to universal healthcare coverage](#)

This study explores the burden of disease in a number of MENA states, as well as health systems financing in each state.

- [World Health Organization EMRO - Epidemic and pandemic-prone diseases](#)

Includes graphic listing current outbreaks in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, which is helpful in understanding the diseases and epidemiological threats to MENA states.

- [UNICEF - Immunization Financing in MENA-Middle Income Countries](#)

This report looks at immunization finance in a number of MENA states, and also looks at factors which impact the administration of regular vaccines and immunizations.

Topic II: Evaluating strategies to combat food insecurity within MENA countries, especially in areas with limited natural resources.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

Climate change has significantly impacted global food security. Due to rising temperatures and irregularity with weather, farmlands have been hit hard, and for some communities the sources of food have been reduced. This is especially noticeable in areas where arable land is scarce to begin with, as is in the MENA region.⁹ Issues with food security go beyond production of food, and also involve the nutritional capacity of food, as well as accessibility to quality food sources.¹⁰ Communities may be limited with the types of food available due to agricultural quality and weather patterns. Additionally, policymakers may not be taking sufficient action to ensure that quality food is accessible to people in rural locations or areas with limited nutritional infrastructure. Nutritional quality varies greatly among marginalized groups, and plays a significant factor in global disparities of health.¹¹

In many areas of the world, a community may have access to sufficient calories, though the nutrition of food sources may be limited to a particular starch. In order to achieve good health an individual needs to consume a variety of nutrients present in different food sources. This is essential for child development, as nutrients such as calcium and Vitamin D play a significant role in physical growth, and Vitamins A and E support brain development and cognition.¹² For populations that do not have access to quality food sources, their future quality of life may be impacted and play a significant role in their future wellness and success.

B. History in the Arab World

Due to the threats that climate change poses to the MENA region, there is limited arable land for many states. Ecological diversity also impacts the types of crops that can be grown in certain

⁹ Thirarath, Itt (2016). Food Security in the Middle East. *Middle East Institute*.
<https://www.mei.edu/publications/food-security-middle-east>

¹⁰ Galal, Osman (2003). Nutrition-related health patterns in the Middle East. *Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, Volume 12, No. 3. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/nutrition/facts.htm>

¹¹ Perez-Escamilla, Rafael, *et al.* (2018). Nutritional Disparities and the Global Burden of Malnutrition. *The BMJ*.
<https://www.bmj.com/content/361/bmj.k2252>

¹² Galal, Osman (2003). Nutrition-related health patterns in the Middle East. *Asia Pacific Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, Volume 12, No. 3. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/nutrition/facts.htm>

regions, meaning that many states are reliant upon other states to import food for specific nutrients.¹³ The MENA region has to import approximately 57% of calories consumed each year, primarily in the form of wheat, grains, protein, and dairy products.¹⁴ Better land allocation and farming procedures could allow for MENA states to produce more of their own food, and as a result be less reliant on trade with other states.

Many of the issues with food security do not concern food availability, but rather food accessibility.¹⁵ A state can have significant food supplies for all its citizens, but struggle to distribute this food to everyone. Rural populations are hit hard with accessibility issues, especially for nomadic populations that travel often and rely on particular strategies. Accessibility goes beyond physical accessibility, and also includes financial barriers that may prevent individuals from receiving quality food. There may be certain food items with high prices due to market control, keeping individuals with lower incomes unable to access these goods.

The situation in Yemen has unfortunately highlighted the need for greater infrastructure surrounding access to food.¹⁶ Massive starvation due to the Yemeni Civil War (2015-present) has so far caused the deaths of over 80,000 children.¹⁷ Populations in war-torn areas experience challenges receiving quality food, and the burden of suffering expands to include nutritional difficulties.¹⁸

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

There are a number of international organizations focused on food security worldwide, including the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Delegates should look into the work of NGOs addressing food security and understand initiatives that may be successful in the MENA region. It is also important to consider all areas associated with food insecurity, and to keep research open to explore all aspects of food security.

Delegates should evaluate and identify the factors that feed into food insecurity in a state or region, and look for different solutions to mitigate these conditions. Evaluating existing policy

¹³ <http://apjcn.nhri.org.tw/server/APJCN/12/3/337.pdf>

¹⁴ MENA Forum (2019). Where does the MENA region's food come from? *MENA Forum*. <https://mena-forum.com/where-mena-regions-food-comes-from/#.Xx-xDy2ZOuU>

¹⁵ Karasapan, Omer (2020). Striving for Water and Food Security. *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*. <https://www.thecaireview.com/essays/striving-for-water-and-food-security/>

¹⁶ Al Jazeera (2020). UN: Millions of Yemeni children on the 'brink of starvation'. *Al Jazeera*. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/06/millions-yemeni-children-brink-starvation-200625084934928.html>

¹⁷ Fox, Kara (2018). 85,000 children under 5 may have died of starvation in Yemen war. *CNN*. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/20/middleeast/yemen-children-starvation-death-intl/index.html>

¹⁸ USAID (2019). Food Assistance Fact Sheet - Yemen. *USAID*. <https://www.usaid.gov/yemen/food-assistance>

and administration will be a first step in changing the current status of food security, with later action addressing the particular challenges and weaknesses with existing mechanisms. Furthermore, delegates should evaluate action that can be taken to reduce food waste, and better allocate nutritional resources to communities in all areas of a state.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- Are there populations within my state that have greater food insecurity than in other areas?
- Are there any factors that threaten food security in my state, such as environmental, economic, or meteorological factors?
- Does my state have any organizations in place that analyze nutritional or food related issues? If yes, do they have any significant findings on areas that need to be addressed?
- What does average daily food consumption look like in my state, and what items are staples foods that supply significant energy needs? Do these foods provide sufficient nutritional value?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- How can members of the League of Arab States work cohesively to combat food insecurity within the region?
- How does political corruption influence food insecurity, and are there any steps the League can take to help mitigate this?
- Can delegates seek to combat food insecurity while also reducing food waste present in many member states?
- In what way can a resolution ensure its solutions reach individuals across the League, especially in rural, impoverished areas?

IV. Additional Resources

- [Brookings - Middle East food security amid the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

Provides information on growing food insecurity amongst League members due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- [World Bank - Arable land \(% of land area\)](#)

This resource can be used to understand arable land in your state, and gage information about agricultural land in particular states

- [UN World Food Programme - Emergency Dashboard - Yemen](#)

This site from the UN WFP provides monthly information reports on food insecurity within Yemen. It also includes data on the impact COVID-19 is having on relief efforts.

- [Middle East Institute - Food Security in the Middle East](#)

This article touches upon food security in a number of states and regions in the Middle East, and also provided excellent recommendations for additional reading.

Topic III: Exploring measures to strengthen film and media industries within Arab countries, in addition to promoting and preserving Arab culture and identity.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

Globally, the film and media industry plays a significant role in shaping and preserving the culture of a society. Hollywood, Bollywood, and Nollywood are “big three” film districts currently, with significant distribution of content worldwide. While Nollywood is the smallest of the three districts, it still releases an astonishing 50 films per week, and brings an estimated \$590 million into the Nigerian economy.¹⁹

B. History in the Arab World

While many countries within the MENA region have been developing their national film industries, the largest by far is the Jordanian film industry. The Jordanian government established the Royal Film Commission in 2003, with the goal to develop an internationally competitive film industry which encourages cross-cultural understanding of Arab culture.²⁰ The Jordan Film Fund was established to provide capital to aspiring filmmakers, in an effort to produce more cinematic content for the public.²¹ In the past decade, the Jordanian film industry has brought in an estimated \$372 million to the Jordanian economy and created 106,000 jobs, making a significant impact on the social wellness of many.²²

Film festivals both within the MENA region and internationally have the ability to showcase Arab films to a larger audience.²³ These festivals propel cinematic achievements to a mainstream

¹⁹ Moudio, Rebecca (2013). Nigeria’s film industry: a potential gold mine? *Africa Renewal*.
<https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/may-2013/nigeria's-film-industry-potential-gold-mine>

²⁰ The Royal Film Commission - Jordan (2020). Who We Are. *The Royal Film Commission*.
<http://www.film.jo/Contents/Who-We-Are.aspx>

²¹ ANSA (2020). Film industry in Jordan boosted by funding initiative. *ANSA*.
http://www.ansamed.info/ansamed/en/news/sections/generalnews/2018/03/07/film-industry-in-jordan-boosted-by-funding-initiative_6f712a79-7924-4f52-aa8c-2df9eda2d841.html

²² Merican, Sara (2020). Crew for Korean Thriller ‘The Negotiations’ Arrives in Jordan, A Booming Location for Global Film Production. *Forbes*.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/saramerican/2020/07/10/crew-for-korean-thriller-the-negotiations-arrives-in-jordan-a-booming-location-for-global-film-production/#5c6668331853>

²³ Mille (2020). Egypt’s Top Film Festival is Back, and They’re Taking Submissions. *Mille*.
<https://www.milleworld.com/best-arab-films-to-watch-egypt-film-festival-online/>

audience, and also encourage states to invest in the Arab film industry.²⁴²⁵ There are also festivals dedicated to showcasing the work of individuals from particular demographic groups, such as the Cairo International Women's Film Festival, which highlights the achievement of women filmmakers.²⁶

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

By encouraging growing media and cultural programs, members of the League of Arab States will be able to preserve essential elements of culture for years to come. Delegates can consider ways in which film programs can be developed further, in order to highlight the complexities within Arab cultural identity. It will be important to consider methods for bringing all demographics into the conversation, including women and youth voices. Furthermore, it will be important to consider accessibility with the products of media industries, and ways that art and media can reach populations from different walks of life. Exploring avenues to bring voices from rural communities is important, to ensure that cultural development programs benefit all populations, not only those in urban and developed areas.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What forms of cultural mediums are significant within my state?
- Does my state currently have any programs promoting media or cultural pursuits?
- Are there populations in my state without access to digital technologies? How can media programs still serve the needs of these populations?
- Where do residents of my state obtain film and media from? Is there limited film created in my state, and is there a particular reason for this?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- How is media and art significant to Arab identity across the MENA region?
- In what ways can media programs reach populations in rural areas and zones of conflict?

²⁴ Simon, Aissa (2016). Arab Film Fests on the Rise. *Variety*.
<https://variety.com/2016/film/festivals/arab-film-fests-on-rise-1201774193/>

²⁵ Frodon, Jean-Michel (2013). Film festivals in the Arab world.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292274304_Film_festivals_in_the_Arab_world

²⁶ Cairo Women's Film Festival (2020). <http://cairowomenfilmfest.com>

- How can media and film be used to break barriers between populations and encourage positive relationships?
- How would a League-wide program bring youth voices to the conversation?

IV. Additional Resources

- [Arab Studies Quarterly - Origins and Patterns in the Discourse of New Arab Cinema](#)

This journal article explores the evolution of the modern film industry within the MENA region, and various factors which influence the growth of this industry.

- [Kraidy, M.M. and Khalil, J.F - Youth, Media, and Culture in the Arab World](#)

The role of Arab youth in modern communications is explored in this article, paying special attention to the way globalization impacts identity.

- [Oliver Wyman - Opportunities and Challenges in the Middle East and North Africa Media Production Market](#)

This source explores the growth of the MENA regions film industry, and additionally the benefits that film and media industries have had on states worldwide.

- [UNESCO World Report - Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue](#)

While this source does not exclusively focus on the MENA region, it takes an in-depth approach to explaining the significance of culture and identity worldwide, and the relationship it creates with other aspects of society. It also includes reports and data about culture in different states, and strategies for cultural development programs.

Topic IV: Discussing the issues surrounding child labor within the MENA region, and resolving issues that cause children to enter the workforce at a young age.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

An estimated 168 million children worldwide are currently engaged in child labor.²⁷ There have been challenges with obtaining accurate data and statistics, due to lack of documentation in states, and difficulty tracking labor in more rural areas in the world. There are also issues regarding the legality of child labor, where in some states it can be legal to fully work at 14 years of age, providing inconsistencies in data about child labor.

There are also challenges with the different types of labor that children may be engaged in, as some fields present particular dangers, especially to individuals that are still in development. Working in manufacturing and construction puts children at risk of being injured during work. Even sectors like farming can provide hazardous, with exposure to chemicals or sharp tools. There are a number of ways that child labor impacts the life and well-being of individuals, with the need for states to get a better grasp at the issue at hand and the ways it hurts child wellness.

B. History in the Arab World

There are a significant number of factors which result in children entering the workforce in the MENA region. For areas in states where subsistence farming is a significant part of nutrition, it is important for communities to utilize all labor possible to bring in the harvest.²⁸ This can cause children to work long hours, and in some cases the time children would traditionally use for schooling are instead used for working. Issues of child labor within family systems are complex, as in many cases the use of labor is essential to keeping the community afloat, albeit causing children to miss out on important developmental and educational experiences.²⁹

It is also important to recognize the influences that conflict and regional instability have on pushing children into the workforce at an early age. Rates of children in the workforce have grown during the ongoing Syrian Civil War, as many children are forced to serve as the main

²⁷ Veerappan, Malarvizhi (2019). Chart: Globally, 168 million children remain trapped in child labor. *World Bank Blogs*. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/chart-globally-168-million-children-remain-trapped-child-labor>

²⁸ FAO (2001). Farming Systems and Poverty: Middle East and North Africa. *Food and Agriculture Organization*. <http://www.fao.org/3/y1860e/y1860e05.htm>

²⁹ ILO (2020). Child labour in agriculture. *International Labour Organization*. <http://ilo.org/ipec/areas/Agriculture/lang--en/index.htm>

breadwinners for their families.³⁰ Conflict and instability push children into the workforce rather than education, which is a violation of Article 32 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child.³²

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

To address the issue of child labor in the MENA region, it will be important for states to determine a comprehensive approach with one another. There are issues with child labor that occur entirely within a state's borders, additional challenges when individuals cross borders due to a number of factors. States must take into consideration factors that push children to work in specific industries in particular locations. Delegates should also consider issues surrounding monitoring of child labor, and ways to improve statistical information to understand trends in this issue for years to come.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- Are there any issues in my state that could be causing more children to enter the workforce? Why are they entering the workforce?
- Does my state have access to education for students of any background, or are only certain groups permitted to attend public schools? What level of education is compulsory for students in my state?
- What are the laws in my state regarding child labor? How does the legal system address violations of these laws?
- Are there specific industries children are entering in my state? If yes, why are these industries popular?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

³⁰ Caspani, Maria (2015). Child labor on the rise among Syrian children as crisis spials: agnecies. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-children-labour/child-labor-on-the-rise-among-syrian-children-as-crisis-spirals-agencies-idUSKCN0PB6C920150701>

³¹ ILO (2012). National Study on Worst Forms of Child Labor in Syria. *ILO Regional Office for Arab States and UNICEF (Syria)*.

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_204043.pdf

³² United Nations (1990). Convention on the Rights of the Child. *United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

- How can a resolution on this topic address the variety of fields in which child labor is present, and in various capacities?
- What must be included in a resolution to ensure that children enter a safe environment after experiences in exploitative conditions?
- What can be done by the League of Arab States to better gather information about child labor in states?
- Are there existing non-governmental organizations that could support the League of Arab States on these topics?

IV. Additional Resources

- [International Labour Organization - Middle East and North Africa: Conflict and mass displacement increase child labour](#)

This link connects to a detailed report on child labor specifically in the League of Arab States, and provides useful background information on different trends and policy recommendations to combat child labor.

- [UN High Commissioner for Refugees - Protection of Refugee Children in the Middle East and North Africa](#)

This report looks at numerous factors that impact the rights of children, including issues with child labor.

- [UNICEF - COVID-19 doubles the burden for millions of children in the Middle East and North Africa Region](#)

An article by UNICEF which explores the relationship with the current COVID-19 pandemic and the need for more humanitarian aid to support children.

- [International Policy Center - Children's Right to Social Protection in the Middle East and North Africa Region—an Analysis of Legal Frameworks from a Child Rights Perspective](#)

This report explores legal frameworks present in MENA states, and connects these laws to various issues impacting children including labor laws.

Topic V: Discussing the impacts of gender based violence against women in the MENA region and strengthening legislation to improve prevention and litigation, with special attention to female genital mutilation.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

An estimated 200 million girls worldwide have experienced female genital mutilation (FGM).³³ FGM is a practice which involves the cutting of some or all of the external female genitalia.³⁴ There are a number of methods in which this practice is carried out, and the age of practice varies across cultures. There are a myriad of risks associated with FGM, including infections, complications during childbirth, and even death. Many experts agree that there are no known health benefits, but rather that the practice is carried out due to cultural norms. Worldwide it is most prevalent in communities in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Rates of prevalence vary across countries, with the highest prevalence found in Somalia (98%), Djibouti (93%), and Egypt (87%).³⁵

FGM violates the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, otherwise known as the Maputo Protocol.³⁶ The United Nations has issued many statements opposed to the practice of FGM, with Secretary General António Guterres establishing the goal to “eliminate female genital mutilation by 2030.”³⁷ However, there is also pushback from communities that argue that anti-FGM rhetoric is the implementation of western cultural norms.

B. History in the Arab World

Within the League of Arab States, there are states which have criminal provisions preventing the practice of FGM, and states that do not.³⁸ Even with laws in place, there is still the issue of enforcement and understanding the issues ongoing within a community. For example, Egypt has

³³ UNICEF (2020). Female genital mutilation. *UNICEF Data*.

<https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/female-genital-mutilation/>

³⁴ National Health Service (2019). Overview - Female genital mutilation. *United Kingdom National Health Service*.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/female-genital-mutilation-fgm/>

³⁵ Dockery, Wesley (2018). Where does the Arab world stand on female genital mutilation? *Deutsche Welle*.

<https://www.dw.com/en/where-does-the-arab-world-stand-on-female-genital-mutilation/~:text=How%20are%20Arab%20governments%20fighting,facilities%20but%20not%20in%20homes>

³⁶ The Maputo Protocol (2011). About the Protocol. *The Maputo Protocol*.

<https://maputoprotocol.com/about-the-protocol>

³⁷ United Nations (2020). International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, 6. *United Nations*.

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/female-genital-mutilation-day>

³⁸ End FGM (2020). Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Call for a Global Response. *End FGM*.

https://www.endfgm.eu/editor/files/2020/04/FGM_Global_-_ONLINE_PDF_VERSION_-_07.pdf

many provisions within its constitutional laws that explicitly prohibits FGM,³⁹ yet an estimated 87.2% of Egyptian women aged 15-49 have experienced FGM.⁴⁰ Of FGM procedures carried out in Egypt, an estimated 75% of procedures are carried out by medical professionals.⁴¹ Communities may believe that the medicalization of FGM carries less risks, but in reality it provides the same harms to individuals.

Situations similar to Egypt raise concerns regarding the effectiveness of existing laws in countries, and whether legal mechanisms in place are doing the job to keep procedures from happening. Policies surrounding FGM are more challenging to address in rural communities, where populations are more widespread and there may be limited access to medical services.⁴²

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

Although the issue of FGM is controversial in some states, it is important that the League of Arab States works comprehensively to address this issue at hand. Existing measures to combat the problem have been somewhat effective, though there are many communities that are not being impacted by the policy and activists' work against the practice.

It will be important to approach this subject aware of the discourse of perspectives surrounding this issue. There are feminist scholars which advocate in favor of FGM for its cultural significance to communities, while others deem it to be a human rights violation. Some states may be vehemently opposed to the practice, though there may still be communities practicing FGM in private. There are also concerns that punishment against doctors who practice FGM is pushing the practice further underground and unknown from public health experts and policy makers.⁴³ The illegality of the practice has caused many women and girls to avoid seeking medical treatment when harmed by the practice, and a different approach to criminalization could facilitate more dialogue about the prevalence and reality of the procedure.

³⁹ Thomson Reuters Foundation (2018). Egypt: The Law and FGM. *Thomson Reuters Foundation*.
[https://www.28toomany.org/static/media/uploads/Law%20Reports/egypt_law_report_v1_\(june_2018\).pdf](https://www.28toomany.org/static/media/uploads/Law%20Reports/egypt_law_report_v1_(june_2018).pdf)

⁴⁰ 28 Too Many (2017). Country Profile: FGM in Egypt. *28 Too Many*.
<https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5a17ef454.pdf>

⁴¹ United Nations Population Fund (2019). When health workers harm: the medicalization of female genital mutilation in Egypt. *United Nations Population Fund*.
<https://www.unfpa.org/news/when-health-workers-harm-medicalization-female-genital-mutilation-egypt>

⁴² Kashiwase, Haruna (2019). Female Genital Mutilation is still practiced around the world. *The World Bank*.
<http://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/stories/fgm-still-practiced-around-the-world.html>

⁴³ Parsitau, Damaris Seleina (2018). How outlawing female genital mutilation in Kenya has driven it underground and led to its medicalization. *The Brookings Institution*.
<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2018/06/19/how-outlawing-female-genital-mutilation-in-kenya-has-driven-it-underground-and-led-to-its-medicalization/>

It will be useful to look at the issue with different lenses to better grasp the root of the practice. Taking an approach that considers non-imperialist, transnational feminism is important⁴⁴, and I suggest that delegates evaluate what this procedure represents in terms of the human right to autonomy and informed medical consent. Additionally, I encourage delegates to explore scholars from a variety of backgrounds to understand the complexities of attitudes people hold towards FGM, to better support communities. Exploring the field of critical medical anthropology is also of use to understand healthcare in relation to political ecosystems of the state.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- How prevalent is FGM in my state? Are there particular demographics that practice FGM more than others?
- Has my state's government promoted campaigns against FGM? Have any prominent NGOs done work in my state against FGM?
- Is FGM legal in my state? If yes, what mechanisms are in place to enforce these laws, and have they been successful?
- Does my state have any anti-discriminatory laws protecting women against domestic abuse and harm?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- How can existing international law, including the Arab Charter on Human Rights, be used to support human rights involving the practice of FGM?
- Is the current enforcement of anti-FGM laws substantial across the League of Arab States, or is an additional League-wide framework needed?
- How can the committee draft a resolution on FGM that recognizes both human rights and cultural rights?
- What can states do to better support individuals who have experienced FGM and other forms of gender-based abuse?

IV. Additional Resources

⁴⁴ Smith, Courtney (2011). Who Defines "Mutilation"? Challenging Imperialism in the Discourse of Female Genital Cutting. *Feminist Formations*, Volume 23, No. 1. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41301637?seq=1>

- [World Health Organization - FGM Fact Sheet](#)

Provides basic information about the practice of FGM and the various types that exist, as well as the cultural and social factors why FGM is performed.

- [Centre for Reproductive Rights - FGM Legal Prohibitions Worldwide](#)

While elements of this article may be outdated, it provides useful information about FGM practices and decriminalization laws. It also discusses North African countries with very high rates of the practice, which can be useful in understanding the differing perspectives on this issue across the MENA region.

- [UNFPA Egypt - Female Genital Mutilation](#)

Although this article only focuses on Egypt, it can provide useful ideas for methods of combating FGM in other states by reviewing the tactics that the Egyptian government has taken.

- [UN Women - Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women and Girls](#)

This article provided statistics and information about violence experienced by women in Arab states, and it is useful in outlining multiple ways how the human rights of women are threatened.