



2021 - 2022

**Model Arab League
BACKGROUND GUIDE**

Special Council on Poverty and Unemployment

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**National
Council
on US-
Arab
Relations**



Original draft by Megan Booty, Chair of the Special Council on Poverty and Unemployment at the 2022 National University Model Arab League, with contributions from the dedicated staff and volunteers at the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations

Honorable Delegates,

My name is Megan Booty and I am so excited to be a part of the 2021-2022 Model Arab League season! I hope you all are prepared to have a great year of debate. I am currently a junior at Converse University studying Special Education with a concentration in Deaf and Hard of Hearing, an ASL minor, and add-ons in Early Childhood and Intellectual Disabilities education. I am very excited at the opportunity to be the Chair of the Special Topic committee and to be exploring the topic of unemployment and education. I enjoy the Special Topic committee because it allows us to explore different topics that may be affected by recent events. Arab states sometimes have more specific issues that can be focused on through a committee like this, and I think the topics being addressed in this committee this year provide an interesting area to explore.

I originally decided to participate in the Arab League because I had competed in debate for six years in high school, although in a different style. I was very excited to pursue this style of debate and explore a more collaborative and group style of debate. This will be my third year in the Model League team at Converse University. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as a delegate and I am looking forward to participating in a new way! My first experience chairing was at SERMAL last year in the Palestinian Committee and am excited to chair again this year.

I want you all to have a good year and participate in debate fully. Please use this background guide as a starting point to explore the topics in depth and understand the situation both globally and in the Arab region. Make sure to dig deep into your countries policies as well to deliberate during debate with the position that your country would take on these issues. I hope you all dig into these topics and come up with some wonderful solutions! I look forward to seeing you all at conferences in this 2021-2022 Model Arab League Season!

All the best,

Megan Booty

Topic I : Discussing the shortage of women in the job sector of the MENA region and developing a plan to encourage higher rates of women's labor force participation and to reduce women's unemployment.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

In 2020 only 46.9% of women, a 4% decrease from 1990, were active in the labor force globally. This is a drastic difference from the percentage of men in the labor force which as of 2020 was 74%. This represents the gap in the labor force on a global scale. Only 38% of the global workforce is made up of women.

There are several possible sources for this gap. Firstly, culture is a large factor in women being able to attain and hold a job. In some areas, it may not be appropriate for women to hold a job, or jobs that are appropriate for women may not be abundant. There are areas however that encourage women to participate in the labor force. Another factor in the overall decrease in the labor force, both for women and men, is COVID. COVID had a major impact on the labor force cause a large amount of the population to lose their jobs.¹ Gender roles also have an impact on the opportunities open for women. These gender roles could relate to their country, religion, or their home life. Another obstacle for women is managing a balance between their work life and family. Since most women belong to cultures where their responsibilities lie in the home this can cause stress and other difficulties in participating in the labor force. In some areas another difficulty could be finding safe transportation. This is especially an issue in conflict areas.²

B. History in the Arab World

The unemployment of women in the Arab states has risen above 16%.³ MENA countries make up 13 of the countries with the lowest participation of women. These countries include Yemen, with the lowest, Syria, Jordan, Iran, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Lebanon, Egypt, Oman, Tunisia, Mauritania, and Turkey. This is not because the education for women in these countries is of a lower quality because in several countries girls actually have higher science and math scores than the boys.

In the arab region there are 3 main thing that cause women to have a lower employment rate. Firstly, family structure. In most arab countries the men are the ones responsible and in charge of

¹ <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-the-workforce-global/>

² <https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Employment/barriers-women>

³ <https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Employment/barriers-women>

the home. This means that most of the women are not allowed to pursue a job opportunity and instead are responsible for taking care of the home. Another reason is that the public sector is very large while the private sector is very small. There is also an unhealthy business environment for women because of the imposed gender roles and lack of support that women receive. Without any assistance in managing the family and work life, especially if they have children, trying to maintain a job and healthy homelife is very difficult.⁴

In Saudi Arabia the employment rate of women is on the rise. This is in part because of the increase in the cost of living in Saudi Arabia. This increase has led to a need for women to work so it has become more accepted. Another contributing factor is that there has been a decrease in religious policing over the opportunities women can pursue. These changes have increased the participation of women from 19% in 2016 to 33% in 2020. This meets the goal they set for Vision 2030.⁵

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

What are ways countries can attempt to bridge the gender gap? An important problem to address is equal pay. This will provide an incentive for women to take part in the labor force. It also provides women a little more security. Solutions could also focus on addressing the stereotypes for the types of job women have. Perhaps exploring ways to promote other job opportunities and providing support for women wanting to pursue those opportunities. Gender discrimination is also a key point that could have some interesting solutions.

Other areas that need to be addressed include things that impact women within the workforce. Planning for economic issues of the future will also help in addressing unemployment across the board.⁶ Support systems are a vital solution for women in the workforce. These systems could focus on helping women in maintaining a job and a family, providing protection, and making connections with high-paying jobs or companies in the private sector. Training and education before and within jobs is also a good solution.⁷

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<https://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/despite-high-education-levels-arab-women-still-don-t-have-jobs>

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<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-05-27/saudi-arabia-2021-women-at-work-climbing-fast-in-conservative-islamic-kingdom>

⁶ <https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Employment/barriers-women#bridging-gap>

⁷ <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-the-workforce-global/>

The International Labor Organization has many ideas for how to address the issue of women's lack of participation in the labor force. A possible solution they have researched involves creating an Active Labor Market Program (ALMP) focused on young women since most of them currently do not. ALMP has a multi-pronged approach to the issue, including training, wage subsidies, job search assistance, and more. This multi-pronged approach will help in resolving the issue both in the short and long term.⁸

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- How big is the wage gap in my country?
- Does my country have any programs or protections for women in the workforce?
- How does my country address discrimination?
- Is there a cultural reason for the impact on the gap in my country?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- Does it address gender stereotypes associated with certain jobs?
- Are gender roles addressed with respect to culture and state sovereignty?
- Do women have protections in new opportunities provided?
- Is it a multi-pronged approach?

IV. Additional Resources

- https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_563865.pdf
- <https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Employment/barriers-women#global-gap/labour-force>
- https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/female_unemployment/
- <https://unctad.org/news/gender-and-unemployment-lessons-covid-19-pandemic>

⁸ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_563865.pdf

Topic II: Devising frameworks for policies addressing high poverty rates.

I. Introduction to the Topic

A. General Background

Currently, just over 9% of the population live in extreme poverty, meaning <\$1.90 in daily earnings. Basic root causes of poverty include things like lack of access to basic needs. There are external factors that can influence this as well including conflict, government, culture, and many others. Natural Disasters can also have a major impact on poverty for a variety of reasons. Disasters can limit access to resources, limit transportation abilities, which can lead to fewer job opportunities, it could hurt companies that assist with poverty and therefore perpetuate the problem.⁹ An example of this could be the current COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has increased the number of people who are below the poverty line on a global scale. Most of the people that currently fall under the poverty line are women and children.¹⁰

The effects of poverty are also vast. Just a few include issues like malnutrition, hunger, and lack of education. Poverty can have effects that impact lasts for life, especially in the case of young children.¹¹ Approximately 356 million children live in poverty, about ½ of those who are in extreme poverty. 1 billion children are qualified as multidimensionally poor “meaning they lack necessities as basic as nutrition or clean water.” Currently most governments are not prioritizing the issue of child poverty.¹² Poverty can impact aspects like health which can have ramifications that last, education which can lead to less job opportunities which can lead to further poverty. This is known as the Poverty Cycle, the effects of poverty causing future poverty.¹³

B. History in the Arab World

The population of people under the poverty line has increased significantly. This is even more concerning when multidimensional poverty is considered. Most of the families who fall below will not get back above the poverty line for several generations. This is because most of the job opportunities they have are low paying and irregular. The biggest reason for poverty in the MENA region is related to the conflicts in the area. This leads countries like Yemen and Syria to

⁹ <https://www.worldvision.org/sponsorship-news-stories/global-poverty-facts>

¹⁰ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview>

¹¹ <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/ending-poverty>

¹² <https://www.unicef.org/social-policy/child-poverty>

¹³ <https://www.children.org/global-poverty/global-poverty-facts/facts-about-world-poverty>

be some with the highest rates of poverty. Conflict also indirectly affects some countries and impacts their poverty rates through issues like trade issues and displacement of populations.¹⁴ The conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen have been a major source of poverty in the region. Due to the conflicts approximately 80% of the Syrian population, 28% of the Iraqi population, and 50% of Yemen's population fall below the poverty line. The Palestine-Israeli conflict has also resulted in decreased job opportunities and increased poverty due to the control exercised by Israel. Political problems in Egypt have also been a contributing factor leading to a 26% poverty rate.¹⁵

COVID has also had major impacts on poverty in the MENA region. It is expected that approximately the poverty population will increase by 3 million due to the effects of the pandemic. The pandemic has just further exasperated the current situations and issues that affect poverty. Including social and political issues as well as decreasing the already limited jobs available to women and children, who are the majority of those in poverty.¹⁶

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

Each country has increased in poverty for different reasons so the solutions to those problems will be different. For some countries, there might need to be support for those affected by conflict. Other countries may need protections for COVID's impact. Therefore, a single approach will not fully address the problem. A solution should explore addressing a variety of issues not only the problems that occur in one area.¹⁵ A comprehensive solution would include dealing with conflict, the pandemic, and any other major contributing factors. It may also be wise to pursue both short-term and long-term solutions, reactive and proactive solutions.

An advisory board for the issues that are occurring in the different areas. A current solution being used by UNICEF is Sustainable Development Goals. This is what the UN is implementing to reach its goal by 2030. This solution addresses more of the social issues that impact the poverty rates but it does not help with the problems caused by conflicts in the area.¹⁷ It is also important to address the conflict areas as well and how to combat the poverty rates rising due to those.

Breaking the poverty cycle is another issue that could be addressed by a solution. The poverty cycle is one reason poverty rates continue to rise. Since poverty can affect adults and children when children and adolescents get stuck in the poverty cycle and later start a family and have

¹⁴ <https://borgenproject.org/7-things-to-know-about-poverty-in-mena/>

¹⁵ <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-persistence-of-poverty-in-the-arab-world/>

¹⁶ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/10/09/mena-global-action-is-urgently-needed-to-reverse-damaging-jumps-in-extreme-poverty>

¹⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/sdgs>

children while still in poverty the cycle continues and the rates increase. A good solution should look at ways to stop child poverty and increase their job opportunities and support for children in poverty. Looking for ways to provide training and education are potential ideas that could be included in a solution.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What is the cause of poverty in my country?
- Has my country taken steps to fight the increase in poverty?
- Does my country's ties with other countries have an impact on the poverty level?
- It is external or internal factors that are causing my country to increase in poverty level

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- What part of the poverty cycle should effort be focused on?
- Are impacts caused by conflicts addressed?
- Does my solution focus on more than one problem area?
- Is it a short-term, reactive, or long-term, proactive, solution?

IV. Additional Resources

- <https://ourworldindata.org/extreme-poverty>
- <https://borgenproject.org/global-poverty/>
- <https://www.arabdevelopmentportal.com/indicator/poverty>
- <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/03/Abu-Ismail-paper.pdf>

Topic III: Establishing a league-wide approach to transitioning young citizens from education into the job sector.

I. Introduction to Topic

A. General Background

The rates of young women that completed the transition from school to the workforce is lower than then of young men. Pakistan, Fiji, and Guyana, had the largest gaps. Many girls never even begin their transition into the workforce. This gap is most likely due to more hurdles for young women in the transition, including issues like less opportunities for decent jobs.¹⁸ Globally the participation of women in the labor force has only grown by a very small percentage. Another issue is that women who successfully make the transition end up in lower paying jobs and are vulnerable with little advancement opportunities.¹⁹

Although the global youth population has increased, the participation in the labor force has decreased. Many youth, mostly women, are qualified as not in employment, education or training (NEET). This is a large reason for the transitional gap because the young women are not participating in the needed programs to connect to decent job opportunities. This is also important because the labor force is in a constant state of change due to developing technology and young women and men need to be knowledgeable in how to work with new technology. Being more adept in the digital world and being comfortable with a variety of technology will help open up more opportunities. Proper education and adequate training and support are important for a successful transition into the labor force.

B. History in the Arab World

Today the concern of most Arab countries is political or security related. Youth education and job transitioning is not a common priority. Youth in the MENA region have the highest unemployment rate of youth in the world as of 2018. Several crises, financial and conflict related, have resulted in the youth unemployment and transition period becoming worse. The main issue leading to youth unemployment is the lack of focus on the structural factors.

Another problem seen is that while more women are receiving education we are not seeing this translate to the labor force. Some reasons for the unemployment include in the 1990s and early 2000s there was an increase in supply pressure in the labor market. Another reason is inadequate education leaving youth unprepared for the labor force. There are also few supports for those in the transition to assist with connections to job opportunities that allow for growth and fit their qualifications.

¹⁸ <https://ilostat.ilo.org/transition-from-school-to-work-remains-a-difficult-process-for-youth/>

¹⁹ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1440783317700736>

In Egypt, the mismatch in skills is not only due to lack of technology or training. There is also a mismatch in the realm of soft skills. Soft skills are those involved in the professionalism part of a job. Included in these skills would be interpersonal relationships and social graces, like arriving on time and being on task. The training programs in Egypt are of a low quality which is a big factor in why this transition is difficult. The training programs are not covering all the areas that the companies are looking for proficiency in, soft skills being one of those areas.²⁰

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

The core problems are lack of quality education for the labor market and lack of transition support so these are good areas to focus on in seeking solutions. Evaluating the job opportunities and education provided and seeing where the mismatches are could provide a good guide to closing the gap in quality education. It may also be important to look into the aspects different companies are looking for to make sure the students are receiving training and education on everything that companies will be looking for.

Countries should also look for ways to provide support to youth as they transition from education to the labor market. Member states could create a group to help youth locate jobs they have qualifications for and help them to make connections. While many students may have the proper education and training to qualify for a decent job if they are unaware of what jobs they qualify for and what jobs allow for growth, making the transition successfully will be very difficult.

Currently, the World Bank and the International Labor Organization have a few solutions in place. One such solution was the Global Partnership for Youth Employment, which ended in 2014. They also in 2009, through their Youth Employment Network Initiative, implemented a program to expand their evaluation capacity. Between 2000-2015 many governments in the MENA region had youth initiatives. This issue needs to become a priority again as the issue has progressed substantially.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What does youth education look like in my country?
- Is there a large NEET population in my Member State?
- Is there any transition support in my Member State?
- What steps has my Member State taken to improve youth education?
- Where is there a mismatch in the skills of my youth and job opportunities?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- What soft skills should be included in training?
- Is the training focused on jobs that allow growth?

- Are the company's requirements lining up with the training?
- Is the support system effective for both young men and young women?

IV. Additional Resources

- <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/employment/>
- <https://wol.iza.org/articles/why-is-youth-unemployment-so-high-and-different-across-countries/long>
- <https://alghurairfoundation.org/from-education-to-employment-transitions-matter-for-arab-youth/>
- https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_536067.pdf

Topic IV: Evaluating the effectiveness of social safety net programs at reducing poverty in the Arab League.

I. Introduction to Topic

A. General Background

Most countries do not have a set plan for a social safety net leading to a lack of consensus of best practices. Most governments are implementing social transfer programmes, or cash transfer programs. India, Egypt, and Canada are all countries which have implemented these programs in various ways. In India it mostly focused on construction workers since they were largely affected by the lockdown. Egypt focused on supporting casual workers with a one-time plan. Canada decided to have a broader approach with an aid program for those families without work.

Mexico made a shift to a new program and it has emphasized the discussion of Universal Basic Income (UBI). “UBI is generally provided in the form of periodic cash transfers to citizens in order to provide living standards above the poverty line.” UBI is not a universally agreed upon program. UBI was a controversial topic before COVID and its ramifications on the economy. The pandemic has brought this controversial policy back into the limelight since the social issue it pertains to has digressed.

B. History in the Arab World

In the Arab world social policies are normally subsidies, health, and education services but there has been a shift recently. Political issues, conflict, and refugees have driven Member states to change the focus of their social policies. More youth focused education policies and programs emerged after the Arab spring. Latin American countries also influenced change throughout their cash transfer models.

While the new social policies in the region have their benefits they also have a few shortcomings. COVID 19 has pushed the boundaries of social policies and tested their effectiveness. While these safety nets have addressed many of those on the lowest end of the economic spectrum they do not address the others who have been impacted by the pandemic. The impacts of the pandemic hit hard for most people across the economic spectrum, therefore, people in many different economic situations need assistance. There is a substantial lack of support for those people who had good jobs but lost them due to the pandemic.²¹

The Arab world has been very divided in their approach to the pandemic and the social response. This division has led to the problem only being addressed half way and many issues still left for the nations to address.

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

Evaluating what the member states do in regards to social policies and how those policies have been impacted by COVID-19 is a good way to begin addressing this problem. It is important to

²¹ <https://www.thecairoreview.com/covid-19-global-crisis/covid-19-and-social-policies-in-the-mena-region/>

get a well rounded view of what member states have been doing and what has been effective so that we can decide the best practices. Another potential solution to explore would be social support in a league wide format. It is important in both of these potential solution areas to consider state sovereignty and the diverse impacts that the pandemic has had on the region.

Not only will different member states have different needs but even different areas inside of a member state will require some differentiation. For example, effective social support in rural areas will vary from those that are effective in urban areas. Food subsidies are a good example of a policy that was effective for some but did not affect others. A multi-pronged approach is important to keep in mind for this issue since there are so many different types of problems that have emerged.

Encouraging companies and parts of the government to work together could lead to substantial improvements by providing companies the support they need to better support the citizens. Exploring ways to establish connections between different sectors could help in developing a thorough approach addressing the issue as a whole. This would allow for social protections to impact those in all levels of the economy as well and lead to more well-rounded and equal policies.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What social protections does my member state have?
- How have those protections held up?
- Does my member state address issues in rural areas?
- What about urban areas?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- How could a support system create connections to support the people better?
- What would a multi-pronged approach include?
- Do the solutions address those higher in the economic spectrum as well as those on the lower end?

IV. Additional Resources

- http://ipcig.org/sites/default/files/pub/en/PIF47_What_s_next_for_social_protection_in_light_of_COVID_19.pdf
- <https://www.theigc.org/blog/cash-transfers-as-covid-19-relief-evidence-from-ghana/>
- <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/safetynets>
- <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/06/23/the-social-safety-net-the-gaps-that-covid-19-spotlights/>

