

McKennaMUN VIII Background Guide



Arab League

**April 4-5 2020
Claremont McKenna
College**



**McKENNA
MUN**

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to McKennaMUN 2020! My name is Katie O'Neill, and I am so excited to be your director for this year's Arab League committee. I am a junior at Claremont McKenna (CMC). I am an International Relations major at CMC, but I also study French and Arabic. Chairing this committee is Genevieve Collins, who is a Sophomore studying International Relations and Middle East Studies.

I have been a member of CMC's Model UN team since my Freshman year, and before that I did high school Model UN in my home town of Boise, Idaho. Genevieve has been a member of the team for the past year.

This committee is near and dear to my heart, as I am actually just returning from a semester abroad in the Middle East! I spent the past semester living with a host family in Amman, Jordan where I did a capstone project on female labor force participation. I also spent 3 months living in Marrakech, Morocco the summer after my Freshman year of college, so I am truly excited to

direct this committee and listen to the innovative solutions I know you delegates will develop through the course of the conference.

Best,

Katie O'Neill

Arab League

INTRODUCTION

The Arab League is a regional body consisting of 22 African and Middle Eastern states.¹ The headquarters of the organization are in Cairo, Egypt. The goal of the Arab League is to achieve peace and prosperity among member states through mutual cooperation. Appropriate areas of cooperation include “economics, communication, culture, nationality, and health.”² The Arab League also has a military component. Unlike the North American Treaty Organization (NATO), the Arab League does not have soldiers or weapons; however, member states are supposed to collaborate on military affairs and refrain from attacking each other. Unfortunately, the Arab League has not often lived up to this part of its Charter. Please see the BBC’s [Profile: Arab League](#) for more background information.

¹ Masters, Jonathan, and Mohammed A Sergie. “The Arab League.” Council on Foreign Relations. Council on Foreign Relations, October 21, 2014. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/arab-league>.

² Ibid.

HISTORY OF THE COMMITTEE

The Arab League was founded in 1945 in response to widespread concern among culturally and linguistically Arab countries over the creation of new borders after World War II. However, due to the history of conflict in the region, often between member states, the Arab League has garnered a reputation for being divisive and inefficient.³ Many critics argue that the Arab League is not truly representative of the people of its member states, but rather the autocracies and monarchies that rule many of these 22 countries. Though many of these criticisms are well-founded, the Arab League has been effective in creating sound policy responses to several recent conflicts in the region.⁴ In your preparation for this conference, your job as delegates is to learn from the past successes and failures of the Arab League and demonstrate how this organization should approach the social and humanitarian issues presented by the two topic areas.

*Note: Syria is currently suspended from the Arab League; however, with increasing stability in the country there is rising speculation that it will be invited to return soon. Syria is included as a

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

country in this committee because it has an important role to play in both of the topics, and I believe that role is not diminished by the current regime or conflict.

Topic I: Female Economic Participation

TERMS TO UNDERSTAND AND ABBREVIATIONS

Economic Activity/Inactivity – Being economically active is not the same as being employed, just as being economically inactive is not the same as being unemployed. Rather, people who are economically active are willing and able to work and are actively seeking employment. They are part of the *labor force*. Someone can be both economically active and unemployed. People who are economically inactive are unwilling or unable to seek employment. This is different than being unemployed.

Female Labor Force Participation – This term is often abbreviated to FLFP. FLFP refers to the rates of economically active women.⁵

⁵ Chamlou, N., Muzi, S., & Ahmed, H. (2016). The Determinants of Female Labor Force Participation in the Middle East and North Africa Region: The Role of Education and Social Norms in Amman, Cairo, and Sanaa. *Women, Work and Welfare in the Middle East and North Africa*, 323–350. doi: 10.1142/9781783267347_0012

INTRODUCTION

Female labor force participation (FLFP) is an important indicator of the state of women's social, political, and economic rights in a country.⁶ Empowering and incentivizing women to work is crucial to supporting not only women's welfare but also national economies. When women have access to independent income streams they have more options, and they are better able to protect themselves from domestic violence and early or forced marriage.⁷ Further, they contribute to household income, which helps to guarantee food security and access to healthcare. The output of an economy is determined by labor and capital. The Arab League is populated with lower and middle income countries with limited capital to grow their economies.⁸ Therefore, maintaining the labor supply is crucial. Countries, such as Morocco and Jordan, have a wealth of educated and qualified young women who remain economically inactive.⁹ Activating this labor source would improve outcomes for women, children, and men.¹⁰

HISTORY

⁶ Chamlou, N., Muzi, S., & Ahmed, H. (2016). The Determinants of Female Labor Force Participation in the Middle East and North Africa Region: The Role of Education and Social Norms in Amman, Cairo, and Sanaa. *Women, Work and Welfare in the Middle East and North Africa*, 323–350. doi: 10.1142/9781783267347_0012

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Moghadam, V. (2005). Women's Economic Participation in the Middle East: What Difference Has the Neoliberal Policy Turn Made? *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 1(1), 110-146. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40326851>

⁹ Report No: ACS5158. (2013, July). Economic Participation, Agency and Access to Justice in Jordan. Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Department Middle East and North Africa, World Bank.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Though women are granted the right to work in nearly every country, they face other restrictions and barriers that make it more difficult for them to find work than their male counterparts. In many Middle Eastern countries, there are laws regulating the hours and industries women can work.¹¹ In other places, women have the right to work. However, they do not have the right to open or manage bank accounts without a husband or father's approval, so they are unable to benefit from their income.¹² Across the developing world, women and girls have lower literacy and secondary education rates, making it difficult for them to find jobs in the formal economy. In nearly every country of the world, developed and still developing, women are not guaranteed sufficient paid maternity leave and struggle to find affordable childcare during the work week. These are just a few of the numerous issues involved in efforts to increase female labor force participation.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has the lowest female employment rate of anywhere in the world.¹³ This includes many of the member states of the Arab League. Though most countries in the Arab League have seen gradually increasing rates of working women, some have experienced the opposite. The table below shows the FLFP rates of Arab League countries

¹¹ Chamlou, N., Muzi, S., & Ahmed, H. (2016). The Determinants of Female Labor Force Participation in the Middle East and North Africa Region: The Role of Education and Social Norms in Amman, Cairo, and Sanaa. *Women, Work and Welfare in the Middle East and North Africa*, 323–350. doi: 10.1142/9781783267347_0012

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Robinson, J. (2005). Female Labor Force Participation in the Middle East and North Africa. *Wharton Research Scholar*, 28. Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/wharton_research_scholars

over the past 20 years. Over this period, Arab League countries have experienced remarkably unequal rates and directions of change in FLFP due to a variety of domestic and international social, political, and economic factors. Part of your responsibility as a delegate in this committee is to understand the developments in FLFP your country has undergone in the past 20 years and why these changes have occurred.

Figure 1: Female Labor Force Participation in Arab League Countries Between 2000 and 2019

	2000	2005	2010	2015	2019
Algeria	11.9	12.8	14.4	15.2	14.9
Bahrain	34.8	38.9	43.8	43.8	44.6
Comoros	31.8	33.5	35.1	36.6	37.6
Djibouti	47.2	49.1	51.3	54.0	54.9
Egypt, Arab Rep.	19.9	20.2	22.6	22.6	22.9
Iraq	9.7	11.5	12.1	12.2	12.4
Jordan	12.7	12.2	15.3	14.0	14.2
Kuwait	49.6	49.0	53.6	58.5	57.3
Lebanon	20.4	20.4	22.0	23.0	23.5
Libya	19.7	21.5	22.5	26.3	25.7
Mauritania	29.8	28.7	28.2	28.8	29.2
Morocco	24.9	26.5	25.6	23.0	21.3
Oman	23.2	24.7	27.0	30.2	30.9
Qatar	41.2	45.4	51.1	58.9	57.7
Saudi Arabia	16.1	17.7	18.2	22.1	23.5
Somalia	18.5	17.4	17.6	18.7	19.2
Sudan	26.6	24.5	23.0	24.1	24.5
Syrian Arab Republic	20.1	16.2	13.2	12.0	11.8
Tunisia	23.2	23.3	24.5	24.7	23.9
United Arab Emirates	33.7	37.2	44.0	49.4	51.1
Yemen, Rep.	20.4	14.4	10.0	6.1	5.8

Created from: World Development Indicators

Series : Labor force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate)

*Note: World Development Indicators did not provide data for Palestine.

An important part of this topic is understanding why your country should, or shouldn't, care about increasing FLFP both domestically and across the Arab League. In countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Kuwait, increasing FLFP is a priority of the governments.¹⁴ Alternatively, Saudi Arabia is a wealthy country with a strong education system and high female literacy rate, yet FLFP rates continue to lag. Despite verbal commitments to change this, Saudi Arabia continues to implement laws that restrict the mobility and independence of women, making it difficult for women to enter the workforce.¹⁵ Delegates should pay special attention to the distinction between local and imported labor. The Arab League consists of labor import and labor export countries, which can impact supply and demand for local female workers. These factors will be discussed in depth in the next section.

THE ISSUE

The factors which influence economic activity are complicated and numerous. When gender is taken into account, they become even more so. For this committee, delegates will need to consider social, political, and economic factors. Examples of social factors include education and cultural norms relating to women and family. Political factors could be representation of

¹⁴ "Why Supporting Women's Economic Inclusion Is Vital for the GCC." World Bank, September 29, 2017. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2017/09/29/why-supporting-womens-economic-inclusion-is-vital-for-the-gcc>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

women in government, personal status and mobility laws for women, and labor laws that impact women. Economic factors might consist of the labor market, equality of pay, and cost of childcare. This section of the background guide will explain how these factors impact FLFP and give examples of action taken by Arab League countries and the UN.

Social

In scholarly research on FLFP, female literacy is usually positively correlated with female economic activity.¹⁶ That is to say, in countries with high female literacy more women are working and seeking employment than in countries with low female literacy. This is evidenced by most developed countries, including wealthy Gulf countries.¹⁷ However, there are some outliers. For example, Jordan is renowned for its education system, specifically in the realm of women's education – one of the main drivers of female economic inactivity in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The adult female literacy rate in Jordan is 98% compared to 65% in Morocco, 44% in Iraq, and 93% in Saudi Arabia.¹⁸ Rates of tertiary education for women (bachelor degrees and higher) are similarly advanced in Jordan. Women's enrollment in tertiary schools in Jordan is 37.4%, while the average across Arab countries is

¹⁶ Chamlou, N., Muzi, S., & Ahmed, H. (2016). The Determinants of Female Labor Force Participation in the Middle East and North Africa Region: The Role of Education and Social Norms in Amman, Cairo, and Sanaa. *Women, Work and Welfare in the Middle East and North Africa*, 323–350. doi: 10.1142/9781783267347_0012

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Literacy rate, adult female (% of females ages 15 and above). (2019). World Bank. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.FE.ZS?end=2018&start=1970>.

33.9%.¹⁹ However, this success in women's education has not translated to high rates of FLFP which sits at 14%, according to Figure 1. Organizations like UNICEF continue to prioritize literacy and primary and secondary education for girls in the MENA region and most Arab League countries are working towards, or have already achieved, high targets for women's literacy.

Cultural norms relating to women and family are heavily emphasized in previous research on FLFP in the MENA region.²⁰ In some Arab League countries, the perception of men as the providers and decision-makers and women as the homemakers persists.²¹ This cultural norm is not equally prominent across the Arab League, so delegates should take time to investigate this aspect for their country.²² However, in countries where this perception is popular, women are disincentivized from pursuing employment even when they have attained high levels of education. Further, when men are prioritized as the decision-makers this can prevent women who wish to work from doing so.²³

Political

¹⁹ School enrollment, tertiary, female (% gross). (2018). World Bank. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/se.ter.enrr.fe?end=2018&start=2018&view=bar>.

²⁰ Chamlou, N., Muzi, S., & Ahmed, H. (2016). The Determinants of Female Labor Force Participation in the Middle East and North Africa Region: The Role of Education and Social Norms in Amman, Cairo, and Sanaa. *Women, Work and Welfare in the Middle East and North Africa*, 323–350. doi: 10.1142/9781783267347_0012

²¹ Marchand, M. H., & Runyan, A. S. (2000). *Gender and global restructuring: sightings, sites and resistances*. Oxon: Routledge.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Female economic activity is often correlated with representation of women in government.²⁴ Although there is not clear causation in either direction, it is clear that rates of FLFP are related to the number of women in governing bodies. Within the Arab League, there is significant spread in the rates of women in politics. The UAE employs a quota system to maintain relatively high representation for women. The country is ranked 41st in the world and is tied with Ireland for percentage of women in ministerial positions²⁵ and boasts an FLFP rate of 51%, one of the highest in the Arab League.²⁶ Having more women in government is a sound strategy for increasing FLFP by giving women the power to influence personal status and labor laws.

Researchers suggest that personal status and mobility laws have a significant impact on FLFP. This is especially relevant to the Arab League because many members employ gendered personal status laws that impact women's ability and willingness to pursue work opportunities.²⁷ A classic example is the, now repealed, law in Saudi Arabia that prevented women from driving. Other countries place restrictions on women's ability to handle their finances independently or

²⁴ Chamlou, N., Muzi, S., & Ahmed, H. (2016). The Determinants of Female Labor Force Participation in the Middle East and North Africa Region: The Role of Education and Social Norms in Amman, Cairo, and Sanaa. *Women, Work and Welfare in the Middle East and North Africa*, 323–350. doi: 10.1142/9781783267347_0012

²⁵ "Women in Politics: 2017." Inter-Parliamentary Union, n.d.

[https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2017-03/women-in-politics-2017?utm_source=Inter-Parliamentary+Union+\(IPU\)&utm_campaign=550dedbec7-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_02_23&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_d1ccee59b3-550dedbec7-258891957](https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2017-03/women-in-politics-2017?utm_source=Inter-Parliamentary+Union+(IPU)&utm_campaign=550dedbec7-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_02_23&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_d1ccee59b3-550dedbec7-258891957).

²⁶ Figure 1.

²⁷ Report No: ACS5158. (2013, July). *Economic Participation, Agency and Access to Justice in Jordan*. Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Department Middle East and North Africa, World Bank.

even have curfews in place. In some places, women are legally allowed to work, but only with the permission of their husband, father, or other male guardian. It is important to examine the laws in your country prior to the conference and analyze the political situation in regards to these laws. If your country has gendered personal status laws that could impact FLFP you need to know if there a growing movement to change them or you need to develop a way to increase FLFP that takes these laws into consideration.

In the same vein, many countries have gendered labor laws. In Jordan, women are restricted from working in some sectors and at certain times.²⁸ This narrows women's work opportunities. Understanding the maternity leave system is also important. In many countries, paid maternity leave is not required by law. In others, paid maternity leave is required but only for a short time. This influences women's desire and ability to seek work. From the employment side, it is important to know who is required to pay for paid maternity leave. In Jordan, the onus is on the employer which disincentivizes companies from hiring women.²⁹

Economic

Though most countries require equal pay for equal work, this is often not the case in reality. Nearly every country in the world has a wage gap, including the United States. The same can be said for many Arab League countries. This, of course, influences women's decision to

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

seek employment. In situations where people do not have to work to survive, they weigh the costs and benefits of working to make a decision. For women, the costs can often outweigh the benefits and the wage gap contributes to this problem.³⁰ Many Arab league countries are plagued by high unemployment and low GDP per capita which means low salaries.³¹ Further, job markets are highly competitive and can be even more so for women who are often the target of hiring discrimination.³² Efforts to decrease the wage gap and incentivize employers to hire and promote women would likely contribute greatly to higher economic activity by women. Without desirable jobs opportunities with reasonable salaries, there is little incentive for women to work considering the opportunity costs of transport, quality time with their children, and energy which could otherwise be spent fulfilling obligations at home. Delegates should have some understanding of the economic situation in their countries and employ a gendered perspective to develop solutions that will increase FLFP.

KEY ACTORS

The World Bank and the Gulf Cooperation Council

³⁰ Chamlou, N., Muzi, S., & Ahmed, H. (2016). The Determinants of Female Labor Force Participation in the Middle East and North Africa Region: The Role of Education and Social Norms in Amman, Cairo, and Sanaa. *Women, Work and Welfare in the Middle East and North Africa*, 323–350. doi: 10.1142/9781783267347_0012

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

The World Bank and the Gulf Cooperation Council³³ (GCC) have been working together to improve FLFP in the six member countries of the GCC. Their efforts include: the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative, the World Bank’s WeMENA Initiative, and the Women in Leadership global forum.³⁴ Delegates should take care to examine these initiatives and the others mentioned in the footnoted article as they will be helpful in designing new solutions.

UNWOMEN

The United Nations Committee on Women, UNWOMEN has prioritized female economic empowerment. Their past actions in this area include the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).³⁵ Delegates should research CEDAW as well as UNWOMEN’s work in the MENA region.

International Labour Organization (ILO)

The ILO has created four key conventions on decent work for women: No. 100, No. 111, No. 156, and No. 183. Additionally, the governing body of the ILO, the International Labour Conference has published several important resolutions on gender equality in work and hosted a

³³ The GCC is a regional body for cooperation similar to the Arab League. Its members are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman. Further reading on the GCC could be helpful for this topic.

³⁴ “Why Supporting Women’s Economic Inclusion Is Vital for the GCC.” World Bank, September 29, 2017. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2017/09/29/why-supporting-womens-economic-inclusion-is-vital-for-the-gcc>.

³⁵ “What We Do: Economic Empowerment.” UN Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment>.

number of high level forums on this topic. Delegates should use the cited source to learn more about ILO's policies on decent work for women and should think about how they can be applied within the Arab League.³⁶

LOOKING AHEAD

There are a number of proposed solutions to the problem of low female economic participation in the MENA region. Reforming laws that restrict women's freedom and movement and financial independence is principal among these recommendations; however, many countries in the Arab League will be hesitant to pursue this avenue. Other researchers have suggested that increased female representation in government will help lead to increased FLFP. Many governments in the Arab League currently employ gender quotas in their governing bodies to support this goal, but it is not yet clear what effect this has on FLFP. The Brookings Institute in Doha suggests that governments should require new laws to undergo gender impact studies. Morocco's system of gender-responsive budgeting is an example of this policy in action, at least in part.³⁷ From a social standpoint, researchers advocate for increased investment in primary and secondary education for girls. While this approach will certainly not harm FLFP, it is a long-term solution that has failed shown drastic results in countries like Jordan. Of course, quotas and

³⁶ "ILO and Gender Equality (GED)." And Gender Equality (GED), <https://www.ilo.org/gender/Aboutus/ILOandGenderEquality/lang--en/index.htm>.

³⁷ Momani, Bessma. "Equality and the Economy: Why the Arab World Should Employ More Women." Brookings Doha Center. December 2016.

affirmative action programs have also been suggested for public and private sector employers, but this solution could prove to be highly contentious. Finally, there are some proposed regulations that will certainly improve FLFP if implemented correctly, such as reform maternity leave, increased salaries for young women, legislation against wage and hiring discrimination, and supporting female entrepreneurs. All of these solutions have been attempted by countries in the Arab League, but they are expensive and difficult to implement. Delegates will need to think creatively to develop innovative programs that work in tandem across the Arab League.

Questions to Consider

1. What has your country done to date to bolster FLFP? Has it been successful? Could your country's approach be replicated by other member states? If so, how?
2. What kinds of laws do member countries have on women and personal status? How can you increase FLFP while respecting local laws? Do some laws need to be changed? If so, how would your country approach this?
3. What are the root causes of low FLFP? Do they differ between your country and the other member states? Why? How can you develop a solution that is comprehensive enough to address the different structural and systemic causes of low FLFP among all member states?

4. How have previous efforts to increase FLFP failed in your country and in other Arab League countries? How can you improve upon these efforts?

Further Reading

1. **Momani, Bessma. “Equality and the Economy: Why the Arab World Should Employ More Women.” Brookings Doha Center. December 2016. This source is highly recommended. If delegates only read one of these sources, it should be this one.**
2. Masters, Jonathan, and Mohammed A Sergie. “The Arab League.” Council on Foreign Relations. Council on Foreign Relations, October 21, 2014.
<https://www.cfr.org/background/arab-league>.
3. “Why Supporting Women's Economic Inclusion Is Vital for the GCC.” World Bank, September 29, 2017.
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<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/530451467995640868/main-report>.

5. “What We Do: Economic Empowerment.” UN Women,

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment>.

*Note: Sources in the Further Reading are also cited throughout the paper, but are not repeated in the Bibliography.

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1. Masters, Jonathan, and Mohammed A Sergie. “The Arab League.” Council on Foreign Relations. Council on Foreign Relations, October 21, 2014.
<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/arab-league>.
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3. Chamlou, N., Muzi, S., & Ahmed, H. (2016). The Determinants of Female Labor Force Participation in the Middle East and North Africa Region: The Role of Education and Social Norms in Amman, Cairo, and Sanaa. *Women, Work and Welfare in the Middle East and North Africa*, 323–350. doi: 10.1142/9781783267347_0012

4. Robinson, J. (2005). Female Labor Force Participation in the Middle East and North Africa. Wharton Research Scholar, 28. Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/wharton_research_scholars
5. Report No: ACS5158. (2013, July). Economic Participation, Agency and Access to Justice in Jordan. Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Department Middle East and North Africa, World Bank.
6. Marchand, M. H., & Runyan, A. S. (2000). Gender and global restructuring: sightings, sites and resistances. Oxon: Routledge.
7. Chamlou, N., Muzi, S., & Ahmed, H. (2016). The Determinants of Female Labor Force Participation in the Middle East and North Africa Region: The Role of Education and Social Norms in Amman, Cairo, and Sanaa. Women, Work and Welfare in the Middle East and North Africa, 323–350. doi: 10.1142/9781783267347_0012
8. Robinson, J. (2005). Female Labor Force Participation in the Middle East and North Africa. Wharton Research Scholar, 28. Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/wharton_research_scholars

Topic II: Water and Conflict

INTRODUCTION

Topic B focuses on the water scarcity crisis in the Levant sub-region of the Middle East. The Levant consists of 6 countries: Jordan, Syria, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, and Iraq. All of these countries except Israel are members of the Arab League. Though many members of the Arab League are not directly involved in this crisis, they do have a vested interest in its political and economic ramifications and may be able to bring innovative solutions or serve as intermediaries in this divisive issue.

Jordan, Syria, and Palestine are already classified as water scarce and have been forced to implement rationing of drinking, household, and irrigation water for decades. Between 2006 and 2010, an estimated 1.3 million people were forced to migrate from rural areas to cities due to lack of water for irrigating their farms.³⁸ Similar realities are evident across the Levant, including ‘water stressed’ Iraq and Lebanon. As climate change begins to accelerate, water scarcity will become even more prominent and the region’s growing population will grow more desperate.³⁹ Conflict in the region combined with water scarcity has placed an incredible burden on states

³⁸ Bar, Ido, and Gerald Stang. “Water and Insecurity in the Levant.” European Union Institute for Security Studies, 28 Apr. 2016, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/water-and-insecurity-levant>.

³⁹ Ibid.

accepting refugees, such as Jordan and Lebanon.⁴⁰ In Palestine, the unavailability of water for irrigation has exacerbated the poverty and discontent experienced as a result of the conflict with Israel.⁴¹ As long droughts become longer and more severe in the Levant, the agricultural capabilities of the ‘Fertile Crescent’ will become crippled and the effects will be felt throughout the region and across the Arab League. This is an environmental, humanitarian, and economic crisis which could soon become a political and military crisis as tensions rise and situations become more desperate.

HISTORY

At the center of the water crisis in the Levant are three important rivers, as well as the many lakes, seas, and other bodies of water they support. These are the Tigris, the Euphrates, and the Jordan River. These ancient rivers have supported civilizations in the midst of one of the most arid regions of the world for thousands of years. However, growing populations, new forms of water management, and climate change have resulted in water scarcity.⁴² Key to understanding this issue is being able to distinguish between ‘upstream’ and ‘downstream’ nations.⁴³ Those nations located near the source of these three rivers have the first opportunity to access their water and their use of that water impacts the availability for downstream nations.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ “From Anin to Zbuba.” Oaklandinstitute.org, Oakland Institute, 2017, <https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/anin-zbuba>.

⁴² Bulloch, J., & Darwish, A. “Water Wars: Coming Conflicts in the Middle East.” 1993. <https://www.mepc.org/water-wars-coming-conflicts-middle-east>.

⁴³ Ibid.

This naturally gives rise to conflict as upstream nations take steps to reserve this water for themselves while downstream nations fight for key access points and compete for what is left over.

In the case of the Jordan River, Syria and Lebanon are the upstream nations and Jordan, Israel, and Palestine are the downstream nations. Syria and Lebanon's use and management of this water has not created significant conflict with the downstream nations.⁴⁴ However, Syria has constructed dozens of dams on the Yarmouk River, which feeds into the Jordan River Basin. The construction and implementation of these dams was heavily debated upon between Jordan and Syria and resulted in a number political and administrative agreements.⁴⁵

The 1967 borders between the West Bank and Jordan and Israel and Jordan are largely marked by the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. However, Israel controls the main sources of freshwater here, including the Sea of Galilee and the West Bank waters of the Jordan River.⁴⁶ These water sources, acquired during the war in 1967, provide 60% of Israel's freshwater.⁴⁷ Under the occupied West Bank lies a mountain aquifer which is controlled by Israel. The water from this aquifer is allocated 80% to Israel and its settlements and 20% to Palestinians.⁴⁸ Palestinians say that they often prevented from accessing this water, and independent research

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Asser, Martin. "Obstacles to Arab-Israeli Peace: Water." BBC News, BBC, 2 Sept. 2010, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-11101797..>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

has shown that Israeli citizens are allocated three to five times more water than Palestinians.⁴⁹

Jordan is unoccupied and has signed a peace treaty with Israel, but the country still struggles to access water. The country regularly undergoes water rationing and though the tap water is deemed 'safe,' most residents are too scared to drink it. Jordan and Israel have signed a number of agreements concerning their water-sharing which will be discussed in the next section.

The primary nations concerned with the Tigris and Euphrates River are Syria, Turkey, and Iraq. These three nations have been competing for control of the rivers for decades, each hoping to gain as much water as possible for irrigation and to generate electricity. In this conflict, Turkey is the upstream nation and Syria and Iraq are the downstream nations. All three countries have heavily invested in the building of dams, both to control the flow of the rivers and to produce electricity.⁵⁰ However, the creation of these dams has, at times, stemmed river flow and created diplomatic tension between the three countries. In fact, Bulloch and Darwish argue that Iraq and Syria were nearly brought to arms in a dispute over dam building in 1975.⁵¹ Another notable issue is Turkey's Southeast Anatolia Project, which is a 32 billion USD project comprised of a network of dams, hydroelectric power plants, and irrigations systems.⁵²

Diplomatic disputes have arisen between Turkey and Syria and Iraq as a result of this project,

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Bulloch, J., & Darwish, A. "Water Wars: Coming Conflicts in the Middle East." 1993.

<https://www.mepc.org/water-wars-coming-conflicts-middle-east>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Tsakalidou, Ilektra. "The Great Anatolia Project: Is Water Management a Panacea or Crisis Multiplier for Turkey's Kurds?" New Security Beat, 5 Aug. 2015,

<https://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2013/08/great-anatolian-project-water-management-panacea-crisis-multiplier-turkeys-kurds/>.

while violence with the Kurds has also occurred.⁵³ Disputes such as these continue today and are explained further in the next section.

Delegates should note that conflict over water is not limited to state entities, but extends to non-state actors as well. When nations use infrastructure, such as dams, to control the availability of water and electricity they create targets for non-state actors. This issue was noted in Iraq and Syria during the reign of the Islamic State. For example, the Fallujah dam near Baghdad diverts water to irrigate the country's most productive farms.⁵⁴ In 2014, the Islamic State seized the dam and shut it down, preventing farms from accessing valuable irrigation water.

⁵⁵ Depending on the political alignment and values of their country, delegates may choose to develop plans to protect water resources from non-state actors in their resolutions.

THE ISSUE

The water crises of the Levant have a number of serious implications in areas ranging from the humanitarian to the environmental to the political and economic. In fact, these crises are so serious that a number of scholars theorize that the scarcity of irrigation water may have played a role in the Syrian Civil War.⁵⁶ At the same time, other scholars point to the dangerously low

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Pearce, F. Mideast Water Wars: In Iraq, A Battle for Control of Water. August 25, 2014. https://e360.yale.edu/features/mideast_water_wars_in_iraq_a_battle_for_control_of_water.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Gleick, P. H. "Water, Drought, Climate Change, and Conflict in Syria." February 3, 2014. <https://journals.ametsoc.org/doi/full/10.1175/WCAS-D-13-00059.1>.

water supplies available to Palestinians and Jordanians as a barrier to peace with Israel and potential cause of deteriorating diplomatic relations.⁵⁷ It is clear that the crises surrounding the Tigris, Euphrates, and Jordan River are serious and that they impact peace and conflict in this notoriously unstable part of the world.

However, delegates assigned to countries outside the Levant and immediately surrounding countries may question what role they have to play in this topic and why their countries care about this issue. Ultimately, the goal of this committee will be to develop a framework for water sharing that works for the Arab League countries involved. Further, delegates will need to find an innovative approach to negotiate with non-Arab League countries Israel and Turkey. This process will draw on the experiences of all the countries in the Arab League and will ideally result in a solution that can serve as a blueprint for other regions experiencing conflict over water sharing and management. Finally, this is an issue that the Arab League has attempted to solve in the past, arguably with little success, so delegates should be able to learn from how their countries previously tried to approach this complicated topic.

In order to approach this topic from an informed standpoint, delegates will need to have an in-depth understanding of the existing treaties regarding water sharing in the Levant and how they succeed in some areas and fail in others. A brief overview is provided here, but more research is highly recommended.

⁵⁷ Bar, Ido, and Gerald Stang. "Water and Insecurity in the Levant." European Union Institute for Security Studies, 28 Apr. 2016, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/water-and-insecurity-levant>.

Jordan – Syria

Jordan and Syria have three main water sharing agreements, all concerning the Yarmouk River on the Syrian-Jordanian border, which is part of the Jordan River Basin. The first agreement was signed in 1953 and established a bilateral plan for irrigation and the construction and maintenance of dams, but did not create an allocation plan for river flow.⁵⁸ The agreement also established a bilateral commission for oversight and arbitration.

In 1983, Syria and Jordan signed a treaty to modify the 1953 agreement. This changed the purpose of the bilateral commission, limiting its oversight and abolishing its arbitration abilities. The treaty allowed Syria to build 25 new dams on the Yarmouk river system so long as Jordan was guaranteed 208 million cubic meters of water from the river per year through the Wahdah (also called Unity, Maqarin, and Wihdeh) dam.⁵⁹ However, a 2013 study showed that most years Jordan only receives 50 to 100 million cubic meters of water from the dam.⁶⁰

In 2001, Syria and Jordan signed their most recent agreement, which reduced the size of the planned Wahdah.⁶¹ The dam was completed in 2005.

Israel – Jordan

⁵⁸ “Shared Water Resources in Jordan.” Fanack Water, 21 Nov. 2016, <https://water.fanack.com/jordan/shared-water-resources/>.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Jordan and Israel signed a landmark peace treaty in 1994 which also specified plans for water sharing. As part of this treaty, Jordan receives 50 million cubic meters of water per year from the Sea of Galilee (also called Lake Tiberias). The two countries have some collaboration of waste management and preventing contamination in the Jordan River. Delegates should consult Further Reading and read about the Red Sea-Dead Sea Project.⁶²

Israel – Palestine

Israel and Palestine have a number of water sharing agreements, in this section two are highlighted. Delegates may wish to research the provisions on water in the Oslo Accords, as well. In 1995, the two countries reached the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement which includes a section on water.⁶³ Per this agreement, Israel was to allow Palestinians access to 23.6 million cubic meters of water; however, Palestinians allege that they are often denied access to these waters.⁶⁴

In 2017, Israel and Palestine reached a new agreement with the assistance of mediators from the United States. Under this new agreement, Israel pledged to provide Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip with a combined 32 million cubic meters of water per year for the

⁶² Pitock, Todd. "Could Water from the Red Sea Help Revive the Dead Sea?" NRDC, 26 Jan. 2017, <https://www.nrdc.org/onearth/could-water-red-sea-help-revive-dead-sea>.

⁶³ "Israel-Palestine: Water Sharing Conflict: ECC Factbook." ECC Library, 15 Jan. 2018, <https://library.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/israel-palestine-water-sharing-conflict>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

next several years.⁶⁵ However, this agreement is not permanent and both sides recognize that future negotiations will be needed.⁶⁶

Syria – Turkey

Syria and Turkey maintain two existing agreements on water sharing and management. The first was created in 1987 and is called the Protocol on Economic Cooperation.⁶⁷ While this agreement deals with a number of subjects other than water, it also stipulates the annual amounts of water to be released from Turkey to Syria through Turkey's network of dams. The agreement in 1987 was that Turkey will ensure a 500m³/s of water flow in the Euphrates from Turkey into Syria.⁶⁸

In 2009, the two countries established the Turkish-Syrian Strategic Cooperation Council Agreement. This agreement created a framework for cooperation on water quality, water pumping stations, the construction and maintenance of dams, and the creation of joint water policies.⁶⁹

Iraq – Syria

⁶⁵ "Israel, Palestinian Authority Reach Water-Sharing Deal." Palestine News | Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera, 13 July 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/07/israel-palestinian-authority-reach-water-sharing-deal-170713165223323.html>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ "Iraq's Shared Water Resources." Fanack Water, 9 May 2017, <https://water.fanack.com/iraq/iraqs-shared-water-resources/>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Despite a long history of conflict of the Euphrates river which has, at times, nearly resulted in armed conflict, Syria and Iraq only have one existing water sharing agreement.⁷⁰ The Syrian-Iraqi accord of 1990 stipulates that Iraq and Syria will share the water flow of the Euphrates with 42% going to Syria and 58% to Iraq.⁷¹

Turkey – Iraq

In 2009, Turkey and Iraq signed a Memorandum of Understanding regarding the exchange of information and expertise on water-related matters.⁷² A memorandum of understanding is not a treaty or otherwise binding agreement; they serve instead as declarations of intent and roadmaps for future policy or legislation.

Role of the Arab League

Delegates will also need to understand the Arab League's role in previous conflicts and the frameworks it has adopted to deal with these issues in the present and future. To this end, a brief examination of the failed Headwater Diversion Plan is provided, as well as a discussion of the broad points of the Action Plan for the Arab Water Security Strategy.

⁷⁰ Bulloch, J., & Darwish, A. "Water Wars: Coming Conflicts in the Middle East." 1993.

<https://www.mepc.org/water-wars-coming-conflicts-middle-east>.

⁷¹ "Iraq's Shared Water Resources." Fanack Water, 9 May 2017, <https://water.fanack.com/iraq/iraqs-shared-water-reources/>.

⁷² Ibid.

Headwater Diversion Plan

In 1964, in response to Israel's growing use of water from the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River Basin, the Arab League approved the Headwater Diversion Plan. This plan was put in motion and funded by the Arab League, with most of the funds offered by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.⁷³ Under the Headwater Diversion Plan, the Jordan River was to be largely diverted from Israel into Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. Through a complicated system of dams, pumping stations, and water storage sites, the three countries would gain water for irrigation. Syria was militantly in support of the plan, Lebanon was reluctant, and Jordan was somewhere between the two. Lebanon and Syria disagreed over where the physical sites for the dams, tunnels, and canals should be placed.⁷⁴ Lebanon feared Israeli retaliation and wanted all of the sites in Syria, making their government responsible for their defense.⁷⁵ Israel would no longer have access to the Baniyas River and the Hasbani River would be diverted two ways into the Baniyas and Lebanon's Litani River. In January 1963, the Arab League had a summit in Alexandria, Egypt where they made plans to prioritize construction of the various projects and to gather military strength in anticipation of retaliation.⁷⁶ However, the Headwater Diversion Plan never came to fruition as the primary sites in Syria were bombed by Israel in 1967.

⁷³ United States, CIA, "The Jordan Waters Issue." The Jordan Waters Issue, 1964. https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000850997.pdf

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Action Plan for the Arab Water Security Strategy

In 2010, a sub-group of the Arab League (discussed next page) published the Action Plan for the Arab Water Security Strategy. This plan laid the groundwork for a number of cross-border programs funded by the Arab League aimed at the preventing further water scarcity in the region. The strategy is founded in three distinct sections: water management, environmental protection in regards to water, and the development of new water resources.⁷⁷ The document serves as a plan for the next 20 years, from 2010 to 2030, and is divided into 5 evaluation periods.⁷⁸ At the heart of this plan is the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) system, which is a globally accepted framework for comprehensive regional water management.⁷⁹ Other highlights of the plan include the use of Public-Private Partnerships and increased investment in research and technology. Delegates should read more about this plan and its progress to date.

KEY ACTORS

⁷⁷ AMWC ACSAD, “The Arab Strategy for Water Security in the Arab Region (2010 – 2030) The Action Plan,” riccar.org, http://www.riccar.org/arab-strategy-water-security-arab-region-2010-2030-action-plan?language_content_entity=en.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Delegates should briefly research the roles played by the **United Nations Development Program (UNDP)** and the **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)** in water management in the Levant, but should focus primarily on the various Arab League-affiliated bodies explained below.

Center for Water Studies and Arab Water Security⁸⁰

This sub-group of the Arab League is responsible for convening high-level meetings of representatives of relevant governments. During these meetings, agreements and resolutions regarding shared water resources are created and discussed. The Center works closely with UNESCWA and the Federal Institute of Geosciences and Natural Resources in Germany to develop legal frameworks.

Arab Ministerial Water Council⁸¹

⁸⁰ Managing Water under Uncertainty and Risk. UNESCO, 2012, [https://books.google.com/books?id=mMGGA13ssaQC&pg=PA716&lpg=PA716&dq=Center for Water Studies and Arab Water Security&source=bl&ots=sH9bwYrrKA&sig=ACfU3U1In7C1db0VLmvKwAqDwfcz_9V7_w&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiGhbW914bnAhWUtZ4KHZVpCTsQ6AEwA3oECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q=Center for Water Studies and Arab Water Security&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=mMGGA13ssaQC&pg=PA716&lpg=PA716&dq=Center+for+Water+Studies+and+Arab+Water+Security&source=bl&ots=sH9bwYrrKA&sig=ACfU3U1In7C1db0VLmvKwAqDwfcz_9V7_w&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiGhbW914bnAhWUtZ4KHZVpCTsQ6AEwA3oECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q=Center+for+Water+Studies+and+Arab+Water+Security&f=false).

⁸¹ Ibid.

The Arab Ministerial Water Council is best known for its annual forums of water security in the region. After each forum, the Council publishes reports on progress in the past year and the results of the form. Delegates may find these reports useful.

Arab Center for the Study of Arid Zones and Dry Lands⁸²

This research and policy development center is probably the most active of the three, and is the Center responsible for the Action Plan for the Arab Water Security Strategy.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Arab League is, at its heart and since its founding, a pan-Arab Nationalist organization. This has been both the organization's main source of strength and its Achilles heel. In the past, the Headwater Diversion Plan was thwarted by Israel, but it was also seriously flawed from the start. Intensely pro-Arab Nationalist and militant countries Syria and Egypt pushed forward a solution to the water crisis that would certainly merit Israeli retaliation with the understanding that Lebanon was hesitant and Jordan wished to avoid military conflict.⁸³ The Headwater Diversion Plan did not account for internal squabbles among Arab League countries

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ United States, CIA, "The Jordan Waters Issue." The Jordan Waters Issue, 1964. https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000850997.pdf

which delayed the project and failed to establish a framework for productive negotiation with Israel.⁸⁴

Alternatively, the Action Plan for the Arab Water Security Strategy is completely inward focused. It lays the groundwork for collaboration between the Arab League countries involved and stays well away from non-Arab League countries. The strategy is totally based on the use of internal resources and makes little to no effort to reach out to neighboring nations who are embroiled in the same water crisis.⁸⁵ While the Action Plan does aim to solidify some common political and socio-economic goals, it does not go far enough.⁸⁶ The truth is that Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip will not be relieved of their water scarcity without negotiation with Israel. Syria's withholding of water from Jordan will not be solved by the development of new water resources or new technology for desalination. And why does this strategy completely ignore the Red Sea-Dead Sea plan which has stagnated for so many years? The Arab League has made, and continues to make, worthwhile efforts to solve the water crisis but it is abundantly clear that a new approach is needed.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ AMWC ACSAD, "The Arab Strategy for Water Security in the Arab Region (2010 – 2030) The Action Plan," riccar.org, http://www.riccar.org/arab-strategy-water-security-arab-region-2010-2030-action-plan?language_content_entity=en.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Questions to Consider

1. What are the root causes of water scarcity in the region? Are they environmental, economic, political? How can Arab League countries work together to solve some of these issues?
2. Is equitable water distribution in the region possible? How can countries be convinced to share their water? Is there a way to make it mutually beneficial for the countries involved?
3. Israel is certainly a part of the equation in this topic, but it is not present in the Arab League and is not even formally recognized by some members of the Arab League? Which countries could negotiate with Israel and how could they go about it? Or can a reasonable solution be developed without involving Israel at all? What role should Turkey play, if any?
4. What are the potential short-term and long-term solutions? How are they different and who needs to be involved to make them work? What other governments or non-governmental bodies can the Arab League reach out to in order to support these solutions? How can these partnerships be developed and sustained?

Further Reading

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4. Pitock, Todd. "Could Water from the Red Sea Help Revive the Dead Sea?" NRDC, 26 Jan. 2017, <https://www.nrdc.org/onearth/could-water-red-sea-help-revive-dead-sea>.
5. The ECC Platform Library has comprehensive articles on water sharing agreements between all of the countries relevant to this topic. Please use this resource in your research.

*Note: Sources in the Further Reading are also cited throughout the paper, but are not repeated in the Bibliography.

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