



Finnish
Institute in
the Middle East



Foundation
of the Finnish Institute
in the Middle East

FIME annual report 2021

The Finnish Institute in the Middle East (FIME) is an academic institute that focuses on the study of Middle Eastern cultures, religions, societies, as well as classical and modern languages. In cooperation with universities, the institute supports Finnish research on the Middle East and offers in-person and online teaching centered on various relevant topics. It also participates in public discourse carried out in Finland on Middle Eastern issues by providing research-based commentary. The institute's sphere of operations covers the entire Middle East region, it is based in Lebanon and it has a representative in Cairo, Egypt, while the Foundation that hosts the institute maintains an office in Helsinki.

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Lähi-itä NYT Podcast (in Finnish): <https://lahi-itanyt.fi/podcastit/>

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Message from the Chairperson

Last year brought exceptionally great news for our institute. For the first time in its history, a research project coordinated by the director of the institute received significant external funding. *The Migration, Transnational Educational Paths and Diasporic Multilingualism* project (MIGDIA), which is led by FIME's director Irina Piippo and funded by the Kone Foundation for the next four years, combines the institute researchers' areas of interest, which range from linguistics to anthropology and political economy. This diversity in research areas highlights the role of the institute as an active research organization. My warmest congratulations to Irina, and our researchers Taavi and Sandra!

One of the institute's main goals is to strengthen scientific cooperation between Finland and Middle Eastern countries. In line with this goal, over the past year, FIME launched the new resident scholar programme. As a part of this programme, several young Lebanese researchers have worked with the institute in three-month residencies as researchers and participated in teaching and other scientific collaborations. For example, in December 2021, Rima Majed who studies the political economy of Lebanese sectarianism and the 17 October 2019 uprising in Lebanon, participated in a colloquium on research in the Middle East and North Africa, which was organized in collaboration with the University of Helsinki.

Despite the difficult conditions, the institute has been able to operate both in the region and elsewhere (including remote events!). Month after month, Taavi Sundell has been the driving force behind the institute on the ground in Beirut. While the other researchers have worked remotely and commendably from Finland, we hope that we will be able to return to Lebanon full-time this year. For their hard work, I sincerely thank the director of the institute, Irina Piippo, the researchers Sandra Nasser El-Dine and Taavi Sundell, the administrative assistant Manal Chatila, our interns Mikko Lehikoinen and Sara Kezia Heinonen as well as our representative Said Sadek in Egypt. The Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East has an equally important role in the whole institution. As such, I extend a kind thank you to members of the Foundation; executive officer Anu Leinonen, administrative assistant Ella Kaplas and Miriam Huovila, who laudably replaced Ella during her leave, in addition to a debt of gratitude to our Board of Trustees.

Hannu Juusola
Chairman, Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East

Review by the Director

Free fall and downward spiral. These words have described the economic crisis in Lebanon over the last couple of years. The year 2021 did not bring relief to the multiple crises plaguing Lebanon. On the contrary, the beginning of the year was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, when round-the-clock lockdowns were imposed, and were described as among the strictest in the world. Later in the summer of 2021, the energy crisis escalated to the point where lights quite literally went out from all of Lebanon. Severe fuel shortages, combined with already worsening power generation issues, cut off electricity from Beirut for several days. The long-running economic crisis has affected everyone, and eighty percent of the Lebanese population currently live below the poverty line, taking the society's capacity to absorb crisis after crisis to an extreme.

Despite the challenging situation in Lebanon and the prolonged pandemic, the institute has had a good year. First, to adapt to the changing educational environment post-COVID, online learning has become an integral part of our course offerings. Second, the institute continues to offer field

courses, which we were able to organize during the second half of the year. In addition, the Arabic language cafés organized from Helsinki provided students with the opportunity to practice conversational Arabic skills at a time when it was not possible to travel to the Middle East.

The institute's research activities have brought many reasons for joy. First and foremost, launched in the fall, the Resident Scholar programme brightened and diversified our small research community and strengthened the institute's ties to the Lebanese academic world. Moreover, the four-year funding provided by the Kone Foundation for the MIGDIA project, in the years to come, will pave the way for long-term research on migration, transnational educational pathways and diasporic multilingualism. Building on FIME's research community and its networks, the multidisciplinary project is an example of what kinds of platforms of growth the institute can offer for academic research opportunities.

Irina Piippo

Director of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East

Research

Migration and Diasporic Multilingualism in Educational Contexts

The Director of the institute, Irina Piippo, focused in her research on multilingualism and second language socialization in educational contexts in Finland. Moreover, she prepared a larger research project that examines international migration and diasporic multilingualism. In 2021, Piippo published two scientific articles and a co-edited collection of articles on the topic of multilingualism in the Finnish school system.

Love and Relationships in Jordan

FIME researcher Sandra Nasser El-Dine worked on her PhD study in the field of social anthropology. The monograph manuscript focuses on generating love through everyday gendered caregiving practices in marital relationships. Her findings are based on the ethnographic material she collected among young local and Syrian adults in Amman, Jordan.

International Political Economy in Higher Education

FIME researcher Taavi Sundell submitted the last publication of his article-based doctoral dissertation and worked on its introductory chapter. His doctoral research in the field of world politics deals with the political economy of higher education in Jordan and Finland, as well as in the context of international open access publishing. In 2021, Sundell published two scientific articles and presented his research in three international conferences.

Planning and Funding for the MIGDIA Project

The research project Migration, Transnational Educational Paths and Diasporic Multilingualism, led by Irina Piippo and hosted by FIME, received funding of EUR 569,700 from the Kone Foundation. In addition, researchers Sandra Nasser El-Dine and Taavi Sundell, intern Mikko Lehtikoinen and Maria Ahlholm from the University of Helsinki were involved in the planning and preparation of the four-year MIGDIA project. The project, which began in early 2022, will examine issues of education, democracy and migration in Finland and Lebanon through sociolinguistics, anthropology, and world politics.

Academic Cooperation

FIME Resident Scholar -Programme

Vana Kalenderian and Rima Majed, who were the first visiting Lebanese resident scholars at the institute, conducted their three-month residencies during autumn. **Vana Kalenderian** is an osteoarcheologist who studies mortuary practices in the ancient Middle East, with a particular focus on Roman-era Lebanon. During her residency, Vana expanded her research into Roman-era Beirut by looking at the ancient dietary practices and its links to health problems, social status, geographical background, and cultural practices. **Rima Majed** is an Assistant Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Media Studies at the American University of Beirut or AUB. Her work focuses on the fields of social inequality, social movements, sectarianism, conflict, and violence. During her residency, Rima completed her co-edited book *'The Lebanon Uprising of 2019: Voices from the Revolution'*. FIME will continue to collaborate with both researchers in 2022.

The Sixth Finnish Colloquium of Middle East and North African Studies – Studying the Middle East: How and for Whom? online event 9-10.12.

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the institute's most important event of the year was transitioned into an online event last minute. Despite this event being held remotely, the colloquium organized in collaboration with the University of Helsinki was successful and gathered more than a hundred researchers, students and others interested in Middle Eastern studies.

Islamic Feminism, Knowledge and Methodology, Cairo 11–12.12.

The seminar brought together 29 researchers, students, and activists from five different universities as well as a few NGOs to reflect on Islamic feminism as an emerging academic discipline. The seminar was coordinated by professor Mulki Al-Sharmani from the University of Helsinki and was organized in collaboration with the American University of Cairo.

The Life Cycle of Ethnographic Material, Haikko 14–15.12.

The Migration, Transnational Educational Paths and Diasporic Multilingualism project held a workshop focusing on questions of data collection and management. The workshop, organized by Maria Ahlholm and Irina Piippo, brought together researchers from the MIGDIA project as well as researchers working in educational settings. The event was funded by the University of Helsinki and it provided an opportunity to plan the MIGDIA project and to network with researchers and projects with similar interests.

Open Access Publication

FIME continues to participate in the open access publication of the *Studia Orientalia Electronica* series published by the Finnish Oriental Society.

Education

Where are you Going, Turkey? online 7-21.10. Istanbul 23-31.10.

The first part of the five-credit course focusing on Turkish foreign relations and international politics in the Middle East was held as an online course, while the second part of the course was organized and conducted in Istanbul. The lecturers of the course were Turkish and Finnish researchers who are the best in their fields. Nine Finnish students from four different universities were able to travel to Istanbul to complete the second part of the course. The course was coordinated by Dr. Anu Leinonen.

Cyprus as a Meeting Place for Peoples, *online 4.10.-15.11. Cyprus 22-29.11.*

This 10-credit course for master's and postgraduate students, which was organized in cooperation with the Finnish institutes in Rome and Athens, introduced the history of Cyprus from antiquity to the present day. 12 students attended the course from five different universities.

An Online Course on the Basic Concepts of Islam

The course is geared towards high school students and university students, and it is planned together with the Faculty of Theology and the Faculty of Humanities in the University of Helsinki and the Finnish Association of Teachers of Religious Education. Ixir-verkkokurssit Oy is responsible for the coordination and technical implementation, while Adjunct professor Ilkka Lindstedt and Ixir-verkkokurssit Oy are jointly responsible for the content. This long-term course will be launched in 2022.

Introduction to Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Case Studies from the Middle East, *online 19.3.–14.5.*

Taught by Dr. Said Sadek, FIME's representative in Cairo, this five-credit course approached research and theory in post-conflict reconstruction through different case studies in the Middle East. 19 students from six different universities attended the course.

Anti/Post/Decolonial Social Theory and the 'Middle East' Region, *online 1.11.-15.12.*

Taught by Dr. Ali Kassem, this course introduced students to post, anti, and decolonial theories focusing on themes of significant relevance to the study of the so-called MENA region (West Asia and North Africa). 15 students from four different universities participated on the course.

Arabic Language Cafés, *online 6.4.-25.5. and in Helsinki 7.9.-23.11.*

The institute organized two conversational language cafés run by native Arabic speakers. The courses gathered online in spring and in a café in Helsinki in autumn. The language cafés aimed to give students opportunities to practice Arabic, since it was still difficult to travel to the Middle East due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The course instructors were Saif Dabjan and Laith Abo Hamdah, with a total of 21 participants.

Public Discourse

The institute takes an active role in disseminating information on the Middle East to the Finnish public. During 2020, researchers of the institute commented regularly in the Finnish media on current events in the Middle East, especially in Lebanon and Turkey. The institute also engages in popularizing scientific research on the Middle East and plays an active role on social media.

Lähi-itä NYT (Middle East NOW) blog (www.lahi-itanyt.fi)

The multivoiced platform straddles fast-moving news broadcasting and analytical academic research, offering various broad, critical perspectives on the Middle East and the region's events. The guest authors on this blog are experts in their respective fields. The blog's editor-in-chief is the chairman of the board of the Foundation, Professor Hannu Juusola.

Lähi-itä NYT (Middle East NOW) podcast (<https://lahi-itanyt.fi/podcastit/>)

In the second season of the Lähi-itä NYT podcast, six new episodes were released. They discussed the following topics: Palestinian refugee youth and camps in Lebanon, the West Bank, and Jordan; Syrian health care system amid the pandemic; the Middle East and Middle East research in Finland; the village of Artas in Palestine studied by anthropologist Hilma Granqvist, and the

Algerian Autonomous Trade Union Movement. The first English-language podcast discussed political sectarianism in Lebanon.

FIME organized the following, very popular webinars with its partners during 2021:

- **Hilma Granqvist - A Pioneer in Palestine: Anthropological Fieldwork in the 1920s**, 30.3.
- **The Changing Patterns in the Middle East - are there Opportunities for Peacemaking?** 13.4.
- **Beyond Populism: The Middle East and its Scholars in Public Discourse**, 27.5.
- **Publication Event of the Book: Plurilingualism in School**, 15.10.
- **Towards Deepening Chaos or Slow Change? - Iraqi Elections and its Regional Situation**, 22.10.
- **Activism and Social Movements in Lebanon after the 2019 Uprising**, 24.11.
- **Middle East Research in Finland: Research, Policy and Politics of Research**, 10.12.

As part of the recreational networking event of the Finnish Cultural and Academic institutes Network, on 4.10.2021, FIME organized a panel event entitled **Affordable and Top Quality - Humanities Research as Finland's Resource** in cooperation with the Finnish Institutes in Rome and Athens and the Finnish Cultural and Academic institutes.

Partners and Networks

Activities in 2021 were carried out in cooperation with numerous partners in Finland and the Middle East. These include the following: the University of Helsinki and its various departments and units, The American University of Beirut (AUB), The American University of Cairo (AUC), Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul (SRII), Institut Français d'Études Anatoliennes (IFEA) (Istanbul), Finland's other academic institutes and cultural institutes with academic activities, the Society of Swedish Literature in Finland (SLS), Åbo Akademi University (ÅAU), The Finnish Oriental Society, the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA), The Finnish Association for Applied Linguistics, AFinLA (Association Finlandaise de Linguistique Appliquée), Finnish National Agency for Education, The Finnish Association for Students of Middle Eastern Studies, The Association of Religious Education Teachers in Finland, The Embassy of Finland in Beirut, The Embassy of Finland in Cairo, The Embassy of Finland in Ankara, The Embassy of Finland in Baghdad and Zafer Chaoui, Honorary Consul General of Finland in Lebanon.

Of special importance were **Zafer Chaoui, Honorary Consul General of Finland in Lebanon, The Finnish Cultural and Academic Institutes Association, SKTI, <https://instituutit.fi/en/> and The Friends of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East, SLIY, www.sliy.fi.**

Institute Personnel

Director Dr. Irina Piippo, Beirut/Helsinki
Researcher Sandra Nasser el-Dine, M.Soc.Sc., Marseille/Kuopio
Researcher Taavi Sundell, M.Soc.Sc., Beirut
Assistant to the Director Manal Chatila, Beirut (part-time, 21hrs/week)
Representative Dr. Said Sadek, Cairo (part-time, approx. 300hrs/year)

Interns funded by the Finnish National Agency for Education:

M.Sc. Mikko Lehikoinen from the University of Helsinki
M.Soc.Sc. Sara Heinonen from the University of Helsinki

Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East

Grants

The Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East has awarded grants totalling 17,876 euros to four researchers for research in the Middle East region and for travel-related costs, in addition to funding five students to pursue Arabic language studies.

Administration

The Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East is registered in Finland and has an office in Helsinki. The highest decision-making power of the Foundation lies with its Board of Trustees, which appoints the director of the Institute. In 2021, the board met six times and consisted of the following experts:

Professor Hannu Juusola (chairperson)

Deputy member: Professor Jutta Jokiranta

Associate professor Saana Svärd (vice-chairperson)

Deputy member: dr Olli Ruohomäki

Professor Martti Nissinen

Deputy member: Tom Kankkonen, journalist

Dr Teija Tiilikainen, director

Deputy member: Dr Toni Alaranta

Tero Norjanen, director of international cooperation

Deputy member: Rolf Steffansson, M.Th.

Adjunct Professor, Dr Sakari Karjalainen, secretary general

Dr Pekka Lindqvist

Deputy member: Adjunct Professor Ruth Illman

Adjunct Professor, Dr Jyri Komulainen

Deputy member: Dr Elina Hellqvist

Ambassador Risto Veltheim

Deputy member: Kari Norkonmaa, M.Pol.Sc.

Professor Serafim Seppälä

Deputy member: Dr Heta Hurskainen

Ambassador Maria Serenius

Deputy member: Patrick Lindgren, LL.M.

Foundation personnel in Finland

Executive Officer and Coordinator of the Anna Lindh National Network in Finland, Dr. Anu Leinonen, Helsinki

Deputy to the Administrative and Communications Assistant and Coordinator of the Anna Lindh National Network in Finland, MA Miriam Huovila

Project Worker Kira Pihlflyckt, Digitization of the Rista photo archive (2.5 months)

Funding

The Foundation's total expenditure in 2021 was 527,983 euros. The Foundation's income consisted of operating grants from the Ministry of Education and Culture (88%) and funding for the coordination of the Finnish network of the Anna Lindh Foundation (10%), as well as other grants, other income, and donations (2%).

The Anna Lindh National Network in Finland – The Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF)

ALF is a network of networks within the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean that has over 4,200 member organizations in 42 countries. It aims to promote understanding between people in EU countries and on the southern side of the Mediterranean, as well as to foster cooperation between the region's civil society organizations (CSOs), cultural networks, and other actors. Each member country has a national network and a network coordinator, which in Finland is FIME. The funding for coordinating the Finnish network is provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Finland and the Anna Lindh Foundation.

The Finnish network included 97 members at the end of 2021, most members being civil society organizations. As the coordinator of the network, FIME represents ALF in Finland, provides information about its activities, develops and extends the Finnish network, encourages cooperation between the member CSOs, and works to improve general knowledge of the cultures and civil societies of the Middle East and North Africa in Finland. ALF coordination has its own strategy and annual report (www.annalindhfinland.fi).

The 2021 program was opened by a discussion event streamed from the Think Corner, **What to do about Polarization and Violent Attitudes**, where one of the panelists was the former President of Finland Tarja Halonen. The spring also included a multi-week program **Celebrating our Diversity**, organized together with the Swedish, German and Lebanese networks, multiple trainings for members of the network and the **Virtual Marathon for Dialogue** for the entire international ALF network.

FIME in numbers

5 scientific articles and one co-edited volume

3 scientific presentations
2 online courses: 2 teachers, 34 participants and 19 completed courses
2 combinations of online and face-to-face courses: 4 teachers, 22 visiting lecturers, 21 participants
2 Arabic language cafes: 2 instructors and 21 participants
7 webinars: 600 participants
25 posts in Lähi-itä NYT and Paikan päältä blog, 16,483 times read
6 episodes of Lähi-itä NYT podcast, 1,074 listeners
FB: 141 posts and 2,276 likes
Instagram: 74 posts and 178 stories, 794 followers
49 Lähi-itä NYT tweets for 930 followers
130 FIME tweets for 350 followers
6 newsletters for 600 subscribers
FIME's experts in media: 27 appearances
26 collaborations and partners

Funding:

Minedu operating grants 88%
ALF coordination 10%
Other 2%