

Annual report 2022

The Finnish Institute in the Middle East (FIME) is a research institute that focuses on the study of Middle Eastern cultures, religions, societies, as well as classical and modern languages. The institute supports Finnish research on the Middle East and offers in-person and online teaching on relevant topics in cooperation with universities. The institute also brings research-based perspectives on the Middle East to public discourse. The Finnish Institute in the Middle East operates in the whole region with an office in Lebanon and a representative in Cairo, Egypt. FIME is hosted by the Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East, which is based in Helsinki.

Contact information

Finnish Institute in the Middle East

c/o Consulate General of Finland in Beirut
30 Badaro Street, Chaoui Building, 7th floor
7956 Beirut
Lebanon

FIME Cairo

Dr. Said Sadek
Senior Representative
said.sadek@fime.fi

The Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East

Kallioliinantie 4
00140 Helsinki
Finland

www.fime.fi

www.fimesaatio.fi

www.facebook.com/FimeInstitute

Twitter: [fimeinstitute](https://twitter.com/fimeinstitute)

Youtube: [FIME](https://www.youtube.com/FIME)

Lähi-itä NYT blog and podcast (FIN and ENG): www.lahi-itanyt.fi

[@FIME_Institute](https://twitter.com/FIME_Institute) [@lahiitanyt](https://twitter.com/lahiitanyt)

Message from the chairperson

Despite Lebanon's continuing political, economic, and social challenges, the institute remained remarkably active in research, teaching, and public outreach in 2022.

The year was marked by many wonderful activities. Deserving of a special mention, the noteworthy multi-year research project *Migration, Transnational Educational Paths and Diasporic Plurilingualism* (MIGDIA) led by Irina Piippo was launched at the beginning of the year. Moreover, while working as a researcher at the institute from 2019 to 2022, Taavi Sundell finalized his doctoral dissertation, which he successfully defended at the University of Helsinki in early 2023. Warmest congratulations to Taavi!

Director Irina Piippo, whose tenure as director will end in May 2023, spent part of the year on research leave. During that time, the foundation's Executive Officer, Dr. Anu Leinonen, an established researcher of Turkey, successfully led the institute. As one of the substitutes for Dr. Leinonen as executive officer at the foundation was Dr. Inka Nokso-Koivisto, also the CEO of Ixir-verkkokurssit Oy that specializes in creating online courses. In fact, Nokso-Koivisto's Ixir, University of Helsinki, and Docent Ilkka Lindstedt created FIME's first MOOC (Massive Open Online Course). This high-quality MOOC, entitled *Väärinymmärretty uskonto? Tunne islamin perusteet* [The Misunderstood Religion? Learn the Basics of Islam] was launched in the fall of 2022. The development and launching of this course placed FIME at the forefront of the fast-developing field of online teaching.

In addition, the foundation and institute welcome several new members into their community. Indeed, Antti Tarvainen started as a new researcher at the foundation in November, while Samuli Lähteenaho began his work at the institute in Beirut at the beginning of 2023. Finally, the eventful year 2022 came to an exciting end as the internationally established anthropologist specializing in research on Yemen, Docent Susanne Dahlgren, was selected as the institute's new director. While Susanne will officially begin her work at the beginning of summer 2023, I would like to welcome all our new employees to the community!

The media visibility of FIME in 2022 was beyond expectations. This visibility could partially be explained by Turkey's reaction to including Finland and Sweden in the NATO process, which has kept Turkey heavily featured in Finnish national news. As a result, Dr. Anu Leinonen became one of the most interviewed experts to explain Turkish politics in media, highlighting the importance of the work conducted at the institute in Beirut and the foundation in Helsinki to shed light on issues in the Middle East. In addition, Antti Tarvainen commented in the media on questions surrounding the Israeli election at the beginning of his work at the foundation in November 2022.

During the year, the long-time assistant of the foundation, Ella Kaplas, handed over her position to Juuli Ahola. All in all, it was a year of changes. Yet continuity is illustrated by the high-level activities and programs produced by the institute. I would like to warmly thank all the employees above, as well as the institute researcher Sandra Nasser El-Dine, Manal Chatila, who

is the assistant to the institute director, Said Sadek, who is the institute's representative in Egypt, and interns of the year 2022, Miia Kivilä and Vera Jegorenkov. I am also grateful for this year's work from our active board!

Hannu Juusola

Chairperson of the board, Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East

Review by the director

My time as the director of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East ends in May 2023. In retrospect, these past three years have been turbulent in Lebanon. While the national economic and infrastructural challenges have not been resolved and continue, FIME has successfully worked amidst local and global crises.

Indeed, the year was full of events and success in terms of the institute's activities. We organized several events that had been postponed due to the restrictions that were imposed during the pandemic. One of these was the course *Ylirajaiset koulutuspolut: näkökulmia Libanonista* [Transnational Educational Paths: Perspectives from Lebanon] offered for teachers who work with newly arrived pupils in Finland. We started planning this course with Taavi Sundell at the beginning of my term based on joint research interests. When it took place, it had grown beyond a singular event and became part of MIGDIA, a larger research project focused on migration, transnational educational paths, and diasporic multilingualism. This research initiative led by me involves a group of five multidisciplinary researchers in Finland and Lebanon.

Research forms the basis for education and public communications at FIME. Building that foundation for the past three years has been a joy. The MIGDIA project will continue to strengthen the research conducted in the institute for the next four years. The institute researchers Sandra Nasser El-Dine and Taavi Sundell have already begun work on the project. Soon I will join them in studying Arabic teaching for native speakers in classrooms.

Irina Piippo

Director of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East

Research

International Migration and Diasporic Plurilingualism in Educational Paths

The research project on migration, transnational educational paths, and diasporic plurilingualism led by institute director Irina Piippo was launched in early 2022. Piippo's research within the project focused on Arabic-speaking middle school pupils' Arabic classes and the language teaching of adults with immigrant backgrounds in Finland. She published a peer-reviewed article and held two presentations on her research.

Love, Marriage and Dating in the Arab World

The social anthropological work of researcher Sandra Nasser El-Dine focuses on love and gender roles in everyday interactions of intimate relationships among young adults in Jordan. Nasser El-Dine defends her thesis in 2023 and launched the field research part of her post-doc research in 2022. In her new study, she examines love and relationships as part of family life among Syrians who have fled to neighboring countries. The perspective is on the relationship between educational opportunities and gender dynamics.

The Political Economy of Human Capital in Jordan and Lebanon

The doctoral thesis of researcher Taavi Sundell explores the political economy of higher education in the context of open-access publishing in Jordanian, Finnish, and international contexts. He received the right to defend his thesis in late 2022 and proceeded to do so in March 2023. Sundell published one peer-reviewed article and held two presentations on his research in 2022.

Visiting Researcher Program

Samuli Lähteenaho (M.Soc.Sc) spent September in Beirut as a visiting researcher of FIME. During this time, he revisited interlocutors featured in his doctoral research and wrote a chapter to his monograph.

Dr. Tiina Hyypä made a ten-day visit to the Omran Center for Strategic Studies in Istanbul as part of the Visiting Researcher Program. The visit allowed Dr. Hyypä to reflect on her thesis results that focused on Syrian idiocracy with the Center's Syrian researchers.

FIME Resident Scholar Program

The program strengthens the institute's academic links and supports the Lebanese academic community amid the challenging economic situation. Political scientist Dr. Dima Smaira was the resident scholar in 2022. She studied how the people in the Southern suburbs of Beirut (Dahiyeh) navigate conflicts and produce *everyday peace* in the infamous residential area. During the three-month residency, Dr. Smaira completed her data collection and analysis and worked on an article on the topic.

Academic collaboration

Seminar: Migration and Transnational Educational Paths. Beirut, 24th-26th May

The seminar organized by Irina Piippo, Taavi Sundell, and Sandra Nasser El-Dine focused on questions of migration and transnational educational paths. The topic was approached from the global South and North perspectives, and the seminar contributed to the research done under the MIGDIA research project.

Conference: The Changing and Enduring Face of the Ancient Near East: the Impact of Migration and Imperialism through the Ages. Beirut, 22nd-24th August

A conference organized by Vana Kalendarian, FIME's fall 2021 resident scholar, focused on the archeology of the Middle East, especially Lebanon, during the Roman period. The conference brought together international and Lebanese researchers of the field. The conference was organized in collaboration with The Centre of Excellence in Ancient Near Eastern Empires of the University of Helsinki.

Online Workshop: Everyday Peace Practices in the Middle East: Insights for Research and Practice. 25th October

Dima Smaira, the spring 2022 resident scholar of FIME, organized a workshop focused on everyday conflict resolution practices. The online workshop brought together international researchers at different career stages, working on similar topics from a Middle Eastern perspective.

Research Seminar: Production and Governance of Human Capital in the Middle East. Beirut, 17th-19th November (rescheduled from 2020)

The international seminar organized by Taavi Sundell focused on the role of human capital in questions of education, labor, and migration in the Middle East. The seminar approached the topic from the perspective of singular states and international organizations.

Education

The Middle East in Global Political Economy: The Case of Lebanon. Beirut, 8th-16th May
Finnish university students learned about different aspects of the system in Lebanon and how it connects to broader regional development paths. The role of international aid, diaspora, banks, and the central bank in the Lebanese economy, as well as environmental resources, education, labor market, migration, and international and transnational powers and actors, were some of the themes of the course.

Love, Marriage, and Dating in the Arab World. Anthropological Perspectives on Contemporary Practices, *online course, 2nd November – 14th December*

The course focused on questions of love, marriage and dating in contemporary Arab societies. It explored what kind of insights an ethnographic method in particular can offer for understanding intimate relationships in the MENA region. The course included guest lectures by eight international scholars. Students from as many as seven Finnish universities were able to partake on the online course.

Transnational Educational Paths: Perspectives from Lebanon. Beirut, 16th-23rd October

The course was organized as a part of the MIGDIA research project and offered to teachers and other professionals who work with pupils who have newly arrived in Finland. Migration, refugee education, international actors in the field of refugee education, e.g., UN organizations, formal and informal education of refugees, and multilingualism were some of the themes of the course. The topics were approached through visits to schools and organizations that work with refugee education and lectures by local specialists.

Online Course: The Misunderstood Religion? Learn the Basics of Islam www.islamkurssi.fi

FIME launched an online self-study course (Massive Open Online Course - MOOC) on the basic concepts of Islam in September. The course targets Finnish-speaking students at the upper secondary and university levels.

Arabic Language Café, Helsinki, October

Informal language cafés were led by native Arabic speakers and offered to advanced Arabic learners. These language cafés were held twice a week in October in Helsinki.

Public discussion

The institute actively disseminates information on the Middle East to media representatives. In 2022, its researchers regularly provided comments for the Finnish media on events in the Middle East, especially in Lebanon and Turkey. The institute also facilitated contacts between journalists and other external experts on the Middle East. In addition, the institute popularizes scientific research on the Middle East on its platforms and promotes this content on social media.

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

The multi-voiced platform straddles fast-paced news broadcasting and analytical academic research, offering 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 (www.lahi-itanyt.fi/podcastit/)

Lähi-itä NYT podcast published nine new episodes on the topics of civil war in Yemen, discrimination of Muslims in Lebanon, research of ancient Middle Eastern languages in Finland, Turkish foreign policy, everyday life in Beirut, feminism in branding the Israeli state, and utopias as a part of violence between Israel and Palestine.

FIME organized several public events in collaboration with its partners:

- **Ratzinger ja Luther: paavi Benedictus XVI:n reaktio reformaatioon**, 10th February
- **The future of the Iran nuclear deal and its importance on regional security**, 1st March
- **Riikinkukko ja kameli – Iran ja Saudi-Arabia vastakkain**, 12th September
- **Peace Building and Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Yemen**, 25th November

The events had over 300 participants in total.

In addition, FIME organized networking events in Helsinki and Beirut.

Partners and networks

Activities in 2022 were organized in collaboration with several Finnish partners and actors in the Middle East, such as the University of Helsinki and its different centers and departments, especially ANEE Centre of Excellence, Tampere University, American University of Beirut,

Haigazian University, Lebanese American University, international MELAMMU Project, other Finnish research institutes and cultural institutes involved in research, Finnish National Agency for Education, Suomen uskonnonopettajien liitto ry, Nordic Mercy Relief ry, Lähi-idän opiskelijat ry, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, Konstantinus association, Rosebud, Finnish Peace Committee, Lebanese Association for History, JUSOOR, Al Kawathar school and the Embassy of Finland in Beirut. We are also grateful to UNESCO, UNHCR, and UNICEF for offering their expertise to the institute.

Of particular importance were the Honorary Consul General of Finland, Zafer Chaoui, The Finnish Cultural and Academic Institutes ry (SKTI, www.instituutit.fi), and the Friends of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East Association (SLIY, www.sliy.fi).

Institute personnel

- Docent Irina Piippo, Director of the Institute 1–6/2022, Dr. Anu Leinonen (deputy director) 8–12/2022, Beirut
- Researcher Sandra Nasser el-Dine, M.Soc.Sc, Beirut
- Researcher, M.Soc.Sc Taavi Sundell, Beirut
- Resident scholar, Dr. Dima Smaira, Beirut (3 months)
- Administrative assistant, Manal Chatila, Beirut (part-time, 21 h/week)
- Senior representative, Dr. Said Sadek, Cairo (part-time, approx. 300 h/year)

Interns funded by the Finnish National Agency for Education:

- MA Miia Kivilä
- BA Vera Jegorenkov from the University of Helsinki

“My knowledge of Arabic and understanding of the Middle East deepened during the internship. I also gained valuable contacts for my master’s thesis through FIME” – Vera Jegorenkov, Institute Intern, fall 2022.

The Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East

Grants

The Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East awarded grants totaling 23,838 euros to four researchers for research in the Middle East region and travel-related costs, in addition to funding two students to pursue Arabic language studies with a total of 3,473 euros.

The Anna Lindh National Network in Finland – The Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF)
The Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East coordinated the Finnish network of The Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) during 6/2014–5/2022.

ALF is a network within the Union for the Mediterranean framework with over 4 200 member organizations in 42 countries. It aims to promote understanding between EU and Southern

Mediterranean countries and foster cooperation between the region's civil society organizations (CSOs), cultural networks, and other actors. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Finland and the Anna Lindh Foundation provided the funding for coordinating the Finnish network.

One hundred and one members, primarily CSOs, were in the Finnish network by the end of FIME's coordinating time. ALF coordination has a separate plan of action and annual report. In Spring 2022, the coordinators and members of the Finnish network participated in creating a section of worldviews in a mobile application for finding friends, organized workshops in Arabic on equity, and marked the end of the coordination period with a networking event.

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 2022, the board met eight times and consisted of the following experts:

Prof. Hannu Juusola (chair)

Deputy member: Prof. Jutta Jokiranta

Doc. Sakari Karjalainen (vice-chair from 14th March onward)

Deputy member: Tom Kankkonen, journalist

Prof. Saana Svärd (vice-chair until 14th March)

Deputy member: Dr. Olli Ruohomäki, Senior Adviser

Tero Norjanen, Director of International Cooperation

Deputy member: Rolf Steffansson, Executive Director

Doc. Pekka Lindqvist

Deputy member: Doc. Ruth Illman, Research Director

Doc. Jyri Komulainen

Deputy member: Doc. Elina Hellqvist

Ambassador Risto Veltheim

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

Prof. Serafim Seppälä

Deputy member: Dr. Heta Hurskainen, University lecturer

Ambassador Maria Serenius

Deputy member: Patrick Lindgren, LL.M

Foundation personnel in Finland

- Dr. Anu Leinonen, Executive Officer of the Foundation 1–7/2022, Helsinki
- Ella Kaplas (M.Soc.Sc.), Administrative Assistant 1–7/2022 and Deputy Executive Officer 8–9/2022, Helsinki
- Dr. Inka Nokso-Koivisto, Deputy Executive Officer and Project Consultant, Helsinki
- Juuli Ahola (MA), Administrative and Communications Assistant 8/2022 onwards, Helsinki
- Antti Tarvainen (M.Soc.Sc.), researcher 11/2022 onwards, Helsinki

Funding

The Foundation's total expenditure in 2022 was 534,891 euros. The Foundation's income consisted of operating grants from the Ministry of Education and Culture (91 %), other grants, other revenue, and donations (9 %).

Key figures

3 scientific articles and two edited volumes

4 scientific presentations

4 seminars, conferences, and workshops: 45 participants

1 online course: 1 teacher, 8 visiting lecturers, 21 participants, and 4 completed courses

2 intensive courses in Beirut: 2 teachers, 23 visiting lecturers, and 21 participants

1 Arabic language café: 2 instructors and 8 participants

Course on Islam (MOOC): 367 registered users, 115 users completed the course

4 public events: 326 participants

26 blog posts in Lähi-itä NYT and Paikan päältä blog series, 14,604 times read

9 episodes of Lähi-itä NYT podcast, over 2,700 listeners

FB: 164 posts and 3000 likes

Instagram: 83 posts and 260 stories, 950 followers

97 Lähi-itä NYT tweets for 1024 followers

186 FIME tweets for 492 followers

6 newsletters for 650 subscribers

FIME or FIME experts in media: 80 appearances

22 collaborators

The Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland grants 91 %, other 9 %