



Annual Report 2024

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

Message from the Chairperson

I took over the position of Chairman from Hannu Juusola last spring, and it has been an honour to advance FIME's important work and activities. I will ensure that FIME maintains its status as a leading, multidisciplinary Finnish science institute that conducts high-quality research.

The past year was an eventful one for the institute. The Israeli attack on Lebanon temporarily shut down the office, and the staff transitioned to remote work. Syria witnessed a dramatic shift in its political power structure. While there are glimpses of potential new beginnings, the situation remains fluid. While writing this, the general state of affairs in the region has improved compared to the autumn. However, the change of power in Washington will likely introduce new twists and turns to the ever-changing political landscape in the Middle East.

Despite the challenges, FIME has continued its scientific activities. In June, the Seventh Finnish Colloquium of Middle East and North American Studies was organized in Tampere. The colloquium gathered prominent Finnish scholars from various disciplines who studied issues related to the Middle East and North Africa. We also heard from foreign scholars when they presented their research. We extend a special thank you to Juuli Ahola for organizing the colloquium.

FIME's researchers have made commendable contributions by providing background information on the current situation in the Middle East in the Finnish media. I want to thank Susanne Dahlgren, who led the Beirut office in a difficult situation, and Samuli Lähteenaho for his excellent work enhancing our understanding of Lebanon's diverse society. I wish him success in his future endeavours. Additionally, I want to thank Manal Chatila, who kept the Beirut office operational despite the difficult circumstances. I also extend my deep appreciation to Said Sadek for his long and tireless work for FIME in Egypt. I wish him a well-deserved and peaceful retirement.

The contribution of the foundation's personnel in Helsinki is also essential. My warm thanks to Anu Leinonen, Laura Aho and Antti Tarvainen. The foundation's board has been active and creative. Kari Kahiluoto, Gunvor Kronman, Maria Leppäkari, and Laura Huovinen joined as new board members, bringing new perspectives to the board's work.

Olli Ruohomäki
Chairperson of the Board, Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East

Quote: FIME's researchers have also contributed commendably to providing background information on the current situation in the Middle East in the Finnish media.

Review by the Director

As 2024 began, it became increasingly apparent that the war in Gaza was prolonging, and its waves would reach neighbouring Lebanon. In the spring, we operated under relatively normal conditions, although many European countries had imposed travel restrictions to Lebanon.

In the spring, we organized lectures in the Badaro Talks series. FIME's triennial colloquium was held in Tampere in cooperation with university researchers. The colloquium program was of high standard, bringing together an unprecedented number of speakers from different parts of the Middle East and beyond. Additionally, cooperation with the Centre of Excellence in Ancient Near Eastern Empires (ANEE) at the University of Helsinki intensified during an international conference held in Helsinki in the summer.

In September, the security situation in Beirut deteriorated, and the entire institute transitioned to remote work. We organized an annual student course in Tangier, Morocco, in October, led by Board Member Marko Juntunen. The course focused on the country's megaprojects, which unfortunately do little to improve the situation of low-income people.

Institute's researcher, Samuli Lähteenaho, defended his PhD thesis on Lebanon's coastal policy at the University of Helsinki. In the fall, he organized the final conference of his research term in Cairo. Our Lebanese resident researcher, Sana Tannoury-Karam, finished her book at the institute. We thank them for their contributions to the institute's scientific activities!

We organized our annual concert in the spring with the Honorary Consul of Finland, Zafer Chaoui, and the Finnish Embassy in Lebanon. The performers were cellist Jussi Makkonen and pianist Nazig Azezian. The concert was a great success.

The conflicts in the Middle East created a significant demand for the institute's experts in Finnish media. In addition, throughout the year, we enhanced our cooperation with other scientific institutes in the region, with the American Arab Council for Social Sciences as a new partner. We also participated in scientific conferences and furthered our scientific publications.

In Beirut 14.2.2024
Susanne Dahlgren
Director of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East

Quote: As 2024 began, it became increasingly apparent that the war in Gaza was prolonging, and its waves would reach neighbouring Lebanon.

Research

Facilitating research in the Middle East

Law and Politics in Yemen

Susanne Dahlgren continued to write her two monographs and completed two scientific articles. Dahlgren was a keynote speaker in Hyderabad, Sindh, and gave a talk at the SeSaMO (Italian Society for Middle Eastern Studies) conference in Cagliari. She also participated in a roundtable discussion at the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) online conference organized by the Association of Middle East Anthropology (AMEA), an affiliate of MESA. Dahlgren is also a member of the AMEA board.

Coastline Politics in Beirut

Researcher Samuli Lähteenaho defended his doctoral thesis, *A Beach Multiple: An ethnography of environmentalism on the Lebanese coastline* in May 2024 in Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Helsinki. He co-authored the monograph *An Anthropology of Crosslocations* (Helsinki University Press). He served as a guest editor for the special issue of the journal *Environmental Humanities, Sand as Matter and Method*, which will be published in 2025. He wrote one article and an introduction with Prof. Brenda Chalfin (University of Florida). Lähteenaho presented his research at conferences and public lectures, his texts were published in several publications, and he commented on the events in Lebanon in the Finnish media.

Research Residency Program

Doctoral researcher Nina Björkman spent a month in Morocco networking with local researchers and representatives of organizations interested in Edward Westermarck's archives. Westermarck was one of the first Finnish social scientists to pursue an international career. He is known for his papers on marriage, morality, and sexuality and his extensive fieldwork in Morocco. The visit continued the Åbo Akademi project, in which Westermarck's extensive archives have been digitized. The archive is part of UNESCO's national Memory of the World register.

During his research visit to Yemen, Dr. Abdullah Alosaimi collected field data for his study on the increase in child marriages in war-torn Yemen. A total of 96 people participated in 16 focus group interviews across Yemen (Taiz, Sana'a, Marib). The interviews are part of a study that examines both the impact of the poor humanitarian situation in Yemen on child marriages and the attitudes and practices that contribute to the lowering of the age of marriage. The aim is also to understand how pre-teen marriages could be prevented.

Resident Scholar Program

The program strengthens the institute's connections to the Lebanese academic field. Dr. Sana Tannoury-Karam served as FIME's local scholar-in-residence from September 1, 2024, to February 28, 2025. She is an associate professor of history at the Lebanese American University (LAU). She is a scholar of modern Middle Eastern and global history, specializing in themes of the political left, internationalism and nationalism, the sociology of intellectuals, and the ideological and social history of the Middle East. Her book project at FIME focuses on a local intellectual group's political organization and activism. The group spoke out for social justice, international solidarity of the working class, universal suffrage, women's rights, and the struggle against imperialism and opposed capitalism.

Scientific publications and presentations

FIME and MIGDIA researchers published eight peer-reviewed articles, one edited book, one doctoral dissertation, one academic book review, and one textbook. They also gave fifteen academic presentations and published texts intended for the public. Upcoming publications in 2025 include five peer-reviewed articles, a Finnish-language non-fiction book, and one edited book.

Academic Collaboration

Striving for international and free science in Finland and the Middle East

The Seventh Finnish Colloquium of Middle East and North American Studies: Decolonizing Middle Eastern Studies – Critical Perspectives and Emerging Debates

Tampere, 10–11 June

The entirely hybrid colloquium was the largest FIME conference to date. The conference, which critically examined research traditions, was attended by 105 researchers, students, and others interested in Middle Eastern studies in person in Tampere and 65 via Zoom. The conference, which was organised in collaboration

with the University of Tampere and included 90 presentations, was attended by a pleasing number of researchers with a background in the Middle East. Keynote speakers were Nikolas Kosmatopoulos and Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian.

69th Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (RAI): Politics, Peoples, and Politics in the Ancient Near East Helsinki, 8.–12.7.

RAI, organised by the University of Helsinki and the Centre of Excellence in Ancient Near Eastern Empires in 2024, is the largest and most significant annual conference in the field of Assyriology. Most universities in the world have at most only few researchers in the field, so the annual meeting is important for maintaining the vitality of the field. Organising the conference in Helsinki is a testament to the international recognition of the research conducted at the University of Helsinki. The conference gathered 357 participants from abroad and 83 from Finland in Helsinki.

Workshop: Ecologies, Infrastructures, and Futures in the Absence of Sovereignty

Cairo/online, 8–9 December

The workshop, coordinated by Samuli Lähteenaho, brought together 15 researchers in anthropology, political geography, and environmental history. In the workshop, organized with Karin Ahlberg, a researcher at Stockholm University, and Florian Bonnefoi, a researcher at the French research institute CEDEJ in Cairo, the participants discussed how environmental and infrastructure policies have become essential themes in the Middle East and along the Suez Canal routes. In a public keynote discussion, which attracted about 40 listeners, Prof. Munira Khayyat (NYUAD) and Prof. Nikolas Kosmatopolous (AUB) discussed under the heading "Ecologies, infrastructures and war".

Guest-lecture series: Badaro Talks

- 15.2. SL Anne Meskanen: Taming the Russian Bear. Lessons from the Finnish Foreign Policy, Beirut
- 18.4. Assoc. Prof. Nikolas Kosmatopoulos: Insurgensea: Palestine's nomadic solidarities, Beirut
- 28.11. Dr. Samuli Lähteenaho: The Beach multiple – coastal politics, environmentalism, and relational space in pre-collapse Lebanon, online

There was a total of about 100 participants in the lectures.

Nordic Nubia Expedition Collections

Finland, spring 2024

The inventory and documentation of the archaeological collections held by the Finnish Heritage Agency from the joint Nordic Nubian expedition (1960–1964), funded by the Finnish Cultural Foundation, was completed in spring 2024. The project was coordinated by FIME's assistant, MA Juuli Ahola, and PhD Oula Seitsonen.

Open-Access Publishing

FIME continued the open-access publishing cooperation with the *Studia Orientalia Electronica* journal of the Finnish Oriental Society.

Education

Raising a new generation of Middle East researchers

Megaprojects, urban slums, and tensions between population groups in neoliberal Tangier

Morocco, 20.10.–27.10. Led by university lecturer, doc. Marko Juntunen.

Nordic PhD Summer School in Istanbul

Collaborating with the Nordic Society for Middle Eastern Studies at the Swedish Institute in Istanbul. Students and teachers are from Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark.

Inservice training: Course in Egypt for the Teachers of History and Social Studies

Egypt, 3.–10.6. Led by MA Sini Sarpo

Open online courses: introduction to Islam and Introduction to the Modern Middle East (www.lahi-itakurssit.fi), upcoming in 2025, Introduction to the Ancient Middle East

Taking part in public Discussion

Providing research-based information on the Middle East increasingly needed in Finnish society

FIME's personnel actively relay information to the Finnish media and comments on events in the Middle East. FIME or its personnel appeared in the media no less than 244 times during the year. The media was particularly interested in the war in Gaza and its spread to the institute's premises in Beirut. FIME and MIGDIA experts were invited speakers at eleven public events organized by other institutions, and approximately 600 attendees heard them.

Lähi-itä NYT (Middle East NOW) Blog and Podcasts (www.lahi-itanyt.fi)

The multi-voiced platform is positioned between fast-paced news reporting and analytical science, offering broad and critical perspectives on the Middle East and its events.

In addition, FIME organized one networking event in Beirut and one in Helsinki during the year.

Culture

Promoting Finnish culture in Lebanon

Cellist Jussi Makkonen and pianist Nazig Azezian in Beirut

Beirut, 5.6.

The highlight of the Finnish Year in Lebanon was the long-established concert, where Jussi Makkonen and pianist Nazig Azezian interpreted Sibelius's music for 300 guests. The concert and cocktail party were organized with the Honorary Consul General of Finland, Zafer Chaoui, and the Finnish Embassy in Beirut. The concert received significant media coverage in Lebanon: <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1416096/la-finlande-de-sibelius-au-liban-la-musique-classique-est-a-tout-le-monde-.html>

Partners and Networks

The 2024 activities were carried out with 22 partners

The 2024 activities were carried out in collaboration with several Finnish and Middle Eastern partners. These include the following parties: the University of Helsinki and its various departments and units, the University of Tampere, Aalto University and Aalto Medialab, the Finnish National Agency for Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Center for Economic, Legal, and Social Studies and Documentation (CEDEJ), Academy of Change (Morocco), Finnish Center for Artificial Intelligence, Helsinki Institute for Information Technology, the Association for Teachers of History and Social Studies in Finland, Ixir Online Learning Ltd, the Orient Institute Cairo, the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, the University of Sindh, other Finnish academic institutes and cultural institutes, the Ordo Sancti Constantini Magni, the Embassy of Finland in Beirut, the Honorary Consul General of Finland in Lebanon, Zafer Chaoui, the Anna Lindh Foundation's Finnish Network, Finnish Psychologists for Social Responsibility, Atena Publishing and Sumud ry.

Particularly key partners include the Honorary **Consul General of Finland in Lebanon, Zafer Chaoui, the Finnish Cultural and Academic Institutes** (SKTI, www.instituutit.fi), and the **Friends of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East** (SLIY, www.sliy.fi).

Institute personnel

- Director of the Institute, docent Susanne Dahlgren, Beirut
- Researcher, M.Soc.Sc Samuli Lähteenaho, Beirut
- Resident Scholar, Dr. Sana Tannoury-Karam, Beirut (1.9.2024 onwards)
- Administrative Assistant, Manal Chatila, Beirut
- Senior Representative, Dr. Said Sadek, Cairo

Interns:

- BA Jasmin Paananen
- B.Soc.Sc. Julia Rauman

The Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East

The Foundation maintains the Institute

Foundation's Grants and Research

The Foundation of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East awarded 25 058 euros in grants. One was the 3,300 euros Aimo T. Nikolainen Grant for Ecumenical Research, funded by the Ordo Sancti Constantini Magni. Other grants were awarded to a Lebanese Resident Scholar, two Research Residencies in Yemen and Morocco, and four advanced Arabic students for a total of 6 320 euros for Arabic language studies in Jordan and Egypt.

Start-up Israel/Palestine: the political worlds of the innovation economy

Researcher Antti Tarvainen wrote a peer-reviewed article related to his post-doc research with Professor Benoit Challand (accepted, not published) and submitted his doctoral dissertation on the politics of the innovation economy in Israel/Palestine for pre-review. In addition, Tarvainen gave two scientific talks related to his doctoral research at international conferences.

Panel discussion: Politics of Technology and Colonialism in the Global Middle East

Helsinki, 23.10.

The panel, organized by FIME as part of the Contestations AI event, discussed the changing role of the Middle East, and Israel/Palestine in particular, in the global technology and security architecture. Two hundred fifty attendees and 100 online participants attended the event.

Benoit Challand's visit

Helsinki, 25.–26.1.

FIME hosted a visit from Prof. Benoit Challand (The New School for Social Research). As part of the visit, a guest lecture, "Politics of Technology and Colonialism in the Global Middle East," was organized on January 26 at the University of Helsinki. In addition, Challand spoke at a discussion organized by Sumud ry on "Innovation economy and colonial violence in Palestine/Israel" on January 25.

Foundation's Anniversary and Anniversary Scholarship

The Foundation of Finnish Institute in the Middle East celebrated its 30th anniversary with a reception in the Finnish Literature Society's ballroom on October 11. The event, attended by 100 people, featured a performance by Palestinian qanun player Shafeeq Alsadi. To celebrate its anniversary, FIME collected 2 346 euros in donations for scholarships intended for master's students to be awarded in early 2025.

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 authority of the foundation lies with its board of trustees. The foundation's board of trustees is responsible for the administration of the institute together with the director of the institute appointed by it. In 2024, the board met four times and consisted of the following experts:

Chair prof. Hannu Juusola (until 26.3.), **Senior Adviser, Dr. Olli Ruohomäki** (26.3. onwards)

Deputy member: University researcher Dr. Heta Hurskainen

Vice-chair prof. Jutta Jokiranta

Deputy member: University lecturer Ilkka Lindstedt

Dr. Pekka Lindqvist

Deputy member: Director, Doc. Ruth Illman (until 13.6.), MA Laura Wickström (13.6. onwards)

Doc. Jyri Komulainen

Deputy member: Dr. Elina Hellqvist (until 26.3.), Adviser Laura Huovinen (26.3. onwards)

Dr. Anasse Bouhlal

Deputy member: Doc. Marko Juntunen

Ambassador Maria Serenius

Deputy member: Dr. Tiina Järvi

Prof. Saana Svärd

Deputy member: Senior Research Fellow, Dr. Timo R. Stewart

Director of International Cooperation Tero Norjanen (until 26.3.), **Regional Director Miikka Kallio** (26.3. onwards)

Deputy member: Executive Director Pauliina Parhiala (26.3. saakka), Director of International Cooperation Tero Norjanen (26.3. lähtien)

Ambassador Kari Kahiluoto (13.6. onwards)

Deputy member: journalist Tom Kankkonen

Ambassador Risto Veltheim (until 26.3.), **CEO Gunvor Kronman** (13.6. onwards)

Deputy member: M.Soc.Sc Kari Norkonmaa (until 26.3.), Director of Life Force Sector Maria Leppäkari (13.6. onwards)

Foundation personnel in Finland

- Executive Officer of the Foundation, Dr. Anu Leinonen, Helsinki
- Antti Tarvainen (M.Soc.Sc.), researcher, Helsinki
- Administrative and Communications Assistant MA Juuli Ahola (until 31.7.), MA Laura Aho (1.8. onwards), Helsinki

Funding

According to the foundation's financial statement, total expenditures in 2024 were 522 023 euros, and profit was 7 789 euros. The foundation's income consists of a grant from the Ministry of Education and Culture (92%) and other grants, revenue, and donations (8%).

MIGDIA

Researching everyday plurilingualism and education

International Migration and Diasporic Plurilingualism in Educational Context

The MIGDIA research project, led by the institute's former director, Docent Irina Piippo, deals with migration, cross-border educational paths, and diasporic multilingualism. FIME will be the background organization for

the research project funded by the Kone Foundation until 2027. Piippo's research project focuses on teaching Arabic as a mother tongue among primary school children in Finland. In total, the project involves five researchers from the fields of applied linguistics, anthropology, and world politics.

Researchers in MIGDIAn

- Doc. Irina Piippo, director of the research project
- Dr. Taavi Sundell, doctoral/postdoctoral researcher
- M.Soc.Sc Sandra Nasser El-Dine, doctoral researcher
- MA Mikko Lehtikoinen, doctoral researcher (funding from the University of Helsinki)
- Doc. Maria Ahlholm, University Lecturer at the University of Helsinki

migdia.fi

Annual Key Figures

8 peer-reviewed articles, 1 dissertation, 1 edited volume, 1 book review in scholarly journals, 1 textbook, 9 popular articles

13 academic presentations

1 conference in Tampere/online, 90 presentations, 170 attendees

1 academic workshop Cairo/online, 15 attendees

3 Badaro Talks, 100 attendees

3 other events or panels, almost 400 attendees

Student course: *Megaprojects, urban slums, and tensions between population groups in neoliberal Tangier*, 3 teachers, 10 students

Inservice training: Course in Egypt for the Teachers of History and Social Studies, 1 teacher and 16 attendees

A misunderstood religion? Basics of Islam (MOOC): 656 new registered users, 217 completed courses

Understanding the Middle East today (MOOC): 473 registered users, 116 completed courses

The grants enabled six students and researchers to spend over 45 weeks in the Middle East.

Lähi-itä NYT blog and its Paikan päältä series 26 texts, 21 writers and 52 000 visits

Lähi-itä NYT podcasts 3, over 1250 listeners or downloads

FB: 98 posts, 3 300 followers, and 3 000 likes

Insta: 70 posts and 170 stories, over 1600 followers

5 newsletters to 900 recipients

FIME or FIME experts in media: 245 appearances (pie chart)

TV-appearances: 21

Radio/podcast interviews: 26

National media articles: 75

Foreign papers: 1

Local papers: 122

22 partners

Income as a pie-chart:

Ministry of Education and Culture grant: 91 %

Other 9 %

All proceedings in total: 529 971 €

Contributions or grants from partners that are not reflected in FIME's accounting total €201 185

In-kind-funding (known), c. 27 500 €

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

Kalliolinnantie 4
00140 Helsinki

Website (institute): www.fime.fi

Website (foundation): www.fimesaatio.fi

Facebook: www.facebook.com/FimeInstitute

Instagram: [fimeinstitute](https://www.instagram.com/fimeinstitute)

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

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