



ArcMUN

Aristotelio College Model United Nations

UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S EMERGENCY FUND (UNICEF)

Children's rights in the Arab world

Study Guide

Contributors: Veronik Kontaxian, Melina Daniilidou

All rights reserved, ARCMUN 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Welcoming Letter.....	
2. Introduction to the Committee.....	
3. Introduction to the Topic.....	
3.1. COVID-19.....	
3.2. World Cup 2022 in Qatar.....	
3.3. Child Marriage.....	
4. Definition of Key Terms.....	
5. Arab World countries.....	
6. Crisis in Syria.....	
7. Points to be addressed.....	
8. Actions already taken.....	
9. Conclusion.....	
10. Bibliography.....	

1. Welcoming Letter

Dear Delegates,

We are excited to welcome you to the 20th Aristoteleio College Model United Nations and we are so happy to have you in the UNICEF Committee. This year, we're dealing with a very important topic, which we also feel will be extremely interesting to discuss during our sessions; the rights of the children in the Arab world. We can assure you that the debates in our committee will be interesting and memorable and we will try our best to make this ArcMUN experience unforgettable for you.

The following Study Guide aims at helping you understand this year's topic and the history of the UNICEF Committee. However, you ought to make some research on your country's position concerning the matter discussed to have a clearer picture of the points being mentioned.

We would also like to take the time to remind you of the importance of your position paper, not only is it a requirement for the conference, but it is an incredibly useful outline for you to have when preparing your arguments both prior to the sessions and during the sessions. Go through this background guide and you should be able to get a decent idea of where we assume the discussion will go.

Last but not least, we would like to thank you in advance for choosing the UNICEF committee and for your cooperation. If you have any questions or need any help feel free to contact us at the following email arcmun2023unicef@gmail.com, we will be happy to help you.

Plus, we would like to let you know that you can join our committee's Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/529432425802926/> so we can communicate and get to know each other.

With that being said, we look forward to meeting you all!

Sincerely,
Veronik Kontaxian
Melina Daniilidou

2. Introduction to the Committee

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, also known as UNICEF, is one of the organization's funds and is responsible for upholding the rights of children and adolescents. It was created back in 1946 by the U.N. Relief Rehabilitation Administration with the main goal of providing aid to children and mothers of war-torn countries.

As the years went by, UNICEF started not only to assist children that have lived through war but also to establish all children's rights worldwide. Among all 54 children's rights, UNICEF is mostly devoted to improving the health, nutrition, education, and general welfare of children.

Nowadays, UNICEF's work is present in over 190 countries but mostly specializes in funding less-developed countries, such as the ones in the Middle East and North Africa, in various emergencies. According to UNICEF, every child has the right to grow up in a safe and inclusive environment, so UNICEF's goal is to save children's lives and defend their rights despite any difficulties. Some of the key action paths that UNICEF deals with are Children's Rights, Migration and Refugees, Gender Discrimination, Safe Settlements, and Youth Employment.

Thirty years since the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted, the Middle East and North Africa have seen notable progress in children's rights, despite issues with governance, inequality, poverty, and conflicts. UNICEF has accomplished providing education, as more children in these regions are in school than ever before. After all, children and young people in this region are asking for the very basics. They are asking for good education, clean water, electricity, reliable internet connection, and clean cities and villages. They are asking for jobs, for their voices to be heard, and for freedom from abuse and exploitation.



3. Introduction to the Topic

Children across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are frequently deprived of the basic rights afforded to them in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and international law.

This is particularly alarming and reprehensible for children within the juvenile justice system, regardless of whether they are in conflict with the law.

Across the region, laws relating to children are outdated, and enforcement of children's rights is too often weak or nonexistent. Many countries lack a comprehensive juvenile justice system that can appropriately respect and handle children's rights. Shockingly, governments in some countries are simply unable or unwilling to adequately protect children.

Across the MENA region, human rights organizations are campaigning for change as they provide and strengthen key services. However, these organizations face their own difficulties, handicapped by restrictions on freedom of expression, and physical attacks on activists.

Despite the progress that has been made, many children in this region are still facing difficulties in their daily lives, such as the following.

- Children in schools are not receiving **quality** education. Only half meet even the lowest international benchmark for **basic skills** in reading, writing, mathematics and science
- The region has the world's highest **youth unemployment** rate in the world;
- Four out of five children in every country in the region have experienced **physical or psychological violence** at home or at school
- 25 million children in the region live in **conflict situations**
- Three quarters of all children in need of humanitarian assistance in the region live in conflict-affected countries
- Conflicts in **Syria** and **Iraq** have left tens of thousands of children from areas previously held by armed groups. These are among the **most vulnerable children** in the world.
- While less than one third of people in the Middle East and North Africa are aware that the Convention on the Rights of the Child exists, the majority said that conditions for children's rights have worsened in the past three years.

According to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the Convention — which went on to become the most widely ratified in history, in whole or in part, on 20 November 1989 and was attached to two additional protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflicts and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography — is still not fully implemented, unknown, or not widely understood, especially in developing countries, but also high-income countries including those in the Middle East and North Africa.

Millions of children continue to suffer violations of their rights, especially when they are denied adequate protection, such as being forced to leave school, carry out hazardous work, engage in early marriage, or fight wars or when they are held in adult prisons.

UNICEF reported in December 2020 that continuing violence, internal and external displacement, natural disasters, growing economic and gender inequality, and high rates of youth unemployment and poverty have left more than 32 million children in need of humanitarian assistance – water and sanitation, education, health care, and protection services – across the Middle East and North Africa.

3.1. COVID-19

An estimated 385 million children live in extreme poverty. Even prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the poorest children were twice as likely to die in childhood than their wealthier peers. Low income is associated with higher rates of chronic health conditions, some of which may increase risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Low-income communities are more likely to be exposed to the virus, have higher mortality rates, suffer economically, and receive lower-quality health care.

The global economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 crisis will likely increase rates of child labor. Globally, an estimated 152 million children were already engaged in child labor before the COVID-19 pandemic, with 73 million engaged in hazardous work. Research has shown that child labor is highly associated with financial shocks experienced by a family, such as illness, disability, or a parent’s loss of employment. Many families do not have the credit or savings to withstand financial setbacks, including income loss, and without adequate governmental support, their children may be at higher risk of entering the workforce to help their families survive.

3.2. World Cup 2022 in Qatar

Thousands of migrant workers lost their lives to make the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar possible. But the scale of the children and human rights abuse doesn't end with these workers' lives. For children of deceased workers, whose families lost their sole breadwinner, the effects can be lasting. Families may feel they have no choice but to send children to work or into early marriage to make ends meet.

Here are eight ways that some child workers building the Khalifa Stadium and the Aspire Zone are being exploited:

1. Expensive recruitment fees
2. Appalling living condition
3. Lies about salary
4. Delayed salaries
5. Can't leave the stadium or camp
6. Can't leave the country or change job
7. Threatened
8. Forced labour

FIFA has an opportunity to end this cycle of human and children rights abuse for families of migrant workers following deaths, injuries, and wage theft in Qatar. FIFA's Human Rights Policy outlines their commitment to remedy those "adversely affected by activities associated with FIFA." In May, Human Rights Watch launched a campaign calling on FIFA and Qatar to provide remedies for migrant workers who suffered abuse and for their families.

FIFA should ensure that the children its World Cup has "adversely affected" can pay their school fees and have a decent chance at a secure future.

3.3. Child Marriage

Each year, 12 million girls mostly in the MENA region are married before their 18th birthday. Like child labor, child marriage is often driven by financial stress. Families facing economic hardships such as job loss may feel they have no choice but to marry daughters off as soon as possible to reduce the number of people in the household to feed. Some may believe their daughter may be better off with a family with greater financial resources or stability. Dowry and bride price practices sometimes mean that families in financial crisis have a monetary incentive for arranging a marriage.

Widespread school closures may also increase risks of child marriage, as research shows that leaving education is highly correlated with girls being married off. For example, the World Bank has found that in some countries, every additional year of secondary school may reduced the likelihood of marrying before age 18 by five percentage points or more.

Child marriage is associated with many harmful consequences, including maternal and infant mortality associated with early and closely spaced pregnancies, lower educational achievement for girls who marry earlier, a higher incidence of domestic violence, and an increased likelihood of the bride and her family living in poverty. While the vast majority of married children are girls, boys can also face this abuse.

So what should each country's government do?

- Governments should enforce child labor laws and laws against child marriage.
- Governments should engage in public awareness campaigns about the harms associated with child marriage.
- Governments should guarantee the right of every child to an adequate standard of living in accordance with international human rights law.
- Governments should urgently expand food-distribution programs for vulnerable families, including by distributing free lunches from schools, even if they aren't holding classes.

4. Definition of Key Terms

Child

A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years, more specifically between the stages of birth and puberty, unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

Arab League

The Arab League is a union of Arabic-speaking African and Asian countries. It was formed in Cairo in 1945 to promote the independence, sovereignty, affairs, and interests of its member countries and observers. The organization began with seven founding members and is now comprised of 22 different member nations and four observer states. The League is bound by a charter and has a council in place to ensure that its goals are met.

Children's Rights

Children's rights are a subset of human rights with particular attention to the rights of special protection and care afforded to minors. They were recognized after the 1st World war, with the adoption of the Declaration of Geneva, in 1924. The process of recognition of children's rights continued thanks to the UN, with the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959.

The recognition of the child's interest and their rights became a reality on November 20th 1989 with the adoption of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child which is the first international legally binding text recognizing all the fundamental rights of the child.

Humanitarian Aid

Humanitarian aid is material and logistic assistance to people who need help. It is usually short-term help until the long-term help by the government and other institutions replaces it. Among the people in need are the homeless, refugees, and victims of natural disasters, wars, and famines. Humanitarian aid can come from either local or international communities.

MENA

MENA, an acronym in the English language, refers to a grouping of countries situated in and around the Middle East and North Africa. It is also known as WANA, which alternatively refers to the Middle East as Western Asia.

GBV (Gender-based Violence)

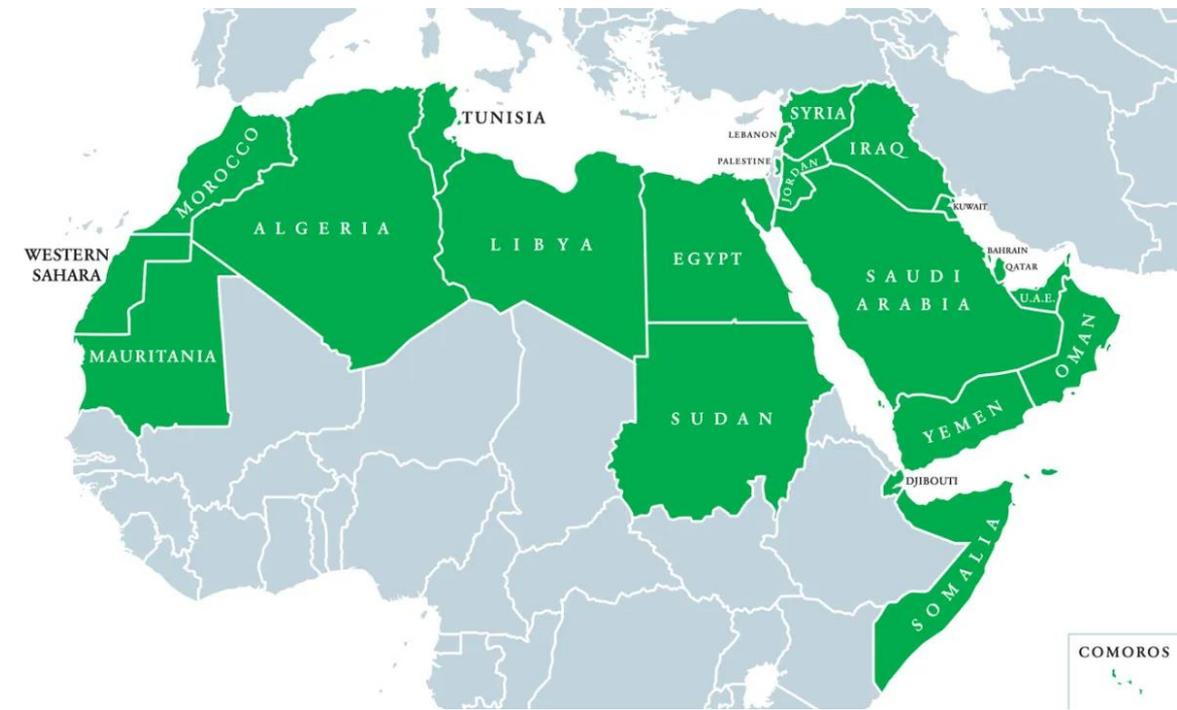
Gender-based violence can include sexual, physical, mental and economic harm inflicted in public or in private. It also includes threats of violence, coercion and manipulation. This can take many forms such as intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation and so-called 'honour crimes'.

5. Arab World countries

There are 22 countries in the Arab World which are the following:

1. Algeria
2. Bahrain
3. Comoros
4. Djibouti
5. Egypt
6. Iraq
7. Jordan
8. Kuwait
9. Lebanon
10. Libya
11. Morocco
12. Mauritania
13. Oman
14. Palestine
15. Qatar
16. Saudi Arabia

17. Somalia
18. Sudan
19. Syria
20. Tunisia
21. UAE
22. Yemen



6. Crisis in Syria

What is happening in the Syrian Arab Republic?

More than a decade of humanitarian crisis and hostilities has had a profound impact on the situation of children in Syria, across the region and beyond. Every Syrian child has been impacted by the violence, displacement, severed family ties and lack of access to vital services caused by massive physical devastation.

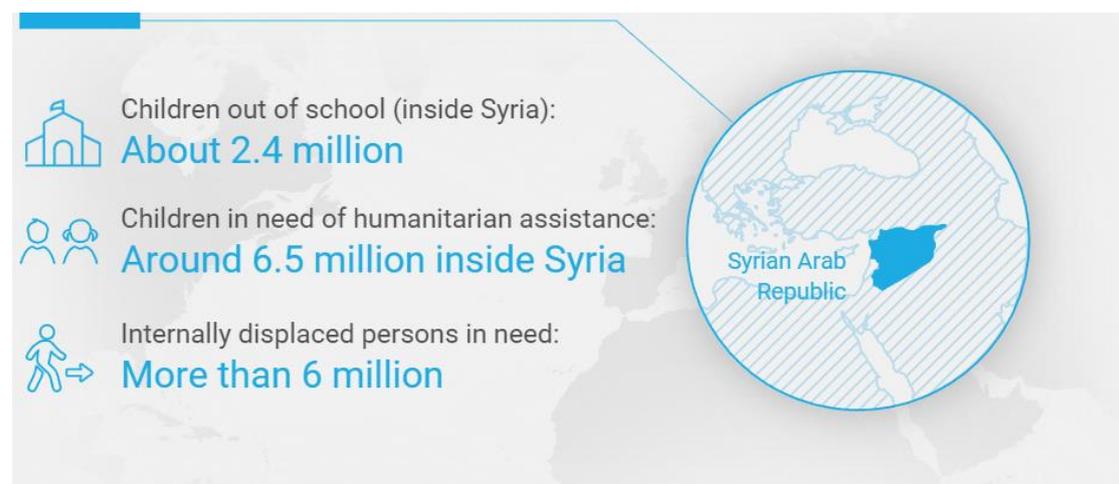
Eleven years of conflict and sanctions have had a devastating impact on Syria's economy, setting development back 25 years. Most of the basic systems and services children depend on – health, nutrition, water and sanitation, education, and social protection – have been cut to the bone. Families are struggling to put food on the table, while nearly one-third of all children are chronically malnourished and more than 6.5 million children need urgent assistance.

How have children been affected?

For many children in Syria, war is the only thing they know. They continue to live in fear of violence, landmines, and explosive remnants of war. They struggle with physical and psychological scars of war. In 2021, a third of children in Syria showed signs of psychological distress including anxiety, sadness, fatigue, or frequent trouble sleeping.

The war has also brought one of the largest education crises in recent history, with a whole generation of Syrian children paying the price of conflict. Education facilities are overstretched, and many schools cannot be used because they have been destroyed, damaged, shelter displaced families or are being used for military purposes.

Children with disabilities carry a double burden when it comes to violence, threats to their health and safety, hunger, risk of abuse, and loss of education. Lack of mobility and difficulty fleeing harm have further compounded the challenges they face.



7. Points to be addressed?

- How is your country tackling the issue of child workers?
- How can countries protect children from being exposed to child marriage?
- Child labour laws exist as of now, however, the question is how can these laws actually be enforced in less developed countries, such as the MENA region countries, and how can your country's government reinforce these laws?
- How can intergovernmental organizations, especially UNICEF help and support abused children in the Arab World countries?
- An estimated 5.8 million children need humanitarian aid to meet their basic needs in Syria and neighboring countries. How can your country's policy contribute to that?

8. Actions already taken

Considering the current situation, UNICEF Child Protection is working towards:

- Strengthening child protection in humanitarian action by scaling up mental health and psychosocial programming and specialized services for children and caregivers, including to address GBV issues, particularly in high intensity conflicts where the impact on children is the greatest.
- Accelerating investment in national child protection delivery systems, including through supporting country and regional level initiatives aiming at improving cross-sectoral coordination, reinforcing the social services workforce, strengthening case management and data collection systems, supporting the justice and law enforcement sectors, and promoting the necessary policy and legal reforms.
- Across the MENA region, UNICEF provides technical and financial support to reforming national polices and laws to align them with international standards, strengthens service delivery systems, supports monitoring systems and data generation for evidence-based interventions, leverages funds and expertises and raises awareness on protection issues among both children themselves and other key duty bearers such as governments and care-givers.

Plus, the 2021 annual report of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage highlights key accomplishments, lessons learned and priorities for the way forward. In 2021, the following programmatic results were achieved:

- Close to 2.6 million adolescent girls (aged 10–19) received life skills and comprehensive sexuality education.
- Addressing harmful masculinities and gender norms was a key focus for the Programme, with over 1.1 million boys and men engaged in dialogues and education sessions.
- Close to 16 million community members, including adolescent boys and girls, were engaged in meaningful community dialogues on child marriage, the rights of adolescent girls and gender equality.

What is UNICEF doing to help children in the Syrian crisis?

Across Syria and in the neighbouring countries, UNICEF and partners continue to work to protect children, to help them cope with the impact of conflict. This includes improving psychosocial support to help children and caregivers recover from trauma, as well as delivering lifesaving support and services for children struggling physically and psychologically.

Working with partners, UNICEF continues to deliver assistance including hygiene kits, safe drinking water, and screening and treatment of malnutrition. To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, UNICEF and partners have been sharing prevention and risk awareness messages and materials.





384,000 children

accessing community-based mental health and psychosocial support



4,027,800 people

who have access to a safe and accessible channel to report sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers



120,000 women, girls, boys and men

accessing gender-based violence risk mitigation, prevention and/or response interventions



1,947,300 children and caregivers

accessing explosive weapons-related risk education and survivor assistance interventions

9. Conclusion

To sum up, as we already mentioned the importance of defending children's rights is major, especially in the MENA region. It is an undeniable fact that instead of being granted the best possible living conditions, their rights are still being violated today in every possible way. Each country's government should prioritize and focus on enduring children's laws in order to reinforce UNICEF's actions towards education, nutrition and equality. Despite all the difficulties, such as wars and conflicts, the politicians and representatives, must maximize efforts in order to provide to each and every child a safe childhood, something they all need and deserve. Either way children are our future.

*"The true character of a society is revealed in how it treats its children."
Nelson Mandela*

10. Bibliography

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNICEF>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/UNICEF>

<https://www.unicef.org/mena/children-rights-progress-mena-crc30>

https://defenceforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/ChildrightsArabcountries_EN_Report.pdf

https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/crc_glos_eng.pdf

<https://www.investopedia.com/terms/a/arab-league.asp>

<https://www.humanium.org/en/child-rights/>

https://defenceforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/ChildrightsArabcountries_EN_Report.pdf

<https://fanack.com/social-justice-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/child-rights-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/>

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/08/15/world-cup-abuses-harm-children-families-migrant-workers>

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/09/covid-19-and-childrens-rights>

<https://ieumun.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/UNICEF-Study-Guide.pdf>

<https://www.unicef.org/mena/child-protection>