



2025-2026

Model Arab League

Background Guide

Summit of Arab Heads of State

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Original draft by Karina Davis, Chair of the Summit of Arab Heads of State at the 2026 National University Model Arab League, with contributions from the dedicated staff and volunteers at the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations

Welcome Delegates!

My name is Karina Davis, Chair of the Summit of Arab Heads of State for the 2025-2026 season. I am a senior at Northeastern University, majoring in chemistry with minors in Chinese language and political science. I have participated in the Summit of Arab Heads of State for the past two years at the National University Model Arab League conference, in addition to my time at the Northeast Regional MAL, where I have been a chair, Assistant Secretary-General, and this year will serve as the Secretary-General. I am so excited to help all of you to prepare for insightful discussions and debate this upcoming year, and I hope to meet you on the circuit at a regional or national conference!

The Summit of Arab Heads of State (HoS) is an opportunity for delegates to act not only as a representative of their country, but also as direct representatives as the head of state. This gives delegates the chance to debate varied issues and a variety of topics, knowing they have the ability to follow through with the solutions discussed. Delegates make agreements and policy decisions based on the viewpoints of the head of state of their nation and their established foreign policies. They must be able to extrapolate the head of state's views on topics they have not yet addressed, while maintaining accurate representation of their country.

Successful delegates in the HoS committee will be able to portray their character accurately while also following all rules of parliamentary procedure in the Model Arab League Handbook. They will have done their preparation well in advance, and come prepared with potential solutions, without prewriting. Delegates should understand the nuances between topics and be prepared to address each topic over the course of the conference.

I wish each one of you great success in committee, and look forward to meeting you in person! I feel truly privileged to be able to Chair the Summit of Arab Heads of State, and to be able to address these important agenda items with you all.

Sincerely,
Karina Davis

Topic I: Establishing and updating standards regarding the safety, facilitation, and support for NGO access within conflict zones.

I. Introduction

A. General Background

Non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, have been increasingly important parts of humanitarian aid efforts during the recent conflict between Israel and Palestine, as well as being essential tools in Syria and Iraq.¹ NGOs supply everything from food and clothing to educational resources and medical relief to areas experiencing conflict and the consequences thereof. However, there have been many instances where NGOs are unable to perform their tasks due to barriers such as being in an active conflict zone, political differences, and complicated regulatory frameworks. In these cases, the lives of civilians, especially children, are put at unnecessary risk. NGOs face challenges such as refusal of access, risks to personnel safety, and limited governmental support or permissions. The council is therefore tasked with identifying regions where NGOs and humanitarian organizations are in most need of assistance achieving their goals, and establishing clear policy and regulations regarding the issues they face, which could be applied throughout the League. It is essential that governments and NGOs work together in whatever way is necessary to achieve their shared goals, although they must also take into account national sovereignty.

It has been posited that governmental and private partnerships for humanitarian aid are focused on 4 main Cs: cooperation, confrontation, complementation, and co-optation.² Each of these aspects can shed light on a method of working with or against agencies to provide humanitarian aid.

Cooperation involves the state and organization having similar goals, and working together on a common solution to achieve them. For instance, the World Conservation Union helped to draft the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species with several governments, an example of how NGOs can help governments draft language.³ Governments that recruit private organizations to run public programs are also examples of this cooperation.

Confrontation can be seen quite often in the Arab world, especially following the 2011 uprisings as many laws regarding the operation of NGOs were restricted.⁴ For example, in Morocco, civil society organizations that receive foreign funding must report to the government within 30 days, and it must be approved, restricting the number of

¹ Brinkerhoff, Jennifer M., 2002. "Government-nonprofit partnership: a defining framework", *Public Administration and Development*(1), 22:19-30. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.203>

² Najam, Adil, 2000. "The four c's of government third sector-government relations", *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*(4), 10:375-396. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.10403>

³ McCormick, J. "International Nongovernmental Organizations: Prospects for a Global Environmental Movement." In S. Kamieniecki (ed.), *Environmental Politics in the International Arena: Movements, Parties, Organizations, and Policy*. Stony Brook: State University of New York Press, 1993

⁴ Tamara Kharroub, "The State of Civil Society in MENA after the 2011 Uprisings," Arab Center Washington DC, April 10, 2024, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-state-of-civil-society-in-mena-after-the-2011-uprisings/>

international groups that can work there.⁵ Although the basic practice of reporting transparency is common, Morocco used their restrictions as a tool to limit or ban several organizations on the basis of their goals, while citing their failure to complete the overly strict and demanding paperwork. Confrontation often occurs when governments see NGOs as not having the same goals as they do, and is especially common in conflicted territories such as Palestine and Syria, where divided governments seek to strengthen their authority.

Complementation occurs when the government and the NGO have a similar goal, but do not have the same method in mind to complete the goal. This could result in lack of funding for NGOs while the problem still persists, but it could also result in multiple relief efforts occurring at once, an overwhelming benefit to the people. Educational programs are a strong example of this. An NGO and the government might each seek to provide education to the citizens, but the goals might not align. So, for example, the government might focus on curriculums, and the NGO might focus on finding teachers or distributing pamphlets, or vice versa. On the other hand, negative interactions in this scenario are also possible: each entity could seek to establish a school, but disputes over curriculum development might lead to fragmented educational services. Disputes that lead to non-co-operation of NGOs and the governments could result in multiple schools in one area, but a deficit in another area in need, due to uncoordinated resource allocation.

Finally, co-optation involves the NGO and government sharing a favored process or strategy, but reaching to accomplish differing goals. This often occurs when a government sees an NGO as attempting to undermine a portion of its regime, such as during consolidations of power, where they may want to assume credit. A common strategy of governments attempting to co-opt NGO programs could be their imposition of requirements for those who receive services, such as race, gender, or other categories. Educational co-optation of NGO processes could involve implementing religious or political beliefs into an otherwise non-partisian curriculum. While co-optation by this definition is not a solution to the issues proposed, it is important to recognize common strategies and pitfalls in NGO-governmental working relationships, in order to avoid them.

B. History in the Arab World

Over the past century, many of the member states of the Arab League have experienced turmoil, including civil war, foreign intervention, and other conflicts. A variety of challenges were experienced when attempting to promote humanitarian goals.

During the Syrian Civil War, access to humanitarian aid was limited for a number of reasons.

⁵Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, “2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Morocco,” U.S. Department of State, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/morocco>.

The volatility of the conflict meant that security was extremely important for aid groups attempting to access the nation, and a variety of restrictions were put into place on their access and movement by the host authority in place.⁶ These restrictions included the necessity of facilitation letters for the permission to work in government held areas, which took months to be submitted and approved, as well as restrictions on their supply chain, including who was allowed to transport important tools like medical goods. Additionally, many donors refused to contribute to distributing aid in areas held by designated terrorist groups, leading to a shortage of funds and a population that needed help regardless of who controlled them at any given time. It also led to significant dangers for aid groups operating in the state. In 2016, for instance, a joint United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent Convoy was attacked by terrorist groups, killing civilians and destroying seventeen truckloads of food.⁷ The attack led to the suspension of aid in Syria for some time, exemplifying the problem of security in relation to aid distribution.

As another example, in Yemen, a decade of war has resulted in one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.⁸ One major barrier to getting aid to all those in need in this instance is that of funding. This includes funding for refugee camps, food, communication, and education, among other needs. The 2025 Yemen Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan seeks 2.47 billion USD, but as of May 9th, only 9% was funded.⁹ Abrupt cuts to humanitarian funding in the first quarter of 2025, including cuts to USAID and other organizations, as well as the ever increasing need for humanitarian aid in other regions, have contributed to these issues.¹⁰ The HNRP addendum provides detailed information on which aspects are most critical to the Yemen conflict, but even to provide what they deem minimum aid, it requires 1.42 billion USD. In 2024, 197 organizations contributed to aid in Yemen, and without funding, they might not be able to continue that work.

In the case of Iraq, the current post-conflict humanitarian crisis is still ongoing. NGOs have a limited presence in the country due to governmental restrictions. Although the Iraqi government is also one of the largest providers of humanitarian aid, their efforts alone have proven to not meet all the needs of their citizens.¹¹ Major restrictions in this case include long and complicated reporting requirements, as well as the difficult process

⁶Mais Balkhi, "Operational Impediments Standing in the Way of Principled Humanitarian Response in Syria," CSIS, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/operational-impediments-standing-way-principled-humanitarian-response-syria>.

⁷"Aleppo Aerial Campaign Deliberately Targeted Hospitals and Humanitarian Convoy Amounting to War Crimes, While Armed Groups' Indiscriminate Shelling Terrorised Civilians – UN Commission | OHCHR," United Nations, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2017/03/aleppo-aerial-campaign-deliberately-targeted-hospitals-and-humanitarian?LangID=E&NewsID=21256>.

⁸Elias Abu Ata, "A Decade of Conflict in Yemen: Humanitarian Lifeline on the Brink, Warns the IRC," International Rescue Committee, March 6, 2025, <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/decade-conflict-yemen-humanitarian-lifeline-brink-warns-irc>.

⁹"Yemen Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025 (January 2025) in Yemen," United Nations, January 2025, <https://yemen.un.org/en/287505-yemen-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025-january-2025>.

¹⁰"Yemen Humanitarian Country Team – Key Messages: Addendum to the 2025 Yemen Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, as of 13 May 2025 [En/Ar] - Yemen," ReliefWeb, May 13, 2025, <https://reliefweb.int/report/yemen/yemen-humanitarian-country-team-key-messages-addendum-2025-yemen-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-13-may-2025-en-ar>.

¹¹Abby Stoddard, "Humanitarian Access Score Report: Iraq," Humanitarian Access SCORE Report: Iraq, July 1, 2021, https://humanitarianoutcomes.org/SCORE_Iraq_2021.

necessary to obtain visas, permissions, and registrations. Additionally, some aid workers, families, and officials have been arrested for unsound reasons, such as in 2018, which interfered with their work.¹² These counterproductive restrictions are a major source of frustration for NGOs, as they are made ineffective without staffing or the necessary permissions to operate.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

Previous and ongoing conflicts in Palestine have also shown that conflict with foreign powers creates a uniquely difficult situation regarding humanitarian aid.¹³ However, it has also been shown that the governments in the Arab League have a more prominent role in negotiating access to conflict zones than any specific NGO, other than the United Nations. For instance, the Rafah Border Crossing on the dividing line between Egypt and Gaza necessitates Egyptian cooperation with NGOs in order to get aid trucks into Gaza. And negotiations mediated by Qatar and Egypt have helped lead to ceasefires such as that in January 2025.¹⁴ In the case of Palestine, it is therefore essential that the Arab League consider how best to negotiate with powers in charge of territory in order to facilitate aid and the work of NGOs. NGOs can not be expected to operate without some degree of security, although specific security guarantees must be developed and their feasibility, as well as its careful recognition of national sovereignty, must be meticulously developed. Additionally, getting NGOs involved in the process serves as a method to ensure the feasibility of plans. Throughout researching this topic, it is important to find sources that indicate both the perspective of governments and the goals of NGOs.

An essential tool for coordinating with NGOs is to negotiate with confederations of these civil society groups. The Arab Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations (AFNGO) and the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND) are two groups of NGOs that attempt to join the efforts of multiple groups to make more effective change.^{15 16} By ensuring that NGOs have access to resources that help them register and be in full compliance with the laws, these organizations can get more done in areas with strict NGO requirements.

When creating lasting frameworks, it is important to take into account the changes that are expected in all nations, due to nothing more than the march of time. Robust solutions to increasing humanitarian access and effectiveness include the implementation of new technologies and have room for amendments based on the march of time, if nothing else.

¹² Human Rights Watch (HRW). (2019). Iraq: Officials arrest, abuse, harass aid workers, 25 February. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/02/25/iraq-officials-arrest-abuse-harass-aid-workers>

¹³“UN OCHA Humanitarian Assistance Plan for Gaza: Considerations for the Delivery of Humanitarian Aid during a Ceasefire in Gaza - Question of Palestine,” United Nations, July 25, 2025, <https://www.un.org/unispa/document/un-ocha-humanitarian-assistance-plan-for-gaza-considerations-for-the-delivery-of-humanitarian-aid-during-a-ceasefire-in-gaza/>.

¹⁴Joaquin Matamis, “Egypt’s Delicate Balance: Maintaining US Support While Confronting Gaza Challenges • Stimson Center,” Stimson Center, April 30, 2025, <https://www.stimson.org/2025/egypts-delicate-balance-maintaining-us-support-while-confronting-gaza-challenges/>.

¹⁵“Government Membership Is Free for Three Years,” Arab Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://arabfederation.org/en>.

¹⁶ “Civil Society Development,” AGFUND, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://agfund.org/en/focusAreas/civilSociety>.

Post the 2011 revolutions, for example, many MENA region nations increased restrictions on nongovernmental organizations and the overall civil society. Some of these restrictions on operation revolve around the mission of the organization, while others have to do with funding, intentionally complex registration requirements, and more. While some restrictions may have their place, delegates should also consider how restrictions or loosening of requirements will stand the test of time, and if they will serve the same purpose now as in 30 years, just as existing legislation is often reevaluated.

A major question to consider is the possibility of streamlined or coordinated requirements for non-governmental organizations to operate in an Arab League nation. NGOs often cite that they must operate differently in each nation, sometimes changing their effectiveness. Additional thought could be put into governmental utilization of NGOs for goals that they do not have the resources or capability to organize. When governments find a use for NGOs, they can work cooperatively, increasing the effectiveness of each organization.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What barriers to NGO work are in place in your nation, other nations, and specific areas-in-need?
- What needs does your nation have that could be resolved or aided by international aid groups or other NGOs?
- What support methods do aid organizations typically request and/or promote, and how can governments meet these requests?
- How can the Arab League promote safe and effective implementation of aid in areas in need?
- Which of the four Cs does your nation use when working with NGOs? How could this government strategy apply to other organizations or be used elsewhere?
- What non-governmental organizations are prevalent in your nation, and what are their missions? How will your nation be impacted by the discussions in committee?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- What support can the Arab League provide to NGOs' operations in member states?
- How can the member nations ensure that NGOs have access to populations in need within their jurisdictions?
- How is an NGO vetted to receive aid, and what requirements does that come with?
- How are areas and populations needing assistance identified?
- What obligations do member states have to their own citizens in terms of supporting them and supporting these groups?
- Should states fund NGOs or directly provide aid to citizens when capable?
- When jurisdiction is not clear or contested and how will the Arab League ensure citizens receive aid? Consider in Palestine, as well as during civil wars, in conflict zones, refugee camps, etc.

IV. Additional Resources

[In the eye of the storm: humanitarian ngos, complex emergencies, and conflict resolution. Peace and Conflict Studies](#)

This 2001 paper by Janice Gross Stein goes into detail on both the situations where NGOS are called and what happens when they face challenges to operation. A must read.

[The role of ngos in conflict management. International Journal of Non-Profit Sector Empowerment\(1\), 2:e34182](#)

This more recent, 2023 paper, discusses the relationship between NGO operations and management of war, conflict, and their interactions with governments.

[Role of civil society and non-governmental organizations in addressing developmental disparities in the middle east. Advances in Electronic Government, Digital Divide, and Regional Development:93-140](#)

This book chapter from the 2025 book Unveiling Developmental Disparities in the Middle East provides a great overview of what civil society and ngos are, and their goals in specifically the Middle East.

[INSO Palestine | Weaponisation of aid and mounting violations of IHL continue to drive risks for aid workers](#)

INSO, the International NGO Safety Organization, is a great resource for looking into operational issues for NGOs in many countries. This section on Palestine is a great example.

[Unpacking Egypt's vital aid role in Gaza and Sudan | UN News](#)

[Palestine | World Food Programme](#)

[Why not enough food is reaching people in Gaza even after Israel eased its blockade Variations in covid-19 spread and control measures in the palestinian territories. Frontiers in Public Health, 9](#)

[The syrian national kidney foundation: response for the need of kidney patients during the crisis. Avicenna Journal of Medicine\(03\), 04:54-57](#)

[The Complete History of Palestinian Refugees - Mideast Journal](#)

Topic II: Presenting potential alterations to the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA) and the addition of new members

I. Introduction

A. General Background

GAFTA, the Greater Arab Free Trade Area, encompasses most, but not all, of the member states of the Arab League. Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, and Somalia are not involved in the initiative, cutting them off from trade with their peers.¹⁷ First established in 1997, GAFTA progressively removed trade barriers, resulting in fewer tariffs and other barriers to trade by 2005. It also removed customs duties and attempted to standardize some economic legislation in member states. Notably, some restrictions on GAFTA were put in place during its implementation, mainly preserving agricultural tariffs and/or rescinding them via a more gradual decline. However, by 2005, agricultural tariffs were removed in their entirety. Some other Non-tariff Barriers (NTBs) still remain, such as quotas and licensing restrictions, as well as restrictions on services. A number of temporary exemptions are also provided for, including industrial products, as approved by the Social and Economic Council.¹⁸ As a nearly 30-year-old agreement, GAFTA does not include provisions for digital trade. In fact, the Agreement to Facilitate and Develop Trade Among Arab States, which GAFTA was created to implement the provisions of, specifies five areas of products to be regulated: agricultural products, ores, semi-finished goods, goods from Arab joint-ventures, and finished goods which are on lists approved by the council.¹⁹ These categories are quite wide, but they have not been substantially updated since their original implementation, which leaves room for negotiation, especially considering online sales and products.

With 20 years having passed since the final tariff liberalizations under the original agreement, there is clear potential for revisiting and adjusting its terms. In fact, GAFTA is one of the weakest regional free trade agreements in the world, implementing only two of the World Trade Organization's 52 noted free trade provisions.^{20 21} Members of the Arab League that are not members of GAFTA, such as Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, and Somalia, are candidates to join, although specific requirements and the gradual implementation of trade liberalization policies must be individually evaluated.

¹⁷Nicolas Peridy and Javad Abedini, "Trade Effects of Regional Integration in Imperfect Competition: Evidence from the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA)," *International Economic Journal* 28, no. 2 (September 4, 2013): 273–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10168737.2013.825306>.

¹⁸Ministry of Economy and Trade, "International Agreements: Gafta: Ministry of Economy & Trade, Republic of Lebanon," International Agreements | GAFTA | Ministry Of Economy & Trade, Republic of Lebanon, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.economy.gov.lb/en/what-we-provide/trade/foreign-trade-department/international-agreements/gafta/>.

¹⁹ Economy, accessed August 12, 2025, https://www.economy.gov.lb/public/uploads/files/3635_6707_7295.pdf.

²⁰Zouheir El-Sahli, "The Partial and General Equilibrium Effects of the Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement," *The International Trade Journal* 37, no. 2 (August 23, 2021): 185–99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853908.2021.1962439>.

²¹Claudia Hoffman, Alberto Osnago, and Michele Ruta, "A New Database on the Content of Preferential Trade (Policy Research Working Paper 7981)," World Bank Open Knowledge, 2017, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstreams/daf3725e-216f-51f1-8a39-b80385a6e2a3/download>.

B. History in the Arab World

Before GAFTA, there was the 1981 Agreement to Facilitate and Develop Trade among Arab States, which set up the basis for trade liberalization in the Arab League.²² This agreement had many similar provisions to GAFTA, but its implementation was less effective, due to its containing less detailed provisions and no enforcement mechanisms. In order to make good upon the provisions in the earlier agreements, and expand on them, GAFTA was negotiated.

Further historical context for the development of GAFTA includes the implementation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995. While the WTOs frameworks for trade facilitation and dispute resolution were essential, GAFTA provided regional agreements that could be more in depth, tackling topics such as standardization and nation-nation agreements instead of overarching generalizations. Finally, GAFTA provided political and regional assurances for its member nations, an additional unifying force in a worldwide environment of increased global power blocs, such as the European Union.

GAFTA trade accounts for only 10% of all trade between member nations, but it is estimated to have led to a bilateral trade increase of 61% within seven years.¹⁷ An expansion of GAFTA could stimulate greater trade expansion, either through additional nations being included or the removal of additional trade barriers.²³ Trade between Arab League member nations is often limited by “behind the border” measures, meaning that trade is not limited by tariffs, but instead limited by strict regulatory requirements and other government restrictions to entering the market.^{24 25}

Since GAFTA went into effect, there have been numerous proposals for a full “free trade” union between member states. At the 2009 Arab Economic Summit, there was an agreement to implement this union by 2015, which was reaffirmed in 2013, although it was never fully implemented.^{26 27}

While formally, all GAFTA members have committed to the removal of NTBs, not all have been removed, and there is an exceptions manual in places, which nations submit to the economic council. Non-Tariff Barriers in the Arab League are moderately common and take a variety of forms. Common NTBs, although not necessarily in the Arab

²²“Agreement to Facilitate and Develop Trade Among Arab States,” General Department for Economic Affairs Finance, Trade and Investment Department, 1981, <https://www.mofne.gov.bh/media/cx5d5ztc/facilitate.pdf>.

²³“ESCWA New Report Highlights Key Challenges and Opportunities for Arab Trade - United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,” UN ESCWA, September 13, 2024, <https://www.unescwa.org/news/escwa-new-report-highlights-key-challenges-and-opportunities-arab-trade>.

²⁴Ebaidalla M. Ebaidalla and Mohammed Elhaj Ali, “Assessing Intra-Arab Trade Integration and Potential: Evidence from the Stochastic Frontier Gravity Model,” *The International Trade Journal* 37, no. 2 (January 24, 2022): 221–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853908.2022.2029725>.

²⁵Azim Sadikov, Border and behind-the-border trade barriers and country ..., December 2007, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2007/wp07292.pdf>.

²⁶Kuwait News Agency. *Arab Common Market*. Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), 2009, <https://www.kuna.net.kw/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=1969914&language=en>.

²⁷“‘Full, Free’ Trade Agreement Can Enhance Inter-Arab Ties,” *Bilaterals*, May 12, 2013, <https://www.bilaterals.org/?Full-free-trade-agreement-can>

League, include product quotas, restrictive licenses, requiring excessive trade documents, and the regulation of import pricing. While not all of these barriers are in place in all countries, knowing what barriers a nation has is essential to understanding what it has to offer and what might be a welcome change. For instance, some North African members have had requirements for licensing concerning the fish trade.²⁸ Additionally, a lack of uniform customs standards across the region leads to complex shipping requirements, and extraneous bureaucratic red tape on imports.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), an agreement between six Gulf monarchies, currently maintains a customs union, which is a key example of the potential to increase trade between member states.²⁹ Customs unions involve the standardization of tariffs with outside nations, the elimination of internal tariffs, and a common market.³⁰ Established in 1981, trade within the council has significantly increased since its inception. Interestingly, an original goal of the council was to establish a common currency, but that concept was not followed through. The successes and failures of the GCC should be an important learning experience taken into consideration when updating GAFTA, especially if more trade barriers are to be removed or adjusted.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

GAFTA has made significant progress in reducing customs fees and tariffs between nations since its inception, and the results of the trade agreement have held steady at around 10% of international trade for member nations in the last decade. However, non-tariff barriers are still common, indicating that more trade liberalization is a possibility, with the chance of increasing the component of international trade done within the Arab League by its member states in future years.

Unfortunately, there exist significant economic imbalances between member states, with several wealthy countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, dominating trade and receiving many of the benefits of GAFTA, while other nations, such as Syria and Yemen, gain fewer benefits.³¹ Visualizing GAFTA as a coalition of its regions brings this topic firmly into the light: the members of the GCC (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), for instance, keep 75% of their produced exports within the bloc. Northern African states (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia) retain 65% within their region.³² But only 30% of trade in the eastern Mediterranean

²⁸ Malvarosa, L. The fish trade of North African Mediterranean countries: intra-regional trade and import-export with the European Union. *FAO Fisheries Circular*. No. 978. Rome, FAO. 2002. 88p.

²⁹ "The Economic Agreement between the Gulf Cooperation Council States (the Economic Agreement) | United Nations Network on Migration," United Nations Network of Migration, 2001, <https://migrationnetwork.un.org/policy-repository/economic-agreement-between-gulf-cooperation-council-states-economic-agreement>.

³⁰ Essay by Simone I. Flynn, "Customs Union: EBSCO," EBSCO Information Services, Inc. | www.ebsco.com, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/business-and-management/customs-union>.

³¹ Javad Abedini and Nicolas Péridy, "The Greater Arab Free Trade Area(Gafta): An Estimation of Its Trade Effects," *Journal of Economic Integration* 23, no. 4 (December 15, 2008): 848–72, <https://doi.org/10.11130/jei.2008.23.4.848>.

³² Miniesy, Rania S.; Nugent, Jeffrey B; and Yousef, Tarik M. "Intra-regional Trade Integration in the Middle East." *Trade Policy and Economic Integration in the Middle East and North Africa: Economic Boundaries in Flux*. New York: Routledge Curzon. 2004.

remains within that region, indicating that they export more than they import, and that trade imbalance can be interpreted as an indicator of economic imbalance. Trade incentives for common industries in these regions, including analysis of international standards for goods, would likely be welcome. Specifically, an examination of the regulations required for trade of agricultural, handicraft, or other industries, as well as a program to help nations meet standards, could be of interest, although other (inventive) solutions are equally viable.

Therefore, it is important to consider how future updates to GAFTA could be crafted to promote economic growth in member nations. Because inter-Arab League politics is often divisive, these provisions should be considered from all perspectives, and be able to benefit not only prosperous industries such as oil and gas production, but also weaker ones like agricultural and technological sectors. While GAFTA in its current form clearly is a major benefit to some nations and sectors and a minor one to others, it has the potential to bring larger benefits to a majority of member nations, and inter-arab trade increasing would ensure more reliable and cost effective resources for members of all nations, even thoughts most benefiting from the current agreement.

Since GAFTA was signed into law, the global supply chain has undergone a variety of changes, many due to the advent of technology and increased globalization. Digital trade especially reflects a sector that was in its infancy when the treaty was signed. Telecommunications and informational technology have boomed in recent decades, and are loosely, if at all, regulated under the treaty. Additional specific provisions for online sellers, distributors of digital products, and online services (like consultations) should all be considered when making amendments. E-commerce standards vary wildly within member states, and the standardization of these measures could solve a number of issues related to seller versus buyer locations and international disputes over e-commerce products. Other important aspects of the economy which GAFTA overlooks include industries relying on highly skilled labor, and service industries.³³

A major debate point of the Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement has always been its membership. The four nations not currently signatories of the agreement have expressed interest in joining, and their inclusion could trigger increased trade both from and to the new members, sparking economic growth. In fact, while they have not officially joined, they are considered candidates for membership, indicating the potential to quickly integrate them into the agreement. Considering the importance of re-working the framework, their input into the updated document should not be excluded, and delegates should seek to understand if they should be admitted upon update or if the normal process should continue to be followed. This should also take into account the choice to create a new trade agreement or update the existing GAFTA agreement.

Resilience is key in all treaties, especially when concerning financial issues, which differ on a year-to-year basis. Any policies put forward by the council should include clear

³³ Morford-Cheibub, Isabel. "Barriers to Intra-Regional Trade in the MENA Region." *Amplify (Al Fusaic)*, October 6, 2023. Accessed August 26, 2025.
<https://www.alfusaic.net/blog/amplify/barriers-to-intra-regional-trade-in-the-mena-region>.

roadmaps of their intended implementation. Milestones and other accountability measures should be set up, and enforcement mechanisms considered as a key tool for achieving mutual goals of economic stimulus and trade.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- How has the Greater Arab Free Trade Agreement affected trade in your nation?
- What protections and non-tariff barriers exist in your country, and on what goods?
- Which industries in the Arab League require further/continued protection, and which industries have the potential to become trade-liberalized?
- What additional free trade provisions would be implementable and effective between your nation and others? Should additional provisions be individualized between member states or consistent across the entire league?
- How can the League use collective responsibility to protect its shared tradable resources value in the rest of the world?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- When and under what conditions will the remaining Arab League states join GAFTA? Will they be granted a transitional period?
- Which non-trade barriers will the League move to eliminate in the next five years? Ten?
- What additional goods will be deregulated?
- What are the tax rates regarding the trade of services? Will Non-Tariff Barriers be removed in service fields?

IV. Additional Resources

[The Greater Arab Free Trade Area\(GAFTA\): an Estimation of Its Trade Effects](#)

From the Journal of Economic Integration, this paper contains statistics and figures that could be helpful to reference during research and speeches, as well as some common definitions.

[The Partial and General Equilibrium Effects of the Arab Free Trade Agreement](#)

This 2021 article in the International Trade Journal is a great resource for understanding the most recent effects of GAFTA, as many sources focus on circa 2005 information.

[Examples of Non-Tariff Barriers](#)

These examples of NTBs will be helpful for identifying present trade barriers and those that your nation has successfully removed.

[Barriers to Intra-Regional Trade in the MENA Region — Al Fusaic](#)

This site is a quick overview of GAFTA, its graphics make things easy to understand and evaluate. Go here first to get a starting point before more complex articles.

[Agreement to Facilitate and Develop Trade Among Arab States](#)

[Council of Arab Economic Unity](#)

[Free Trade Areas Analysis - Video](#)

[Is it the right time for an Arab free trade agreement? - Al Tamimi & Company](#)

Topic III: Maintaining independent economic systems and preserving significant cultural institutions in the face of growing global influence

I. Introduction

A. General Background

The current economic systems in the Arab League vary between member nations, but typically include a significant focus on oil resources, as the region's highest grossing export.³⁴ The three main economic structures, including command, market, and traditional, are each at play in the region. However, most economies in the region are mixed, and governments may control some parts of the economy, but not others. This mixed economic system allows individuals and foreign investors to take part in the economy via the market, farmers and trade workers to do their traditional crafts, and governments to control areas of economic interest. In Saudi Arabia for instance, the oil sector is an example of command economics. An essential part of the global economy, trade routes, energy supplies, and exports are irreversibly intertwined with the rest of the world.

The increased global influence on Arab states poses a unique challenge to the preservation of these aspects of society. Economic and political systems face pressures to adapt to global norms, liberalize their structures (via the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank programs), and respond to the expectations of their international trade partners.³⁵ The United States and the European Union have significant soft and hard power and are major importers of oil, leading to their increased influence in the region's economics. The soft power of the United States, in particular, has been undergoing rapid changes in recent months.³⁶ In addition, some member states have US military bases in their nations and maintain close ties to the country.

Economic contributions from nations like China, via their Belt and Road Initiative, which all 22 league states currently participate in, contributes funding to many energy and infrastructure projects in the MENA region.³⁷ Additionally, China's high oil needs mean that it is a valuable trading partner for the region. However, these high levels of investment could lead to China attempting to exert additional influence in the region or exploit established programs at the expense of member states.

³⁴“The Economic Context of Saudi Arabia,” The economic context of Saudi Arabia - International Trade Portal, accessed September 2, 2025, <https://www.lloydsbanktrade.com/en/market-potential/saudi-arabia/economical-context>

³⁵IMF Communications Department, “A Chance for Change: IMF Agreement to Help Bring Egypt’s Economy to Its Full Potential,” IMF, November 11, 2016, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2016/11/11/NA111116-A-Chance-For-Change-Egypt>.

³⁶ “U.S. Soft Power Is Spiraling in Asia, with China Filling the Void,” Council on Foreign Relations, accessed August 6, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/us-soft-power-spiraling-asia-china-filling-void>.

³⁷ “The Belt and Road Initiative Ten Years on: China and the Middle East in a Changing Geopolitical Landscape,” Middle East Council on Global Affairs, November 20, 2024, <https://mecouncil.org/publication/the-belt-and-road-initiative-ten-years-on-china-and-the-middle-east-in-a-changing-geopolitical-landscape/>.

Furthermore, the phrase “significant cultural institutions” covers a large swath of society, reaching into every corner of life, including religion, education, and history. The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), is the League's most important tool for promoting and preserving cultural institutions and traditions.³⁸ The preservation of arabic culture, art, and language is promoted through academic institutions such as the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS) in Doha, and the Paris based The Arab World Institute (Institut du Monde Arabe), an example of cultural heritage preservation in concert with another nation. Furthermore, the region boasts several United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) world heritage sites, demonstrating the importance of partnering with global organizations to preserve regional traditions.

The Arab League does not exist in isolation, and it is important to consider how it interacts with the outside world. Cultural institutions also face threats of decreased importance due to globalization and the increasing influence of modern technology. As global influences increase, they do have the potential to increase heritage preservation, but also have the opportunity to create a more homogeneous world through social media, internet, and cultural diffusion. This is not to say that these are all negative aspects of society, but certainly to identify areas the league could put resources into identifying how to use them productively. In each aspect of the topic, the key will be to identify ways in which the League can work to preserve its systems and heritage, and maintain its unique identity. However, of equal importance is the chance to utilize increased global connectivity to promote these goals, instead of shying away from it.

B. History in the Arab World

A major economic focus of the Arab League has been the oil industry since 1908, when an oil field was discovered in Masjed Soleyman in southwestern Iran.³⁹ Natural Gas, another key export, has been of historical relevance since 6000-2000 B.C., and was likely a source of ancient “eternal fires” present in Zoroastrian Temples.^{40 41} However, it was not commercialized until the early 20th century, much like oil. As much of the world attempts a shift towards green energy and renewable fuel sources, many Arab league nations must identify alternative sources of income in preparation for the potential decrease in demand. Before oil and natural gas, there were other traditional sources of economic growth, including agricultural exports (especially between league members) and long distance trade routes. As the speed and efficiency of trading increase, it becomes

³⁸“In Brief,” Arab League of Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation, March 7, 2019, <https://www.alecso.org/nsite/en/component/content/article/814-who-are-we-v2?catid=63&Itemid=220>.

³⁹“Middle East Briefs,” Middle East Briefs | Publications | Crown Center for Middle East Studies | Brandeis University, accessed September 2, 2025, <https://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/middle-east-briefs/index.html>.

⁴⁰Afzadeh, “Eternal Fires of Ancient Iran—on the Sasanian-Era Ādur Gušnasp Zoroastrian Temple,” borderlessblogger, May 2, 2024, <https://borderlessblogger.com/2023/05/25/sacred-flames-alight-on-the-three-eternal-fires-of-pre-islamic-persia/>.

⁴¹Energy4me, “History,” Energy4me, accessed September 2, 2025, <https://energy4me.org/learn-about-energy/energy-sources/natural-gas/history/>.

essential to identify the best method for Arab traders, but their overland and sea trading history remains a valuable cultural and economic artifact.

In addition to the economic-cultural traditions involved in trade, there are several other traditions that make up the unique cultural identity of the Arab League, as well as its individual member states. ALESCO has established 5 subsidiary departments to promote Arab Culture and learning, including the Education Department, Culture Department, Department of Science and Scientific Research, and Information and Communication Technologies Department. The education department attempts to ensure the promotion and preservation of the arab language and arab language manuscript, among other efforts. The Culture department specifically aims to preserve heritage and heritage sites, and “seeks to raise awareness as to the significant role of culture and heritage in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”⁴²

One of ALESCO’s main goals is to preserve heritage sites such as Al-Quds (Jerusalem), and other sites in Arab countries which are at risk. Recent and ongoing conflicts in the Arab world have resulted in the neo-imperialization of many cultural/historical artifacts and sites, including 110 sites in the Gaza Strip as of May 2025.⁴³ Many sites in Syria were similarly damaged by the civil war, and countless cultural artifacts have been destroyed or looted.⁴⁴ In addition to this tangible heritage, the ongoing Western influence in the region could pose a threat to cultural preservation, especially due to migration from and to the league.

The Arab League has a long history of occupation and conflict with outside powers, complicating the scenario significantly. Following the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Arab revolt, the current league states were occupied by France and England via the 1916 Sykes–Picot Agreement. This occupation was a failure of the original promise in the McMahon–Hussein correspondence by the British, indicating a beginning of increased distrust in the West by the Arab nations.⁴⁵

However, Western states have also been consistent trading partners and cultural influences in the region during the 20th and 21st centuries. During the Cold War, the United States did everything it could to ensure that the region was firmly within its sphere of influence, becoming a dominant power, but also a dominant trading partner.⁴⁶ America buys large amounts of oil and natural gas from the region. American non-governmental organizations additionally make up a large portion of NGOs working

⁴² “Culture Department,” Arab League of Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation, March 7, 2019, <https://www.alecso.org/nsite/en/departments/culture-department>.

⁴³ Bridget Alex, “The International Order Is Failing to Protect Palestinian Cultural Heritage,” SAPIENS, June 6, 2024, <https://www.sapiens.org/archaeology/cultural-heritage-gaza-destruction/>.

⁴⁴ “History in Ruins: Cultural Heritage Destruction Around the World,” AHA, April 29, 2025, <https://www.historians.org/perspectives-article/history-in-ruins-cultural-heritage-destruction-around-the-world-april-2017/>.

⁴⁵ A Century On: Why Arabs resent Sykes-Picot, accessed August 6, 2025, <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2016/sykes-picot-100-years-middle-east-map/index.html>.

⁴⁶ Mackenzie Voke, “Impact of the West on the Middle East and North Africa,” Digital Research at Fordham, Spring 2018, https://research.library.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=international_senior.

in the region. The European Union and the League of Arab States frequently engage in dialogues, and partake in a significant amount of trade, but their relations are often strained by regional conflicts, including during the recent Israel-Palistine conflict.^{47 48}

Arab-Chinese relations in the 20th century were relatively distant, and China did not take an official stance in the Arab-Israel conflict, for example. As it was itself undergoing major change at the time, it is understandable that more productive relationships have been ever-increasing between the Arab States and the Chinese sphere of influence. However, the Arab League historically has sought to maintain neutrality between various spheres of influence, soft power, and technological powers are the most recent concerns to many nations.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

Global institutions centered around the United Nations or other organizations have been instrumental in preserving cultural traditions and promoting economic development in the region. One example of an Arab league nation partnering with an international organization has been Egypt's current agreement with the International Monetary Fund. In 2016, Egypt received a 3 year loan of 12 billion USD from the IMF under the Extended Fund Facility.⁴⁹ One of its major goals and accomplishments was to create a flexible monetary exchange rate between the Egyptian pound and the US dollar. This distance allowed the government to control inflation and "improve Egypt's external competitiveness, support exports and tourism, and attract foreign investment."⁵⁰ Based on this example, it can be shown that interconnectedness in economies of the Middle East and those of the international community is often beneficial, as increased reliable actions by a nation make them a more reliable and relevant trading partner. Within the Arab League, this concept could manifest itself as loans to member nations for specific goals, which might include funding for education, humanitarian programs, debt assistance, or other areas. It could also manifest itself as a commitment to favorable trade between member states, or the inclusion of new focus areas in current projects. Cooperation within the Arab League on these items could allow for increased resilience to outside economic challenges, including the decrease in demand for oil and natural gases.

Working with other global organizations is also a potential path forward for the goal of increased historical and cultural preservation. UNESCO world heritage sites create tourist attractions that increase economic gains and heritage education when visited, and could provide significant protections to sights nominated or selected for the honor. Within the Arab League, member nations who identify key similarities or differences between their

⁴⁷"Converging Interests, Diverging Realities: Arab League–Eu Cooperation," giga, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/giga-focus/converging-interests-diverging-realities-arab-league-eu-cooperation>.

⁴⁸"League of Arab States (LAS) and the EU," EEAS, accessed August 12, 2025, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/league-arab-states-las-and-eu_en.

⁴⁹IMF Communications Department, "A Chance for Change: IMF Agreement to Help Bring Egypt's Economy to Its Full Potential," IMF, November 11, 2016, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2016/11/11/NA111116-A-Chance-For-Change-Egypt>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

cultural identities can be prompted to encourage dialogue between their own cultural institutions, and create knowledge sharing platforms. Delegates should plan to develop strategies to preserve the tangible and intangible aspects of Middle Eastern culture and the unique culture of their nation. They may decide to create online databases of cultural information and historical images, set up international preservation teams, attempt to recover artifacts, and more. In order to preserve Arabic language learning, the council could consider national support for higher education, incentives for highly educated individuals to work and live in the Arab League post graduation, and increasing the population seeking higher education.

It is important to remember that a solution to increased outside influence in the region does not necessarily include removing all influence, and in fact, most likely will not. Nations must ensure that measures taken are favorable to their people while also achieving their goals, and international cooperation is an entrenched and necessary phenomenon on some occasions. However, the Arab league stands to ensure its own resiliency in the face of an ever shifting international political landscape by increasing internal cooperation and support. Economic and cultural issues are intertwined in a variety of places, including via tourism, social support, and nationwide identities. For instance, traditional economic institutions such as trade and agriculture will play a large role in this topic, due to their relevance as heritage economic activities, despite modern changes. In order to preserve the nation and its culture, the economy must be supported, and in turn an economy without the involvement of its people will not be of much use.

D. Case Study: Economic and Cultural Interactions with China

China's Belt and Road Initiative has so far helped the Arab region expand several infrastructure projects.⁵¹ This economic backing has assisted the Middle East in providing essential services to citizens. However, this venture also provides opportunities for Chinese companies to become the de facto providers of services, and in the case of nations with fewer resources, could create a "debt trap". It is important to take into account the trade between the region and China. The MENA region provides nearly 20% of the liquified natural gas imports to China, so the situation is not all one-sided.⁵² This mutual further exemplifies the importance of finding a balance between complete de-integration, while still taking into account the mutual benefits of trade and inter-governmental cooperation.

Efforts in the economic and technological fields to limit outside influence should take into account the technological capabilities of member states and find a balance between full independence and complete reliance on others. National security interests should be considered and protected against. HuaWei, the Chinese technological company, could be

⁵¹"The Belt and Road Initiative Ten Years on: China and the Middle East in a Changing Geopolitical Landscape," Middle East Council on Global Affairs, November 20, 2024, <https://mecouncil.org/publication/the-belt-and-road-initiative-ten-years-on-china-and-the-middle-east-in-a-changing-geopolitical-landscape/>.

⁵² Nima Khorrami, Brian Katulis, and Paul Salem, "Mena at the Center of the West: China's 'Opening up to the West' Strategy," Middle East Institute, August 4, 2025, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/mena-center-west-chinas-opening-west-strategy>.

easily subverted to provide sensitive information to the Chinese government based on its existing regulations. Other security concerns could arise from having Western military bases in the region, such as in Qatar as an example.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What have been the major effects of trade with outside states in your nation and in the Arab League as a whole?
- What cultural traditions are most at risk in your country, and how could they be effectively preserved?
- Does your state seek to increase relations with China or the U.S., or does it seem to be distancing itself from them?
- What economic and cultural institutions could be promoted within the Arab League to counter/balance outside influences?
- How might the Arab League maintain outside ties while decreasing cultural diffusion, and should it do so?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- What common regulations should the Arab League adopt regarding cultural preservation, especially in the age of social media?
- What measures should nations take regarding cybersecurity threats posed by the integration of foreign technology in everyday life?
- Should the league make an agreement of formal neutrality (e.g. not aligning too closely with the U.S. or China)?
- Should the league seek a unified economic strategy when dealing with foreign nations in order to preserve shared/unique industries?

IV. Additional Resources

[The Colonial Legacy in the Arab World: Health, Education, and Politics](#)

The historical background for this topic on the interconnectedness of global economics and culture cannot be overlooked. This source identifies key lasting effects of colonialism that will appear in our conversations.

[Preserving Cultural Heritage in Syria through War and Transition | Wilson Center](#)

Syria is a great case study for the cultural aspect of this topic. This source identifies a number of problems that conflict in a region can bring up, and some interesting strategies tried so far. Both intangible and tangible cultural artifacts are discussed.

[Navigating Influence: Great Powers in the Middle East and North Africa | Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#)

Broken up by region, this site identifies global influences in the middle east, including from China, the US, and the EU, as well as internal influences. A great source for identifying how your specific region or nation has been impacted.

[IMF Middle East Regional Economic Outlook](#)

The International Monetary Fund's page provides multiple reports on the Middle East's economic situation. Delegates should read the most recent, but also feel free to look into past reports.

[Arab Monetary Fund Homepage](#)

[April 2014 - Preserving Cultural Heritage– AHA](#)

[Middle East and North Africa: Development news, research, data | World Bank](#)

[Middle East & North Africa | Brookings](#)

[UNESCO on Beirut](#)

[ALESCO Home Page](#)

[UNESCO Culture](#)

[Middle East and North Africa | Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank](#)

[UN Trade and Development](#)

[Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries](#)

[Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center](#)

[World Heritage in Danger](#)

[Arab States | ICCROM](#)

[Preserving Cultural Heritage In War Torn Iraq Challenges and Imperatives](#)

Topic IV: Developing a League-wide equivalent of the Schengen Area to ensure easy travel and work between member states

I. Introduction

A. General Background

Currently, there is no guaranteed freedom of travel or work within the Arab League for member nations. Restrictions on movement between nations depend heavily on personal citizenship. Additionally, high volumes of migrants and refugees further complicate matters. Conversely, the Schengen Area, encompassing most European states, allows for free travel between member states, and harmonized border controls ensure that nations enact clearly defined regulations on who is allowed to enter the area.⁵³ This includes standardized visa processes and coordinated immigration policies, although each nation maintains its own sovereignty relating to the process. This allows citizens to travel for work, study, or entertainment at any time. Coordinated police enforcement and cooperative law enforcement are also values promoted by the Schengen Agreement.⁵⁴

The Arab League as a body may not be suited for all of these freedoms. However, the implementation of specific regulations based on the successful model of the Schengen agreement are possible. Of particular concern to many member nations is the transit of migrants/refugees between member states and their rights. The freedom to work in a neighboring country could bring workforces to areas in need or provide new opportunities to citizens of the Arab League. Evaluating proposed border synchronization and regulation coordination will require individualized assessment, but the potential of increased economic growth and other benefits indicates the necessity of initiating these negotiations. Other benefits of the Schengen agreement that could be transferable include the potential for increased tourism and tourism revenue. Culturally, the Schengen area also serves as an avenue for individual nations to showcase their uniqueness, in light of their increased commonality. Nations have the opportunity to seek out their individual cultural traditions, institutions, and share them with the rest of this league through this initiative.

B. History in the Arab World

The Arab World's borders have undergone significant changes over the past two centuries, leading to instances where, at some point, free travel was possible between regions, but is no longer allowed. In 1914, parts of Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, and others were in the Ottoman Empire, while Egypt, Sudan, and Oman were under British control, while Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco were French, to name a few.

⁵³ GS (ug) Wang, "A Guide to the Schengen Area - LSE Undergraduate Political Review," LSE Undergraduate Political Review - Research, Grow, Inspire, November 22, 2023, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseupr/2023/02/14/a-guide-to-the-schengen-area/>.

⁵⁴ "Operational Law Enforcement Cooperation," Migration and Home Affairs, accessed August 6, 2025, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/law-enforcement-cooperation/operational-law-enforcement-cooperation_en.

After World War I, the Sykes-Picot treaty carved up the Middle East into British and French protectorates, again creating borders that did not necessarily follow cultural or political divides. Some borders of present-day Syria, Iraq, and Jordan, for instance, were created during the occupation by the West. Syria and Iraq had a long history of being separate political regions. The occupation meant that borderlands were separated, resulting in those living close to it losing connection with family and friends on the other side, or ending up in the nation they did not identify with, years later.

By the end of the Second World War, most of the Arab states we know today had gained independence from colonial powers, although Yemen seceded directly from the Ottomans in 1918, and Saudi Arabia unified in 1932. In 1945, the Arab League was established, creating the foundations of international cooperation between the self-governing regional powers.

One ideology that the Arab League experimented with in the 1950s and 1960s through the 1980s was called Pan-Arabism. In its purest form, Pan-Arabism promoted the unification of all majority Arab nations into one state. Closely tied to Arab nationalism, products of this movement resulted in the establishment of the short-lived states of the United Arab Republic (UAR, 1958-71) (Egypt, Syria, Iraq), the Arab federation (Jordan and Iraq, 1958-1958), and the United Arab States (UAR and Yemen, 1958-1961).^{55 56 57} While each of these movements did not last, their existence shows a history of union that could contribute to the possibility of decreased border controls or increased cooperation between states.

Despite this, there is a current strong culture of nationalism in most countries in the Arab League that should not be overlooked or discarded. Each established nation has its own rights to sovereignty and self-governance, but historical similarities could pave a path for further communication.⁵⁸ For instance, the acceptance of refugees based on historical and cultural similarities, or increased cooperation in criminal or other investigations with mutual benefit.

The Gulf Cooperation Council, or GCC, is one example of an inter-arab system of reduced restrictions between borders. Consisting of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, it allows citizens to pass between nations with only a national identity card, as well as several economic stipulations.⁵⁹ This union's

⁵⁵“United Arab Republic,” Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed August 6, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Arab-Republic>.

⁵⁶Liam Nagle, “When Jordan and Iraq United: The Arab Federation,” Arab America, June 4, 2025, <http://arabamerica.com/when-jordan-and-iraq-united-the-arab-federation/>.

⁵⁷ “Basic Documents of the Arab Unifications : Arab Information Center (U.S.),” Internet Archive, January 1, 1970, <https://archive.org/details/BasicDocumentsOfTheArabUnifications>.

⁵⁸Mohammed M Hafez, “16- The Elusive Dream of Pan-Islamism,” essay, in *The Cambridge Companion to Religion and War* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 332–48. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108884075.021>

⁵⁹Babar, “Free Mobility within the Gulf Cooperation Council,” DG, January 1, 1970, <https://repository.digital.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/558290>.

procedures could be a model for other nations, although the union's close ties and relatively low numbers make their situation different from others in the region.

C. Finding a Solution to the Problem: Past, Present, and Future

Refugee relocation and assistance has been a question of utmost importance to the Arab League since its inception. There have been a variety of refugee populations over time, including from Palestine, since the 1948 war.⁶⁰ Other refugee populations include Syrian, Iraqi, and Yemeni refugees. A major issue for the refugee population in the Arab League has been integration into the host state, especially for long-term refugees who seek naturalization. This could be addressed via the concept of freedom to live and travel in the Arab League, but the prominent opposition to long-term refugees in the region might also pose a substantial legislative challenge when attempting to set up these reforms.⁶¹

Historically, the right to work in another country in much of the Arab League for migrant workers has been regulated by the Kafala (sponsorship) System.⁶² The system sets up a method for migrant workers to be sponsored by their employers or a government agency, but has often led to labor rights violations, due to its expiration from traditional working regulations. Strict restrictions on Kafala workers include when they can move, switch jobs, or even obtain permission to return to their home country. A middle ground expansion of the right to work in another Arab state could take the approach of reforming this system, while a more liberal approach might more closely align with the permissions to work that the EU demonstrates.⁶³

Travel freedoms within the Arab League have historically been visa-based. In most countries, there is a selection of other Arab League nations that allow visa-free travel, but a majority of the states require visas or visas-on-arrival for citizens of other member states.⁶⁴ Some exceptions do apply, such as within the Gulf Cooperation Council, which has recently revealed plans for a visa system where visitors, like citizens, can move freely between the six states on a single visa.⁶⁵ However, no Arab League state has yet taken it so far as to remove all border control between themselves and another state, likely due to logistical issues. In order to take such a step, visas, length of stay requirements, and a host of other regulations would need to be unified first.

⁶⁰ "The Arab-Israeli War of 1948," U.S. Department of State, accessed August 6, 2025, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/arab-israeli-war>.

⁶¹ "Refugee Crises in the Arab World," Carnegie Endowment for international peace, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2018/10/refugee-crises-in-the-arab-world?lang=en>.

⁶² "What Is the Kafala System?," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed August 5, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-kafala-system>.

⁶³ "Residence Rights When Living Abroad in the EU," Your Europe, January 1, 2022, https://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/residence/residence-rights/index_en.htm.

⁶⁴ Zaidiseed, "Where Can Citizens of Arab Countries Travel without a Visa?," Reach Immigration, January 5, 2025, <https://reachimmigration.com/en/blog/countries-you-can-travel-to-without-a-visa/>.

⁶⁵ Bailey Berg, "A New Tourist Visa Will Make Travel Much Easier among 6 Gulf Countries," AFAR Media, July 28, 2025, <https://www.afar.com/magazine/6-gulf-countries-to-offer-unified-tourist-visa>.

The Arab Interior Ministers Council (AIMC) is a specialized body of the League of Arab States that enables international crime and security proceedings.⁶⁶ It typically distributes international search warrants, but local proceedings are done by local officials in most instances. Changes to this system would likely involve expanding or decreasing its authority. For instance, in the case of the Schengen zone, there are temporary allowances for law enforcement officials to cross national borders when in the pursuit of justice. In the Arab League's case, nations would have to consider if their current system is more beneficial, or if there is any middle ground to be reached, such as direct contact between offices in different countries, or other opportunities.

Overall, it is important to consider the complex political atmosphere of the Arab League, as well as its history of changing borders, while examining the possibility for open borders or common systems. Considerations for each aspect of a potential treaty that the committee comes up with should be treated individually. Specifically, delegates should recognize that they could decide to establish some common systems, while not enabling free movement, or they could establish only free movement, or another other combination. States will likely need to create new infrastructure to support the implementation of these goals, such as monitoring the flow of travelers throughout a free-movement region or combating existing challenges such as unauthorized workers, human trafficking, or other considerations. Delegates might consider how to fund these infrastructure changes, perhaps by imposing fees on passports, travel fees, or other sources of funding.

II. Questions to Consider in Your Research

- What are your nation's current border restrictions and travel agreements?
- Would your country find benefit in increased travel for work purposes?
- What are the current policies on migration and acceptance of refugees in your nation compared to the League as a whole?
- What standardizations of border control could be put in place that would not violate your state's sovereignty?
- Is there potential for law enforcement treaties to provide the same benefit of cross-border co-operation as in the Schengen Zone?

III. Questions a Resolution Might Answer

- By what mechanism would the potential zone be created, and what body would oversee it? A treaty, individual agreements, or a current league council?
- If lessened passport controls are integrated into the League, what does the policy for external boundaries look like?
- Under what timeline and with what safeguards could aspects of the cooperation be implemented?
- What provisions are in place regarding disputes on jurisdiction, international criminal activity, etc?
- Do lowered travel restrictions apply to tourists only, or are there work freedoms as well?

⁶⁶“Understanding the Arab Interior Ministers’ Council and Its Role in Transnational Repression,” MENA Rights Group, August 17, 2023, <https://menarights.org/en/articles/aimc>.

IV. Additional Resources

[The Schengen area explained - Consilium](#)

Read this first for a quick overview of the Schengen area, its requirements, and the basis of discussion for this topic.

[When Emergency Measures Become the Norm: Post-Coronavirus Prospects for the Schengen Zone](#)

An interesting analysis of what happens when there isn't enough trust between states in the zone, this article could help delegates identify middle grounds for highly contested issues.

[Treatment and Rights in Arab Host States \(Right to Return - Human Rights Watch Policy Page\)](#)

This historical overview of the rights of Palestinian refugees is important context for what might happen if the delegates do not adequately address refugee rights and travel for all nationalities during this topic. Creating a unified policy on refugees would be a big step forward for the Arab League.

[Taking the Pulse: Is Schengen Still Fit for Purpose?](#)

This recent article from the Carnegie Endowment presents multiple perspectives on the functioning of the Schengen area 40 years after it was created. Delegates should use this piece to identify pitfalls their policy suggestions might run into and for further context.

[Evaluating Schengen | Royal United Services Institute](#)

[Refugee Crises in the Arab World - Carnegie Endowment](#)