



مؤسسة عبدالله الغرير للتعليم
Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education

OUR FIRST

YEARS
• IN REVIEW •



LETTER FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

Education impacts every facet of daily life. It propels human, economic, and social development, and empowers our future leaders.

Three years ago, my father endowed the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education to ensure that young Emiratis and Arabs have access to the support they need to complete their education. The foundation is the physical embodiment of our family's legacy, anchored in a cause that is the cornerstone of prosperous, progressive and inclusive societies. Education impacts every facet of daily life. It propels human, economic, and social development, and empowers our future leaders.

While we have achieved much, the needs remain great and the challenges are more complex than ever. No organization can tackle the issue single-handedly. As we expand our reach, we welcome collaborations from philanthropists, governments, civil society, and members of the international community to take part in this important collective work.

HE Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair
Chairman, Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education



Moving out of the infancy stage and into our adolescence, we will not only expand upon our work, but strive to set a new standard of philanthropy in the Arab region. We approach philanthropy as a catalyst for innovation and development. We intend to offer an open source of knowledge and experience that will inspire and guide philanthropists to become the strategic change-makers our region needs and deserves.



I applaud the initiative of businessman Abdulla Al Ghurair endowing a third of his fortune to education.

H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE, and Ruler of Dubai



 @HHSkhMohd



“ We are racing against a clock that never stops ticking, with each passing minute finding millions of young people without access to the high-quality education opportunities needed to spur meaningful change in all facets of the Arab world. ”

LETTER FROM OUR CEO

We truly believe in the power of partnerships. As we look to increase the reach of our programs, collaborations will be key to delivering sustainable impact at scale.

As we close out our first two years at the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education, we take a moment in writing this report to reflect upon and share our achievements, learning, and intentions for the future. I offer you our annual report with humility. Humility in knowing that while we have achieved great things, more work is needed to support Emirati and Arab youth in realizing their potential as the next generation of leaders. Humility in offering up our learnings so that our community may benefit from our experience. And finally, humility in sharing the daunting task we set for the next two years, to scale and refine our programs to reach thousands of regional youth.

All of us, our beneficiaries, our peers, our partners, and our stakeholders are pioneers forging ahead to solve some of the great challenges facing young people in the Arab world today. Together we hold the unenviable position of innovating solutions while simultaneously delivering critical services.



We are racing against a clock that never stops ticking, with each passing minute finding millions of young people without access to the high-quality education opportunities needed to spur meaningful change in all facets of the Arab world.

I'd like to close by conveying my heartfelt thanks to the individuals and organizations that make our work possible. We truly believe in the power of partnerships. As we look to increase the reach of our programs, collaborations will be key to delivering sustainable impact at scale.

Maysa Jalbout
Chief Executive Officer, Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education

M Jalbout



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OUR FOUNDER

*A LEGACY
ANCHORED
IN EDUCATION*

06 OUR FOUNDER

08 About Abdulla Al Ghurair

We aim to reignite what is already in the region's DNA: a culture of giving back, a connectedness to community, and a spirit of generosity that creates impact.

ABOUT ABDULLA AL GHURAIR

Abdulla Al Ghurair founded each of his business and philanthropic concerns with the intention of improving life within the communities in which he operated. Although all of his businesses contribute to society, Abdulla Al Ghurair's support to education is dear to his heart, and is a true mark of his dedication to his faith. Because Abdulla Al Ghurair did not complete his formal education beyond grade 8, he placed a significant value on education for his family, his compatriots, and fellow Arabs.

Long before the unification of the United Arab Emirates, Mr. Abdullah had been one of the first developers of the local educational sector. Beginning in the early sixties, Mr. Abdulla built schools, including the first co-educational school and dormitories in rural Masafi, providing students with access to quality education. The school has since graduated countless students who might not have otherwise had access to education. Mr. Abdulla also funded scholarships and contributed to education disaster relief in the region and abroad.



His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE, and Ruler of Dubai with Mr. Abdulla Ahmad Al Ghurair, founder of the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation, January 1st, 1990

“Education is the cornerstone of prosperous, progressive and inclusive societies, and essential for the sustainable development of our nation and the empowerment of our future leaders.
Mr. Abdulla Ahmad Al Ghurair, Founder, The Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education”



Abdulla Al Ghurair then went on to establish not-for-profit schools and a university to provide well-priced quality education. In the spirit of spreading knowledge, Abdulla Al Ghurair established the first printing and publishing company in the UAE in 1978, alongside many other businesses.

The jewel of his philanthropic achievements is the establishment of the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education (AGFE). By establishing AGFE, Abdulla Al Ghurair ensured that his legacy and that of his family is anchored in social impact. By entrusting a third of his wealth to the Foundation, Abdulla Al Ghurair created one of the largest private institutional philanthropies in the world.

WHO WE ARE

ABOUT THE ABDULLA AL GHURAIR FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATION



For us, education is more than a process of acquiring knowledge. We believe in its power to give hope, build resilience, and unleash possibility.

OUR MANDATE

Our sights are set firmly on the end-goal.

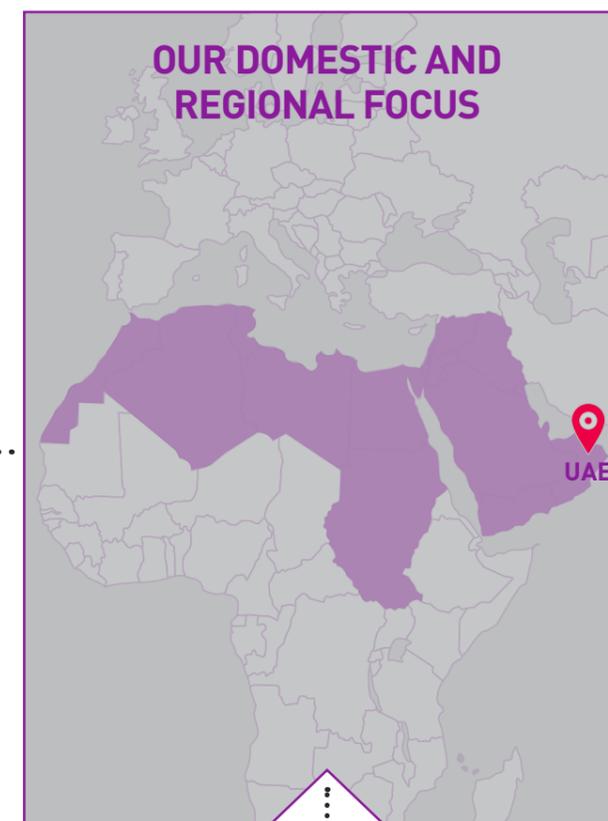
“Seeking an education is not only about personal achievement, it is our civic responsibility as Arabs. I hope this foundation will help deserving young Arabs fulfill their education quest and that they in turn will help others.”
Mr. Abdulla Ahmad Al Ghurair, Founder, Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education

Established in the spring of 2016, the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education set out to better equip regional youth to assume their roles as the next generation of Arab leadership.

Like many of its peers, AGFE executes both a domestic and regional agenda. **The foundation faces the challenging task of catering its program across a vast geography, harboring a wide variety of needs, languages, and contexts.**

However, one thing remains the same. Arab youth, regardless of nationality, are many, ambitious, and will inevitably inherit the burden of carrying a troubled region into the future.

We, at AGFE, are charged with empowering and supporting Arab youth to grow into the leaders this region needs and deserves. We develop our programs with input from governmental, multilateral, and civil society sectors to promote education innovation, achieve scale, and make sure the youth of this region are ready for the future.



 **AGFE VALUES** We realize our mission through programming that values:

COLLABORATION

We embody a spirit of community, collaboration, and giving back; together, we hope to create a culture of learning.

EXCELLENCE

We strive to set the highest standards for ourselves, our students, and our partners.

INNOVATION

We think in terms of big ideas and are unafraid to employ new ways of approaching education and learning.

COMMITMENT

We demonstrate tangible impact and enable long-term change through education in the region.

We at AGFE are charged with empowering and supporting Arab youth to grow into the leaders this region needs and deserves.



OUR STRATEGY

We are evolving our ideas,
increasing our impact,
and changing our collective future.

“We know for a fact there is a hunger among Arab youth to learn, to go to universities that provide higher-quality education, and to upgrade their skills so they can attain the jobs of the future. Every day we work towards satisfying that hunger.”
Maysa Jalbout, CEO, Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education

AGFE dedicated its inaugural years to pursuing **two strategic objectives** that would not only allow us to set the stage for influencing the outcomes we seek, but also to lay the foundation for growing our initial programming.

1 IMPACT

We set out to influence the following outcome areas:



ACCESS

Opening the door to high quality education opportunities



READINESS

Supporting students in preparing for university and career success



FUTURE SKILLS

Improving the skillset of the regional workforce

2 SCALABILITY

We recognize that to achieve far-reaching impact, we must also focus on scale.



SCALABLE PLATFORMS

Investing in scalable platforms that help us efficiently identify and serve our scholars



MEANINGFUL RESEARCH

Conducting important research that supports the regional knowledge base and informs our own programming



NEW STANDARD OF PHILANTHROPY

Inspiring and supporting our scholars and peers to set a higher standard of effective philanthropy



OUTREACH & AWARENESS

Growing our networks; strengthening our message to promote outreach and awareness



PARTNERSHIPS

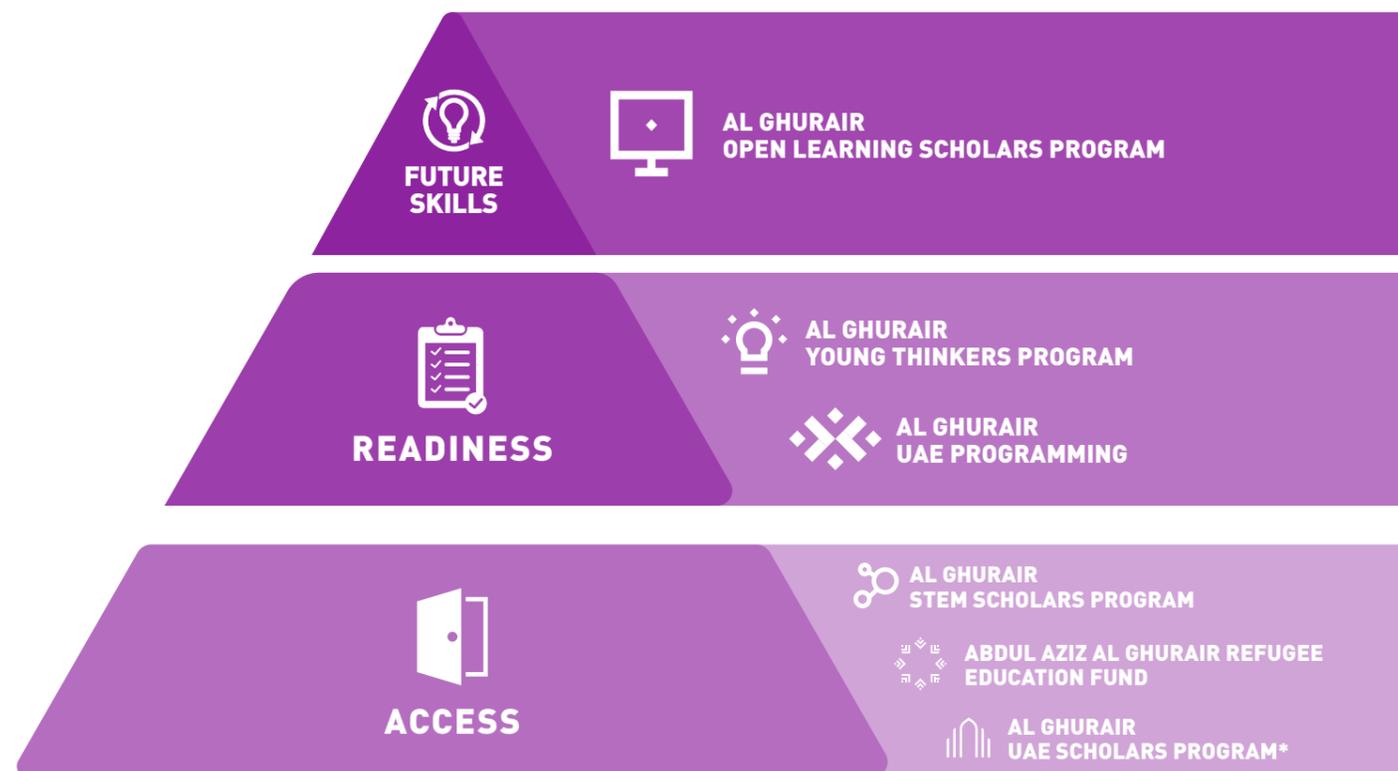
Deepening our regional and international partnerships



OUR PROGRAMS

We are learning by doing,
and we would not have it any other way.

Our two flagship programs were established in 2016 with the inauguration of the foundation. Since then, we added four new programs to our portfolio and continue to refine our offerings to best suit regional needs and influence our desired outcomes.



SPECIAL PROGRAMMING



THE ABDUL AZIZ AL GHURAIR REFUGEE EDUCATION FUND

Established 2018

Established via a private bequest from our Chairman, the Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund supports access to education for refugee youth hosted in Jordan and Lebanon as well as Arab children affected by regional turmoil residing in the United Arab Emirates. The fund also supports Arab children affected by regional turmoil residing in the United Arab Emirates through secondary, vocational, university education, and school re-entry programs. The fund awards grants to non-governmental organisations and education institutions working towards improving the livelihoods of refugee children and youth.

*Merged with the Al Ghurair STEM Scholars Program in 2018



THE AL GHURAIR STEM SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Established 2016

In line with AGFE's vision to create the next generation of leaders, the Al Ghurair STEM Scholars Program supports high achieving, underserved students from across the Arab world in pursuing top-quality undergraduate or graduate degrees in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math. In addition to full financial coverage of tuition, housing, and living expenses, the program offers access to mentorship and career support, opportunities to engage in community service activities and professional learning experiences, and a network of Al Ghurair Scholars from across the Arab world.

THE AL GHURAIR OPEN LEARNING SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Established 2016

Traditional classroom environments are difficult to scale and cannot reach every student who wants to learn. The Al Ghurair Open Learning Scholars Program allows students to improve their existing skill set via online education while remaining in their local environments. The program brings online degrees and credentials from leading universities to Arab youth across the region through efficient and scalable education. The program offers full scholarships for online master's degrees in 25+ specializations, and MicroMasters certifications that can lead to a blended master's program on campus.



THE AL GHURAIR UAE SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Established 2017

The Al Ghurair UAE Scholars Program was created as a pilot program to help build the next generation of UAE leaders. The program supported Emirati students in pursuing top-quality undergraduate and graduate degrees through scholarships at leading universities in the UAE and abroad, in addition to professional exposure and leadership development opportunities. UAE scholars were provided access to mentorship and career advising, tools for university and career success, and a network of Al Ghurair Scholars from across the Arab world. The program was merged with the Al Ghurair STEM Scholars Program in 2018.

THE AL GHURAIR YOUNG THINKERS PROGRAM (YTP)

Established 2018

The Al Ghurair Young Thinkers Program (YTP) is a digital platform developed to help Emirati and regional youth achieve university and career success. The program supports participants with the skills necessary to grow into adult citizens who contribute effectively to the future of the UAE through university and career planning tools. YTP includes an interactive application that matches individual interests and passions to prospective career paths, enabling youth to gain focus early in their education journey. The platform includes over 30 bilingual modules focused on building the skills that are essential to success in a rapidly changing world, and access to trained, bilingual 'Success Advisor' career coaches who guide youth in setting and achieving their academic and professional goals.



COMING IN 2019



THE AL GHURAIR UAE PROGRAMMING

The foundation is preparing a set of programs designed to support Emirati youth in their education-to-employment transition. By working closely with the UAE government, the new programming will facilitate access for students to high-quality work experience opportunities and career readiness skill-building.

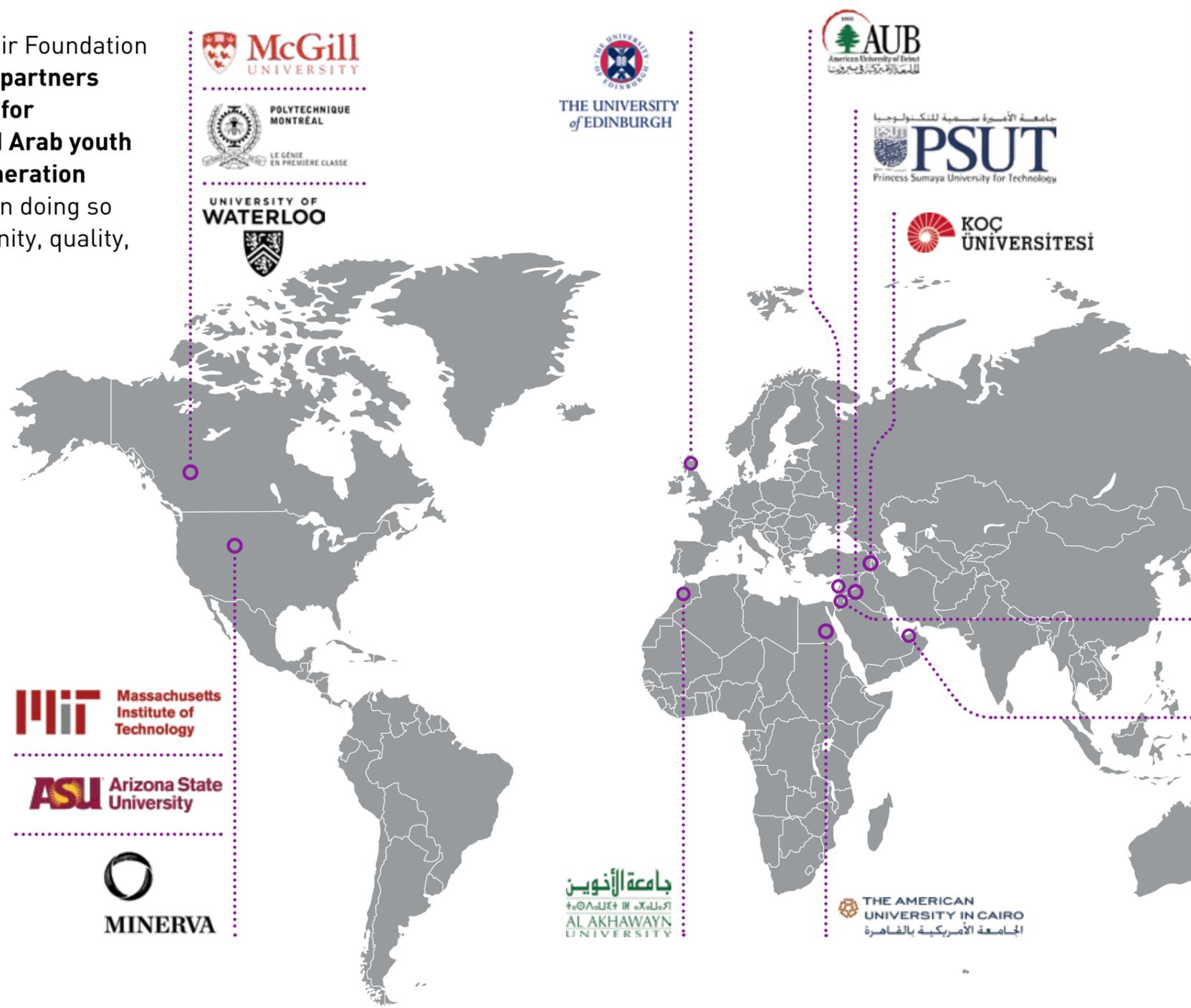


OUR PARTNERS

We are moving forward, learning, and succeeding ... together.



At the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education, **we seek partners that share our passion for supporting Emirati and Arab youth to become the next generation of leaders.** We believe in doing so with a focus on community, quality, innovation, and impact.



A UNIFIED MISSION

Aside from our university partners, we work with local, regional, international organizations and government bodies to further our mission through unified action.

In partnership with the **Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization**, we will be facilitating access to opportunities that will support Emirati youth transitioning to the workforce.

As a part of the **Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund**, we partner with four organizations across the region to provide access to education for displaced refugees.



OUR REACH

This is just the beginning,
and we are hungry for more.



22,000

ARAB YOUTH
REGISTERED ON OUR
ONLINE PORTAL



6,000

EMIRATI YOUTH
ENGAGED ON
THE AL GHURAIR
YTP PLATFORM



800

AGFE SCHOLARS
FROM
18 ARAB STATES



16 ACADEMIC
PARTNERS
ACROSS 10 COUNTRIES



6 PROGRAMS
READY TO SCALE

As one of the largest privately funded philanthropic education initiatives in the Arab world, the Foundation is evolving and growing to have more of an ambitious impact regionally. We're facing acute needs and are devoted to addressing these challenges and equipping Arab youth with the knowledge and skills they need to fulfil their promise as the future leaders of the region.

H.E. Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair, Chairman, Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education

We are proud of what we have achieved in just two years, and we are excited for what is to come. The ambition and resilience of the youth we serve drive us to continually improve our programs and partnerships.



SCHOLAR
SPOTLIGHT

As AGFE scholars, we want to stay connected to our society. We are here to make an impact and improve the lives of the underprivileged in our communities.



Hany Anan, an AGFE scholar at the **American University of Beirut**, hosted a series of workshops in refugee camps across Lebanon introducing topics like Game Design, Advanced Web-development, and History and Cultural identity of the Arab Region.

OUR FUTURE

It is not only about where you have been,
but where you are going.

WHERE WE ARE GOING

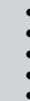


“The Al Ghurair Foundation for Education is setting the highest standards for institutional philanthropy and investment in new models of education in the UAE and the Arab region.
H.E. Mohammed Gergawi, UAE Minister of Cabinet Affairs and the Future”

START UP **INITIAL 2 YEARS**

INDIVIDUAL IMPACT | **PROGRAM FOCUS**

At our inception, AGFE designed and delivered its own programs. We intentionally did this so that we could immediately address significant needs and intimately understand our beneficiaries. We consciously devoted our thinking and resources to the program level and learned key lessons along the way.



NEAR TERM **YEARS 3 TO 5**

SCALED IMPACT | **SCALE & EFFICIENCY FOCUS**

With our flagship programs in place, we now focus on scaling our reach by investing in partnerships, technology, and innovative means of design and delivery.



LONG TERM **YEARS 6 TO 10**

SYSTEM-LEVEL IMPACT | **SUSTAINABILITY FOCUS**

Education systems are complex, multi-stakeholder environments. With well-designed and efficiently managed programming, strong partnerships, and a concerted advocacy role, we are ultimately laying the foundation to pursue sustainable and far-reaching impact.

IMPACT

EMPOWERING YOUTH TO WRITE A NEW ARAB STORY

24 IMPACT

26 Access

32 Readiness

38 Future Skills

A woman wearing a black hijab and glasses is speaking in front of a presentation screen. The screen displays the text "Summer P" and "In collaboration with" above a logo. The woman is framed by a yellow diamond shape. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

We create opportunities to activate the untapped potential of Arab youth, providing underserved students with the scholarships, support, and skills training that they need to thrive.

ACCESS

No more looking through the keyhole. It is time to open doors.

While tertiary enrollments are on the rise, there exists vast inequality in access to high quality education. Economically disadvantaged Arab youth have far less entry to good schools than do their high-income peers. Further burdening an already biased system are the 2 million conflict affected children who are currently out of school with little to no hope for re-entry. **Through its scholarship programs, AGFE is working hard to restore equal access to quality education for regional youth.**

THE TERTIARY EDUCATED POOL IN THE ARAB WORLD IS SET TO DOUBLE BY **2030**¹

HOWEVER...



ACCESS

TO HIGH QUALITY UNIVERSITIES FAVORS AFFLUENT STUDENTS RATHER THAN THE MOST TALENTED²



TUITION COSTS REACH **10** TIMES WHAT AN AVERAGE FAMILY OF 5 CAN EXPECT TO EARN³



AT LEAST **2 MILLION**

CONFLICT-AFFECTED CHILDREN ARE OUT OF SCHOOL IN MENA AND HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS ARE UNABLE TO CONTINUE THEIR EDUCATION⁴



THE PROPORTION OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IS AS HIGH AS **40%** IN SOME COUNTRIES BUT THEY ENROLL LESS THAN **11%** OF STUDENTS⁵

AGFE RESULTS THROUGH 2018

800 SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED ACROSS **16** COUNTRIES

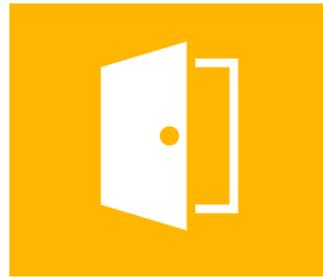
36% OF AGFE SCHOLARS ARE *FIRST* GENERATION UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

OVER **6,000** DISPLACED STUDENTS ARE SET TO RECEIVE EDUCATION THROUGH THE FIRST REGIONAL PRIVATE PHILANTHROPIC REFUGEE EDUCATION PROGRAM

“We welcome the generous commitment by Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair. This significant contribution is in line with UNHCR’s direction towards a whole-of-society approach where individuals and organizations work hand in hand to ensure that people who have been forced to flee are able to rebuild their lives and take control of their futures.
Mr. Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1. The Future of Jobs and Skills in the Middle East and North Africa. World Economic Forum, 2017, www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_EGW_FOJ_MENA.pdf
2. Devarajan, S. (2016). The paradox of higher education in MENA. Speech presented at Paradigm Shifts in Tertiary Education in Algeria, Algiers. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2016/06/27/the-paradox-of-higher-education-in-mena/>
3. Egypt | Average Household Income: Value | Economic Indicators | CEIC. (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/egypt/average-household-income/average-household-income-value>
4. UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report UNESCO International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP). (2017). Six ways to ensure higher education leaves no one behind.
5. Masri, S. and Wilkens, K. (2011) Higher Education Reform in the Arab World. The Brookings Project on US Relations with the Islamic World, Washington DC.

OUR APPROACH



AGFE recognizes that a sizeable portion of academically talented Arab students lack access to quality education due to economic obstacles. The ongoing conflicts continuing to plague the region exacerbate limited access to education for displaced youth. AGFE's initial work in the area of access to education focused on serving acute individual needs by offering support, scholarships, and alleviating economic pressures to level the playing field for disadvantaged students.

AGFE scholarship programs go above and beyond simply clearing financial hurdles for disadvantaged students.

To immediately assist several hundred youth, AGFE instituted three scholarship programs that would not only make further education possible, but also encourage students to pursue highly demanded science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Through targeted outreach, the programs are encouraging first generation university pursuits, and helping displaced students to continue their education despite regional conflicts and relocation hardships.

For the Al Ghurair STEM and UAE Scholars programs, AGFE hand selects scholarship recipients through a rigorous and competitive process that yields cohorts of ambitious, talented, and resilient youth. Managing the selection process in-house allowed the foundation to establish and test a set of criteria that identifies students capable of gaining admission to top institutions and persisting throughout the duration of their degree programs at a greater rate than their peers.

AGFE scholarship programs go above and beyond simply clearing financial hurdles for disadvantaged students. The foundation understands that low socio-economic-status students have unique needs. These students, on average, have lower abilities to weather economic shocks such as the rise in tuitions or living expenses. They are less prepared for the fast-paced university environment or academic rigour of coursework. They have much narrower professional networks from which to seek mentoring, secure internships, and secure full-time work upon graduation. AGFE employs a student coordinator at several of its partner campuses to offer direct support to students and ensure they can access the university resources they need to thrive. The foundation also encourages and assists students to engage in community development and work experience to strengthen their networks and skillsets.

The first year of the scholarship programs allowed students to study within the Arab region with 4 university partners in 4 countries. In our second year, the partnerships expanded to include 16 partners across 10 countries.

Special Project

In its early stages, the Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund program awarded its first round of grants in 2018 to partners offering secondary, vocational, and tertiary education support to refugee students hosted in Jordan and Lebanon. Over the three-year program, an estimated 6,000 refugees will be able to continue their studies despite their displacement.

LESSONS WE LEARNED



PRIORITIZE SCALE

Due to the lack of quality data in the region, the foundation did not have a clear estimate of the level of demand for its programs. When the first call for applications opened, the response far exceeded expectations and we quickly learned just how deep the needs are, and the value of being agile enough to respond. We now build features into our program design that allow us to operate amidst the ambiguity and to quickly expand our processes to meet the demand.



LOCAL LENS

Regional universities, NGOs, and other organizations best understand the needs of Arab youth. While we work with international institutions when it makes sense to do so, we prioritize partnering with local organizations particularly in areas that directly engage young people.



DON'T WAIT

When the foundation was endowed, we faced the decision to either take time meticulously designing our programs, or jump right in and start offering scholarships, despite the fact that all the scholar-support components would not be firmly in place. The foundation commenced operations right away, and in hindsight, we would not have had it any other way. The need was too great, and in the end, we learned valuable lessons that helped us improve our operations for subsequent intakes.



STUDENT SUPPORT

The foundation quickly learned that success for economically disadvantaged students requires more than purely financial support. Language, geographical, and psychosocial barriers all burden low-income students attending top schools. To meet these needs, AGFE is raising the bar in scholarship programs and now employs a coordinator in many of our partner universities to assist AGFE scholars in overcoming a myriad of challenges, thus increasing the likelihood of on-time graduation and meaningful employment.

WHAT'S NEXT

Scaled Impact: With the flagship programs in place, AGFE will invest in the technology and partnerships that will help scale its existing programs. Leveraging technology will streamline the application and selection processes, allowing the foundation to efficiently award scholarships and serve scholars. The foundation will focus on developing its 'Scholar Development Framework' through which AGFE Scholars will capitalize upon opportunities to build professional and life skills, grow their networks, and engage with their communities.

NEAR TERM

System Level Impact: Expanding access to high quality education requires more than scholarship programs. All stakeholders must focus on alleviating obstacles for disadvantaged students. With its partners, AGFE will look to take a central advocacy role encouraging all facets of the education ecosystem to undertake the necessary changes.

LONG TERM



WE PUT OUR SCHOLARS FIRST.

We tailor our programming to the needs of regional youth, preparing them for academic and career transitions, ultimately empowering them to learn for life.

READINESS

Success is where preparation and opportunity meet. You can find us there.

Although Arab youth are aiming high for the future, **their education is not preparing them to fulfill those aspirations.** Students and employers alike agree that MENA education systems are not equipping students with the skills needed for higher education or professional life. To address this widespread deficiency, **AGFE is building university and career readiness components into each of its programs, and recently launched its Al Ghurair Young Thinkers Program (YTP) digital platform.**



ARAB YOUTH HAVE SOME OF THE **WORLD'S HIGHEST** EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS. **THEY ARE 22% MORE LIKELY** THAN STUDENTS IN OECD COUNTRIES TO REPORT THAT THEY EXPECT TO PURSUE THEIR **HIGHER EDUCATION!**¹

HOWEVER...



“Education and learning are fundamental to a strong society and economy. They promote employment and create increased opportunity for all. While there has been progress made in improving education, there is always more that can be done.”
Fady Mohammed Jameel, President, Community Jameel International

AGFE RESULTS THROUGH 2018

OVER 6,000 EMIRATI STUDENTS ENGAGED WITH YTP

15 ONLINE MODULES TRIALED 834 TIMES IN THE PRE LAUNCH PHASE

AGFE SCHOLARSHIPS AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS ENCOURAGE **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION** WITH **60% OF STUDENTS** ACTIVELY PURSUING COMMUNITY OR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT PROJECTS

1. Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development. (2017). PISA 2015 Results (Volume III): Students' Well-Being, PISA. Paris: OECD Publishing.
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4. Cooper, W., Gallagher, G., Collins, T., & Shahir, T. (2015). How will the GCC close the skills gap? Ernst & Young. Retrieved from [http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/ey-howwill-the-gcc-close-the-skills-gap/\\$FILE/ey-how-will-the-gcc-close-the-skills-gap.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/ey-howwill-the-gcc-close-the-skills-gap/$FILE/ey-how-will-the-gcc-close-the-skills-gap.pdf)
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OUR APPROACH



Preparedness for university and career is integral to a young person's development and is a building block upon which vibrant economies are built. A successful transition from school to work sets the pace through which youth become productive members of the labor force, and society at large. Unfortunately, poor preparation is widely recognized by educators, employers, and policymakers as a significant deficiency amongst young Arabs, particularly economically disadvantaged youth.

The Al Ghurair Young Thinkers Program was firstly custom designed and piloted to support Emirati youth in making sound choices about their tertiary pursuits and career ambitions.

Given its sizeable youthful population, strengthening the education-to-employment transition is a significant way that AGFE is working to contribute towards livelihoods in the region. To level the playing field for disadvantaged students and ensure their successful persistence through our programs and beyond, the foundation initially built readiness and support measures into all of its programs.

Quickly recognizing the significant depth and breadth of the poor readiness issue, the foundation wanted to offer a solution that reached beyond the cohorts of AGFE Scholars. AGFE developed its Al Ghurair Young Thinkers Program (YTP) as its focused effort to support Arab youth in becoming university and career ready. The Young Thinkers Program was firstly custom designed and piloted to support Emirati youth in making sound choices about their tertiary

pursuits and career ambitions. Housed on a cutting-edge, first of its kind program in the Middle East, YTP is a fully-digital platform, powered by Arizona State University (ASU). The program functions on a human centered design approach that responds directly to the needs of the students. The program was well received in the United Arab Emirates and is gearing up for regional expansion.

A run-off of scholarship programs for low income youth is that they can enjoy participating in student activities and community service in lieu of engaging in low-level employment. These types of activities aid in developing networks, life, and professional skills. AGFE's STEM Scholars spend an average of 29 hours per semester in student activities and community service, and 84% now feel ready to take on leadership positions with student organizations.

In late 2018, AGFE began designing its 'UAE Programming,' a range of new initiatives for Emirati youth. The programming works with universities, policy makers, and the private sector to encourage the demand for and supply of work experience and readiness programs. These initiatives will launch in 2019 and are designed as experiential learning initiatives and will complement the existing YTP digital platform.

LESSONS WE LEARNED



EXPECT TO FAIL

Innovating in an area where there were few pre-existing benchmarks, we expected to fail. This took the focus off being perfect and facilitated the risk-taking behavior that allowed innovation to flourish culminating in YTP. Valuing the learning process is a great way to get the most out of an innovation journey.



NO PLUG AND PLAY SOLUTIONS

While we found that lack of preparedness for university and career success is a common issue across the Arab region, it became evident that solutions must be tailored for local contexts. What works in the GCC may not resonate with youth in the Maghreb region. We took great care to make programs locally relevant.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Our university partners are invested in the success of AGFE scholars. Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane designed and delivered a multi-week prematriculation program for AGFE scholars to ensure that incoming students were academically and socially prepared for the university experience. The university has committed to conducting additional research to understand how it can better serve disadvantaged students.



DESIGNED FOR YOUTH

We found that serving youth requires tech-focused designs and engagement strategies that reflect the media and tools utilized by young people today. Traditional learning and outreach approaches were ineffective while digital learning, gamification, and the ever-evolving social media platforms are king. Involving youth early in the program design process was a great way to better understand the modalities that work best for them.

WHAT'S NEXT

NEAR TERM

Scaled Impact: With YTP already well received in the UAE, AGFE will continue investing in the digital platform and leverage its scalability for regional expansion. We will experiment with university and career readiness programming by piloting new initiatives in the UAE, and upon establishing proof of concept, roll out solutions regionally.

LONG TERM

System Level Impact: Lack of preparedness for university and career pursuits is a deeply rooted systemic problem whose solution will lie amongst a coalition of stakeholders. All partners, including education systems, employers, policy makers, etc. must strengthen the school to work transition, and AGFE will look to take a central advocacy role that encourages a joint approach.

WE INVEST IN THE FUTURE OF OUR REGION

We approach philanthropy as a catalyst for innovation in education and for achieving sustainable development.



FUTURE SKILLS

The future belongs to each of us. We are creating the capacity to ensure that everyone is ready to receive it.

The bulge of young people in MENA is a unique demographic gift that, if correctly tooled, can fuel economic growth. Unfortunately, **university curricula are not aligned with industry requirements**, resulting in soft and technical skill gaps that exclude youth from the workforce. **AGFE is working to address the gaps with its Open Learning Scholars program and by aligning its scholarship programs to the needs of the labor force.**



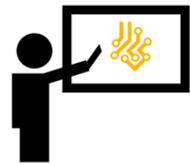
MENA'S SIZABLE
**YOUTH
POPULATION**
CAN UNLOCK THE POTENTIAL
OF THE REGION'S ECONOMY¹

HOWEVER...



**TECHNOLOGICAL
ADVANCEMENTS**

**WILL 45% OF MENA
AUTOMATE JOBS**
YET ARAB YOUTH ARE NOT PREPARED FOR THE
NEW ROLES THE ADVANCEMENTS WILL CREATE²



**EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY
AND BLENDED LEARNING METHODS** THAT FACILITATE LEARNING
AND DISTANCE EDUCATION ARE
**NOT WIDELY
EMPLOYED**



ONLY 25% OF STUDENTS

enroll in a highly demanded STEM discipline at university⁴



**KNOWLEDGE-BASED
ECONOMIES**

**DEMAND NEW SKILLS THAT ARAB YOUTH DO NOT
POSSESS, AND UNIVERSITY CURRICULA ARE
MISALIGNED TO INDUSTRY REQUIREMENTS³**

“ Together we will learn, share and develop a homegrown approach to tackling our region's challenges and help our citizens in the Arab world so they can reach their full potential.
H.E. Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair, Chairman, Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education, Keynote Speech at the 2016 Global Islamic Economy Summit ”

AGFE RESULTS THROUGH 2018

**ALL AGFE SCHOLARS ARE PURSUING
IN-DEMAND DISCIPLINES**

**WE OFFER ACCESS TO TOP-TIER
GRADUATE-LEVEL
ONLINE EDUCATION IN A REGION
WHERE IT IS SCARCE**

96% OF SCHOLARS FEEL THE OPEN LEARNING
PROGRAM IMPROVED THEIR CHANCES FOR ADVANCEMENT

**BLENDED EDUCATION CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM FOR BIGGER
LEADING REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES RESULTING IN
BIGGER TECH-ENHANCED COURSES**

1. Yusuf, S., & Evenett, S. J. (2003). Unlocking the Employment Potential in the Middle East and North Africa: Towards a New Social Contract.

2. Al-Toukhi, F., & Forbes. (2018, February 18). Nearly 20 Million Jobs In The Middle East Could Be Automated. Retrieved from <https://www.forbesmiddleeast.com/en/20-million-jobs-middle-east-potential-automated/>

3. Farah, S., & Benchiba, S. (2018). Investing in Tomorrow's Talent: A Study on the College and Career Readiness of Arab Youth (Rep.). Retrieved from <http://www.alghurairfoundation.org/en/content/how-prepared-are-arab-youth-college-and-their-careers>

4. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2018). UIS Statistics. Education: Distribution of enrolment by field of study: tertiary education. Available from <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>.

OUR APPROACH



Local education systems are not supplying graduates with the skill-sets demanded by regional economies. Educators favor rote and recall methodologies, teach curricula perpetuating outdated content, and are largely disconnected from the needs of the labor force. Universities do not always consider the graduate employability to be central to their mandate, and as such, may not offer disciplines that are prized by employers nor emphasize career exposure or skill development.

While the skills-gap largely rests on the disconnect between the products of the education system and the needs of the workforce, there exist other culprits that exacerbate the divide. Immense social pressure to pursue traditional career paths and limited exposure to private sector employment are two strong factors limiting young people from pursuing the skills needed to be successful in the job market.

As nations transition to knowledge-based economies, the skills gap is a major perpetrator of several unfortunate Arab-world realities. It renders throngs of young people uncompetitive for jobs, employers frustrated with ill-prepared youth, societies strained by the burdens of unemployment and underemployment, and economies sluggish. AGFE quickly recognized the limited availability of 'future skills' degree programs available in the region and designed its Open Learning Scholars Program to offer graduate-level distance and blended education re-tooling youth to capitalize on employment opportunities. The OLS program offers full masters degrees and micro-credentials in approximately 30 highly demanded disciplines.

Inaugurated via partnerships with recognized leaders in digital education, we expect to expand our partnerships in the coming years. Like its scholarship programs for on-campus study, AGFE hand selects scholarship recipients through a rigorous process to yield cohorts of scholars that not only meet the foundation's criteria but also display an aptitude to study online. While digital education carries an unfounded stigma of being inferior to in-classroom learning, our students are very optimistic about the quality of the AGFE programs and the impact online credentials will have on their careers.

Students are very optimistic about the quality of the AGFE programs and the impact online credentials will have on their careers.

With the skills gap a prevalent issue across the region, AGFE looks to build relevant solutions into all its programming. Our flagship STEM scholarship and UAE programs support pursuit of undergraduate and graduate degrees in high-demand STEM disciplines. The YTP platform is tailored to expose and encourage youth to consider coveted career paths. The foundation's new UAE programming also puts future skills at the forefront, prioritizing engagement with the private sector to better align education outcomes with the needs of the labor force.

Scaled Impact: With its flagship programs in place, AGFE will continue to expand its partnerships to offer a greater diversity of degree disciplines to an increasing number of regional youth. We will also focus on leveraging technology to scale access to programming. The foundation will continue to advocate for wider recognition of credentials earned in digital classrooms.

NEAR TERM

LESSONS WE LEARNED

ADVOCATE WHILE YOU INNOVATE

Introducing educational innovation to the marketplace is often met with resistance. To facilitate uptake, we found that it was important to couple programming launches with advocacy campaigns that break down misconceptions and ill-founded stereotypes that are not mired in evidence or facts.

IT'S ALL ABOUT MINDSET

Our community was apprehensive about adopting a digital learning strategy to facilitate AGFE's work in the future skills area. We quickly found that AGFE scholars not only were comfortable with the format and performed well in the distance or blended learning environments, but also enjoyed the experience and appreciated the flexibility it provided. Our early cohorts of scholars exhibited achievement and persistence rates through their programs that far exceed industry averages. We soon realized that mental mindset barriers were the only obstacles to reaping the real benefits of educational technology.



System Level Impact: Mitigating the skills gap requires more than scholarship programs and accessible graduate education. All stakeholders must work in a concerted effort to identify points of improvement along the education-to-employment transition and institute a dynamic mechanism for ensuring curricula, mindsets, labor incentives, etc. are aligned with the needs of rapidly changing economies. AGFE will look to take a central advocacy role that encourages a joint approach.

LONG TERM

WHAT'S NEXT

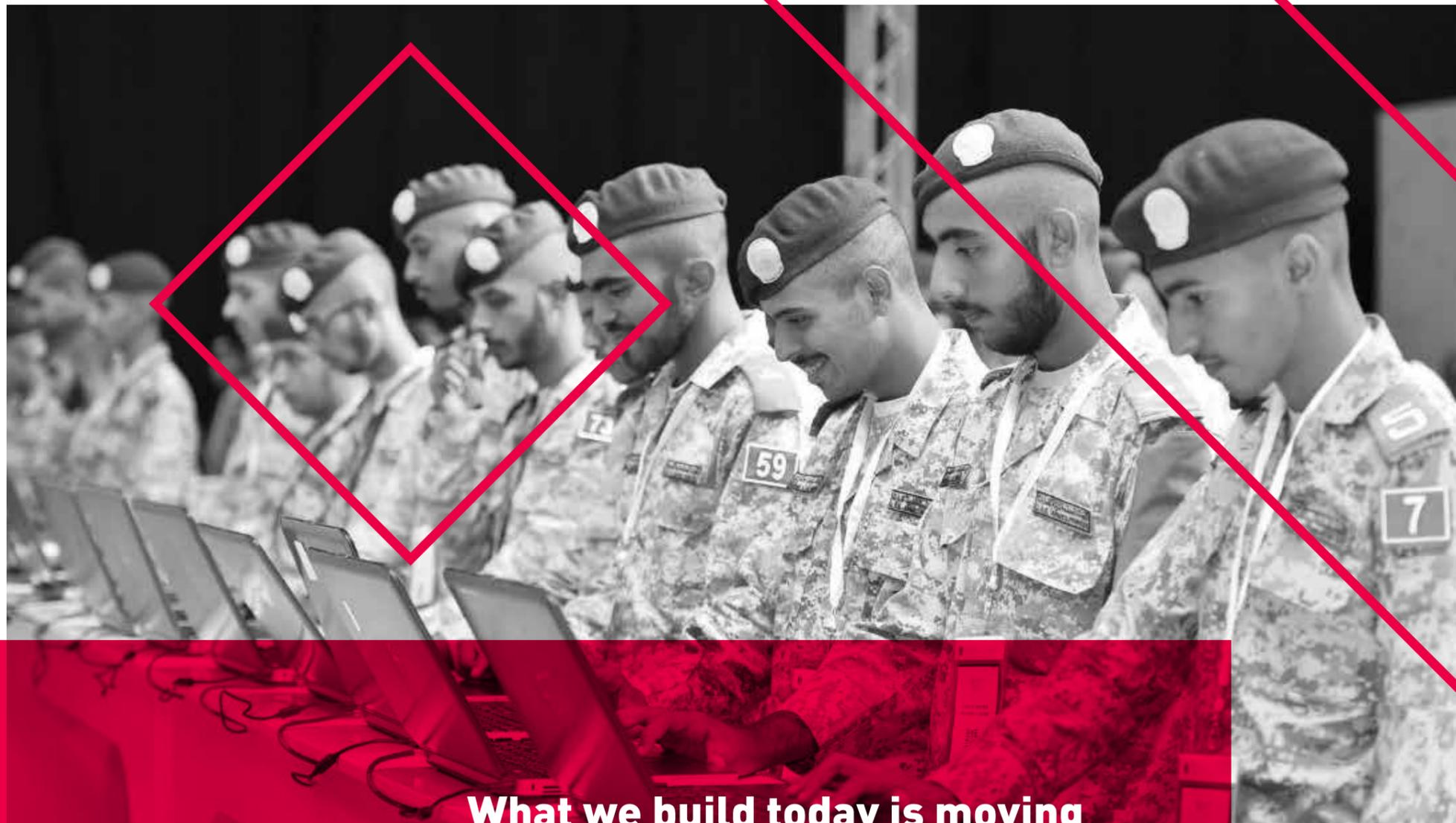


WE COLLABORATE CLOSELY WITH OUR PARTNERS

We align with those who share our values. Together, we aspire to lead a more inclusive and transformative vision for education.

SCALABILITY

*WE ARE
BETTER
TOGETHER*



44 SCALABILITY

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What we build today is moving us closer to where we want to be tomorrow.

SETTING A NEW STANDARD OF PHILANTHROPY

OUR WORK

The Arab world has a proud history of philanthropy. Nations and private citizens alike are known for their longstanding generosity. AGFE was established in the United Arab Emirates, a global leader in international aid and cooperation.

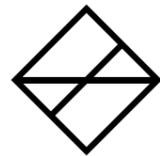
Acknowledging the significant level of giving, the foundation recognized the immense opportunity that could be realized if regional philanthropists take an increasingly strategic and collaborative approach. Unfortunately, the Arab world is notoriously under supplied with data and media coverage around philanthropic initiatives our consultations revealed that philanthropists have very little access to information about the work their peers conduct or international best practices in addressing issue areas.

AGFE, in partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, to inspire would-be philanthropists and encourage existing ones to improve their practice studied 7 best-in-class philanthropy initiatives and conducted in-depth interviews with 8 catalytic philanthropists. A first of its kind project in the Arab world, the foundation published its findings across 15 Arabic-language digital knowledge assets.

Accessible via a dedicated website and available in a common language, the knowledge assets formed the most useful, comprehensive, and current survey of philanthropic activity in the Middle East and North Africa. Philanthropists and external stakeholders alike can now learn from the personal journeys of Arab givers and learn valuable lessons from programs operating in region today.

THE WAY FORWARD

Heavy demand for the knowledge assets shed light on the pressing need for a platform upon which philanthropists can network, learn, and collaborate. Again, with the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, AGFE will convene the Arab Giving Network (AGN). Established to support strategic and collaborative giving, the network will launch in early 2019.



شبكة المطاء العربية
ARAB GIVING NETWORK



“ Giving effectively isn't easy. Figuring out what interventions will make the biggest difference, scaling solutions that work, measuring progress and adjusting strategies – it's hard to do. Bill Gates, Co-Chair and Trustee, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation ”

EXPANDING OUR PARTNERSHIPS

OUR WORK

AGFE began its operations with four academic partners: The American University of Beirut, the American University of Cairo, the American University of Sharjah, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Office of Digital Learning. Over the next two years, the foundation added 12 additional academic partners, thus expanding the geographic and academic study opportunities for our scholars to 16 institutions across 10 countries.

Our academic partners offer more to our scholars and our mission than simply a quality education. They demonstrate a shared vision for improving access to a university education for economically disadvantaged students. Our university partners also assist in identifying and encouraging eligible students to apply for our programs. A number of committed NGO partners contribute towards student outreach via referrals and application assistance. In 2017, 21% of our successful candidates were referred via these partners, increasing to 26% in the following year.

Academics and outreach aside, the foundation's work is supported and expanded through the support of its numerous government, inter-government, civil society, private sector, and media partners.



THE WAY FORWARD

AGFE periodically seeks new partners, and assesses existing partnerships to ensure alignment with our strategic objectives. The foundation welcomes relationships with organizations that are dedicated to ensuring access to educational opportunities for Emirati and disadvantaged Arab youth. As the foundation scales its activity, these partnerships will be integral to streamlining operations, leveraging resources, and employing innovation to most effectively carry out our work.

“ Our increasingly competitive global economy requires institutions to think differently about how we provide higher education to students at scale. Our partnership with the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education will help fill a critical need in the Arab World and prepare the next generation of leaders to tackle future economic and social challenges Dr. Michael Crow, President, Arizona State University ”

STRENGTHENING OUTREACH AND AWARENESS

OUR WORK

AGFE's mission is focused on young Emiratis and disadvantaged Arab youth, aged 15-30 years. Successfully identifying and engaging these populations is key to the success of our programs and to influencing the outcomes we seek. Focused outreach is not always easy given the Arab region's geographic expanse, security issues, and language barriers. Despite the logistical challenges, AGFE employs a grassroots approach to outreach by utilizing web-based solutions to engage candidates and employing a network of partners to refer candidates.

Raising awareness of the foundation's operations and areas of interest is important to building coalitions and creating an advocacy platform for education issue areas. Through its 'AGFE Speakers Series', the foundation introduces stakeholders and members of the public to educational leaders, providing a forum for productive dialogue around relevant topics. Three speakers series events were hosted to date, welcoming over 150 participants.

The foundation hosted its first day-long Education Forum event in 2018. This event went beyond the brief agenda of the speakers series and offered an extended line-up of presentations and discussions. Entitled 'From Co-Ops to Startups: Graduating Work Ready Youth', our first forum presented international best practices in cooperative education and internships.

THE WAY FORWARD

As AGFE sets its sights on system-level impact, it is increasingly important that the foundation regularly convene stakeholders around relevant areas of mutual interest. We plan to strengthen our activity in this area, particularly in convening our peers in the philanthropic community to openly share best practices and collaborate on solutions. Two foundation roundtables are planned for 2019/2020.

OUR EVENTS THROUGH 2018

Open, Connected, and Purposeful: How Universities Shape the Knowledge Economy

Transforming Learning, Transforming Lives

Innovation and Higher Education

From Co-Ops to Startups: Graduating Work Ready Youth

“Partnerships between NGOs and Foundations foster relationships that result in long-term stability and impact, and the partnership between AGFE and ULYP is motivated by the same vision – providing holistic education for underserved youth across the region. Our goals are a collaborative effort.
Melek El Nimer, Founder, Unite Lebanon Youth Project



INVESTING IN SCALABLE PLATFORMS

OUR WORK

To efficiently identify and select eligible beneficiaries, AGFE custom built the region's first fully internet-based application process. Moving away from paper-based applications allows young people across the region to easily test their eligibility for AGFE programs and subsequently access our scholarships. In just two years, over 73,000 individuals tested their basic eligibility for the our programs and 22,000 candidates began the AGFE application process. These numbers were made possible by, and set to grow due to, our scalable platform.

AGFE's Young Thinkers Program and Open Learning Scholars Program are both delivered via fully digital platforms. These geographically unbounded platforms allow us to scale access to regional youth regardless of physical location.

THE WAY FORWARD

The foundation has already embarked on expanding and scaling its grants and scholarship management system to effectively perform all post-award and monitoring activities. This will streamline scholars' and grantees' interaction with the foundation and facilitate our management of requests and financial flows. Moreover, in the coming year, we aim on establishing a vibrant virtual community for collaboration and opportunity sharing across all our scholars. We also plan to use the virtual community to engage external program stakeholders such as mentors and companies searching for young talent.

The Young Thinkers Program is developing a mobile application allowing students to access the full platform on the go. The app will be available later this year.

IN 2 YEARS
OUR APPLICATION
PORTAL MANAGED:

73K
ELIGIBILITY TESTS

22K
OPENED APPLICATIONS

7.5K
SUBMITTED APPLICATIONS

Philanthropists have an important role to play in our region. We need to work in partnership with government, civil society and the private sector to address the most critical challenges we are facing. We must focus on the best investments we can make, especially education, and insist on results in the same way we do in our businesses.
H.E. Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair, Chairman, Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education, Keynote Speech at the 2016 Global Islamic Economy Summit



ENGAGING IN MEANINGFUL RESEARCH

OUR WORK

The Arab world is relatively devoid of rich research and region-wide data sets. In tailoring its programs to best meet the needs of Arab youth, AGFE conducts original research to bridge the gaps in existing data and to make meaningful contributions to the regional knowledge base.

To strengthen its programs supporting college and career readiness, the foundation conducted a survey with over 3,000 Arab high school and university students to learn more about the needs of and resources available to youth. In 2018 the foundation published its initial report, 'Investing in Tomorrow's Talent: A Study on the College and Career Readiness of Arab Youth'. A first of its kind, the report sheds light on the state of the education to employment juncture in the Arab World.

To shape the programmatic components and focus of the Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund, AGFE commissioned two studies to better understand the gaps in education access and employment opportunities for displaced youth in Jordan and Lebanon. The studies will be made publicly available in 2019.

THE WAY FORWARD

The foundation expects to publish two reports and a host of smaller pieces in 2019. Made possible through research collaborations and partnerships, AGFE intends to be a major contributor to the regional knowledge base on topics that deserve greater attention and have policy implications on access, quality, and equity issues in the education sector across the Arab world.



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SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

Farah Balaha, an AGFE scholar at the **American University of Sharjah**, completed research over the summer at the **Harvard Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics**. Her work was part of a Mohammad Bin Rashed Space Center grant awarded by her professor.

The experience opened my eyes to the possibilities and scientific frontiers that Arab scientists have yet to fully explore. I will be a part of that journey.



