



Abdulla Al Ghurair
Foundation



From learning to earning:

The impact of strategic philanthropy on vulnerable youth in Jordan and Lebanon

Lessons from the Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund

2025

عبد العزيز الغرير
صندوق تعليم اللاجئين

Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair
Refugee Education Fund



Contents

Executive summary	5
Introduction	8
01 Philanthropy in the regional context	10
The Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund	14
02 Jordan: A youthful population seeking opportunities	19
A saturated labor market	20
Promoting TVET in the face of stigma	20
Case studies	23
Survey and learner insights from Jordan	31
03 Lebanon: Countering a crisis of labor uncertainty	33
A crisis of labor	34
Education on the brink of collapse	35
Case studies	36
Survey and learner insights from Lebanon	44
04 The way forward: Recommendations	46



Executive summary

In Jordan and Lebanon, vulnerable youth from refugee and host populations face many challenges, including poverty, conflict, and displacement. The Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund addresses these needs by transforming access to education through its Learning to Earning model, which promotes inclusive technical and vocational training (TVET). The Fund collaborates with various partners to create a holistic educational ecosystem, fostering lifelong learning, community development, resilience, and growth.

This report examines the impact of strategic philanthropy through educational interventions for vulnerable youth in the region. It includes research and insights from the Fund's experience in case-study partner projects, highlighting effective practices and areas for improvement. The report also draws on interviews with key stakeholders and a survey of 300 participants to pinpoint strategic recommendations for TVET funding initiatives in the region.

1. Philanthropy in the regional context

Globally, private philanthropy has become crucial for supporting communities in crisis, promoting economic development and welfare through donations, investments, and research funding. In the Arab region, philanthropy is rooted in a historical and religious context that encompasses practices like Zakat and Waqf. Education is a key focus, and is more important than ever for improving lives and communities, especially with millions of Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. Private philanthropic organizations can diversify funding opportunities in this area.

In recent years, the sector has moved away from charitable approaches to become more institutionalized, aligning more closely with humanitarian and development-oriented models and emphasizing long-term solutions. The Arab Spring and the pandemic further highlighted the need for humanitarian assistance. Over the last decade, a new generation of foundations has emerged, focused on these priorities.

Against this backdrop, the Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund awards grants to local and grassroots organizations that help refugee and conflict-affected youth access education in Jordan, Lebanon, and the UAE. Since 2018, the Fund has grown to almost 165M AED (45M USD), reaching almost 100,000 youth by the end of 2024.

The Fund pursues a flexible, holistic, impact-driven approach, emphasizing data collection and evaluation, while Zakat principles promote beneficiary independence and long-term solutions. Strategic partnerships with various organizations enhance the impact of these efforts. This collaborative approach transforms the traditional donor-grantee dynamic, ensuring the Fund remains relevant and responsive to emerging needs.

2. Jordan: A youthful population seeking opportunities

In Jordan, with a youthful population and limited resources, the Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund provides TVET opportunities through various strategic partnerships. Despite progress, TVET in Jordan remains undersubscribed, calling for a multifaceted approach that encompasses technical expertise, soft skills, and sustainable employment models.

Jordan's labor market faces challenges: two-thirds of the population is under 30, with a 50% youth unemployment rate in 2022. The country also hosts the second-highest share of refugees per capita, with an extremely high unemployment rate among Syrian refugees. Upskilling is crucial to address these issues.

The country has made significant educational progress, and the government prioritizes desperately needed TVET. However, TVET, focused on practical skills and career advancement, still bears a stigma, with most school graduates preferring academic education.

The Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund partners with organizations like Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT), Luminus Education, and Spark to address these gaps:

- **DOT Jordan** offers digital skills development programs ranging from basic digital literacy to advanced coding, along with soft skills training. With Fund support, the Career Readiness and Support Program guides youth through training, job coaching, internships, and job placements, emphasizing job market awareness and English language skills.
- **Luminus Education** is Jordan's largest private TVET provider. The Fund began supporting Luminus in 2018 with the Refugee Education Initiative, focusing on inclusive, employment-oriented training for refugees and vulnerable Jordanians. This includes courses offered by the Abdul Aziz al Ghurair School of Advanced Computing (ASAC).
- **Spark** operates globally, empowering youth in crisis regions with technical skills, job prospects, and private-sector alliances. In Lebanon and Jordan, the Skills Training Education Program (STEP) is co-funded by the Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund.

Overall, surveys and interviews reveal that the Fund's partner projects in Jordan are highly rated, with 94% of participants reporting improved work performance and 79% job satisfaction. However, financial constraints and a limited job market remain significant barriers.

3. Lebanon: Countering a crisis of labor uncertainty

Lebanon has a youthful population and the highest concentration of refugees globally. Multiple crises, including financial slumps, the pandemic, the Syrian refugee crisis, and the Beirut explosion, have severely impacted education and livelihoods.

Each year, 50,000 youth enter the labor market, often finding low-paid, irregular work. Lebanon's youth struggle with unemployment close to 24% in an economy heavily reliant on the informal sector. Syrian refugees face particular employment barriers, while challenges for entrepreneurship include limited funding access, unreliable infrastructure, and complex bureaucracy. Compounding crises have severely impacted Lebanon's education system. Over a third of youth aged 15-24 have never attended school, while Syrian refugees face a 15% secondary-school attendance rate.

There is a mismatch between skills needed and education obtained, with TVET undervalued and underfunded. Youth entrepreneurship is rising, but coordination is lacking. The Fund has engaged with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like Borderless, DOT Lebanon, and United Lebanon Youth Project (ULYP) to address these challenges and promote diverse training entry points:

- **Borderless**, an NGO in Beirut, supports vulnerable children with tutoring, supplementary classes, psychosocial support, and vocational skills training. The Fund partners with Borderless on Technical Training and Professional Integration in Ouzai and Karantina. Projects incorporate upskilling in manual, digital and soft skills.
- **DOT Lebanon** is focused on technology and sustainable economic growth, working with vulnerable communities. The Fund supports DOT's Digital Opportunities Through Integrated Training (DoIT) program, which empowers learners with digital skills, certifications, and job placements.
- **ULYP** focuses on academic and life skills, taking a holistic approach involving families and communities. The Fund-supported For the Livelihood of Youth (FLY) Program, launched in 2021, aligns youth qualifications with job market needs, providing upskilling opportunities.

Data shows high participant satisfaction with Lebanese Fund-supported programs, with computer and software training as the preferred options. However, obstacles to finding jobs persisted. Work permit issues also presented significant constraints for refugee youth.

4. The way forward: Recommendations

Improving livelihood upskilling opportunities is crucial for economic growth in Jordan and Lebanon. Shared challenges vary by country, requiring targeted, strategic, agile interventions for long-term solutions. Based on experiences with partner projects, the Fund can make five broad recommendations:

1. **A collaborative approach:** Collaborative partnerships among stakeholders—NGOs and the private and public sectors—ensure relevant interventions. Regional coordination can enhance independence and impact, leveraging innovative financing solutions.
2. **A holistic model:** Comprehensive vocational training combines skills development with practical application and ongoing career support. Better participant selection, targeted assistance, and paid internships are crucial. Reducing language barriers and ensuring continuous communication and follow-up enhance effectiveness.
3. **Expanding the knowledge base:** More research is needed to support evidence-based decisions in TVET. Independent data collection and analysis are crucial, along with developing an overarching understanding of the role of philanthropic bodies and the challenges faced by vulnerable youth.
4. **Scope, scale, and sustainability:** Organizations should focus on sustainable, strategic and systematic change and appropriate scaling. Emphasis should be on quality training, modernizing equipment, and private-sector involvement.
5. **Flexibility and agility:** In a dynamic landscape, it is key to cultivate a flexible, adaptable approach in order to stay relevant to local needs and realities. Programs should be tailored to specific circumstances and agile in response to change or crisis.

The Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund's experience in Jordan and Lebanon demonstrates that philanthropy can aspire to extend beyond financial assistance to encompass strategic collaboration, knowledge sharing, and holistic, sustainable solutions—all tailored to the unique and urgent challenges faced by the region's economies and vulnerable communities.



Introduction

In Jordan and Lebanon, vulnerable youth—from both refugee and host populations—face significant challenges, including poverty, conflict, and displacement. Amid crisis and uncertainty, for many hope lies in educational opportunities.

To meet these urgent needs, the Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund—a strategic, Islamic philanthropic fund—is transforming access to education for refugees and youth in conflict areas. The Fund promotes inclusive technical and vocational training (TVET) through its “Learning to Earning” model (Figure 1). TVET that is accessible, equitable, high quality, and relevant can promote lifelong learning, provide industries with needed skills, and contribute to community development and resilience.

The Fund’s philosophy goes further: equipping individuals with essential skills while redefining education as a collaborative and sustainable force for change. This initiative integrates various elements to create a holistic educational ecosystem, fostering resilience and long-term growth. A central pillar of this approach is the Fund’s support of and collaboration with various partner organizations.

This report explores the impact of private funders and philanthropic entities in supporting educational interventions aimed at vulnerable youth in refugee and host communities in the region. Its focus is

on livelihood skills capabilities, resources, and opportunities for pursuing individual and household economic goals.

It draws on the experience of the Fund and on original research conducted by the Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS). Overviews of Jordan and Lebanon sketch the broader national context and outline existing skills development policies, actors and programs. Six case studies—upskilling programs supported by the Fund—highlight effective practices, positive impacts, and potential for improvement.

Further inputs included interviews with key informants from government institutions, international and national organizations, experts, employers and philanthropists, and representatives of institutions that received grants from the Fund; interviews with staff at partner organizations; a survey of 300 participants in projects across Jordan and Lebanon; and seven focus-group interviews that allowed the research team to delve deeper into the outcomes of the survey.

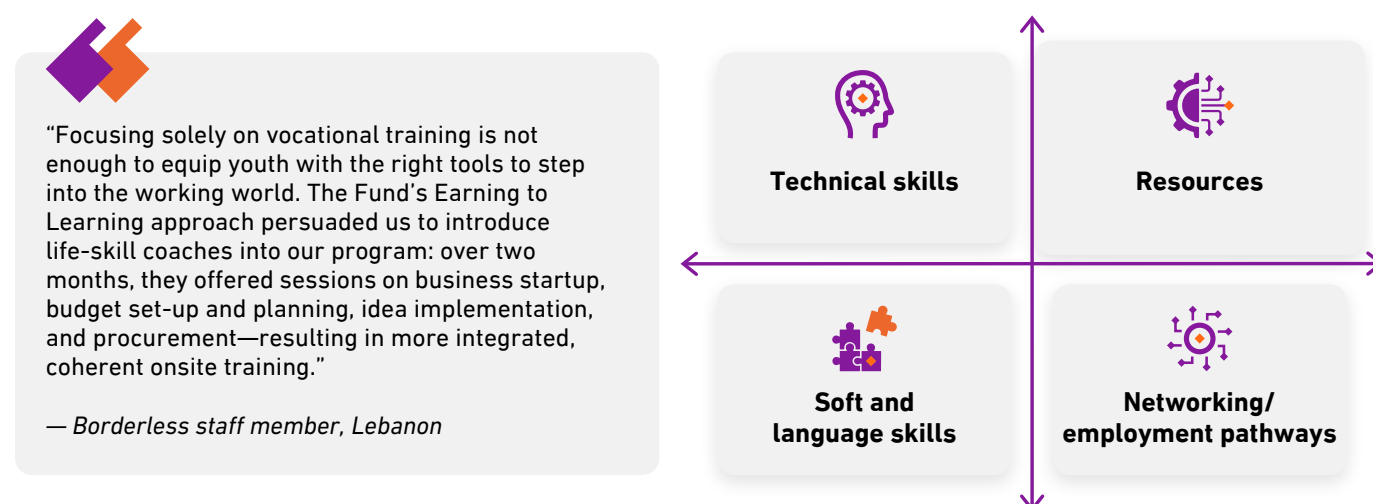
The aim is to shed light on regional challenges and draw lessons from the Fund’s unique approach to meeting them. Ultimately, this work presents a vision of a strategic way forward for stakeholders, within the tradition of strategic Islamic philanthropy.

Figure 1:

The Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund Learning to Earning model

Pathways to improved livelihoods

Holistic learning-to-earning goes beyond basic TVET to support learners throughout their career journeys.



A young boy with short brown hair is shown in profile, looking down with concentration at the internal components of an open computer case. His hand is visible at the bottom right, near the power button area. The computer case is silver and open, revealing various internal parts including a motherboard, RAM, a large black fan, and several red and yellow cables. The background is a solid teal color.

01

Philanthropy in the regional context

Globally, private philanthropy for development has emerged as a significant force, essential to supporting communities in crisis. It consists of promoting economic development and welfare through forms of financial support, including donations, investments, and funding for research.

In recent years, there has been a trend toward greater “institutionalization” of the philanthropic sector—meaning a closer alignment with the broader humanitarian and development sector. Nonetheless, the Global Philanthropy Environment Index is stable or reducing in most countries in the Arab region (Figure 2).

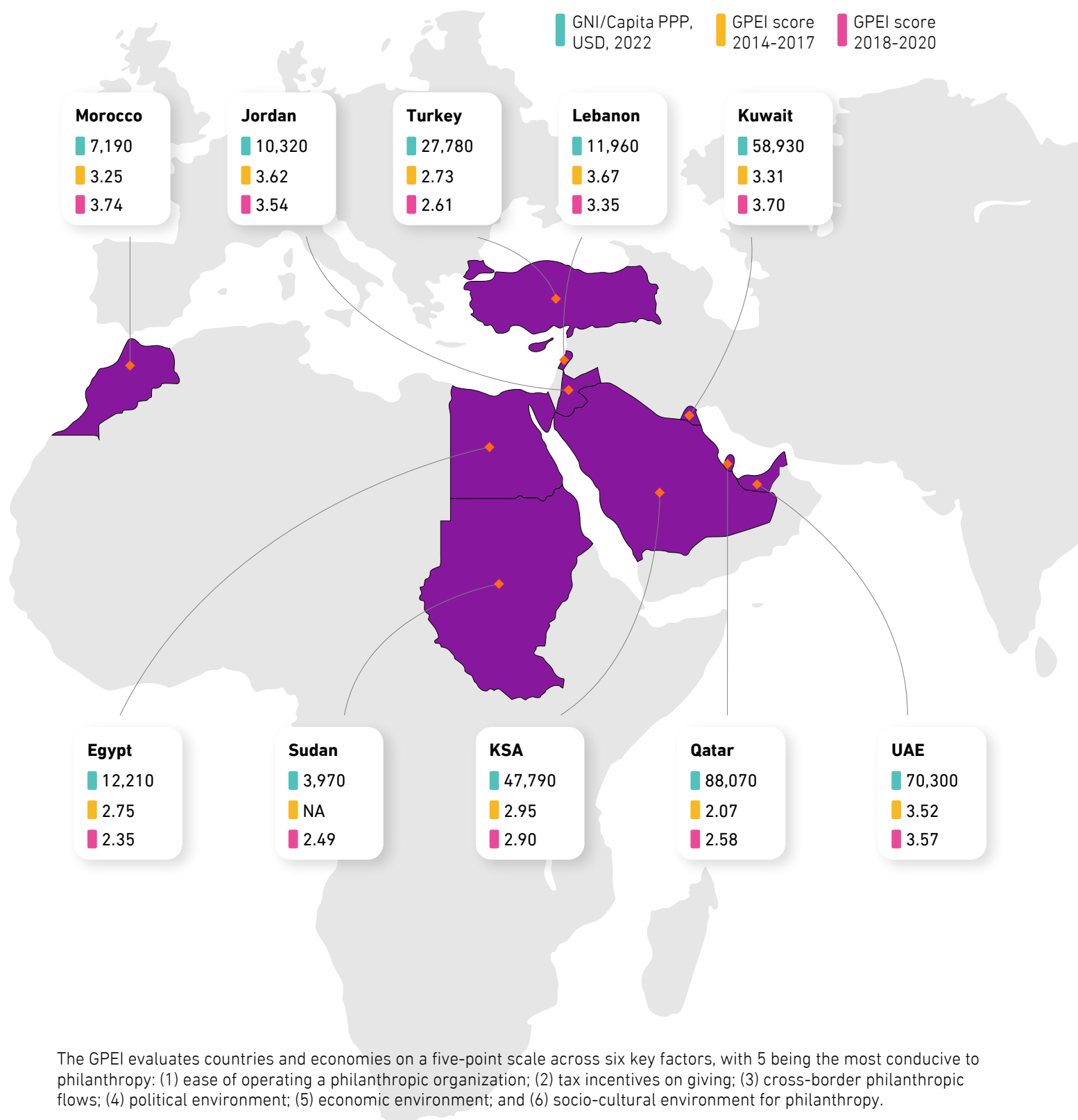
In the Arab region, philanthropy is shaped by unique cultural contexts. It has deep historical roots, linked to Zakat and Waqf—long-standing religious practices that form the foundational principles of Islamic philanthropy, which has played a crucial part in promoting social and economic welfare in the region.

Education remains one of the most prominent philanthropic sectors, globally and regionally, with funding historically largely focused on early-childhood programs and teacher development. Private philanthropic organizations play a crucial

role in diversifying funding opportunities here, often extending direct support through university programs. In countries such as Lebanon and Jordan, these efforts include specific refugee education initiatives. Key challenges include balancing emergency and long-term responses, reconciling non-state initiatives with national systems, and managing global and national responsibilities.

Philanthropy in the Arab region is moving away from charitable practices to a more development-oriented approach. As elsewhere in the world, there has been a shift toward more focused and strategic philanthropy, involving social investment for long-term solutions. With the Arab spring in 2011, the sector shifted to addressing urgent humanitarian and socio-political needs. The pandemic led to further emphasis on humanitarian assistance and emergency relief. A new generation of Arab foundations formed in the last decade has been characterized by a secular and developmental focus. Figure 3 illustrates the enormous range and variety of philanthropic efforts in the region.

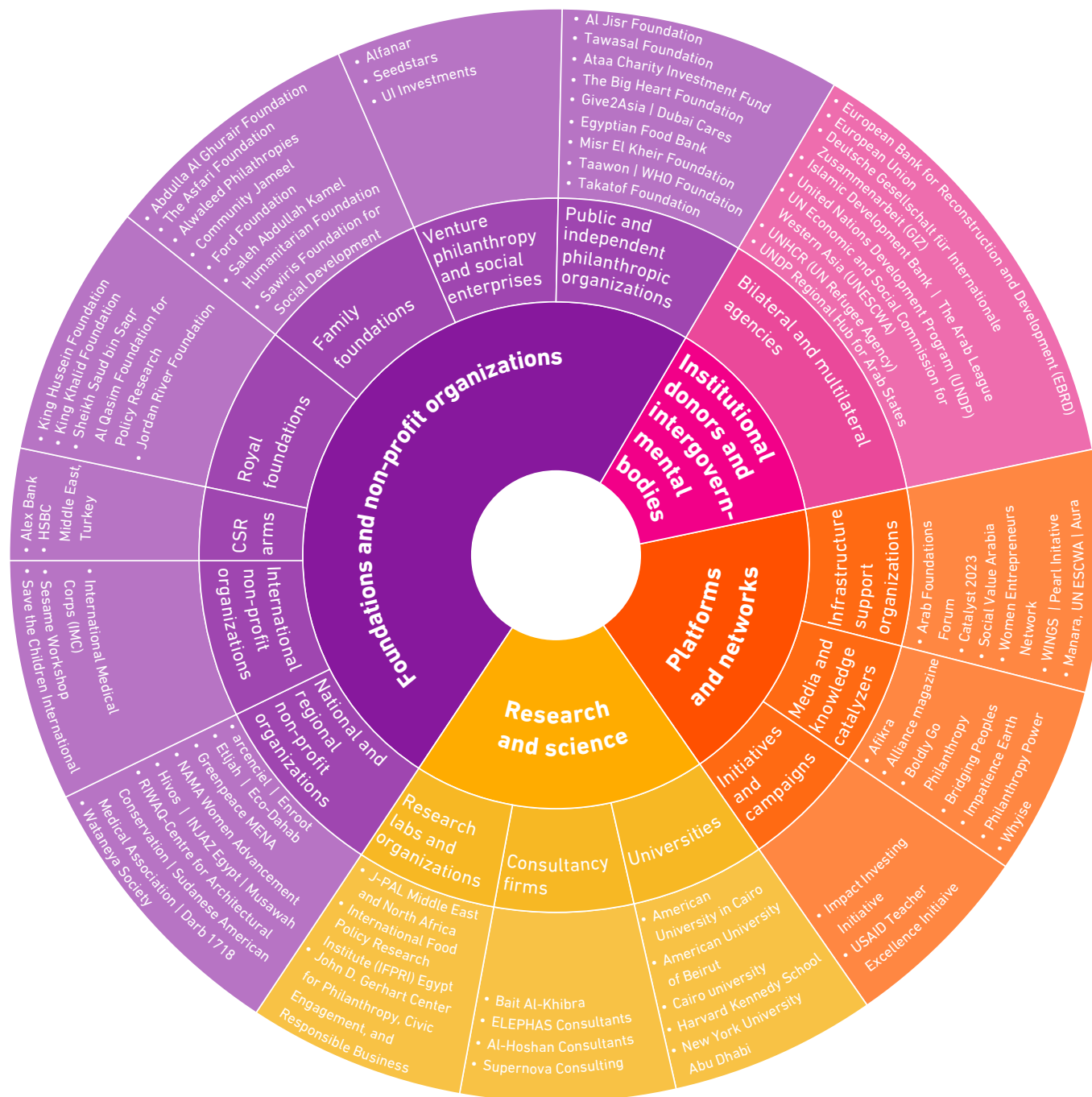
Figure 2:

Comparison of Global Philanthropy Environment Index scores in the Arab region

Source: Global Philanthropy Environment Index, 2022, Global Philanthropy Indices, Indiana University Indianapolis.

Figure 3:

The range and variety of philanthropic organizations in the Arab region



The Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund

Prominent among organizations bringing a fresh approach to philanthropy in the region is the Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund (or the Fund). The Fund, administered by the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation, operates in Jordan, Lebanon and the UAE, helping refugees and vulnerable youth to access secondary, vocational, and tertiary levels of education.

Alarming statistics showing increasing gaps and challenges facing young people in the Arab region. Almost three million Syrian refugees have sought refuge in Jordan and Lebanon, joining almost 2.2 million and 450,000 Palestinians in Jordan and Lebanon respectively. More than half of Syrian refugees are children and youth.¹

Education offers the best chance for youth to improve both their own lives and their communities.

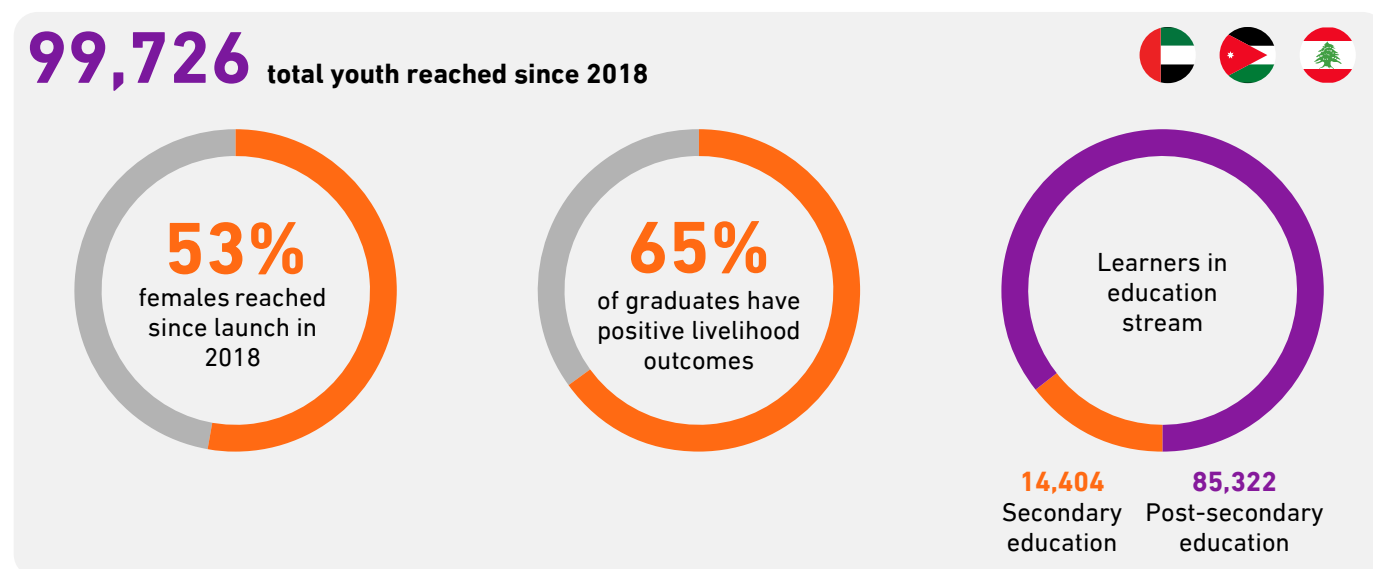
For refugees, education creates a safe environment amid disruption, provides livelihood opportunities, equips them with the necessary skills and knowledge to be able to plan their pathways, and enables them to positively contribute to their hosting country.

This understanding spurred Emirati businessman and philanthropist H.E. Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair to create, in 2018, the 120 million AED (\$32.6M USD) Fund to support 20,000 learners—Syrian and Palestinian refugees as well as host-community vulnerable youth between the ages of 12 and 30.

The Fund awards grants via a competitive selection process to organizations working directly with refugee and conflict-affected children and youth. In Jordan and Lebanon, the Fund, awarded over seven years, supports high-impact education programs. The first round of grants to partner organizations was initiated in September 2018. In its second round, the Fund received over 65 proposals, of which 8 were selected. Over the last five years, it has grown well beyond its original targets to amount to 145M AED (40M USD), reaching over 99,700 youth (as of December 2024). Figure 4 summarizes the Fund's activities, reach, and impact.

¹ "Where we work," UNWRA, 2019.

Figure 4:

The impact of the Abdul Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund**Alignment with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)****Quality
education**

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

**Gender
equality**

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

**Decent work
and economic
growth**

Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

**Reduced
inequalities**

Reduce inequality within and among countries.

**Climate
action**

Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

**Peace, justice
and strong
institutions**

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

**Partnerships
for the goals**

Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.



It is with education that young people can develop their mind, their character, and a hopeful perspective to become productive and self-reliant members of their communities. And we, as philanthropists and educators, must empower them to find their own pathways to elevated livelihoods.

– H.E. Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair



A unique approach to philanthropy

In a dynamic and challenging landscape, the Fund models a flexible, adaptable approach and structure which allows it to stay relevant on the ground. It strives to be impact-driven, outcome-focused, scalable, and responsive to market demands.

The Fund further focuses on the importance of data collection and evaluation to continuously explore solutions and address challenges in an agile manner. This is particularly important as statistics for the philanthropic sector in the region are scarce.

Zakat as a model focuses on the independence of learners, creating less dependence on aid, and encourages longer-term solutions—for example, ensuring robust certification, which leads to improved employability prospects. The Fund actively shares its model, data and learnings with peer philanthropists, generally supporting a movement away from charitable approaches toward a strategic lens.

Prioritizing partnership

The Fund values a strategic partnership model as a way of increasing impact. This prioritization of partnerships empowers organizations at a community level, regardless of their size or

type—from large international bodies such as UN organizations, through to medium and small organizations. Across all partnerships, the Fund strives for integration and harmony of themes, and prioritizes local and grassroots NGOs by giving them opportunities to grow and strengthen their impact. Figure 5 gives an overview of the partner projects in Lebanon and Jordan that are presented as case studies in this report.

Partnerships are built on trust and transparency, with listening, learning and collaboration central shared values. Professional accountability embedded in authentic partnerships ensures that the Fund keeps focused on the needs of the most vulnerable. This represents a transformation of the traditional donor-grantee dynamic to a more collaborative, two-sided interaction. The Fund works closely to build capacities of partners, remaining flexible to meet emerging needs as changing insights are gained from the field.

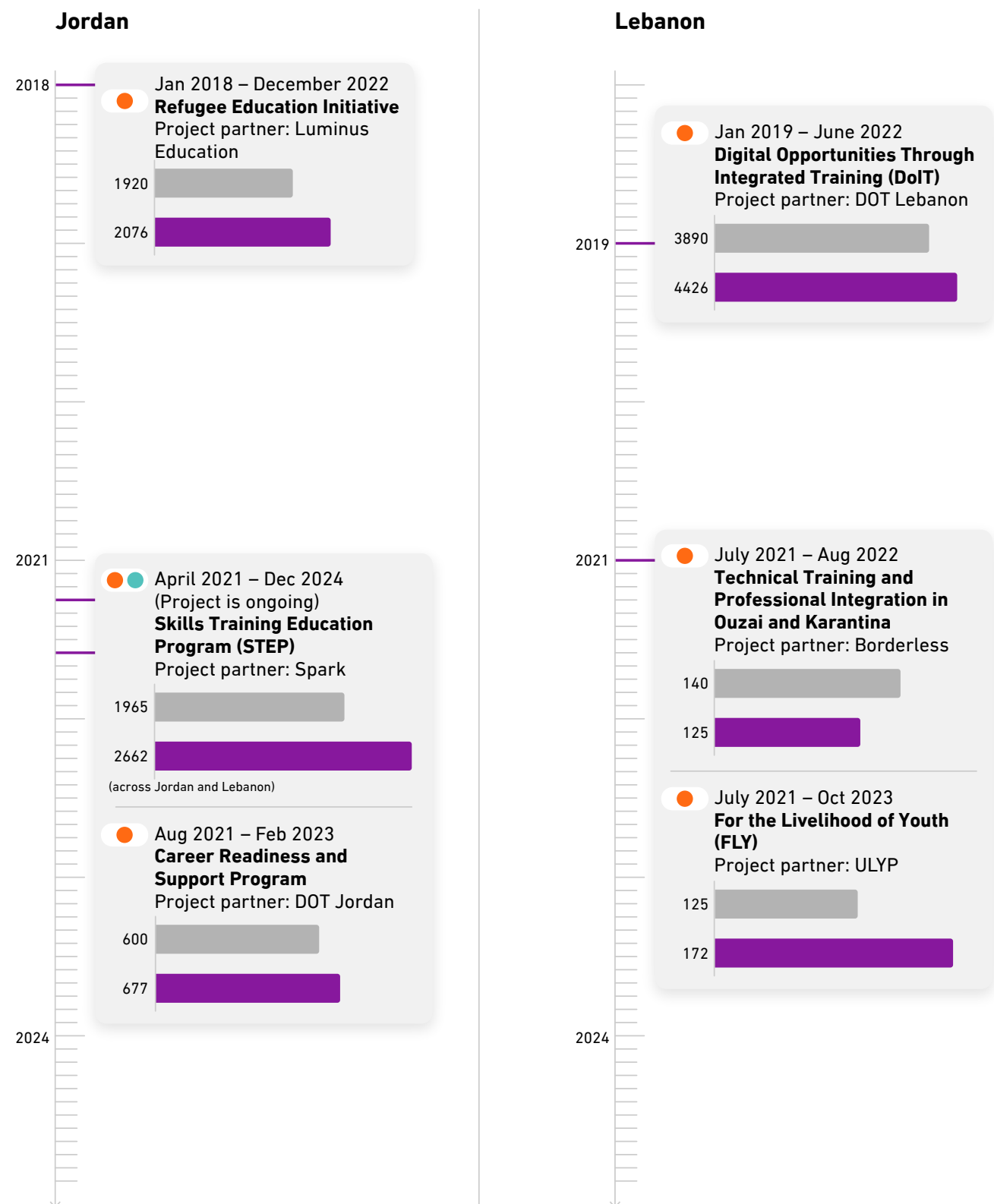
The Fund's commitment to strategic and Islamic philanthropy in the Arab world fills a gap left by international NGOs with different priorities. The impact of these programs shows the benefits of a systematic, holistic and collaborative approach across the sector. The following chapters explore some of these working partnerships in Jordan and Lebanon.



Figure 5:

The Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund at a glance: our case studies

● Vocational training
 ● Entrepreneurship
 ■ Target beneficiaries
 ■ Actual beneficiaries reached



A photograph of two young men in a workshop setting, overlaid with a semi-transparent pink filter. They are both wearing grey t-shirts, blue suspenders, and dark blue baseball caps. The man on the right has a 'BOSCH' logo on his cap and is looking towards the left. The man on the left is also looking left and has his hand near his head. The background shows industrial equipment and a complex network of pipes.

02

**Jordan: A youthful
population seeking
opportunities**

Jordan is one of the countries where the Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund is working to provide TVET opportunities for young people through our Learning to Earning model and strategic philanthropic partnerships.

With a youthful population but limited resources, Jordan has made great strides in recent years in expanding education and employment opportunities. Still, TVET remains undersubscribed. Tackling this requires a multifaceted approach that considers not only technical expertise but also soft skills, sustainable employment models, and the needs of the private sector.

A saturated labor market

Jordan has one of the youngest populations in the world: almost two-thirds of its population is under the age of 30. The entrance of this cohort into the workforce presents unique opportunities, along with significant challenges. Women face particular obstacles: Jordan has the third-lowest female labor participation rate in the world.

Economic and social reforms in Jordan began in the early 1990s, accelerating with the 1999 accession of King Abdullah II, who has promoted Jordan as an investment-driven, knowledge-based economy. It is now one of the most open economies in the region, well integrated with its neighbors through trade, remittances, foreign direct investment (FDI) and tourism.

But challenges persist. Employment is concentrated in the greater Amman area, with a direct impact on the economic opportunities of those living far from economic centers. Annually, 100,000 young

individuals seek employment in a labor market that can only absorb half that; in 2022, there was a 50% unemployment rate among youth aged 15-30 years.² Jordan also hosts the second-highest share of refugees per capita in the world, the vast majority Syrian nationals—who face an unemployment rate almost double that of Jordanian nationals.³

Figure 6 demonstrates the profound impact of the 2012 Syrian refugee influx on employment figures. Figure 7 explores their current inclusion in the economy, based on numbers officially registered with the UNHCR in Jordan. (However, note that not all refugees are registered; the Fund extends support to all, regardless of status or nationality.)

Jordan's market holds limited purchasing power, making it challenging for businesses to thrive. High operational costs push many businesses to consider relocating to more favorable environments, like Dubai's free zones. Ultimately, a significant discrepancy exists between the skillsets demanded by the private sector and those possessed by Jordanian youth. This makes upskilling, supported by the Fund, an urgent priority

Promoting TVET in the face of stigma

Jordan has made notable educational progress in recent years: the illiteracy rate dropped below 5% for the first time in 2022, and in 2023, four in ten adult Jordanians had attained secondary education or higher.⁴

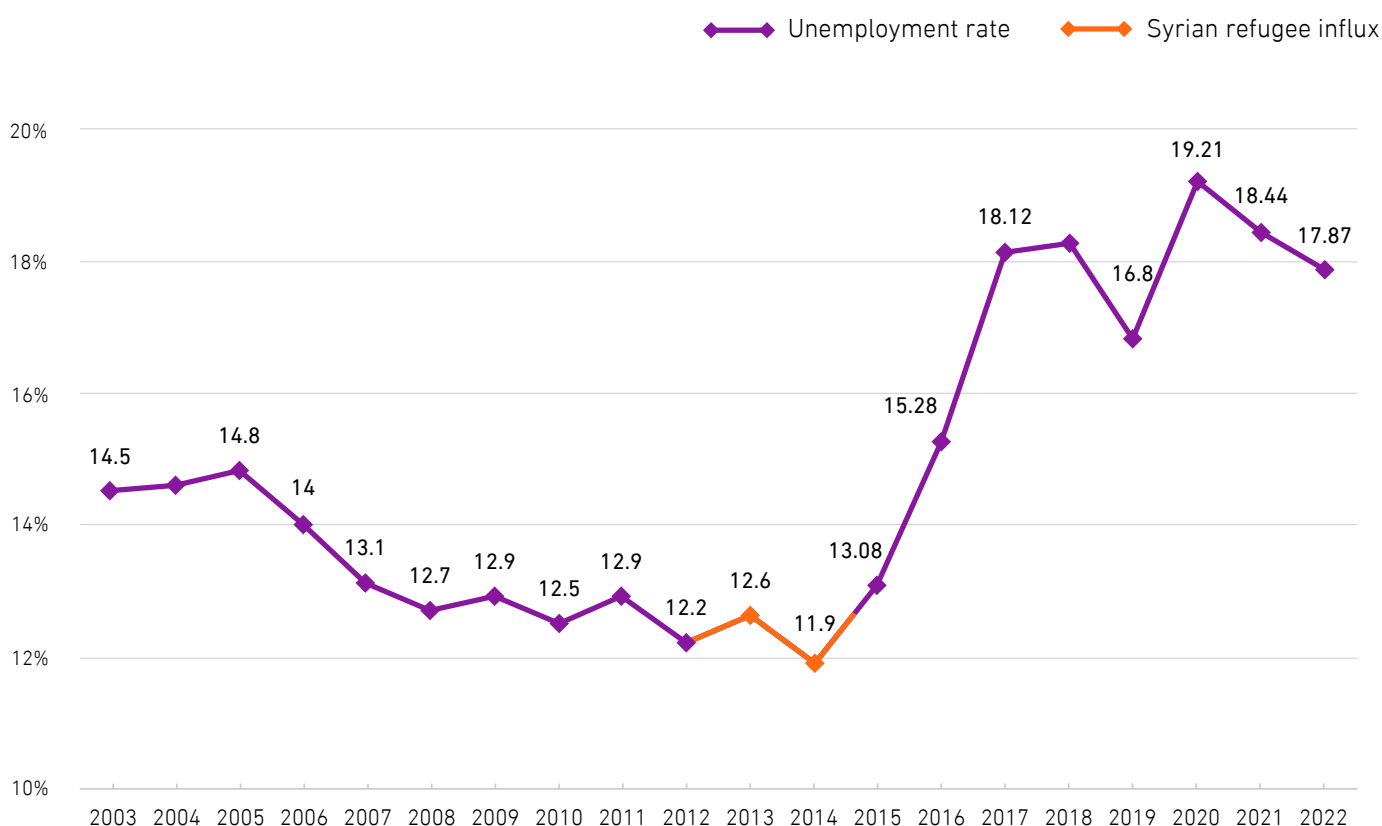
Historically, there has been a stigma around vocational training and education, which is perceived as inferior to academia. Graduates often aspire to work in the public sector, deemed secure, and

² [The World Bank in Jordan, Overview, The World Bank, 2022.](#)

³ [MENASP Network, "The employment of Syrians in Jordan," 2020.](#)

⁴ ["Unemployment rate hit 21.9% in Q1 2023," Jordan Times, June 1, 2023.](#)

Figure 6:

Unemployment rate in Jordan 2003–2022, showing impact of Syrian refugee influx

shy away from the vocational sector, partly due to limited initial pay. While this prejudice is declining, most school graduates in Jordan prefer academic education.

But universities may not be the best preparing ground for viable careers. A lack of coordination and knowledge of the labor market means that some fields, such as medicine, are oversaturated.

What the market requires, in fact, is more technical/vocational human capital. Vocational training, which focuses on hands-on, practical skills for specific jobs, and vocational education, which provides a broader foundation for targeted careers, offer valuable opportunities for skill development and career advancement.

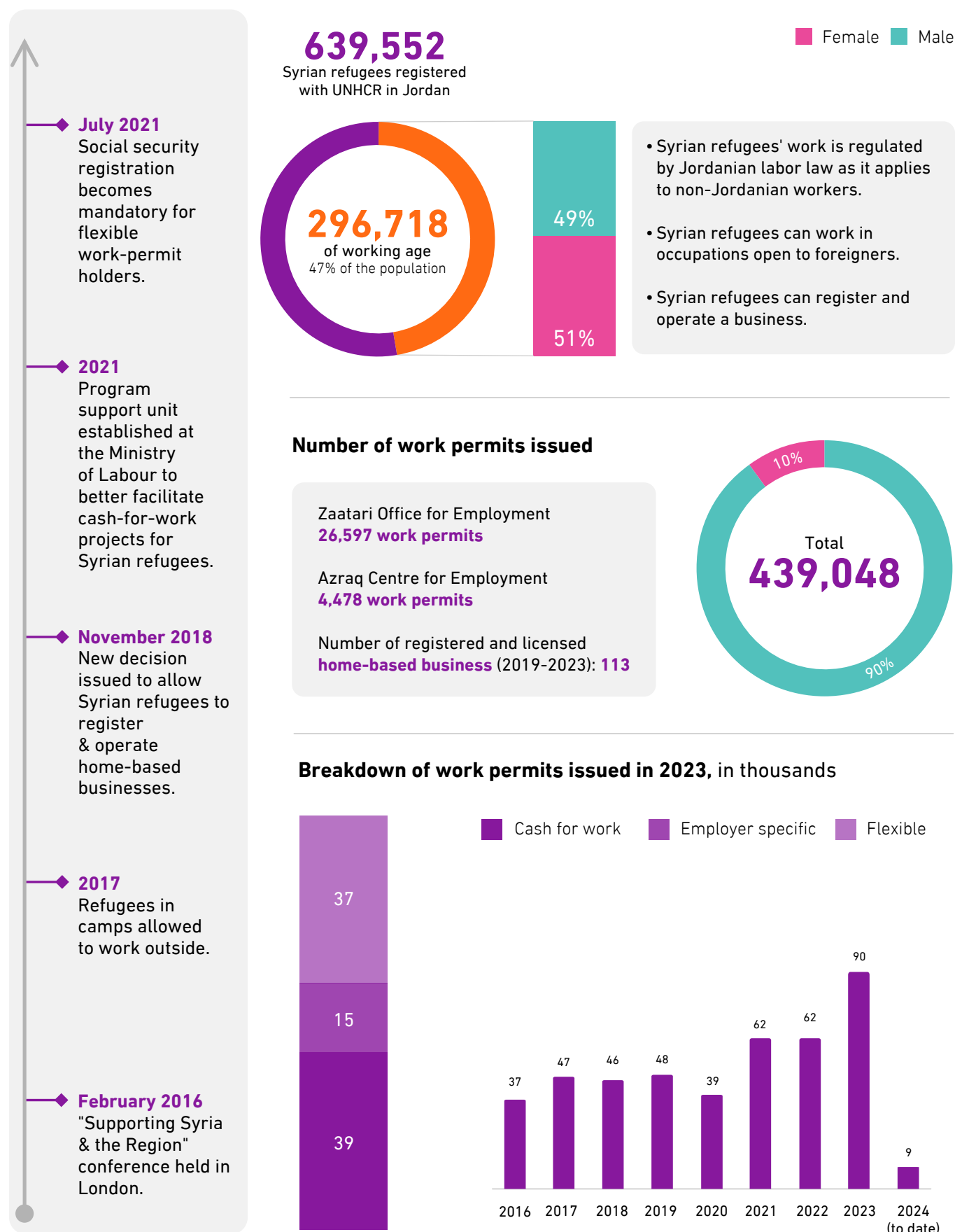
The Government of Jordan has prioritized TVET in various national development plans over the last

twenty years, with strong support from King Abdullah II. This emphasis aligns with Jordan's broader strategy to address unemployment and equip its workforce with practical skills that meet the needs of the labor market.

There are currently 35 Vocational Training Corporation (VTC) centers in Jordan.⁵ However, these face a number of constraints: the curriculum is often outdated, left behind by the rapidly changing demands of the job market; the integration of modern technology and digital skills in training is limited; teachers have limited professional development; and a lack of private-sector involvement inhibits the establishment of professional standards and certification. And, while vocational programs may secure initial employment for participants, there is a risk of termination once funding expires. The ability of graduates to secure long-term employment remains uncertain.

⁵ Vocational Training Corporation.

Figure 7:

Economic inclusion of Syrian refugees in Jordan, 2024

Source: UNHCR Jordan, February 2024

Case studies

To fill the gaps between earning and learning, the Fund has developed strategic partnerships with organizations on the ground, including the Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT Jordan), Luminus Education, and Spark.



I am now studying IT at the university because of the Word Press course I took and the laptop I received through the program, which enabled me to explore and discover the field.

– Al Ghurair learner, Jordan

Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund and DOT Jordan

Career Readiness and Support Program

The Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund is a supportive partner of the Canadian NGO DOT, which established a Jordan office in 2016. The Fund collaborates on several DOT Jordan projects, including the Career Readiness and Support Program and English language training.

DOT believes in empowering youth to create sustainable initiatives that address community needs. It focuses on youth-led innovation through programs that foster digital skills development, ranging from basic digital literacy, to administrative skills, to advanced application development and coding languages. DOT's training initiatives are

structured to cater to a range of skill levels, and youth are also supported with soft skills training to prepare them for the job market.

DOT actively seeks to build relationships and partnerships with employers. Partners include a variety of private-sector IT companies, as well as community organizations and small start-ups. Through DOT's networks, youth are connected to job placements, in diverse fields and in administrative and technical roles.

DOT's Career Readiness and Support Program sought to equip both Jordanian and refugee youth with information and computer technology skills (ICT). From an initial intake of over 600 learners, 200 were selected for a further pathway where they were provided with devices and an English business course, and given access to internship opportunities. The youth DOT targeted were in remote areas and did not have prior access to such training opportunities.

Working with the Fund, DOT redefined their program, transitioning from a training-focused approach to the more comprehensive Learning to Earning model. They did this by introducing multiple components within one program, supporting youth in a holistic way throughout their journey to employment.



This encompassed different training levels, job coaching, internships, and job placements, always emphasizing job market awareness.

English language training

DOT was the first organization in Jordan to offer English language support tailored to digital skills training—important, given that some internship opportunities were remote. Sessions aimed not only to improve the practice and confidence of students in English, but also to improve internet navigation and communication skills.

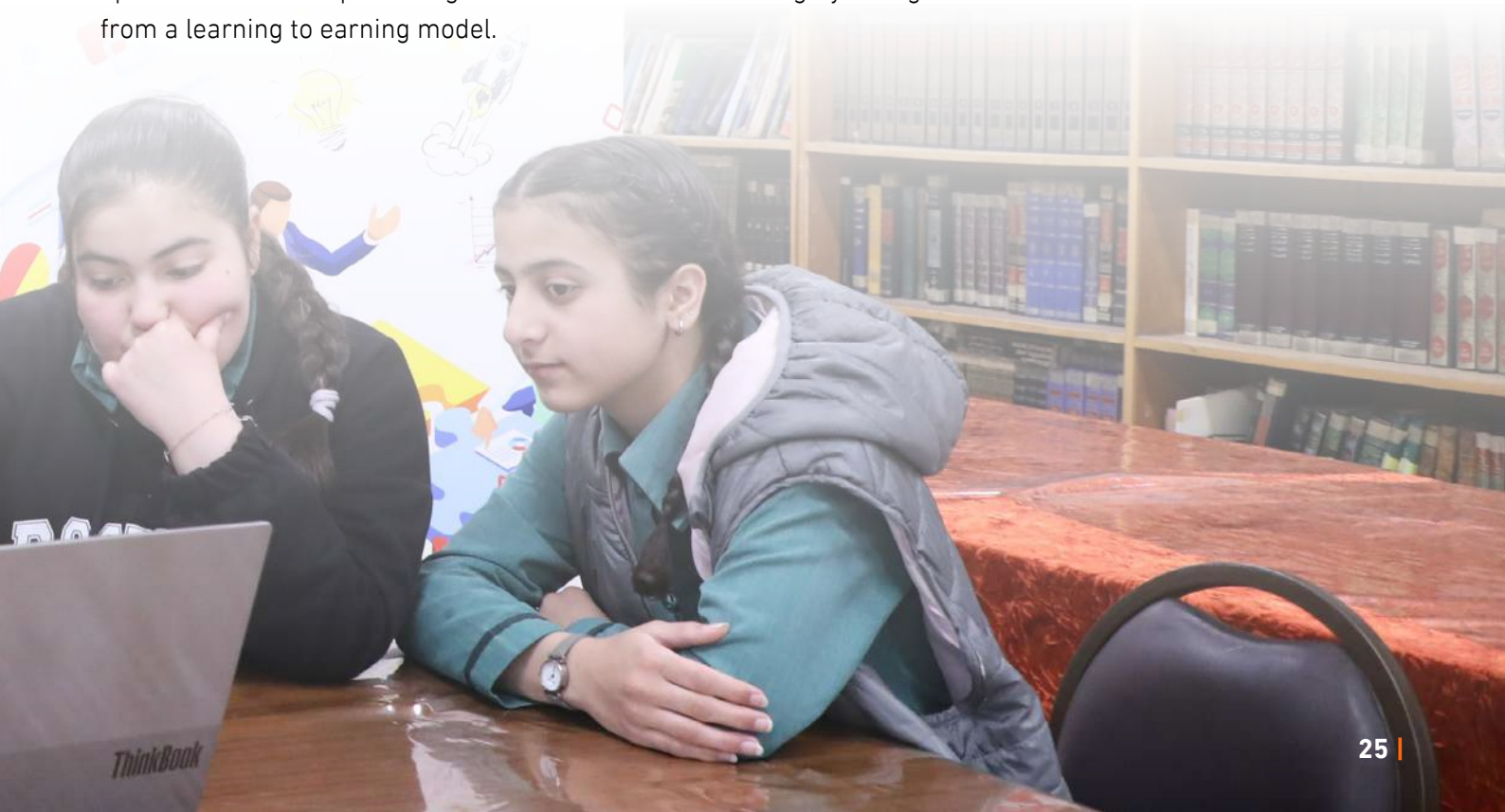
The Fund, responding flexibly to a clear need, allowed the reallocation of stipend funds so that 40 selected students could test out an English-language training course that had not been initially included in the budget. This experience fed into later projects, where language training would be budgeted for in digital upskilling courses.

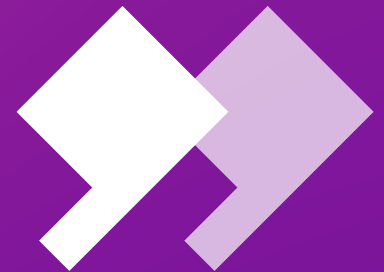
The Fund also supported DOT's efforts to provide access to their courses through Knowledge Stations (KSs)—a government initiative to bridge the digital divide by providing access to the internet and devices such as laptops, even in remote areas. This has opened the door for promising students to benefit from a learning to earning model.

Learners generally reported that the training improved their work performance and expanded their personal, academic, and professional networks. For those without immediate job placements or currently pursuing academic paths, the training expanded their horizons, enhanced skills, and nurtured their independent thinking and planning.

However, the training did not necessarily lead to finding stable employment. Coaching, including marketing oneself and interview performance, was deemed vital, especially among younger participants. In the future, the organization aims to focus more on developing training curricula, particularly in emerging fields such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and environmental sustainability.

Overall, the Fund has helped to influence DOT's program design, encouraging a more comprehensive and holistic approach through the the Learning to Earning model. The agile and flexible approach of the Fund model enabled DOT to expand its offerings beyond traditional coaching, addressing the multifaceted needs of participating youth and identifying new challenges. By allowing for the continuous redesign of initiatives, approaches, and budgets, the Fund promoted resilience in the face of highly changeable circumstances and needs.





The program connected me with two freelance opportunities ... I started to learn more about what I am doing and how things work.

– Al Ghurair learner, Jordan

Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund and Luminus Education

Refugee Education Initiative

Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund support for Luminus Education, the largest private TVET provider in Jordan, began in 2018 with the Refugee Education Initiative. This provided inclusive employment-oriented training for refugees and vulnerable Jordanians, encompassing international and local diploma programs.

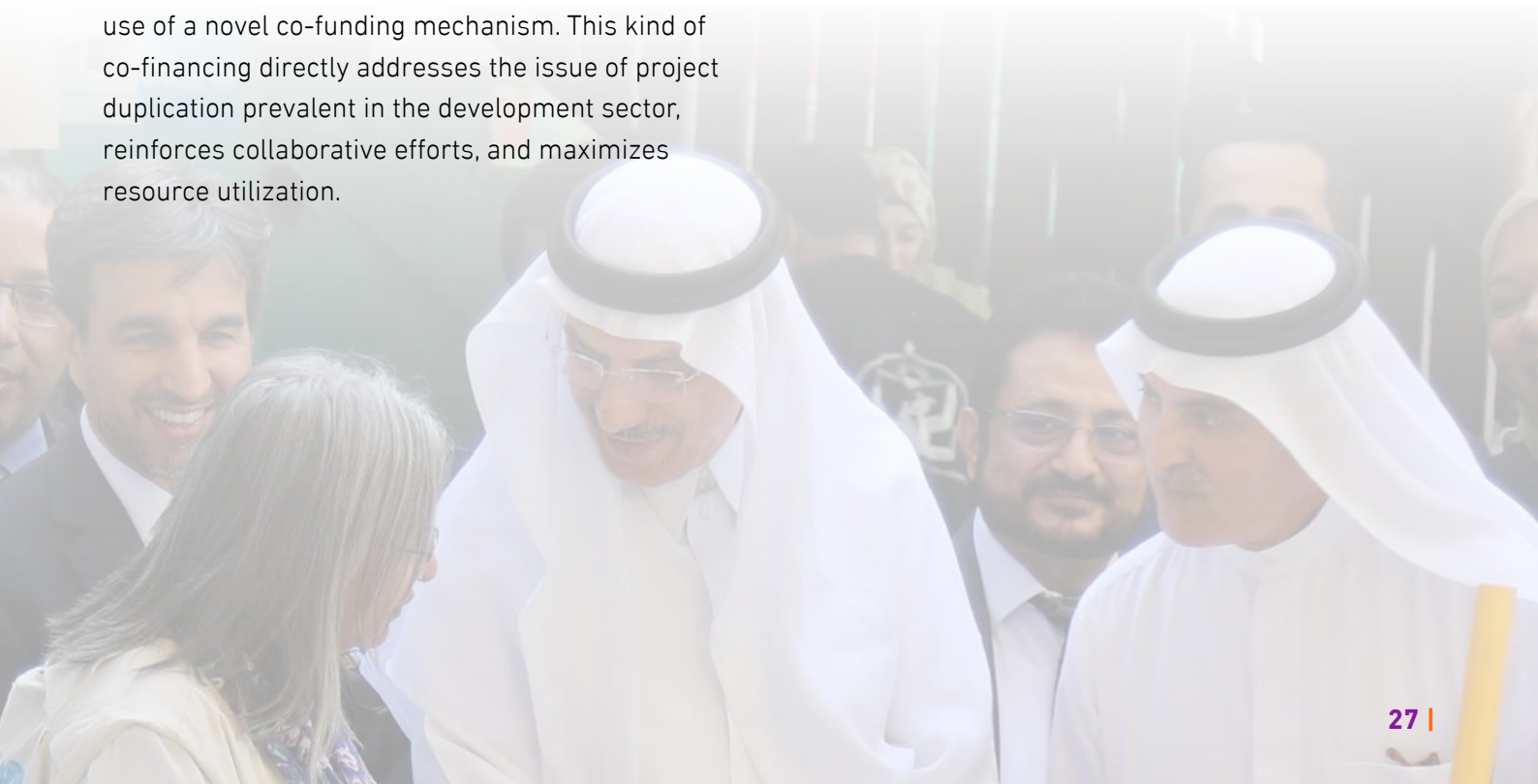
Luminus Education was initially established in 1981 as Al Quds College. In 2017, Al Quds and Luminus became a unified institution. With four campuses spread across the country, Luminus Education offers a wide range of degree programs in various sectors, with curricula focused on practical skills.

For the Refugee Education Initiative, the Fund made use of a novel co-funding mechanism. This kind of co-financing directly addresses the issue of project duplication prevalent in the development sector, reinforces collaborative efforts, and maximizes resource utilization.

The program integrated students across various schools, including the Abdul Aziz al Ghurair School of Advanced Computing (ASAC), which was created in 2019 with the support of the Fund, enabling Luminus to explore the opportunities of advanced computing. This is a significant milestone in the relationship with the Fund, one that continues to provide certifications to refugees and vulnerable youth and expose them to opportunities beyond the local job market.

A total of 2,035 students ultimately graduated from the Refugee Education Initiative, exceeding initial targets and recording a mere 2% dropout rate. The majority of participants were of Syrian, Jordanian, and Palestinian backgrounds. Notably, around 40% of learners were women.

Fund involvement, initially planned to end in 2021, was extended until December 2022 due to restrictions imposed during the pandemic. Luminus Education and the Fund tackled this challenge collaboratively. Luminus did a survey to understand the issues and challenges, and after consultation with the Fund arranged to reallocate budget and provide devices and internet bundles. The agility of this rapid repurposing ensured that students were not left behind. The extension provided by the Fund allowed for the completion of upskilling and employment initiatives.



Similarly, a flexible response to student feedback meant that the program was extended to longer than two weeks—a learning that was reflected in a change to the Fund’s broader certification policy: it now only accepts courses in the optimal four-month to one-year range. Luminus also decided to open the college at later hours to cater for working students.

The Fund was also instrumental in facilitating connections, helping Luminus to promote their upskilling opportunities and maximize outreach via the Fund’s participation in consortiums such as the Global Muslim Philanthropy Fund for Children (GMPFC). For instance, it facilitated a collaboration between UNICEF and Luminus by supporting a UNICEF after-school program (Makani)—a chance to identify promising young learners and prepare them with the necessary soft skills to join Luminus after graduation.

Participants surveyed were generally very satisfied with the training and how it improved work performance and helped to find employment. The coaching some students received helped practically in their CV writing and soft skills development.

Luminus itself took many learnings from this partnership: it opened up opportunities to co-fund with the Government and other donors. Luminus went on to collaborate with INTAJ, a consortium of tech companies in Jordan, where they put into practice innovative means to reach refugees. These kinds of collaborative and innovative approaches reflect the Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund’s commitment to strategic philanthropy, which focuses on leveraging networks and expanding opportunities to reach diverse vulnerable groups through multiple channels. This approach ensures continuous learning for both the Fund and its grantees, strengthening their collective impact.

A total of 2,035 students ultimately graduated from the Refugee Education Initiative, exceeding initial targets and recording a mere 2% dropout rate. The majority of participants were of Syrian, Jordanian, and Palestinian backgrounds. Notably, around 40% of learners were women.

Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund and SPARK

Skills Training Education Program (STEP)

STEP is co-funded by Spark, the Abdul Aziz al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund, and The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), and is administered by GMPFC. The partnership was facilitated and strengthened by the Fund's active participation and leadership as a founding donor of GMPFC.

Operating in several regions in the world, Spark works to create pathways for youth, giving them the tools they need to succeed in regions affected by conflict, climate crisis, and displacement. Spark's mandate is to empower students and entrepreneurs

to study, work and grow their own businesses through four main pillars; scale up, skill up, match up and start up.

Spark's main objective in Lebanon and Jordan is to improve resilience and reduce poverty. It strives to achieve this by partnering with local organizations to equip youth with practical technical skills through tailored training initiatives, linking them with job prospects, and fostering alliances with the private sector. In this, the program aims to align with the needs of the private sector: a comprehensive, business-aware approach that is key to the Fund's philanthropic strategy.

One unique element of the STEP collaboration is that Spark, backed by the Fund, made great efforts to get both the universities and private sector to engage in dialogue and to ensure their commitment to the program. Focus group discussions between university leaders and HR professionals tackled the challenges facing recent graduates in their search for employment in the initial years after graduation, and explored potential solutions.



STEP's top two pillars, start-up and scale-up, revolve around entrepreneurship and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprise (MSME) development. These collaborative efforts have resulted in the creation of 585 new businesses in Lebanon and Jordan: 85 were co-supported by Fund and IsDB. Additionally, support has been provided to 380 high-growth potential SMEs, with the Fund's and IsDB's co-funding enabling many of these enterprises to expand their operations.

Central to the program's methodology is localization: projects collaboratively developed with local partners to maximize reach and impact. This aims to build the capacity of local partners and empower them to sustain outcomes beyond a project's lifespan.

Spark's active embrace of entrepreneurship opened pathways beyond traditional job seeking, and tapped into the freelance ecosystem that helps overcome some of the hurdles experienced by refugee communities. STEP was the first project the Fund supported that had an entrepreneurship component; it is a testing ground for a model of

learning, entrepreneurship, and job creation that could be scaled and adapted to support vulnerable youth more widely. This is an indication of the Fund's risk appetite, embracing new models and approaches that philanthropy has not traditionally utilized. Participants in the STEP program were satisfied with the ways in which the training improved their work performance, potential income and job satisfaction. Most were positive that the training assisted them in finding employment and expanding their networks. SMEs owners said that the material was profoundly useful to their employers and the whole enterprise.

Overwhelmingly, participants felt that the training program was physically accessible and that the skills acquired were aligned with market demands. The organizational support, relevance to current work and the up-to-date nature of practical experience gained were well-received.

Overall, the training might be refined and perhaps expanded: several participants felt that they would have benefited from more time in the program.



Survey and learner insights from Jordan

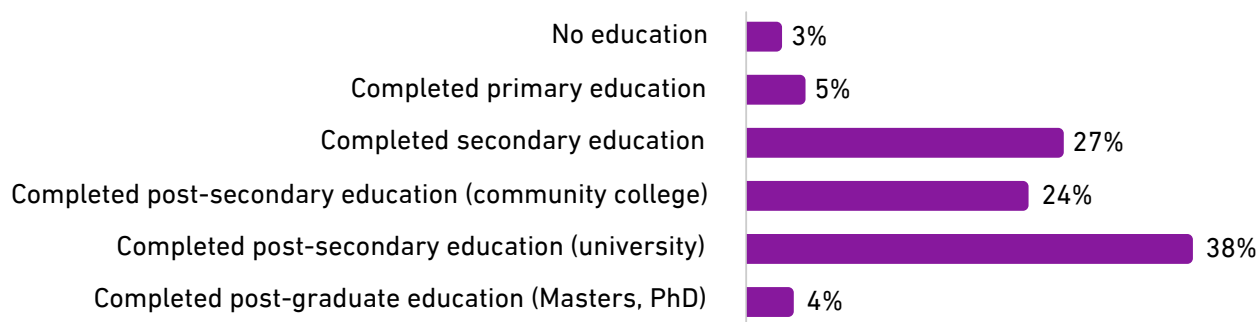
From the case studies, informant interviews, beneficiary surveys, and focus group interviews, certain learnings emerge about the projects that the Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund has supported in Jordan. These give us insights into the quality of training, preparedness for careers, and constraints experienced by participants in these programs.

Figure 8 gives a snapshot of the relatively high educational level of surveyed participants—pointing to the quality of applicants to these programs—and an indication of the obstacles they face in furthering their education.

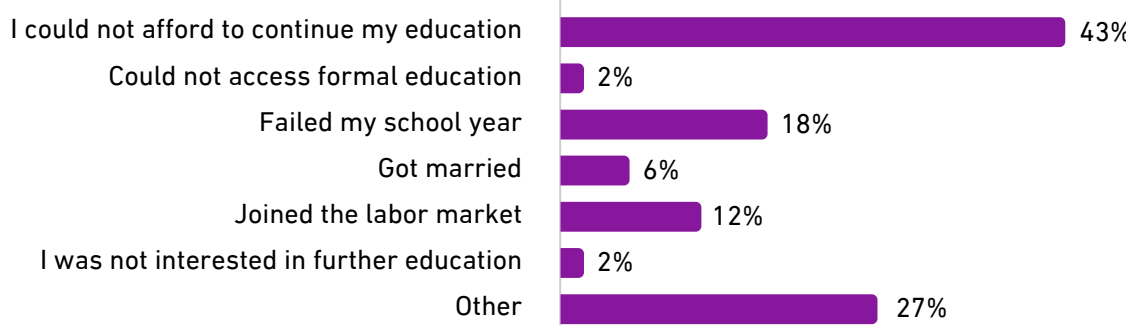
Figure 8:

Educational attainments and obstacles for survey respondents in Jordan

Completed level of educational attainment: Program participants surveyed in Jordan



Reasons for discontinuing formal education: program participants surveyed in Jordan



Most rated the quality of training highly. A substantial 94% agreed that their work performance improved, and 79% felt more satisfied with their job post training. Four in ten participants appreciated the training they'd received in vocational skills relevant to their job, which was matched by their interest in computer and software training. Almost a third were interested in entrepreneurship and business skills training, along with networking and relationship-building, career development and professional development workshops.

In terms of preparedness for career opportunities, the training programs were perceived as contributing positively to job acquisition, with 65% agreeing that it helped them find a job. Moreover, the overwhelming majority felt that the training contributed to expanding their personal, academic, and professional networks. Training certifications were valued highly, with 90% of learners finding them extremely or somewhat useful.

Financial constraints remain the primary barrier to continuing education in Jordan. The predominant reason given for not continuing education (43% of responses) was an inability to afford it. The unavailability of desired job positions in the labor market was the chief complaint of jobseekers.

While the vocational training programs that participants enrolled in were effective in developing networking skills and improving job satisfaction and performance, they were less successful in directly leading to job placements, especially in the private sector and self-employment opportunities. There remains a gap between the skills provided and the needs of the private sector job market. Economic and policy factors such as work permit and visa regulations continue to affect employment for refugees—for example, the increasingly constricted list of jobs they are permitted to hold.

The Fund's experience with programs following the pandemic is that it is critical to open up opportunities at a global level, with skills suitable for remote work and offshoring. English language proficiency remains a challenge—all partner programs now include English language upskilling as an essential element.

Innovations explored in case study projects can be adopted and implemented across the sector. For all TVET partners, it is vital to consider not only immediate skills, but also the resources needed to facilitate access to education, and soft and language skills that can improve employability. It is also important to be able to tweak and refine policies constantly to match new learnings and changing circumstances.



03

**Lebanon:
Countering a crisis
of labor uncertainty**

Lebanon currently houses around six million Lebanese and non-Lebanese residents.⁶ The country has the largest number of refugees per capita in the world: in 2023, refugees made up around 22% of the population.⁷ It is a relatively youthful country—44% are under the age of 24—and it holds the highest concentration of refugees in the world: in 2023, around 22% of its population. Each year, roughly 50,000 youth enter the labor market.⁸ However, many are not able to get a job with local institutions and businesses, and young people are increasingly engaged in low-paid, irregular and informal work.

Lebanon has endured multiple and overlapping crises over the past decade: financial slump, the pandemic, the August 2020 Beirut explosion, increasing fuel and wheat prices as a result of the war in Ukraine, and hostilities on the southern border with Israel. For young people, both Lebanese nationals and refugees, these complexities impact their day-to-day lives, their education and skills development, and their chances for better livelihoods.

In this landscape of extreme uncertainty, a number of organizations supported by the Fund are working to expand opportunities for young and vulnerable people.

A crisis of labor

The 2012 Syrian refugee crisis exacerbated a downward economic trend. After years of stagnation, 2019 saw a further decline in GDP per capita. Poverty levels are soaring among all population groups in Lebanon, with young people among the most burdened.

This has left Lebanon's labor market in a critical situation. Lebanon's youth struggle with unemployment close to 24% in an economy heavily reliant on the informal sector.⁹ Unemployment figures are particularly poor for women. Syrian displaced persons can only work in limited fields, and only a few obtain a work permit. For Syrian refugees, the employment rate in those aged 15–24 years was 26% in 2023.¹⁰

Many young professionals such as engineers and nurses have left the country. Others drop out of education to take on informal work that is often badly paid, irregular and exploitative, with limited (and in some cases no) labor rights for non-Lebanese in particular.

Micro- and small enterprises may play an important role in economic development. However, entrepreneurship faces numerous challenges in Lebanon. Access to funding, such as for internships and apprenticeships, is difficult. The country's infrastructure, with unreliable electricity supply and internet connectivity, disadvantages tech-dependent start-ups. The bureaucracy around registering a business is also very complicated. Frequent changes in laws and regulations, along with restricted market access in certain industries, hinder growth and innovation.

⁶ [Worldometer, Lebanese population, 2025.](#)

⁷ ["These ten countries receive the most refugees," Norwegian Refugee Council, 2023.](#)

⁸ ["ILO's support to Syrian Refugees and host communities," ILO, 2022.](#)

⁹ Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate) - Lebanon; Jordan. International Labour Organization, "ILO Modelled Estimates and Projections database (ILOEST)" ILOSTAT. Accessed June 18, 2024.

¹⁰ ["Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon," UNICEF, 2023.](#)

Education on the brink of collapse

The pandemic, the Beirut explosion, the refugee crisis, and the financial crisis have all contributed to the dire state of the education system. The crisis affects academic and vocational tracks, and Lebanese and non-Lebanese youth.

There is huge regional and class disparity in educational attainment in Lebanon. School enrolment rates are relatively low, and more than a third of all youth between the ages of 15 and 24 have never attended school.¹¹ Most underserved youth find themselves in the poor public schooling system, together with Syrian refugees, who mainly attend “second shift” classes, if at all.¹² Syrian refugees in Lebanon attend secondary school at a shockingly low rate of 15%, and among Syrian youth, six in ten are without any education, employment or training. Both Palestinian and Syrian refugees can only enter tertiary education with legal residency.¹³ This imposes huge financial constraints on refugees and is one reason why many drop out of education.

There is a profound mismatch between skills needed and education obtained, and Lebanon’s higher education institutions produce a large number of graduates who are not absorbed into

the labor market. Despite this, traditional academic achievements continue to be more valued than TVET, which is widely viewed as a second-rate education.¹⁴ There is a need for a culture change in these attitudes, which can only be achieved with a strengthening of the TVET sector.

As things stand, TVET suffers from insufficient funding, with the sector heavily dependent on external donors. Institutions are poorly equipped, curriculum reform is overdue, and there is a lack of qualified teachers.

There are a number of youth entrepreneurship initiatives and some evidence that entrepreneurship is increasing among younger people.¹⁵ However, there are few systematic efforts to coordinate these initiatives. The education system has not adapted to promote an entrepreneurship culture or to match market needs, for example by developing in-demand media, communications, marketing and digital skills.¹⁶

With many young people dropping out of formal education, there is great need for a diversity of entry points to training. Further partnerships with employers could help – but with very little systematic knowledge about the sector available, coordination among TVET programs is essential to ensure employment needs are covered.

¹¹ “Education in Emergencies Data Snapshot: Lebanon Overview of crises and national education situation,” USAID, Social Impact, fhi360.

¹² Pushparatnam, A. et al. “Learning and Earning Losses: The educational and economic costs of Lebanon’s public school closures,” World Bank Blogs, October 25, 2023.

¹³ “Education in Emergencies Data Snapshot: Lebanon Overview of crises and national education situation,” USAID, Social Impact, fhi360.

¹⁴ Vlaardingerbroek, B. & Hachem El Masri, Y. “Student transition to upper secondary vocational and technical education (VTE) in Lebanon: from stigma to success,” *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 60(1): 19–33, 2008.

¹⁵ Hill, S. et al. “Changing Patterns of Entrepreneurship in Lebanon,” International Applied Research Symposium, The Transforming Power of the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Ecosystem: Lessons Learned, 2018: 10–19, 2018.

¹⁶ Sawaya, L. & Serhal, C. “Lebanon’s youth: Barriers for growth and unfolding opportunities,” UNDP, 2022.

Case studies

It is with these limitations and ambitions in mind that the Fund has partnered with organizations in Lebanon such as Borderless, DOT Lebanon, and Unite Lebanon Youth Project (ULYP), which provide vocational training to the most vulnerable youth in critical areas.



I thought I was a loser. I didn't know how to write or read so I didn't have motivation. But they encouraged me so now I desire to learn, and my morale is up.

– Al Ghurair learner, Lebanon



Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund and Borderless

Technical Training and Professional Integration in Ouzai and Karantina

The Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund has funded two projects run by Borderless, an independent NGO that operates in Beirut. The organization works with children who are unable to access education facilities and provides retention support for those enrolled in public schools. Focusing on livelihood, education, and protection, they offer tutoring and supplementary classes, as well as psychosocial support and assistance for parents.

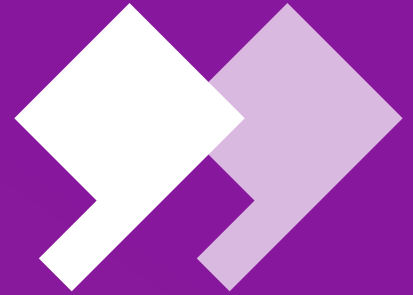
Challenges for youth in Lebanon include decreased opportunities in the workspace, poor working conditions, and more highly educated competitors. In this context, Borderless aims to provide vocational training that paves the path for youths to become small entrepreneurs, freelancers, or consultants.

Borderless works with two of the most marginalized communities in Lebanon, Ouzai and Karantina, both significantly affected by the 2020 Beirut explosion. This kind of grassroots involvement illustrates how the Fund prioritizes responsiveness to community needs, working with organizations of all sizes.

Here, the agility and flexibility of the Fund's philanthropic approach is in evidence: it can cut through bureaucracy, and is able to adapt and modify program designs and targets, considering the particularity of certain contexts while still meeting overarching goals. This agility extends beyond budget reallocations to redesigning programs collaboratively and adapting to meet specific community needs as they arise, particularly in emergencies. In one example, learners were experiencing crippling transportation costs, so Borderless was given the flexibility to reallocate funds to the transport budget. In another example of agile working, during the pandemic, Borderless instructors could compensate for any missing sessions by conducting remedial sessions. Volunteers were recruited to assist in childcare while mothers received training.

Borderless realized that focusing solely on vocational training was not enough to equip youth with the right tools to step into the working world. Influenced by the Fund's Learning to Earning model, life-skill coaches offered sessions to the youth on business startup, budget set up and planning, idea implementation, and procurement. Another significant development in the program design was the addition of a career counsellor who actively networked with businesses to find internship opportunities for students.

Beyond providing training, Borderless actively sought out youth feedback both during and after the program. For example, after a month or so of finishing their internships/training, Borderless did focus group interviews and surveys to gain insights about students' prospects, needs and current status. This focus on follow-up and accountability is another hallmark of the Fund's approach across partner programs.



As a whole, the impact is to see our students one step closer to an income-generating opportunity.

– Manager, Borderless

Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund and DOT Lebanon

Digital Opportunities through Integrated Training (DoIT)

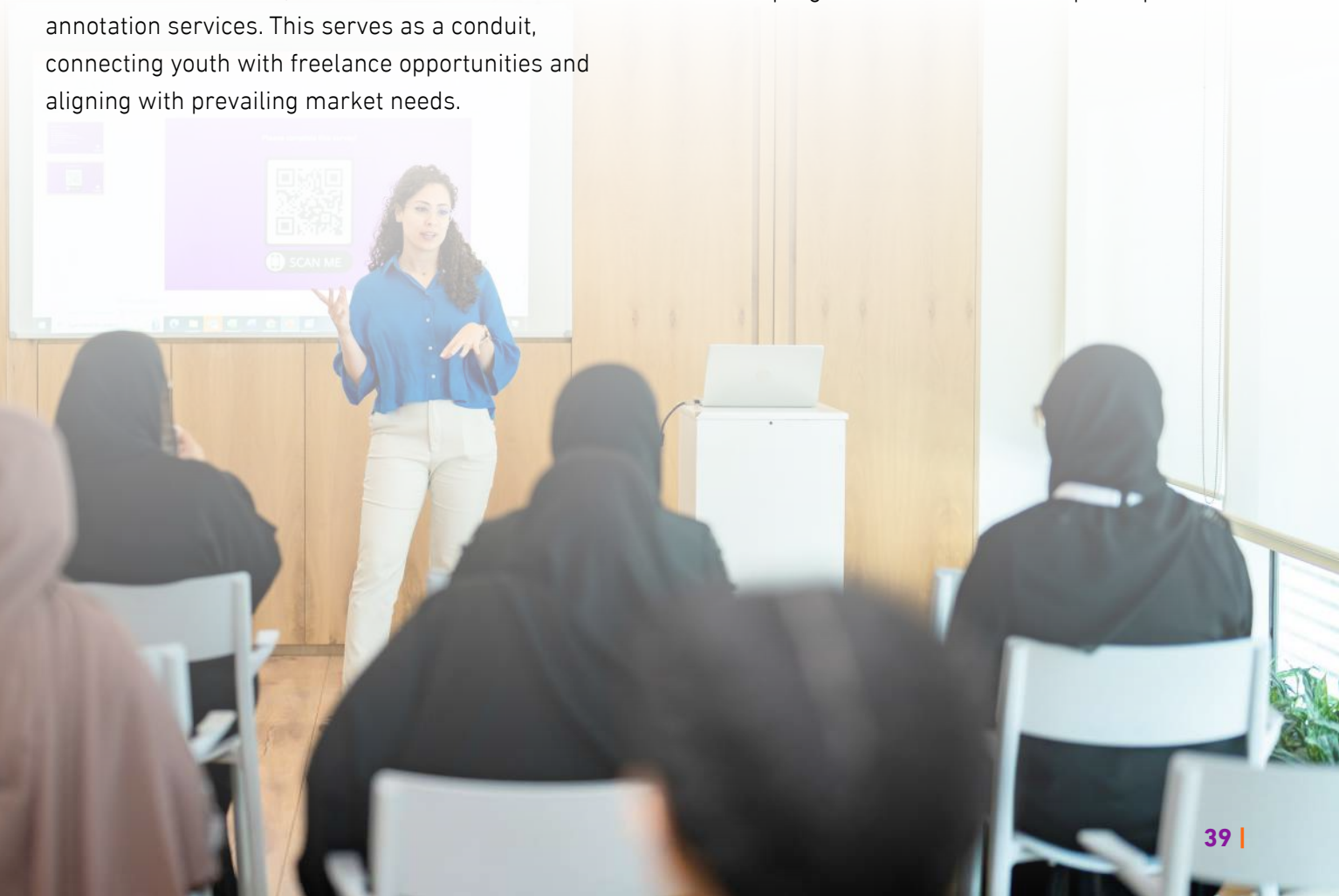
DOT Lebanon is part of the same network as DOT Jordan, supporting youth to create digital solutions that have impact on their communities. They have run educational programs focusing on technology and sustainable economic growth since 2003.

DOT works with vulnerable Lebanese communities and youth as well as Syrian and Palestinian refugees, offering digital upskilling, entrepreneurship skills training, and English language proficiency. DOT operates its own platform, known as BOT (Bridge Outsource Transform), for data collection and annotation services. This serves as a conduit, connecting youth with freelance opportunities and aligning with prevailing market needs.

The Fund-backed Digital Opportunities through Integrated Training (DoIT) program was implemented from 2019–2022, with 4,426 unique learners enrolled. The aim was to empower them with essential digital skills.

Several participants mentioned that they gained new technical skills in areas like computer hardware, software and social media management, as well as improved communication skills such as phone communication and professional etiquette. Moreover, according to participants in the focus group discussions, the training filled a higher education gap, providing technical and practical knowledge. The courses aligned with market demands, covering a range of topics including digital media literacy, software development, and AI. Targeted English-language support courses were offered by accredited language institutions.

As required by the Fund, DOT introduced valuable internationally recognized certifications—certified by industry giants such as Google and Cisco—which made the program more attractive to participants.



The project operated throughout the pandemic and multiple other crises; its success hinged on its adaptability and ability to navigate challenges in the face of increasing limitations and restrictions for vulnerable participants. The online modality was challenging, as the learners often experienced unstable internet connection and electricity cuts. The Fund enabled DOT to navigate these various challenges by allowing the flexible repurposing of funds: DOT was able to provide internet cards and kits so students could have access to 3G internet connection, and followed up with the students to recharge devices ahead of time to avoid delays in joining the sessions.

A total of 109 applicants were referred to 249 job vacancies, and 140 interns were successfully placed with various employers. Participants gained technical

skills in areas like computer hardware, software, and social media management in addition to “soft” skills: a holistic approach to upskilling, as encouraged by the Fund.

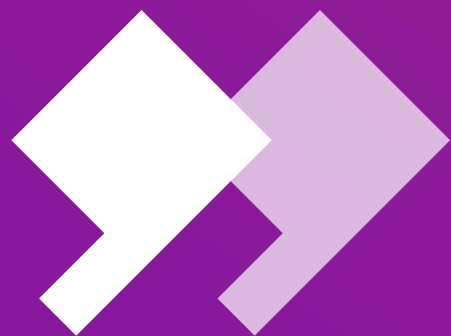
The Fund’s participation strengthened the capacity of local partners through improved financial reporting practices. Collaboration with partners and participation in working groups fostered knowledge sharing and facilitated continued support to overcome crises.

Digital skills training and integrating online learning into other programs are key, as digital delivery has the potential to expand a program’s reach and impact. One learning has been the need to find organizational partners that work in online and digital spaces.



One of the challenges was the bad internet during the pandemic. The organization used to charge our SIMs so that we could connect on 3G, and they provided kits to everyone. Those who lived in faraway areas could go on a website to use the tools online.

– Al Ghurair learner, Lebanon



Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund and Unite Lebanon Youth Project

For the Livelihood of Youth (FLY)

The Fund collaboration with the Unite Lebanon Youth Project (ULYP) started in 2018 and continued for three consecutive cycles, benefiting 1150 youth in total. ULYP started their work in 2010, focusing on academic and life skills at all levels, after a pilot study revealed a demand for enhanced critical thinking, creativity, and early intervention in children's education. Additionally, they identified a necessity for more holistic approaches involving families and communities.

ULYP launched the FLY Program in 2021 with the view to aligning the qualifications of the youth with the needs of the job market. The program provided upskilling opportunities to graduates who could use the scholarship to take specific courses offered through an online platform.

The program aimed to recruit three cohorts of vulnerable and refugee youth living in Lebanon. Each cohort was meant to involve 30-35 participants who would access training for around 6 months, but numbers expanded substantially over the last cohorts.

Being agile enough to make such adjustments mid-program is a hallmark of the Fund's flexible philanthropy. In the final cohort, 82% of the students graduated and secured a diploma. Another example of the Fund's flexible approach here is that the

project started during the pandemic and some of the program had to be adjusted to be delivered online. During this time, the project provided 93 students with a laptop.

There were challenges related to students staying motivated online. A crucial challenge related to staff and student mental health issues stemming from the ongoing crises in Lebanon. This demonstrated the necessity of a flexible approach in times of crisis, including extended deadlines, increased learning autonomy, and more direct assistance with coursework and completion.

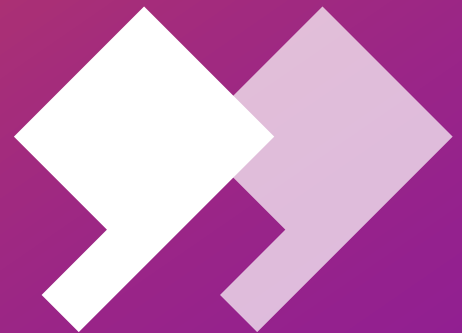
The flexible and holistic approach provided students with opportunities in every part of the upskilling journey, whether looking for a new job or wishing to enhance their current employment role.

Another way in which the Fund's involvement with the project was beneficial is seen in the insistence on accountability and two-way communication. ULYP staff gave the feedback that they had learned a lot from the rigor required in reporting back to the Fund, and that this had influenced their practices going forward.

It was clear that many students found the upskilling opportunities helpful and the courses relevant. Participants were also clear that the courses helped in improving work performance and most were encouraged to continue vocational training.

Gaining skills that could be used in remote employment was significant, specifically for Palestinian and Syrian youth who could not work in many professions in Lebanon or who felt that they had experienced discrimination.

This successful and impactful collaboration has established ULYP as a suitable partner to administer one of the Al Ghurair Education Relief Fund projects to support Palestinian students abroad.



I was already managing projects in the company I was working in. But the course gave me more technical vocabulary for my job. I learned how to classify tasks, kick off meetings, manage a team, and manage and assess risks.

– Al Ghurair learner, Lebanon

Survey and learner insights from Lebanon

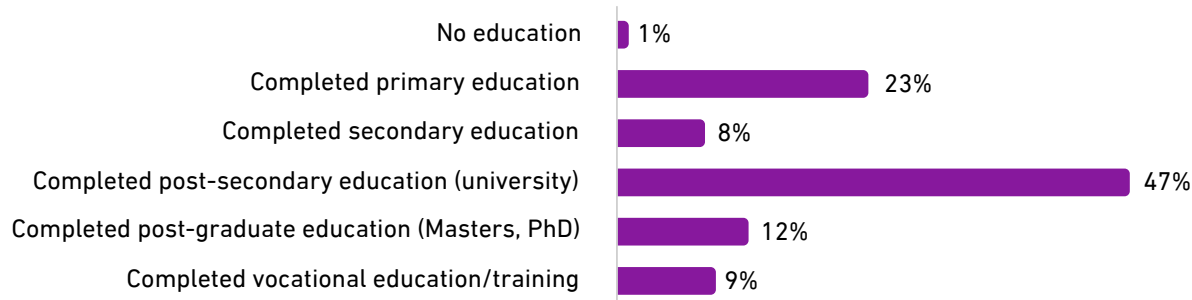
As with Jordan, informant interviews, beneficiary surveys, and focus group interviews throw light on the learnings from, and perceptions of, Lebanese projects that the Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund has supported. Figure 9 illustrates the educational attainments of the survey participants, and highlights their educational obstacles.

The overall Lebanese data indicates a high degree of satisfaction with logistical aspects of the training programs, such as timing and physical accessibility. For example, one learner, who had previously participated in a Borderless carpentry course, desired to expand his skillset in digital marketing and English, and learned about new, relevant Borderless workshops through social media. Computer and software training emerged as the leading preferred course direction, with networking and relationship-building workshops a close second.

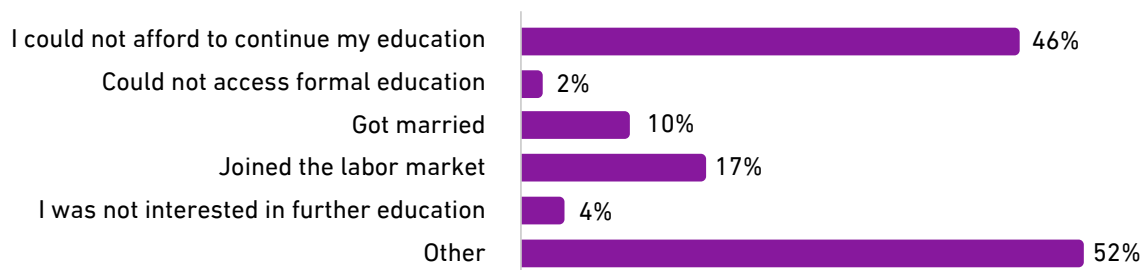
Figure 9:

Educational attainments and obstacles for survey respondents in Lebanon

Completed level of educational attainment: Program participants surveyed in Lebanon



Reasons for discontinuing formal education: Program participants surveyed in Lebanon



With regards to career opportunities, the most positively perceived impact of the training was in expanding personal networks and work performance. A third of the participants rated their certification as extremely useful, while 43% considered it somewhat useful.

However, 85% of survey respondents disagreed that the training helped them find a job. A gap is evident between skills enhancement and practical outcomes like job acquisition and income improvement.

This disparity may be further exacerbated by the financial crisis in Lebanon, which could hinder the translation of acquired skills into employment opportunities and economic advancement.

Among the most significant constraints reported by participants included financial struggles in general. Work permit/visa restrictions were a great challenge for refugee youth, with 66% impacted. While advocacy around these issues is beyond the remit of the Fund, further research might be done to investigate the utility of advocacy organizations addressing these issues.



04

The way forward: Recommendations

Improving the quality of post-secondary and skills development programs is crucial for long-term economic growth. In both Jordan and Lebanon, there are profound challenges with technical and vocational training at all levels.

In recent years, there has been a shift toward a more focused, strategic and institutionalized philanthropy, involving social investment for long-term solutions. There is a need to discuss now what strategic philanthropy can do further to scale and adapt. Impact can be maximized by broadening collaboration efforts among philanthropic entities and government programs.

Across Jordan and Lebanon there are shared challenges, but the intensity and nature of these challenges vary with the social and economic context of each country. Participants from Lebanon were more concerned with practical barriers such as financial struggles and visa restrictions, for example, while those from Jordan were more focused on challenges related to the applicability of skills and job market alignment. This reflects a need for targeted interventions to address specific challenges. This might include an expanded role for advocacy organizations, with perhaps pressure to loosen restrictions on work permits where relevant.

The most prominent shared obstacle remains the establishment of sustainable pathways to employment for youth, be it through internship

programs or skills development initiatives.

Organizations continue to encounter difficulties in managing youth expectations, cultivating critical thinking, and bridging the gap between chosen education paths and market realities. Given restricted employment opportunities, skills gaps and market demands, organizations frequently find it challenging to provide successful pathways to employment.

Navigating the demands and priorities of all types of donors—whether traditional donors or philanthropic organizations—also continues to be a major challenge for all kinds of organizations.

To overcome these obstacles and have an impact at a national level, organizations must recognize the importance of collaboration and strategic partnerships between civil society organizations, donors, and government entities—ultimately contributing to a more cohesive approach to youth employment.

Philanthropic entities like the Fund can help to create these partnerships and collaborations: focusing on quality outcomes and impact, not simply quantity, and providing a space where organizations can test models and explore alternatives. One of the main pillars of Zakat funding is to provide solutions to poverty, helping learners improve their living standards. Ultimately, this is what drives the Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair Refugee Education Fund: the impact and sustainability of interventions.

Recommendations for organizations and projects

Based on experiences with partner organizations in Jordan and Lebanon, the Fund can offer five broad recommendations for livelihood education in the region, to be actioned by organizations of a variety of types, whether grassroots NGOs, government bodies, or philanthropies. More project-specific recommendations may apply at the micro level.

1 A collaborative approach

Over the years, the Fund has built partnerships with over 20 organizations in Jordan and Lebanon. It has participated in and helped create consortiums such as the GMPFC, forging connections between organizations and potential employers, ministry representatives, funders, and partners.

These partnerships are essential for addressing complex challenges. By leveraging collective resources and expertise, philanthropists can build sustainable milestones to change. Engaging all stakeholders, including NGOs, businesses, and government entities, in program design and implementation can ensure interventions are contextually relevant and effective.

In general, donors and philanthropies in the region could play a more active role in shaping the regional education agenda through improved coordination, leveraging funds, tracking results, and exploring partnerships with the private sector for innovative financing solutions. Another key lesson learned is that it is valuable to build and leverage networks beyond the life of a funded program.

Specific recommendations and actions may include:

- **Institutionalizing the Zakat system.** Partnerships with governments and philanthropic bodies can channel Zakat toward youth TVET initiatives. Formalizing this system can ensure that resources are consistently available for development projects.
- **Strengthening collaboration between philanthropy, governments, and NGOs.** Multi-stakeholder partnerships could be launched to implement youth upskilling interventions. This may at times include relationships with organizations that advocate for refugee inclusivity and regulatory reforms.
- **Pursuing alternative funding models.** Co-funding and further embeddedness in partner platforms and networks could be linked to more impact and long-term enhancement.
- **Encouraging cross-country learning and adaptation.** The challenges shared between Jordan and Lebanon present an opportunity for cross-country learning.

2 A holistic model

As the survey and focus groups showed, many of the youths interviewed in both Lebanon and Jordan failed in finding a job despite their training. It is clear that vocational training is ineffective if it is not embedded in a holistic career journey: qualifications alone are not sufficient without resources, life skills, and an employment environment that facilitates career development. A holistic approach encompasses all of these stages of the journey, from assessment to follow-up.

More targeted assistance and institutional support for entering the labor market is called for. One of the most important recommendations is the need for securing paid internships. Key informant interviews showed that the practices of internship and apprenticeship are not yet fully valued or understood in Lebanon and Jordan. A more structured approach and more support for employers who are willing to take on interns should be considered—which might require a broader cultural mindset shift in the private sector.

Specific recommendations and actions may include:

- **Emphasizing soft skills.** Soft skills, such as English-language skills, have emerged as important factors for success. Reducing language barriers can be a key factor in participants' effectiveness in the job market. Entrepreneurship and business skills might also be incorporated as a theme in a round of grants.
- **Improving targeted selection and recruitment of diverse participants.** Selecting motivated students through entrance exams, with rigorous criteria applied, could be a strategy for maximum benefit. Pre-assessment may be necessary to ensure that individuals have the basic knowledge and experience to benefit from their chosen course—as proposed by ULYP participants.
- **Implementing a tiered training structure to accommodate different skill levels.** This would improve diversity and inclusivity. Learners at Borderless in Lebanon suggested that this would create a more focused learning environment.
- **Communicating directly and regularly with participants throughout implementation.** After a program is concluded, active follow-up engagement is a practice much appreciated by participants. It is advantageous to continue networking, relationship building, and professional development workshops beyond the life of the program.

3 Expanding the knowledge base

The Fund focuses on the importance of data collection and evaluation to explore solutions and address challenges in a continuous, agile manner. This data-driven approach allows for ongoing refinement and adaptation of programs to maximize their effectiveness and impact. This is particularly important as statistics on the philanthropic sector in the region are scarce. Decisions on priorities in funding tend to be “experience based”—understanding largely acquired through communication with partners and donors. However, evidence-based decision making and program design are hindered by a lack of reliable data on technical and vocational education and training. Thus, there is a need for more independent data collection and analysis.

There is also a lack of broader research on the role of philanthropic bodies in the region, or on the changing conditions under which civil-society organizations operate. Given the limited number of Arab philanthropies operating in Jordan and Lebanon, the concept of philanthropy itself, especially strategic philanthropy, is relatively new and calls for more study and discussion.

In addition to financial challenges, refugee youth are mostly concerned with the problems of work permits and visa restrictions, residency status and the right to work. In both Jordan and Lebanon, the diverse residency laws create challenges for refugees and host communities. While the Fund's philanthropy is focused on helping learners negotiate these circumstances in creative ways, there is space for advocacy organizations to research these problems more deeply.

Specific recommendations and actions may include:

- **Fostering innovation in philanthropy through research.** Research could be funded to understand changing socioeconomic contexts and emerging trends in different industries, maintain agility and flexibility, and encourage data-driven planning to shape national and global education agendas.
- **Expanding impact measurement and adaptation.** The existing robust monitoring and evaluation framework could be strengthened, using KPIs to assess educational and employment outcomes by including regular consultations with learners.
- **Cultivating a more robust assessment culture.** This brings greater transparency and optimizes effectiveness.

4 Scope, scale, and sustainability

There is scope for organizations at all levels to ask questions about the scale and reach of their programs; to think beyond assisting individuals, to implement long-term and sustainable changes for communities. Individual success stories can be recognized, while emphasizing the need for systemic, coordinated approaches supported by donors and NGOs. Any process should directly involve partners, including participants, in developing more efficient and context-specific project design and implementation.

What is the optimal scaling for positive impact? Should the aim be that more of those who are reached are in employment at the end of the program? Rather than providing entrepreneurship bootcamps, should organizations work for better conditions for youth entrepreneurs? Scaling could be focused on finding the optimal balance, where more effort is placed into programming for the right number of students to ensure better immediate impact and to create long-term change. For example, targeting a few geographic areas and providing their residents with high-quality education that will pay off in a sustainable manner may be preferable to targeting many participants with short-term training that may not secure work opportunities.

There's also a need for a wider vision that prioritizes longer-term, contemporary educational approaches. This entails enhancing the quality of training for students and trainers, modernizing school equipment, and greater involvement of the private sector.

Specific recommendations and actions may include:

- **Scaling vocational education and entrepreneurship.** Youth upskilling programs can be expanded and invested in, with more emphasis on entrepreneurship. Projects may be tailored to market needs, providing youth with funding and resources for small business ventures.
- **Tailoring program expansions to be mindful of diversity and new technologies.** Programs could be tailored to promote new technology, enabling youth to be up to date with market needs; this might involve the input of sponsored experts.
- **Expanding capacity building for diverse youth.** Continuous, market-aligned skills development and mentorship can complement traditional education. Diversity of age and background can be ensured by working with high schools, informal education outlets, and training centres.
- **Increasing strategic philanthropy for emergency relief.** A systematic, rapid-response framework for emergencies, using cross-border networks to deploy resources, can enable the continuation of education and training to prepare the young generation for reconstruction and recovery.

5 Flexibility and agility

In a dynamic and challenging landscape, it is key to cultivate a flexible, adaptable approach and structure to stay relevant on the ground, responsive to market demands and changing circumstances. This agility is seen in the Fund's response to unexpected crises and its ability to adjust rapidly to the local needs of different communities in Lebanon and Jordan. By allowing for the continuous redesign of initiatives, approaches, and budgets, the Fund promotes resilience in the face of highly changeable circumstances and needs.

For example, the Fund's agile approach enabled DOT Jordan to consider expanding its offerings beyond traditional coaching. In another example, the Fund involvement in Luminus Education was extended at short notice to compensate for restrictions imposed during the pandemic, while a flexible response to student feedback meant that the program was able to alter its duration, course intake, and operating hours to optimize participation. With ULYP, the Fund provided students with laptops to facilitate learning during the pandemic, and made allowances for student stress. This agility is a hallmark of the Fund's flexible philanthropy.

Specific recommendations and actions may include:

- **Ensuring continuous proactive adaptation.** This can be achieved with flexible project management, responsiveness, and two-way communication with partners.
- **Devising a technical education that is customized and adaptable.** This will keep the training relevant to the job market and its rapidly changing needs.
- **Allowing more choice to enroll in relevant courses and training.** While it is important to integrate digital training, other skills may also be necessary to fill the current gaps in the market and for particular target groups. Choice across a network of organizations is preferable to a limited selection of courses.
- **Taking a participatory approach to addressing social problems.** For all stakeholders, along with the youth who are at the forefront of all challenges, openness to new ideas is recommended with regard to program design, priorities and implementation.

The overarching lessons to be drawn are that philanthropy should extend beyond financial assistance to encompass strategic partnerships, collaboration and knowledge sharing, and holistic, sustainable solutions. These may be tailored to the unique challenges faced by the private and public sectors and communities in Jordan and Lebanon, moving away from generic approaches. To achieve this, more research is required at every level.



Abdulla Al Ghurair
Foundation



عبد العزيز الغرير
صندوق تعليم اللاجئين

Abdul Aziz Al Ghurair
Refugee Education Fund

