

Opening the door to youth employment



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Royal support for a youth employment network in the Middle East and North Africa has been critical to its success



Your goals are our goals, and I am sure that you will strengthen our efforts to ensure that our young men and women achieve their full potential in satisfying and productive employment.' His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan Mabarak Al Nahayan, the minister of tolerance, offered this affirmation of Education For Employment (EFE) during the launch of our office in the United Arab Emirates in May 2016.

EFE's mission – to equip young people with the skills and opportunities they need to build careers that create a better future – is especially relevant in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Jobs could help to anchor peace and stability, but the region remains the hardest in the world for young people to secure employment. In our efforts to change this, the support of His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan has been crucial.

Above: EFE nursing graduates in Palestine.

Launching in 2006, we pioneered demand-driven job training and placement in countries across MENA. The model increases youth employment by assessing the private sector's entry-level labour needs, building soft skills and technical training programmes in response, and linking graduates directly to job opportunities. We later added programmes for young people who have trouble accessing private sector work opportunities but who could succeed as micro-entrepreneurs, if they have the right preparation.

Over the following decade we built locally-run EFE affiliates in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Yemen, which tailored the model to their specific country context. Global hubs in the US, Europe and the UAE helped to start up these local affiliates and offer ongoing support through capacity-building and access to international networks of supporters and corporate partners.

In the UAE, government and business leaders' strong interest in improving the future of young people inspired us to launch a global hub office there. Some of the region's most influential business leaders joined us as EFE-UAE board members. They drew on their local insight and networks to introduce us to royal family members including His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan Mabarak Al Nahayan.

The patronage of His Excellency Sheikh Al Nahayan has been key to our work in the UAE in a number of ways. Not only did he lend his expertise (he was formerly a minister of higher education and scientific research, minister of education, minister of culture and knowledge development and chancellor of several universities) to our launch event in the UAE, His Excellency's understanding of media operations also enabled him to attract public attention to a key social issue. This ensured that regional youth employment, and EFE's model for addressing it, reached the headlines of nearly every major media outlet. Importantly, His Excellency's optimistic vision for the role that youth can play in society aligns strongly with EFE's convictions, making his advocacy authentic and compelling.

Perhaps above all, royal and ministerial support has helped to distinguish EFE from the many other international non-profits that have aimed to establish a presence in the UAE, and elevated our work in the view of multinationals and local Emirati institutions alike. It has underscored our credibility and relevance in a region where reputation is key. Ultimately it has enabled EFE to catch the attention of corporate and institutional entities that have since become partners, helping us to reach youth across the Middle East and North Africa.

Since our first graduating class in 2006, EFE has linked more than 80,000 youth in MENA to the world of work and the dignity and hope that come from employment. None of this would have been possible without the distinctive role that royal patronage has played, both in the UAE and beyond. ●