



Education-to- Employment Forum

*Exploring Education-Career
Pathways, Opportunities,
& Synergies*

October 16, 2024



Welcome to the Education-to-Employment Forum!

Hosted by the Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research, the Education-to-Employment (EdEm) Forum serves as a vital link between research, policy, and practice on employment in the UAE. This event reflects our commitment to addressing the challenges young graduates face as they transition from education to the workforce. It brings together students, job seekers, employers, researchers, and policymakers for meaningful discussions on this pressing issue.

The EdEm Forum focuses on discussing capacity-building programs, university-industry collaborations, and pathways to help graduates thrive in the job market. Applied research plays a key role in aligning education with labor market needs, and through this collaborative effort, we aim to close gaps, enhance communication, and support a smoother transition into meaningful employment.

Our first panel, “Education-to-Employment Pathways: A Chat with Programmatic Stakeholders,” will explore how career development centers and non-profits design and implement employment programs. The second panel, “Unpacking Gender Challenges: A Roundtable on the MENA Paradox,” tackles the underrepresentation of women in the workforce despite rising education levels, examining the societal and structural barriers they face. Finally, our third panel, “LinkedOut: A Conversation with Job Seekers,” focuses on the expectations, struggles, and opportunities young job seekers encounter in the labor market.

By sharing insights from students, job seekers, and employers, we aim to refine pathways that enhance the education-to-employment journey. We are confident that today’s discussions will inspire fresh ideas, spark innovation, and create valuable connections and collaborations for all attendees.

PROGRAM

Time	Activity
8:30 - 9:00am	Registration
9:10 - 9:15am	Opening Remarks Rui da Silva , Al Qasimi Foundation
9:15 – 10:15 am	<u>Keynote:</u> Youthful Expectations: Attitudes and Aspirations Toward Work Among Emiratis and non-Emiratis in the UAE <i>Moderator:</i> Jessica Maluch , Al Qasimi Foundation Seungah S. Lee , HEC Paris in Qatar
10:15 – 10:45 am	Coffee Break
10:45 – 11:45 am	<u>Panel 1:</u> Education-to-Employment Pathways: A Chat with Programmatic Stakeholders <i>Moderator:</i> Janaan Farhat , Al Qasimi Foundation Ammar Ashkar , Manager of Learning and Development, Al Qasimi Foundation Dana Downey , Assistant Dean of Student Affairs; Director of Career Development Center, New York University Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) Rafeef Dahir , Senior Career Development Counselor, Zayed University Nada Jammoul Messaikeh , Co-Founder and Managing Director, Impactiv

PROGRAM

11:50 - 12:50pm

Panel 2: Unpacking Gender Challenges: A Roundtable with Researchers and Employers on the MENA Paradox

Moderator: **Seungah S. Lee**, HEC Paris in Qatar

Janaan Farhat, Research Associate, Al Qasimi Foundation

Mira Zakharia, Senior Director of Human Resources, Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA)

Fatima (Bin Mousa) Alloghani, Managing Owner, Born2Localize

Umer Bhat, Human Resources Director, RAKGAS

12:50 - 1:20pm

Coffee Break

1:20 - 1:30pm

Group Photo

1:20 - 2:20pm

Panel 3: LinkedOut: A Conversation with Jobseekers on Expectations, Struggles, and Experiences in the Labor Market

Moderator: **Derick Zeeno**, Al Qasimi Foundation

Alanood Altamimi, Scholarship Coordinator, Al Qasimi Foundation

David Ho, Associate Consultant, Grant Thornton

Amal Afyouni, Program Associate, Education for Employment

Ahmed Shahin, Incoming Student, HCT Abu Dhabi

2:20-2:30

Closing Remarks

Janaan Farhat, Al Qasimi Foundation

KEYNOTE



Dr. Seungah S. Lee

Assistant Professor of
Entrepreneurship and Organizations
HEC Paris in Qatar

Dr. Seungah S. Lee's research broadly explores how nation-states and organizations negotiate the evolving demands of a globalized world and adapt models to foster entrepreneurship, innovation, and youth development within their local contexts. Her most recent projects include studies on how semi-governmental organizations promote local entrepreneurship and innovation, cultivate youth entrepreneurial spirit, and facilitate the transition from school to work in the Arab Gulf. Prior to her current role, she served as a Senior Lecturer of Social Research and Public Policy at NYU Abu Dhabi and earned her PhD from Stanford University.

“Youthful Expectations: Attitudes and Aspirations Toward Work Among Emiratis and non-Emiratis in the UAE.”

The fast-growing economy of the UAE requires a cadre of talented, skilled workers to sustain its economic transformation efforts. As such, the UAE has been actively pursuing various endeavors to develop, recruit, and retain talent in various sectors and industries. Critical to this work are the roles of companies and organizations that hire young people and universities which facilitate the transition from school to work. Yet, such work is not without challenges. The frequently cited need to “fill the skills gap,” especially among the national population, poses challenges for developing and implementing comprehensive policies for localizing human resources. Companies face challenges in employee engagement and retention of talented nationals and non-nationals alike. Universities are increasingly pressured to facilitate students' post-graduation career pathways and increase their employability through various resources and opportunities. Much of the conversations around youth employability, the labor market, and human resource needs center on their links to the UAE's broader economic transformation goals and the policies and activities of companies and universities. However, what is less frequently discussed is the youth themselves. A better understanding of youth would provide insights into how to retain and motivate them to actively participate in diverse sectors and industries. It would also provide pragmatic insights for universities and other related career development organizations for how to better facilitate the transition from education to employment. This keynote session presents findings from a study that examines the values, preferences, and perceptions of UAE youth toward employment and their perceptions of the role universities have played in their career trajectories. It also offers insights for policy and practice.

PANEL 1

Education-to-Employment Pathways: A Chat with Programmatic Stakeholders



Dana Downey

Associate Dean of Student
Affairs @ NYUAD



Ammar Ashkar

Manager of Learning and
Development @ Al Qasimi Foundation



Dr. Nada J. Messaikeh

Co-Founder and Managing
Director @ Impactiv



Rafeef Dahir

Senior Career Development
Counselor @ Zayed University

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Education-to-Employment Pathways: A Chat with Programmatic Stakeholders



Dana Downey

Associate Dean of Student
Affairs @ NYUAD

Dana Downey is the Associate Dean of Student Affairs at NYU Abu Dhabi, overseeing the Career Development Center, Civic Engagement & Service, and assessment and communications within the division. With higher education experience across three continents, she focuses on fostering curiosity, impact, and growth, while connecting people to opportunities and reducing barriers. Dana has presented at 54 conferences on career advising, employability, data-driven decision-making, and the social impact of education. She holds a BS from the University of Florida, an MA from The University of Texas at Austin, and is pursuing a PhD in International Development & Education at the University of Minnesota.

Dr. Nada J. Messaikeh is the Co-Founder and Managing Director of Impactiv, a social enterprise focused on human capital development and youth empowerment through innovative mentoring programs. With over 30 years of experience in academic leadership and financial management, she has held senior positions at institutions such as NYU Abu Dhabi and Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi. A certified public accountant with a Doctorate in Business Administration from the University of Manchester, Nada is also a passionate advocate for youth and women's empowerment, contributing to mentorship programs in the UAE and Lebanon.



Dr. Nada J. Messaikeh

Co-Founder and Managing
Director @ Impactiv

PANEL 1

Education-to-Employment Pathways: A Chat with Programmatic Stakeholders



Ammar Ashkar
Manager of Learning and
Development
@ Al Qasimi Foundation

Ammar Ashkar is the Manager of Learning and Development at the Al Qasimi Foundation. Ammar previously worked as a Business Development Manager at Saeed Abdalla AlSuwaidi Advocates and Legal Consultants, Dubai, and holds a bachelor's in Civil Engineering from Tishreen University, Syria.

He brings a diverse set of skills and experiences, with a background in business, engineering, and performing arts. His passion is helping others to succeed, striving to be a supportive and empowering force, always looking for ways to make a positive difference in the lives of others. Ammar chose to join the Foundation because of its focus on promoting and advancing education and research in the UAE and beyond.

Rafeef Dahir is the Acting Manager of the Student Careers and Alumni Department and a Senior Career Counselor at Zayed University. With a postgraduate degree in Education and Training specializing in Career Development, she has over 25 years of experience in the UAE focused on creating innovative career and personal development solutions. Recently, Rafeef collaborated with a task force to launch the First Year Experience course and the "Uniquely ZU" framework, aimed at supporting students from their first year to career success.



Rafeef Dahir
Senior Career Development
Counselor @ Zayed University

PANEL 2

Unpacking Gender Challenges: A Roundtable with Researchers and Employers on the MENA Paradox



Janaan Farhat
Research Associate
@ Al Qasimi Foundation



Umer Bhat
Human Resources Director
@ RAKGAS



Fatima Alloghani
Managing Owner
@ Born2Localize



Mira Zakharia
Senior Director of Human
Resources @ Ras Al Khaimah
Tourism Development Authority
(RAKTDA)

PANEL 2

Unpacking Gender Challenges: A Roundtable with Researchers and Employers on the MENA Paradox



Janaan Farhat
Research Associate
@ Al Qasimi Foundation

Janaan Farhat serves as a Research Associate at the Al Qasimi Foundation. In her role, she collects and analyzes data on education and social policy, writes reports and policy papers, and organizes conferences and symposia, including the biennial GCES conference. She is also a freelance copyeditor and academic consultant, serving as the co-founder of “Student Proofreading Service.” Janaan holds a BA in International Studies from Leiden University, specializing in the Middle East. Her research interests include education, youth employment, cultural heritage, and public policy in the Gulf and Middle East.

Umer Bhat is the Human Resources Director at RAKGAS, bringing over 14 years of HR leadership experience across global organizations, including Coca-Cola, PPG, and Brasil Foods. With expertise in driving strategic HR initiatives, Umer focuses on addressing key organizational challenges such as talent management, diversity, and inclusion, and fostering sustainable workplace practices. He holds an MBA from London Business School.



Umer Bhat
Human Resources
Director @ RAKGAS

PANEL 2

Unpacking Gender Challenges: A Roundtable with Researchers and Employers on the MENA Paradox



Fatima Alloghani
Managing Owner
@ Born2Localize

Fatima Alloghani is a leading expert in Emiratisation strategy with over 20 years of experience. She has held key roles at Schlumberger Oil and Gas Services, Dubai World/Nakheel, Etihad Airways, Total ABK Academy, Abu Dhabi Terminals, Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank, and currently serves as Managing Owner of Born2Localize. Fatima has advanced the UAE Government's Emiratization efforts, hiring over 2,000 Emiratis at Majid Al Futtaim Group, with a goal of recruiting 3,000 more in partnership with NAFIS. She holds a master's degree in Global HR Management from the University of Liverpool and is pursuing a doctorate at the University of Strathclyde Business School, focusing on national talent engagement and legacy creation in mega projects and events.

Mira is a senior expert in organizational strategy and transformation, specializing in operational human resources, leadership, and culture. With a degree in Human Resources Management and over 20 years of experience in the public and private sectors — particularly in oil and gas, healthcare, and education — she is based in Abu Dhabi. Mira aids leadership teams in developing effective HR functions, including talent acquisition, performance management, and diversity initiatives. She has delivered growth solutions regionally and internationally, impacting both organizational performance and employee engagement.



Mira Zakharia
Senior Director of Human
Resources @ Ras Al Khaimah
Tourism Development Authority
(RAKTDA)

PANEL 3

LinkedOut: A Conversation with Jobseekers on Expectations, Struggles, and Experiences in the Labor Market



David Ho

Associate Consultant
@ Grant Thornton UAE



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PANEL 3

LinkedOut: A Conversation with Jobseekers on Expectations, Struggles, and Experiences in the Labor Market



David Ho

Associate Consultant
@ Grant Thornton UAE

David Ho is currently an Associate Consultant at Grant Thornton, UAE. Originally from Vietnam, he received his bachelor's degree in social research and public policy at NYU Abu Dhabi. During his studies, David gained valuable internship experience across the UAE as well as professional experiences in Washington, D.C., USA, and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. David is particularly passionate about the job market in Vietnam, having completed his thesis on the entry-level job landscape there. His insights into this topic reflect his commitment to understanding and improving employment opportunities for young professionals in his home country.

Amal Afyouni specializes in higher education policy and workforce development, focusing on advancing research and policies that support student success. She received her bachelor's degree in political science and sociology from Ohio University, and a master's degree in public policy from Vanderbilt University in May 2023. Recently returned to the Middle East, Amal is committed to bridging the gap between education and employment. Through her efforts, she aims to foster a more inclusive educational environment that promotes lifelong learning and professional growth.



Amal Afyouni
Program Associate
@ Education for Employment

PANEL 3

LinkedOut: A Conversation with Jobseekers on Expectations, Struggles, and Experiences in the Labor Market



AlAnood Altamimi

Scholarship Coordinator
@ Al Qasimi Foundation

AlAnood Altamimi graduated with a degree in Political Science from the United Arab Emirates University in 2018, following her education at Julfar High School. During her undergraduate studies, AlAnood completed an internship at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which provided her with valuable experience in the field. She has also engaged in various volunteering activities and workshops, fostering her personal and professional development. In June 2024, she interned at the Al Qasimi Foundation and began working full-time as a Scholarship Coordinator in September 2024.

Ahmed Khalisdar graduated from WellSpring Private School in Ras Al Khaimah, the UAE. Raised in Queens, New York, and Ras Al Khaimah, Ahmed has a unique perspective on diverse job markets worldwide. He also formerly participated in the Hands-on-Learning Program run by the Al Qasimi Foundation in 2023. Currently taking a gap year, Ahmed plans to enroll in HCT Abu Dhabi in spring 2025 to study logistics and supply chain management. He hopes to bring new insights to the Education to Employment Forum as an aspiring job seeker and incoming university student.



Ahmed Khalisdar

Incoming Student
@ HCT Abu Dhabi