

# GPE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



Fourth-grade students in class at Al Zyadi School, Lahj governorate, Yemen.  
UNICEF/UN0580137/Gabreez

**Quality education equips individuals and nations for the future. The level and relevance of learning and skills gained today will dictate an individual's employment, wealth and well-being tomorrow. The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) helps countries build stronger education systems as a springboard to stronger economies and more stable societies.**

## THE CHALLENGE

- ▶ Across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), **one in five children are out of school** due to conflict, extreme climate and school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Education facilities have been destroyed and are unable to host students in classrooms.
- ▶ For children who are in school, **education quality** is a main concern as only half **meet the lowest international benchmarks** for skills in reading, mathematics and science. **School completion rates drop significantly** at the secondary level. Education systems struggle to provide **early childhood education**, especially in rural and high-conflict areas.
- ▶ Conflicts and crises have increased **vulnerability among children and youth**, exacerbating gender inequalities. Girls are at higher risk of early marriage, gender-based violence and to be out of school in lower secondary. Boys are more likely to experience child labor, be recruited into armed forces and to not complete upper-secondary school.
- ▶ The pathway from learning to earning is strained as the region has **the highest youth unemployment rates in the world**. Nearly half the population is under the age of 24, but they lack access to

learning and work experience to equip them with skills for future employment. As of 2018, it was estimated close to one third of youth in North Africa and more than one out of five youth in Arab states were unemployed.

## GPE APPROACH

Education is a prominent driver of peace and a springboard to stronger economies and fairer, more stable societies. GPE's unique partnership approach supports countries to transform their education systems at scale to give children and youth the skills they need to thrive.

Across the MENA region, there are **six GPE partner countries** that have received a combined total of **US\$445 million** in grant support: **Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen**.

There are five countries **eligible to join the partnership** including **Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Syria**. The **West Bank and Gaza** is also eligible to access GPE funding to support vulnerable children and education civil society advocacy.

Although not a partner country yet, **Syria** has received GPE support through exceptional approval of an accelerated grant of **\$3.75 million** for children's education in the aftermath of the earthquake in February 2023, especially for children with disabilities and with out-of-school status.

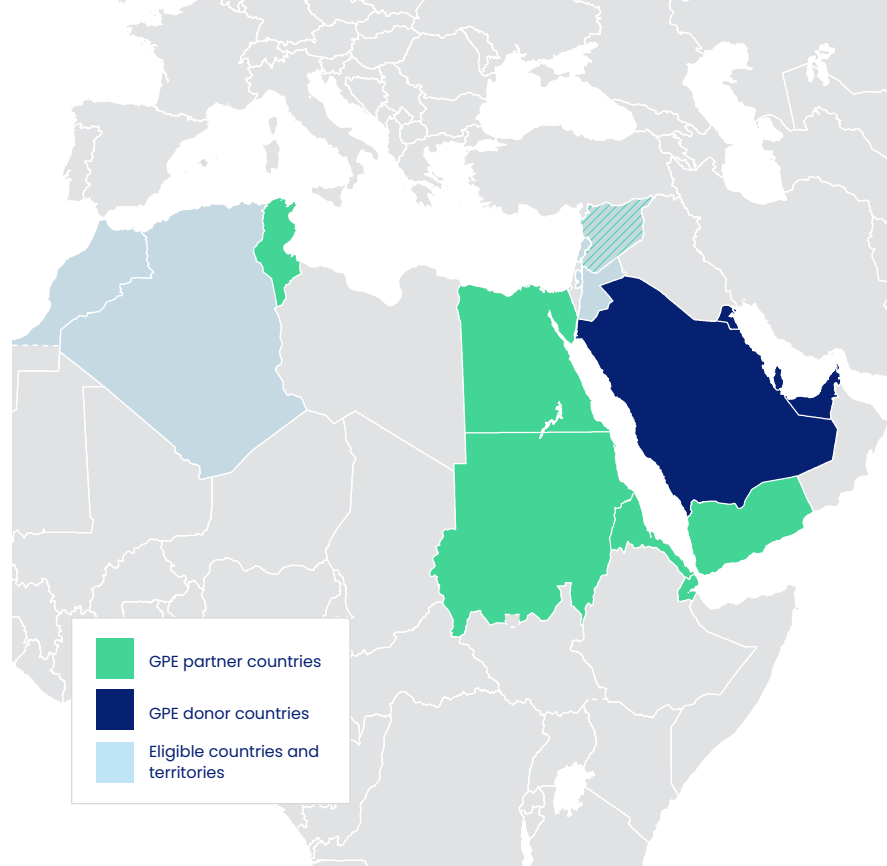
## GPE DONORS

In the Middle East, donors promote the importance of economic empowerment and investment to transform education systems, contributing resources to address education challenges experienced across the region and the world that are tied to conflict, gender equality and skill development for employability, especially in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

Across the region, there are **four GPE donors**:

- ▶ The **United Arab Emirates (UAE)**, a donor since 2018 and the first from the Middle East, has contributed a total of **\$139 million** to GPE. The UAE promotes the need to educate all girls—an imperative at the heart of GPE’s mission—and sits as the sole Arab donor alternate member on the GPE Board. **Dubai Cares**, a UAE-based global philanthropic organization that advocates for children’s rights, was also GPE’s first philanthropic foundation partner.
- ▶ **Kuwait**, a donor since 2021, has pledged **\$30 million** to GPE and invests in education through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development.
- ▶ **Qatar**, a GPE donor since 2022, has pledged **\$20 million** through Education Above All. Education is at the core of Qatar’s 2030 vision in its focus on becoming a hub for the provision of quality education for all.
- ▶ **Saudi Arabia**, a donor since 2021, has pledged **\$38 million** to GPE. Saudi Arabia promotes education as central to building human capability through strong basic education in the early years, youth skill development and lifelong learning opportunities. As part of Saudi Vision 2030, they have launched the Human Capability Initiative.

The **Islamic Development Bank**, whose member countries represent more than **one third of GPE partner countries**, has also collaborated with GPE since 2019 to increase domestic and international funding for quality education through innovative financing mechanisms.



## THE PROMISE OF INNOVATIVE FINANCING: ACG SmartEd

The **Arab Coordination Group Smart Education Financing Initiative (ACG SmartEd)** is an innovative financing mechanism that addresses the global learning crisis by scaling up education financing. It aims to deploy **\$500 million** in blended funds for education across the Islamic Development Bank’s (IsDB) 37 member countries. Launched at the RewirED Summit in December 2021, ACG SmartEd provides \$4 for every \$1 mobilized through the **GPE Multiplier**—another GPE innovative financing mechanism. SmartEd offers a unique opportunity to **make education investments holistic**, simultaneously addressing school infrastructure and key components of education quality.

In May 2023, the first ACG SmartEd allocation of **\$280 million** to **Cameroon**, the **Kyrgyz Republic** and **Uzbekistan** was announced. Uzbekistan has received its allocation of **\$160 million** and is using this funding to construct and equip more than 80 schools and to enhance their education management information systems to improve data availability for education monitoring and decision-making.