

Middle East and North Africa

Regional EducationUSA Profile

Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen

27

EducationUSA Advising Centers in the Region

17 Comprehensive
10 Standard
0 Reference

EducationUSA advising centers in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are located at U.S. embassies and consulates, America-Mideast Educational and Training Services, Inc. (AMIDEAST) offices, American Centers, and a World Learning center in Algeria. Although all centers offer virtual advising, EducationUSA advising centers for Iran, Libya, and Syria are 100 percent virtual operations. The region includes 27 centers (17 comprehensive and 10 standard) in 19 countries and territories with 33 advisers who provide up-to-date services and programming.

EducationUSA advisers across MENA provide expertise, support, and information about local higher education systems and the broader postsecondary sector landscape in the region. In addition to advising students and college counselors, EducationUSA centers offer U.S. higher education institutions (HEIs) and governmental partners opportunities to engage student audiences through tailored programs and activities that support increased student mobility. Gulf countries such as Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) offer government scholarship programs to their citizens. EducationUSA advisers maintain contact with scholarship offices to connect them with prospective HEI partners' students interested in U.S. study.

MENA is a dynamic and complex region divided into three subregions: North Africa, the Levant, and the Gulf. Students

across North Africa have historically chosen study options in Europe, while many Gulf countries strive to expand capacity and retain domestic students. Newly developed higher education options are likely to attract some MENA students.

EducationUSA advisers in the MENA region work in an environment of frequent change and opportunity. Despite a decade of overall population growth, the *2023 Open Doors® Report on International Educational Exchange* indicates a 1.5 percent decrease in students from the region studying in the United States during academic year (AY) 2022-2023 compared to the previous year. This is the sixth consecutive year of decline, with Bahrain (-4.1 percent), Oman (-5.7 percent), Qatar (-19.2 percent), Saudi Arabia (-12.2 percent), and the UAE (-7.2 percent) all decreasing as a result of scaled-back government scholarship programs, changes in mandatory military service requirements, growing higher education options in the region, and increased competition from other countries. After a decade of consistent growth, student numbers from Kuwait have also dropped for a fourth year (-8.4 percent). In a surprising turn, student mobility from North Africa saw an overall increase of 7.2 percent for the first time in many years: Egypt (7.1 percent), Morocco (9.3 percent), Algeria (12.7 percent), and Tunisia (10.2 percent).



An electronic version of this publication containing hyperlinks is available at <https://educationusa.state.gov/us-higher-education-professionals/recruitment-resources/global-guide>



The Levant also saw growth in mobility. Specifically, Jordan saw a 7.5 percent increase, and Syria a 4.4 percent increase.

The MENA region boasts many EducationUSA Competitive College Clubs (CCCs) through which advisers meet regularly with highly motivated and engaged high school students to prepare them for study on U.S. campuses and guide them through the college application process. Advisers help students identify their best institutional fit by exploring their academic, cultural, geographic, and financial needs and preferences. CCC activities include community service projects, book clubs, virtual programs, lectures from guest speakers, test preparation activities, and information sessions on the application process. All CCCs foster student leadership skills. EducationUSA advising centers in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the Palestinian Territories, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Yemen manage CCC programs. The EducationUSA Opportunity Funds program serves high-achieving prospective students who demonstrate financial need and operates at advising centers in Egypt, Iran, and Lebanon.

EducationUSA advising centers in MENA conduct strategic outreach in collaboration with public diplomacy and consular sections at U.S. embassies and consulates. Half of the advising centers in MENA are based at an embassy or consulate and are located within the public affairs sections. REAC: Regional Managers and EducationUSA advisers hold regular education briefings and webinars for U.S. HEIs about local educational systems, trends, opportunities, and recruitment strategies.

Regional Overview

The United States remains a top higher education destination for students from MENA, despite recent declines in the overall number of students from the region enrolled at U.S. institutions. The decline in enrollment is partly due to economic pressures, currency devaluation, and the rise in locally and regionally available options. Some governments have also narrowed the lists of approved institutions or areas of study for scholarship programs. For example, Kuwait eliminated dentistry and pharmacy scholarship programs to the United States. However, scholarship opportunities remain available to many

students in the region and are designed to support emerging labor market needs.

Local and regional institutions attract students because of their cost, location, and partnerships with international institutions. Growth in student mobility from MENA depends partly on labor market demands, driving the need for specialized training unavailable in the region. The growth of online study opportunities has created interest in hybrid programs, online degrees, and partnerships between U.S. and regional institutions. The future of online higher education will continue to influence students' study abroad plans and preferred coursework modalities. As nations move beyond the pandemic, it is unclear whether countries that require degree attestation will continue to recognize online coursework and degrees. Countries that successfully leverage digital education will likely see more opportunities to attract and retain international students in the future.

Over the past decade, MENA has experienced one of the highest population growth rates of any region in the world. Demand for postsecondary

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education far exceeds the capacity of local universities in many countries. In addition, variability in the quality of higher education systems leaves some students without local options to develop the skills necessary to enter competitive labor markets. Science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) fields are in high demand, and there is growing interest in health fields, including medicine, health sciences, and public health. Students in North Africa and the Levant are increasingly interested in exploring the benefits of community colleges, including lower costs, transfer flexibilities, and limited standardized test requirements. Students in Gulf countries are largely interested in studies in aeronautics, business, cybersecurity, tourism, antiquities, and a broad range of medical fields. Governments in the region are also pushing for growth in the number of students pursuing education-related fields.

Most countries in the region have engaged with the U.S. government and U.S. colleges and universities to expand local higher education capacity through institutional linkages. Many universities in the Gulf are interested in collaborating with U.S.-educated faculty to develop institutional capacity and are eager to connect with U.S. institutions for joint research and teaching opportunities. Although students in the Gulf region have adequate access to universities in their home countries, they are also interested in studying in the United States, particularly at the graduate level. U.S. institutions are encouraged to collaborate with the

region's ministries of education and higher education to implement programs that create pipelines of students equipped with skills that will prepare them for educational opportunities in the United States.

Recent Trends

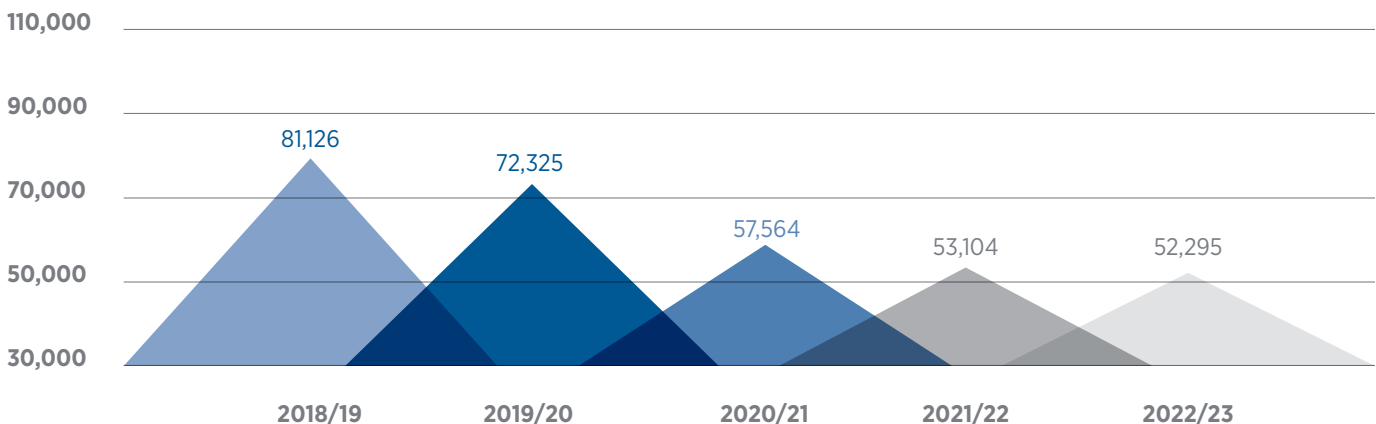
Many countries in the region are eager to include U.S.-trained professionals in their workforce development efforts. Governments support scholarships and short-term grants for local faculty to experience U.S. study tours, research projects, and short-term training programs for government officials and administrators. Scholarship programs link government objectives and priority fields of study to meet national labor market needs. Other programs encourage work experience through internships, Curricular Practical Training (CPT), and Optional Practical Training (OPT) in the United States. According to the *Open Doors* data, there was a 4 percent increase in MENA students enrolled in OPT in AY 2022-2023.

Students across MENA pursue study abroad in a range of countries. Some choose Canada because of the perception that the country offers lower tuition rates and a less complex student visa process. The UK is attractive to some students because of its geographic proximity and historical ties to Gulf countries like Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE. France remains a viable option for students from North Africa due to geographic proximity and linguistic affinity.

Compared to five years ago, students in the MENA region now have more opportunities to study closer to home, and increasing numbers are choosing institutions in Oman, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, and the UAE. Kuwaiti universities are adding new degree programs and improving physical capacity. Competition for international students in the Gulf is growing as Qatar, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia establish themselves as regional educational hubs. Over the past year, several Gulf nations eased visa and employment restrictions on foreign nationals, allowing them to remain in the country while working to support their studies. For example, the UAE has 73 HEIs. Over half of these universities have a student body composed of students from outside the country. Outstanding students in the UAE are eligible for a five-year student visa extended to family members. This attracts students from Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Egypt. U.S. branch campuses in the region – including six in Qatar and three in the UAE – are growing in popularity. Many American-style HEIs in the region have attained accreditation from one or more U.S. accrediting organizations, including one in Egypt, two in Lebanon, one in Morocco, one in Qatar, one in Saudi Arabia, and six in the UAE. Qatar offers a live-to-classroom distance learning model through Arkansas State University under the Global Studies Institute (GSI) umbrella. This model will transition over the next two years to all in-person classes.

Student recruitment practitioners from U.S. HEIs must often seek permission

Student Mobility in the Region (Five-Year Trend)



from the local government before entering secondary schools. The security process takes time, especially in STEM-focused and other government schools. Though some students demonstrate significant financial need, these secondary institutions prepare highly qualified students for merit-based U.S. scholarships. Countries such as Jordan, Kuwait, and the UAE require student recruitment fair organizers to collaborate with local agencies. Government permission is also often necessary to host virtual fairs, especially in countries with approved institution lists.

Students and parents in the MENA region express concern about safety and other social issues in the United States. Gun violence is of particular concern, and international media coverage of shooting incidents on university campuses amplifies anxiety and fear. Social media campaigns, including the EducationUSA #StudyWithUS hashtag and the #WhyUS program, started by Temple University, have been widely shared to engage broader audiences and address many of these concerns. Personal connections are critical to establishing positive, realistic impressions of the United States. HEIs are encouraged to consider in-person visits to the region as conditions allow.

Top Senders and Countries to Watch

Below are the top 10 countries in the region by number of students studying in the United States. *Student Mobility Facts*

and *Figures* sheets for all countries are available on the [EducationUSA website](#).

1. Saudi Arabia
2. Iran
3. Kuwait
4. Egypt
5. Jordan
6. Lebanon
7. Oman
8. Israel
9. Morocco
10. UAE

What to Expect in the Next Three to Five Years

Kuwait is the region’s third-largest sender of international students to the United States. Although qualified students can receive fully funded government scholarships, they must achieve a minimum score on a standardized English exam to qualify for the benefit, limiting the pool of eligible students. Recent pandemic-related interruptions to the academic year have contributed to a decrease in qualified scholarship applicants in the short term. EducationUSA Kuwait launched several new initiatives to promote study in the United States, including outreach at Kuwait’s largest mall and a wide-ranging social media campaign that set an embassy record for YouTube views. The funding of new grants to increase access to Kuwaiti schools helped create college advising positions in high schools. The U.S. embassy sponsored the participation

of a large group of students in the EducationUSA Academy Connects virtual precollege program.

As Saudi Arabia continues to implement its Vision 2030 plan for social and economic change, its government proactively seeks opportunities for training, apprenticeship, and in-person learning for recent graduates and rising leaders. There are growing opportunities for capacity building and exchanges in previously closed fields, such as the arts and tourism, and fields tied to targeted growth areas, such as space, conservation, and medicine. Significantly, Saudi entities are willing to fund such trainees, internships, or professional programs. The fields of interest include: space, including aerospace engineering and satellite data visualization technologies and interpretation; conservation, including wildlife management, marine sanctuaries, and national park management and interpretation; cybersecurity, including technologies to secure critical infrastructure and best practices on cyber policy, international security cooperation, and data protection; museum management, including conservation and public outreach strategies; film, with a particular emphasis on hands-on experience in “below the line” technical crew roles, such as production design, costume design, lighting, sound mixing, and visual effects; and medicine and public health education, including opportunities for job shadowing, research,

27.0%

Algeria has the largest percentage growth in the region over the last five years (*with over 100 students*)

Five Countries of Origin (with over 100 students) with Highest Percentage Growth, International Students in the Region (Five-Year Trend)

Country	2018/19	2022/23	% Change
Algeria	238	302	27%
Lebanon	1,672	2,097	25%
Egypt	3,675	4,247	16%
Morocco	1,461	1,603	10%
Jordan	2,435	2,608	7%

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and clinical experience in nonmedical residency programs.

Due to continued domestic economic challenges, governments across the region have changed scholarship designs, titles, and foci while establishing stricter eligibility requirements and limitations on study location. In many cases, scholarship recipients are limited to specific fields of study at institutions on government-approved lists, significantly limiting choice. HEIs should highlight programs that support priority fields, as identified by ministries of education and higher education, and be prepared to offer documentation demonstrating student compliance with scholarship requirements. In Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, students no longer apply directly to scholarship programs, and an offer of admission must be granted from an eligible institution before students can apply for financial aid. This change has

resulted in fewer students studying in the United States and a corresponding decline in students enrolling in U.S.-based English language institutes before their studies. *Open Doors* reported a 16.7 percent decrease in non degree programs, with the largest drop from Gulf countries.

U.S. institutions should expect more interest in partnerships, linkages, and U.S. faculty visits to the region. Local institutions see their U.S. counterparts as models for institutional structures and curricular development. STEM fields are the highest priority across the region. Many regional institutions have allocated funding to send faculty to the United States for training and advanced research. There is also interest in earning accreditation from U.S. accrediting bodies.

Loss of jobs, weakening currencies, and higher food costs in countries like Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Yemen

continue to make academic options viable for many students only if full scholarships are offered. In contrast, many Gulf countries, such as Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, have experienced greater currency stability, resulting in more flexibility for students to explore study opportunities abroad regardless of financial aid. However, economic challenges have not affected all families equally, and many continue to have the resources to support their children's higher education. HEIs should consider the MENA region's broad range of economic situations in their outreach strategies to attract a diverse array of top students, including government scholarship recipients, self-funded students, and those requiring financial support.

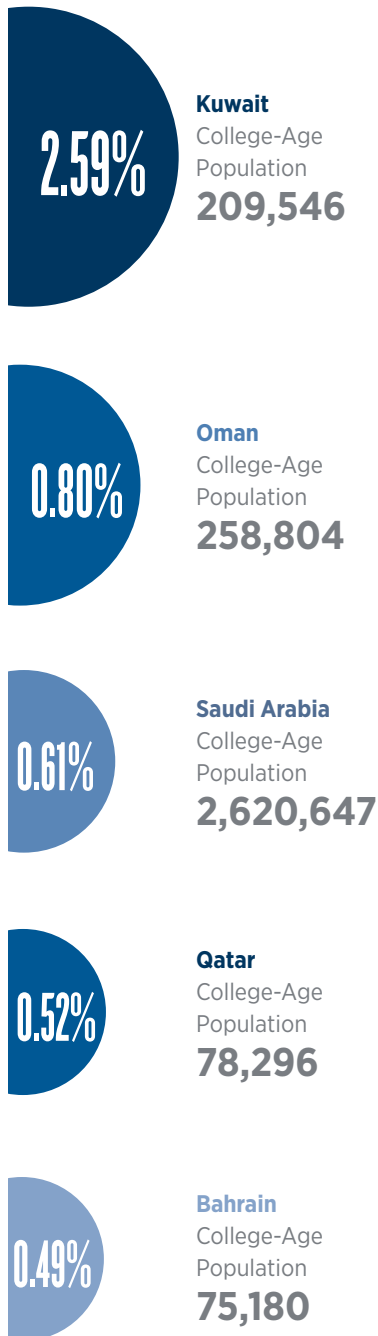
Several governments sponsor college and university fairs and value the participation of U.S. institutions. EducationUSA advisers can provide guidance on local conditions, participate in events, help obtain required approvals from local authorities, and facilitate communication with higher education ministries. U.S. institutions can also send faculty to EducationUSA-sponsored events. EducationUSA advisers can arrange faculty-to-faculty dialogues and provide strategies for engaging counterparts in collaborative research projects and other joint ventures. Provided they have authorization from the college or university, alumni of U.S. institutions are also welcome to attend and represent their alma maters.

Virtual Engagement and Social Media Usage

According to the 2024 [Digital Global Overview Report](#), there were 377.86 million internet users in the MENA region in January 2024. Internet connectivity is widely available in the region, although Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, and Iran have the slowest speeds for fixed connections. Bandwidth sufficient to participate in webinars or download large files is a challenge for those in areas affected by power outages, slow connection speeds, or limitations on connectivity. These issues are particularly pressing in Algeria, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen.

Mobile-friendly content is recommended, as the average web traffic from mobile

Five Countries of Origin in the Region with Highest Per Capita College-Age Student Mobility to the United States



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics; Indicator: 2023 or most recent Population of the official age for tertiary education, both sexes

devices across the region is close to 70 percent. The most used web browser is Chrome, with some usage of Safari, Edge, Samsung Internet, and Opera.

As local conditions permit, centers offer face-to-face programming while maintaining a virtual presence. Virtual programming’s broader engagement and reach to previously untapped audiences have proven that sustaining a combined approach is necessary. The most popular platforms for webinars include Zoom, Facebook Live, and Google Meet. YouTube is popular for viewing prerecorded sessions, and Instagram Live and Reels have become more widely used in the region. WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger are frequently used for texting.

Virtual EducationUSA advising services are available to any/all students—including individuals who may currently reside in a secondary location that is not their country of origin. Iranian and other students may explore the online resources available at <https://educationusa.state.gov/> for information on both in-person and virtual services world-wide.

EducationUSA webinars offer opportunities to engage students creatively while informing them about educational opportunities in the United States. EducationUSA centers in the MENA region continue to develop innovative approaches to student outreach, including the recent launch of mobile applications in Bahrain and the UAE that provide students and parents with information about upcoming EducationUSA programs.

Online webinars and programs are less popular in Kuwait than in neighboring countries. Instagram and YouTube have the most traction, with 3.62 million users at the beginning of 2022, reaching 84 percent of the population. In-person engagement with Kuwaiti students goes far, and when face-to-face meetings are safe and permitted, in-person recruitment will be essential.

Successful Recruiting Strategies

- Consider high school guidance counselors a resource and conduit to reach larger student audiences. The EducationUSA network has enhanced efforts to engage these key stakeholders and provide information about the U.S.

higher education sector and college advising resources. Local counselors frequently meet to share best practices in the admissions process and to discuss topics such as applying for student visas, writing school profiles, meeting institutional application deadlines, and identifying institutions that best meet students’ needs. When possible, coordinate with recruitment colleagues to organize virtual school visits, as not all schools can accommodate the high demand for engagement. In Kuwait, the U.S. embassy is working with the ministry of education and local providers to introduce a robust college advising program in government public schools. Six trained counselors, alongside EducationUSA, work directly with these schools to educate students about studying in the United States. Eighty percent of government scholarship recipients are from public schools. This program can be a driving force toward increasing the number of Kuwaitis pursuing study in the United States.

- Translate websites and promotional materials into Arabic, Farsi, Hebrew, and/or Kurdish and record videos featuring currently enrolled students from MENA to engage parents and students with limited English-language skills. High-quality video and photo content can convey a sense of the campus and local communities that will resonate with students and their families. Students, particularly undergraduate students, are eager to learn about campus life, including housing arrangements and dining options that meet religious needs. Institutions are also encouraged to highlight student support services, such as academic tutoring, extracurricular

Regional Student Totals Top Five Countries of Origin

Country	2022/23	% Change
Saudi Arabia	15,989	-12%
Iran	10,812	16%
Kuwait	5,427	-8%
Egypt	4,247	7%
Jordan	2,608	8%

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activities, social programs, public safety precautions, and medical services on campus.

- Parents and family members in the MENA region often play an essential role in students' decision-making about institutions and programs of study. In some cases, graduate students will be accompanied by dependents and seek institutions that will accommodate their families. Institutions should consider crafting recruitment messages with these audiences in mind. If feasible, return to the region for yield events.
- U.S. HEIs can benefit from relationships with their alumni when recruiting abroad. Alumni may offer helpful insights into their experiences as students, hold key positions in the public and private sectors, and appreciate the opportunity to engage with admissions officers from their alma maters. Don't underestimate word of mouth when it comes to recruitment plans.
- Engaging currently enrolled international students during recruitment and orientation is another helpful strategy for reaching prospective students. EducationUSA invites all students and alumni to submit an [interest form](#) to connect with EducationUSA advisers eager to develop joint programming, student success profiles, and other engagement opportunities.
- Although EducationUSA advisers can offer guidance and advice about Gulf scholarship programs, U.S. institutions are encouraged to contact scholarship

organizations directly with specific questions.

- North Africa is a largely untapped market for international students. HEIs are encouraged to contact EducationUSA for assistance in planning a trip or virtual engagement focused on Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, or Tunisia.

Institutional Partnerships

HEIs throughout MENA are eager to explore partnerships with U.S. institutions that provide opportunities for reciprocal student and scholar exchanges, joint research ventures, and dual-degree programs. EducationUSA REACs and advisers can inform local institutions about the U.S. higher education sector and provide strategic guidance on establishing successful partnerships. Beyond EducationUSA advising services, the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) facilitates other in-person and virtual exchanges to support student mobility, institutional partnerships, and higher education capacity building, including the [Fulbright Program](#) and the [International Visitor Leadership Program \(IVLP\)](#).

National governments across the MENA region include ministries that centralize the curriculum, accreditation, training, and strategic priorities for each country's education sector. As a result, governments are critical stakeholders for institutions seeking to establish partnerships with local universities. EducationUSA REACs and advisers can facilitate engagement among institutions interested in regional

collaboration. In many countries, the U.S. embassy or consulate can also connect interested parties. In Kuwait, there is a growing interest in establishing partnerships with technical colleges, aviation institutions, 2+2 programs, and short-term programs. Saudi universities are interested in Arabic-language programs, study abroad partnerships, training, faculty exchange programs, and U.S. academic programs based in the kingdom. Universities in the UAE seek partnerships with HEIs in surrounding emirates beyond Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

While many institutions in the region are interested in establishing partnerships, it is crucial that all parties clearly outline goals and expectations. U.S. HEIs should be prepared to highlight their strengths and offer suggestions for mutually beneficial arrangements. For example, many countries in MENA are interested in partnerships for English-language instruction, which could be accomplished through faculty exchanges, specific in-country workshops, or virtual initiatives. While virtual exchanges may be a great approach in some cases, issues with connectivity or staff continuity could present a challenge in countries like Yemen.

Foreign Government and Private Funding

Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE fund government-sponsored scholarship programs and maintain lists of approved receiving institutions. U.S. institutions can raise awareness and increase the chance of inclusion on these lists by visiting these countries' cultural missions in Washington, DC, and conducting outreach by email or phone. Proactive engagement can offer U.S. institutions the opportunity to inform government authorities about their programs of study, express interest in hosting students from the region, and explain how U.S. institutions are prepared to be effective and qualified hosts for their students. In many of these countries, the number of scholarships available for students to study in the United States has declined in the last few years due to budget constraints. U.S. HEIs should highlight the quality and affordability of their programs and work closely with funders and organizations that offer scholarships to prospective students.

U.S. Study Abroad

Top Five Receiving Countries in the Region

Destination	2021/22	% Change
Israel	2,714	404%
United Arab Emirates	1,176	58,700%
Morocco	712	3,460%
Jordan	618	506%
Egypt	227	468%



Bahrain. Through the Crown Prince's International Scholarship Program (CPISP), the government of Bahrain has historically provided 10 scholarships to support overseas study for students, most of whom choose to study in the United States. This year the program will add 10 additional scholarships, bringing the total to 20. All scholarship students enter at the undergraduate level and can receive full funding through a doctoral degree. In addition, some qualified students apply for the program but are not selected. With the right resources, advice, and support, these high-caliber students could choose to study in the United States.

Oman. Since 2012, Oman's Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) has offered scholarships for Omanis to pursue undergraduate and graduate studies in the United States. More than 500 students study abroad annually and go to 21 scholarship destinations, with the United States and the UK hosting the largest numbers of students. Most scholarships are awarded to support

“Omanization,” an initiative to increase the number of Omani citizens employed in industries of strategic importance to Oman. Over 75 percent of Omanis studying in the United States are on a scholarship program. The number of undergraduate and graduate scholarships decreased last year, after the Direct Entry Scholarship (DES), an external undergraduate scholarship for students, was put on hold in fall 2021. Despite this, many Omani students continue to pursue higher education studies in the United States. For undergraduate study, there are two types of government-funded scholarships: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education (STEM); and Education, Social Sciences, Art, and Management (ESAM). The MoHE selects receiving institutions for all students in these scholarship programs. At the graduate level, the MoHE offers a National Postgraduate Scholarship supporting study in key subjects at select institutions. To be eligible for a National Postgraduate Scholarship, applicants must have received an unconditional

offer of admission at an MoHE-approved university. Visit the [MoHE website](#) for more information.

Kuwait. The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) offers a scholarship for undergraduate studies that includes an initial year of English-language instruction to ensure proficiency. In 2018, the Kuwaiti government began requiring that all scholarship recipients earn a score of 5 or higher on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or a 45 or higher on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) to receive a scholarship to study abroad. This policy shift reduced the number of students eligible for scholarships. There is a generally low standard of English-language proficiency among Kuwaiti public school students, who formerly comprised approximately 85 percent of scholarship recipients. Pharmacy studies is no longer an approved field of study for Kuwaiti scholarship recipients in the United States, and rigorous requirements for admission to U.S. medical and

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dentistry schools have caused more Kuwaiti students to pursue these fields in other countries, mainly the UK and Ireland. The MoHE also offers graduate scholarships to qualified applicants who have already received funds from the ministry's undergraduate scholarship program. Additionally, government agencies and private institutions such as Kuwait University, the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, the Civil Service Commission, the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, and the Kuwait Investment Authority offer scholarship opportunities for graduate students.

Libya. The Libyan government continues to grant scholarships to top students; however, due to the processing time for funding (in some cases taking years), many students have been left unable to pursue study overseas.

Qatar. The government of Qatar offers scholarships to Qatari students pursuing studies abroad. Factors considered for eligibility include high school exit scores, English-language proficiency, and unconditional acceptance to a government-approved U.S. university and field of study. In addition, male students must complete one year of national service or be given a waiver before pursuing postsecondary studies. While female students have the option to complete national service, they are not required to do so before continuing their education. Scholarship recipients must also commit to working at one of 30 government entities upon graduation. Other companies, such as Qatar Airways and Sidra Medical Center, and industries, such as the banking sector and the gas and petroleum sector, offer scholarships, most of which adhere to the government program requirements.

Saudi Arabia. The government of Saudi Arabia has restructured its scholarship program to better align with its economic and workforce development goals. Saudi Arabia launched the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Scholarship Program in 2022, supporting high-achieving high school and university graduates in one of four tracks: Pioneer Path, Supply Path, Research and Development Path, and Promising Path. The Pioneer Path (Alrowad) supports students pursuing

bachelor's and master's degrees in various fields at 30 HEIs worldwide. The goal is to increase competitiveness in disciplines that support sustainable development and contribute to the kingdom's Vision 2030 initiative. The Supply Path (Emdad) targets training, bachelor's, and master's degrees in fields that meet the needs of the labor market. It supports students pursuing study at 200 HEIs around the world. The Research and Development Path supports students pursuing doctoral degrees in select fields at 200 HEIs around the world. The Promising Path (Wa'ed) supports students pursuing bachelor's and master's degrees in sectors and fields that are growing in demand. For more information about the program, visit the [Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Scholarship Program's website](#).

Other scholarship programs include the Ministry of Culture Scholarship, the Saudi Space Commission Scholarship, the AlUla Scholarship, NEOM, the Mawhiba foundation, the Mohammed bin Salman Foundation (MISK), and the Institute of Public Administration (IPA). Companies like Aramco and Saudi Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC) also provide employees with scholarships to study abroad, focusing on the United States.

UAE. Of the 1,502 Emiratis studying in the United States in AY 2022-2023, 76 percent were undergraduate students, while just over 17 percent studied at the graduate level. There was a 27 percent increase in students staying for OPT and getting work experience before returning home. A majority of students received full scholarship support. Ten government-sponsored scholarship programs offering full funding are available to UAE students to support study in the United States. Some scholarships are specific to a particular emirate, and benefits differ depending on the government entity awarding the scholarship. The Ministry of Education (MOE) scholarship program is open to all UAE students; recipients receive full tuition support, a monthly stipend of more than USD\$3,200, an annual airline ticket, funds for books and clothing, medical insurance, and other benefits. UAE scholarship students must attend one of the 50 U.S. universities on the MOE-approved list and pursue majors approved by the scholarship-granting institution. To qualify, students must gain

admission at an approved institution, meet English-language proficiency requirements, and achieve a high grade-point average in grade 12. Similarly, the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) provides scholarships for study at select U.S. HEIs. Approved majors, many of which are in STEM fields, are determined by anticipated UAE job market needs.

ADEK launched the [Khotwa \(RizeUp\) Scholarship Program](#) in September 2022 to expand Emirati students' access to education opportunities abroad and open new knowledge horizons for high school graduates. The 1.9 billion-dirham RizeUp program will send up to 6,000 Emirati students from the emirate of Abu Dhabi to community colleges in the United States and Canada by 2028. Students can then transfer their credits to an international or local university to complete their bachelor's degrees. Throughout the program rollout, the public affairs section at the U.S. embassy in Abu Dhabi connected ADEK with U.S. community colleges and homestay organizations, including facilitating a meeting with Community Colleges for International Development, one of the largest community college organizations in the United States. The U.S. embassy will introduce additional contacts and best practices to ADEK as they build out the RizeUp program, which will expand Emirati students' access to education opportunities abroad and equip students with future-ready skills to contribute to the growth of the knowledge economy. In January, 75 percent of the first batch of 135 Emirati students were attending 16 community colleges across the United States.

Many oil companies and other regional private firms offer scholarships to current and future employees working in STEM fields. Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, Dubai Police, SABIC, and Saudi Aramco have programs for high school students who are on track to become employees after obtaining a bachelor's degree in the United States.

Regional Economics and Market Demands

Students in the MENA region have traditionally prioritized STEM fields when exploring programs of study. Most government scholarship programs in



Gulf countries specify approved majors based on labor market and workforce development needs. Some countries have developed nationalization practices to reduce the need for expatriate labor. Qatari and Emirati nationals, for example, are minority groups in their country's population, and expatriates fill many roles in the workforce. Still, ministries of labor seek to expand the employment of citizens in priority fields and encourage their citizens to pursue key fields of study. These include innovation, entrepreneurship, space science, alternative and renewable energy, engineering, artificial intelligence, hospitality, culinary studies, health, music, performing arts, sciences, business, and information technology.

In addition to popular STEAM fields, some emerging sectors, including cybersecurity and English-language instruction, offer opportunities for U.S. recruiters. Saudi students may be interested in short-term English language programs to prepare for graduate studies, qualify for scholarships,

and attain a competitive advantage in the labor market. Peace studies are also gaining prominence, especially in current and former conflict zones. New fields of study are emerging in Saudi Arabia as the country opens its borders to visitors and tourists, whose presence drives demand for expertise in managing historical sites, national parks, theme parks, and concerts. In March 2020, the Saudi Ministry of Tourism launched the Your Future Tourism campaign, which aimed to create 100,000 jobs by the end of 2021 and one million jobs by 2030.

Regional EducationUSA Events, Fairs, and Conferences (in person and virtual)

EducationUSA centers in the region organize in-person and virtual events throughout the year. Consult the [EducationUSA website](#) and Facebook pages for information about the growing number of webinars, fairs, and workshops offered in specific countries across the region. REACs also share regular updates via the MENA newsletter for HEIs, issued six times per year, and via a closed

Facebook group, [EducationUSA in the Middle East and North Africa](#).

Throughout the year, EducationUSA advising centers offer country briefing webinars about local education systems, challenges and opportunities, and country-specific developments that impact student recruitment. U.S. HEI representatives can further engage by meeting with U.S. embassy public affairs and consular staff (subject to scheduling availability), presenting at an EducationUSA advising center, and visiting local high schools or universities. HEI representatives are encouraged to contact EducationUSA centers to explore options. Upcoming fairs and exhibitions in which EducationUSA is participating are listed below.

EducationUSA REACs maintain a [list of regional fairs and opportunities](#) in which U.S. HEIs may participate.

Bahrain. The Bahrain Education and Training Exhibition (EDUTEX) is usually

Middle East and North Africa



held in March at the Bahrain International Exhibition and Convention Center, and the [University of Bahrain Career Fair](#) takes place in April.

Jordan. EducationUSA will host a university fair November 15-16.

Oman. The annual [Global Higher Education Exhibition \(GHEDEX\)](#) in Muscat and Sohar is Oman's largest higher education expo. It takes place February 4-6 in Muscat and May 3-4 in Sohar. The GHEDEX fall fair in Muscat will be in October. The virtual [Education and Training Exhibition \(EduTrex\)](#) and the IDP education fair held in September are also popular. This year's [EduTraC](#) Oman exhibition will be held October 13-15.

Qatar. EducationUSA is hosting an education fair in September.

Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Education's International Conference and Exhibition for Education (ICEE) offers insights into the Saudi education market and gives opportunities to build strategic alliances and business contacts. The conference will be held at Riyadh's International Convention and Exhibition Center.

UAE. [Najah Expo](#), the official government-sponsored education expo, typically attracts more than 1,600 visitors. It will occur in Abu Dhabi October 27-29 and in Dubai November 6-7.

Virtual Team. EducationUSA virtual advisers for Iran, Libya, Syria, and Yemen will host a virtual university fair on September 4.

Government Scholarship Programs. ICEF Middle East Scholarship Summit provides a unique opportunity for selected international educators to network with a large gathering of scholarship providers and universities sending students abroad from the Middle East.

All Countries. EducationUSA centers host regular web chats and video conferences for students in the region. Advisers offer focused online discussions on study options and undergraduate and graduate admissions issues. Advisers also present weekly or monthly sessions on financial aid, personal statements, and standardized tests.

All advising centers conduct predeparture orientations in the summer, and some centers also conduct orientations in January. U.S. institutions are encouraged to advise accepted students to visit the [EducationUSA website](#) or contact their local EducationUSA center for dates and times. Even students new to EducationUSA or first-time visitors can attend a predeparture orientation.

Many centers host monthly meetings with guidance counselors from surrounding secondary schools. These meetings offer opportunities for U.S. HEIs to engage with local schools and prospective students. Interested representatives should contact an adviser.

U.S. Study Abroad in the Region

For the first time, *Open Doors* data shows substantial growth in the number of U.S. students traveling to the MENA region for study abroad programs. The COVID pandemic affected U.S. study abroad programs across all regions, resulting in a 91 percent decline overall, according to 2022 *Open Doors* data. The 2023 *Open Doors* data indicates a rebound in the region, with 5,559 U.S. students studying in MENA in AY 2021-2022. Israel hosted 2,714 of these students, making it the leading study-abroad destination in the region and the 12th most popular in the world. The UAE and Morocco hosted the region's second and third most students. Saudi Arabia, which has welcomed international students for a long time, is making it a focus and priority to have more international students come for long- and short-term programs in religion, Arabic, and other fields. Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Education and Saudi

universities have shown interest in hosting American students and would welcome discussions about collaborations, especially with exchange programs. A new initiative, Study in Saudi, provides information about long- and short-term programs, deadlines, the application process, and Saudi universities. Students can learn more and apply through the [Study in Saudi website](#).

The State Department's USA Study Abroad branch is collaborating with government and higher education stakeholders throughout the region to build capacity for U.S. study abroad programming. USA Study Abroad's [Increase and Diversify Education Abroad for U.S. Students \(IDEAS\) Program](#) awarded 37 grants to U.S. colleges and universities in 2024 to develop study abroad programs across the world focusing on various foreign policy themes, including economic development and entrepreneurship, global health, and technology and innovation. Two U.S. colleges and universities are using 2024 IDEAS grants to expand their higher education partnerships and study abroad programming in Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. USA Study Abroad also provided funding to four U.S. embassies, consulates, and binational Fulbright Commissions in the region in 2024 to implement U.S. Study Abroad Engagement Grant projects that will build foreign higher education institutions' capacity to partner with U.S. colleges and universities and host more U.S. study abroad students.

Although EducationUSA advising centers in the region do not host study abroad programs, some centers offer internship opportunities and are eager to work with American student volunteers. Study abroad staff can inform students about potential internships and connect students with a local advising center.

U.S. study abroad students are welcome to join EducationUSA programming activities throughout the region. U.S. institutions are encouraged to provide information and resources to study-abroad participants prior to their departure from the United States so that they can promote the institution to local audiences. Students have delivered general presentations about their institutions, joined conversation groups,

Best and Worst Times of the Year to Interact with Students (in person and virtual)

Algeria. The best time to visit is from November to February. Avoid traveling during Ramadan and the Eid holidays.

Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar. The best time to visit is from October to February. Avoid traveling during Ramadan and the Eid holidays. There are many international school calendars due to the large expatriate community. Consider the Indian school timetable as well as exam preparation times.

Egypt. The best times to visit are from October to December and mid-February to March. Avoid visiting during Ramadan, Eid, and other major holidays, including Sham el Nessim (April) and Sinai Liberation Day (April 25).

Iran, Iraq, Libya, Palestinian Territories, Syria, and Yemen. Travel is not advised (at the time of publication). Virtual interaction is recommended. Consult [travel.state.gov](#) for more information.

Israel. The best times to visit are from November to January and March to May. Avoid significant holidays, such as New Year and Passover, the dates for which can vary each year.

Jordan. The best times to visit are October to November and February to May. Avoid traveling during major religious holidays, such as Ramadan, Eid, Easter, or Palm Sunday.

Lebanon. The best time to visit is from mid-October to March. First-term exams take place in early January. Avoid visiting during major religious holidays.

Morocco. The best times to visit are October to November and March to April. Avoid visiting during Ramadan and the Eid holidays.

Oman. Visit during GHEDEX, Oman's largest [higher education expo](#), typically held in April. Another good time to visit is during [EduTraC](#) in October in Muscat.

Saudi Arabia. The best time to visit is from October to February. Avoid traveling during Ramadan and the Eid holidays. Due to the large expatriate community, there are many international school calendars. Consider the Indian school timetable as well as exam preparation times. In AY 2021-2022, Saudi Arabia moved to three semesters instead of two, resulting in long weekends and shortened summer vacations in July and August. Saudi Arabia has simplified its visa process, making travel to the country much easier.

Tunisia. The best time to visit is from October to November and January to mid-February. Avoid major exam periods (early December and late February to early March).

UAE. The best time to visit is from October to February. Avoid traveling during Ramadan and the Eid holidays. There are many international school calendars due to the large expatriate community. Consider the Indian school timetable as well as exam preparation times.

assisted with mock admissions interviews, and participated in alumni fairs and other events that allowed them to engage with local high school and university students.