**AUF funds 2 Iranian university COVID-19 projects**

As part of its special COVID-19 action plan, the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF) has launched an international call for projects from 10 April to 5 May 2020 to support, within its member institutions, initiatives by young researchers related to the pandemic. Although an exceptional fund of 500,000 euros was initially devoted, the great success of this call, nearly 2000 projects from 79 countries, and the quality of the proposed projects have led the AUF to double its fund which now reaches one million euros in order to finance 92 projects from 87 member institutions in 44 countries.

In the Middle East region, 8 projects were selected, 4 from Lebanon, 2 from Iran, 1 from Cyprus and 1 from Djibouti. The 2 Iranian projects are led by 2 different universities: the design of a portable respirator for COVID patients, led by Maryam KHALILI of the University of Teheran, and the design and manufacture of a micro-fluid metamaterial biosensor for the rapid detection of COVID-19, led by Amin KHAVASI of the Sharif University of Technology.

The objective of this call is to accompany the academic community's response to the pandemic and to support the development of solutions with an immediate technological and/or social impact to help health systems and populations cope with this unprecedented health crisis.

Eligible applications were evaluated by committees of experts attached to the 10 AUF regional direction in the Americas, Asia-Pacific, the Caribbean, Central Africa and the Great Lakes, West Africa, Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, the Maghreb, the Middle East and the Indian Ocean.

The submitted topics covered a wide variety of areas, the selected projects include assistance programs for vulnerable populations, making of protective materials for frontline workers, research projects on medical aspects, digital applications to study the pandemic, etc.

*On the occasion of the announcement of the results, the Rector of the AUF, Slim Khalbous, declared: « The international call for projects "Young Researchers" launched with our COVID-19 plan has been an unprecedented success and I am delighted with this broad mobilization of the French-speaking scientific community! The AUF had planned to allocate a fund of 500,000 euros, however, in view of the very large number of quality projects received, I have decided to exceptionally increase this special fund to one million euros in order to support a larger number of projects. Furthermore, I am already taking steps today with our partners to seek additional funding and invite them to support innovative French-speaking youth together!»*

**About AUF**

AUF is the French-speaking world’s leading university network, with 990 member institutions from 118 countries, spread over five continents. Created 60 years ago and characterized with a wide experience in research and digital knowledge, AUF is involved in many fields such as training, research, university governance, entrepreneurship, student employability, and sustainable development. [www.auf.org](http://www.auf.org)