



*My SFF Journey: A Story of Growth
and Grit*

Bakhtibegim Qurbonova

A Glimmer of Hope: Discovering the Shams Family Foundation

My name is Bakhtibegim Qurbonova, and I come from Tajikistan. After high school, I was overwhelmed by questions like “Where should I apply?” and “What should I study?” I sent applications to local universities, but inside I dreamed of going abroad. That’s when I found the Shams Family Foundation (SFF), an organization that helps students study at South East European University in North Macedonia. At first, I was scared—I had no experience, and the visa process looked impossible.

But SFF believed in me. They helped me fill out every form, coached me for the visa interview in a neighboring country, and answered all my questions. When I finally boarded the plane to Skopje, my heart was full of hope and nerves.

“The best view comes after the hardest climb.”

Arriving in North Macedonia felt like starting a new book. Every street, café, and classroom was full of possibilities. Through this journey I learned that courage means moving forward even when you’re afraid, and that a helping hand can turn big challenges into exciting adventures.



From the very start of our journey, numerous members of the SFF team visited us to offer support and motivate us to stay resilient.



A Guiding Light

SFF believes education is the best way to empower every human being to *'become the best version of who they can become'*.

One of the greatest sources of support, guidance, and motivation throughout my journey has been *Kamruddin Shams*. Whenever we felt discouraged, he was always there with the right advice at the right time. He treated each of us with care, offering guidance that was thoughtful and tailored to our individual situations. More than that, he taught us to look beyond the present moment and think a few steps ahead, helping us see the bigger picture and believe in our potential.

After I graduated from university successfully, I still felt a bit lost about what to do next and what decisions to make. The advice I received from him became one of the most valuable and timeless gifts in my life, guiding me forward when I needed it most.

A Life-Changing Opportunity: My Erasmus Exchange Experience

Another major turning point in my university journey was my *Erasmus exchange experience*. Thanks to the support of my university SEEU and the Shams Family Foundation (SFF), I was given the chance to join this program as an international student. In my third year,

I spent a semester studying in Seville, Spain. This experience gave me incredible motivation. It was inspiring to learn alongside students from across Europe, in a diverse and dynamic environment. Sharing knowledge, ideas, and traditions with people from different cultures was truly rewarding. It strengthened my passion for education and encouraged me to aim higher in my academic and personal growth.



A Dream Realized: My Graduation Day

Graduation day was a moment I had dreamed of for years — finally wearing the cap and gown, walking across the stage, and holding my diploma in my hands. The excitement was overwhelming. We were the first group of students from the Shams Family Foundation (SFF) to graduate from the university, which made the day even more special.

As I stepped onto the stage, my heart beat faster than ever before. Seeing all the professors and feeling their recognition made me proud and honored to be part of this community. Although I felt a little sad that my relatives

couldn't be there to share the moment, the presence of the SFF members filled that space with warmth and support. It was a day I will never forget — the perfect ending to one chapter and the start of a new one.

"Degree unlocked. Adulting loading... please wait." :)



My Journey into Software Testing

While I was still a student, I had the opportunity to complete a six-month remote internship as a software tester at a *Swiss company, Intelact*. This experience allowed me to develop valuable skills and gain practical knowledge in the field.

After graduating, I focused on finding the right job. I actively searched for opportunities both in North Macedonia and abroad. Finally, my hard work paid off — I secured a remote position as a *QA Engineer at Imperum*, a company based in the Netherlands. I have now been working there for almost a year, continuing to grow professionally and apply everything I've learned along the way. (photos from our workshop)



‘There was no way I could have imagined this path when I was still in high school in my home country. At that time, studying abroad, building a career, and growing personally felt so far out of reach. The challenges seemed too big, and at moments, I doubted whether it was possible at all.

But thanks to the incredible support of the Shams Family Foundation, what once felt impossible became my reality. They not only guided me through each step — from choosing the right path, to settling into a new country — but they also gave me the confidence to believe in myself. Their advice, encouragement, and dedication were like a light showing the way forward during uncertain times.

Looking back, I realize that no dream is too big when you have the right people supporting you. I will always be thankful to SFF for helping turn my hopes into achievements and for inspiring me to keep striving for more.’

Bakhtibegim