Refugees Country Briefing

SYRIA

This document was developed in the framework of the EU-funded project "Refugees and Recognition – Toolkit for recognition of higher education for refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation" by the ENIC-NARIC centres of France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom.

nuffic

CIMEA

CIeP Enic-Naric France

NOKUT

UK NARIC

This country briefing – specially developed to help with the evaluation of credentials of refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation – should give orientation on the education system in Syria in the light of recent political and economic developments in this country. It presents a systematised overview on its higher education system and links to the available information sources that are useful for the evaluation of qualifications of refugees coming from Syria, even in cases where candidates present insufficient or lack of documentation.

Syrian Arabic Republic

Source: CIA World Factbook

Location: Syria lies at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. It is bordered by Lebanon and Israel on the west, Turkey on the north, Iraq on the east, and Jordan on the south.

Population: 18 million

Ethnic Groups: Syria is home to diverse ethnic and religious groups, including Syrian Arabs, Greeks, Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds, Circassians, Mandeans and Turks.

Languages: Arabic is the official language

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

May 2017

2

1. Current (political) situation and its impact on the educational system

Modern Syria gained its independence from France in 1946, but has lived through periods of political instability driven by the conflicting interests of various groups. Since March 2011 political power, long held by a small elite, has been contested in a civil conflict. Initially the conflict was sparked by the Arab Spring and turned into a complex war involving regional and international powers.

The war in Syria has generated an overwhelming humanitarian crisis. The conflict has a profound impact on the Syrian people and on the availability of vital public services, including access to education. As the crisis is now in its sixth year an estimated 11 million Syrians have fled their homes and many Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance in the country. Among the people escaping the conflict the majority have sought refuge within Syria itself or in neighbouring countries. According to the UNHCR 4,8 million have fled to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq, and 8,7 million are internally displaced in Syria. At the same time more than one million have requested asylum to Europe[1]. A significant (but decreasing) part of the country is controlled by the 'Islamic State'. Other areas are contested between the regime and various opposition groups.

Prior to the crisis, the majority of Syrian children were enrolled in primary and lower secondary/ preparatory school (aged 6 to 15) and around 70% of the children attended secondary school. Today, a total of 5.4 million children and youth (aged 5-17) inside Syria and 1.4 million refugee children and youth in the neighbouring host countries are in need of educational assistance[2].

Within Syria, one in four schools have been either damaged, or used as shelter and for military purposes. [3] The lack of safe learning spaces, a shortage of qualified teachers, learning materials, uncertainty over examinations as well as water, sanitation and hygiene undermine the access to education and the quality of education. In areas that are controlled by the government, the Ministry of Education is making efforts to provide secondary education and continues to administer the final exams. Due to security reasons, many students choose to complete a self-study program the last year and only show up to take the final examinations. Despite positive steps taken by governments and other organizations to provide education for Syrian refugee children in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, about half of the school aged Syrian children in those countries were not in formal education in 2015. [4]

Syria was a lower middle income country with a fairly high level of education and extensive higher education system. When the Ba'ath party took control of the country in 1960s, it made education one of its priorities. The higher education landscape was made up of a

---

[1] http://data.unhcr.org
[2] Syria Crisis Education Strategic Paper, London Conference 2016
[3] UNICEF. 2015. Education under Fire
[4] Syria Education Sector Analysis, the effects of the crisis on education in Syria 2010-2015 Unicef Mena Regional office.

network of public and private universities and higher institutes, all under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education. Relatively large numbers of both men and woman benefitted from a form of post-secondary education. In the 2012-2013 academy year, there were approximately 662.000 registered students in higher education institutions throughout Syria. [5]

Due to heavy fighting it is, in particular, in the north and northeast of the country that universities have felt the full force of the crisis. At present, a number of universities are operating at limited capacity, have closed their doors or have transferred to other areas. The majority of the public universities are located in the 'safer' regime held areas, some secondary branches in other cities had to close.
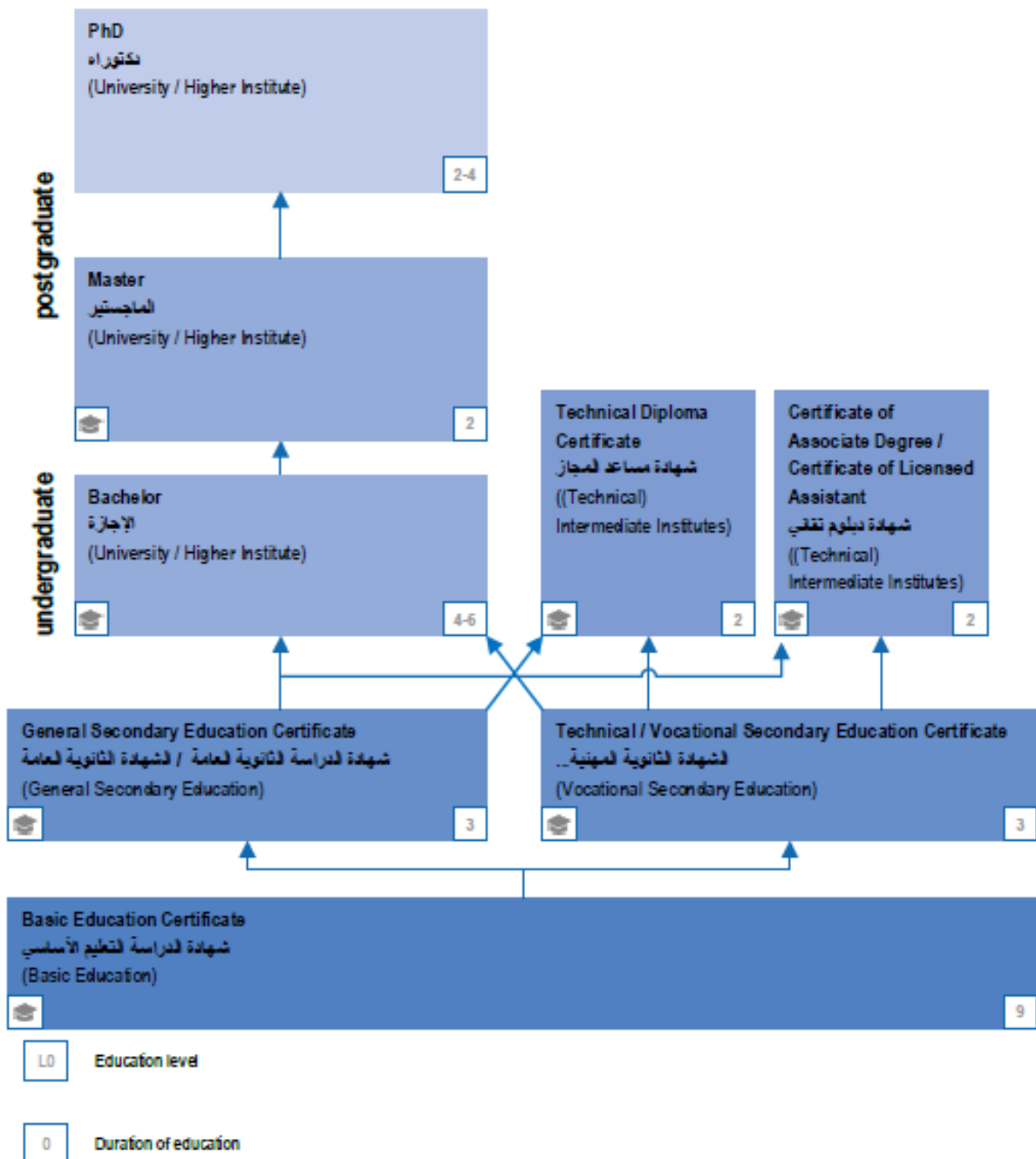
On the surface, many universities in Syria still function. However, higher education is severely affected by the cumulative effects of the conflict and the related deterioration of infrastructure and disruption of essential services. There has been a decline in the level of education and the number of students. As students dorms are now used to house refugees within Syria, going to university can be extremely dangerous. Students and academic staff in some cases have to travel quite far across checkpoints, dealing with concerns regarding compulsory military service. [6] Besides this, the ongoing instability and violence have meant that it has become more and more difficult for students to keep up with their studies. As a result, the number of students enrolled at universities has dropped by a large percentage. Many of the individuals fleeing the war scene of Syria are academic teachers, students or young people at the age of becoming students.

Approaches to evaluation of the qualifications from Syria can be different in different ENIC-NARIC countries depending on the mandate and practices of the evaluation authorities. More information on assessment practices of documentation from Syria can be obtained from the E-learning modules to be developed within the framework of the EU-funded project "Refugees and Recognition – Toolkit for recognition of higher education for refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation" by the ENIC-NARIC centres of France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom.

---

[5] Ministry of Higher Education: http://mohe.gov.sy/mohe/index.php?node=555&cat=2863
[6] Military conscription is tightened and mandatory for all men over the age of 18. In 2014, the Syrian government limited educational deferments. There are reports of 'flying checkpoints' near university campuses to catch military service evaders. The prioritization of military service also impacts Syrian university academic staff. The government, for example, issued a rule that higher education institutions only hire faculty who have completed their military service, and in addition, university administrations could withhold salary in order to compel an employee to report for service.

2. Education chart

Source: https://www.epnuffic.nl/en/publications/find-a-publication/education-system-syria.pdf

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

May 2017

5

3. Education system

Primary and secondary education

Basic Secondary Education Certificate (شهادة الدراسة التعليم الأساسي)

- Compulsory education
- Basic and lower secondary education
- Official duration of studies: 9 years.
- Grants access to upper secondary education.

> Upon completion of compulsory education (up to grade 9) students are admitted to secondary education, which is one of two three-year programmes: Technical/Vocational and General Secondary Education.

Technical / Vocational Secondary Education Certificate (الشهادة الثانوية المهنية)

- Vocational upper secondary education
- Official duration of studies: 3 years.
- Grants access to post-secondary vocational education or the labour market

General Secondary Education Certificate (الشهادة الثانوية العامة / شهادة الدراسة الثانوية العامة)

- General upper secondary education (literary section/scientific section)
- Official duration of studies: 3 years
- Grants access to higher education in Syria.

Post-secondary technical vocational education and training

Technical Diploma Certificate (شهادة دبلوم تقاني)

- Post-secondary vocational education
- Official duration of studies: 2 years
- Grants access to the labour market in Syria

Certificate of Associate Degree/ Certificate of Licensed Assistant (شهادة مساعد المجاز)

- Post-secondary vocational education
- Official duration of studies: 2 years
- Grants access to the labour market in Syria.

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

May 2017

6

Top performing student can be admitted to bachelor's degree programmes.

Higher Education

By law, all students with a General Secondary School Certificate are guaranteed admission to public higher education institutions. Access is based on the general secondary education specialization (literary/ scientific) and results of the final exams.

Bachelor's degree (الإجازة)

- Higher education, can be either research-oriented or professionally oriented
- Official duration of studies: 4-6 years depending on the program
- Fields of engineering, architecture, pharmacy, dentistry and veterinary medicine (5 years) and general medicine (6 years)
- Minimum GPA is 50% or 60 %
- Research/project/internship
- May grant access to second cycle higher education programmes in Syria.

Master's degree (الماجستير)

- Higher education, can be either research-oriented or professionally oriented
- Official duration of studies: 2 years
- Minimum GPA is 60%
- Thesis is required
- May grant access to the PhD in Syria (with a GPA of at least 75 %).

PhD (الدكتوراة)

- Higher education, research-oriented
- Official duration of studies: at least 3 years
- Thesis and the publication of at least 2 academic articles are required.

For more information, please see the links to existing country profiles.

4. Education institutions

Education is centralized. The Syrian government plays a major role in the supervision and control of education. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the quality assurance of primary and secondary education. Higher education is supervised by the Ministry of Higher Education, with the Council for Higher Education being the coordinating body. Higher education institutions can only operate with government approval. Syria has both public and private universities. There are 7 public universities and 20 private universities.

Website of the Ministry of Education

* http://moed.gov.sy/site/ (in Arabic)

A list of recognized higher education institutions is available on the website of the Ministry of Higher Education:

* http://www.mohe.gov.sy (in Arabic)

Due to the unstable situation, it is difficult to obtain accurate information about what is happening on the ground. There's been limited scope for independently researching and verifying any facts, events or circumstances in Syria.

Campuses of Aleppo University, Al-Furat University, Damascus University and Tishreen University have all been attacked. Although (on the surface), the website of the Ministry of Higher Education indicates that universities are currently operating normally, various sources report that the universities/campuses in areas Deir ez-Zor, ar-Raqqah,Aleppo, Idlib and al-Hasaka have been hit the hardest.

The Ministry of Higher Education allows students to transfer to institutions in more stable areas, provided it offers their academic major. Damascus University, Tishreen University and Baath University accepted large numbers of students from various governorates because of the problems in their own universities.

Public institutions
Public Universities educate the vast majority of the students in Syria:

Damascus University (جامعة دمشق)
http://www.damascusuniversity.edu.sy/
Is under the control of the Syrian government.

Aleppo University (جامعة حلب)
http://www.alepuniv.edu.sy/
Main campus and campuses in Idlib are closed. The Ministry of higher Education suspended all exams.

Tishreen University (جامعة تشرين)
http://www.tishreen.edu.sy/
Is under the control of the Syrian government. Has been attacked several times.

al-Baath University (جامعة البعث)
http://albaath-univ.edu.sy/
Is located in Homs, activities are regularly disrupted because of the conflict.

al-Furat University (جامعة الفرات)
http://www.alfuratuniv.edu.sy/ - website is offline
Located in Deir ez-Zor is under the control of the regime, but in the outskirts of the city 'Islamic State' has control. Colleges of the university in the city al-Hasaka were closed. The university set up offices on other university campuses where students are able to graduate with a degree awarded by al-Furat university.

Syrian Virtual University (الجامعة الافتراضية السورية)
https://www.svuonline.org
Head office is located in Damascus and under control of the Syrian government.

University of Hama (جامعة حماه)
http://www.hama-univ.edu.sy/

Private institutions

Some private universities set up temporary campuses in safer locations of the capital Damascus (however with deficiencies in infrastructure). Qasyuon University transferred classes from its main campus to a secondary school in Mezzah neighborhood (Damascus). Ittihad Private University, founded in Raqqa, moved its campus to the Institute of Fine Arts in Mezzah. The International University for Science and Technology (IUST) moved the faculty of pharmacy to a temporary campus at a public sports facility in Damascus.

5. Certification / Documentation

National format norms and composition of the file

Syrian qualifications need to be checked closely for authenticity.

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union
May 2017
9

The General Secondary Education Certificate is usually only issued in Arabic. Exam results for secondary school students from 2014 onwards can be verified online through the website for the Ministry of Education (please see useful sources/links).

Higher education diplomas are issued in Arabic. Some private universities issue documents in English. Documents are legalized by the issuing authority and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Refugees often flee suddenly, without the ability to take much with them. Refugees may come with

> For more information and sample documents, please see the links to existing country profiles or contact your national ENIC-NARIC centre.

full documentation, partial documentation, or nothing at all. Even when open, some institutions may be unresponsive or refuse to verify documents for various reasons. Refugees may have good reasons for not directly requesting documents from institutions.

Link to good practices: EAR HEI manual Chapter 12 Refugees
http://www.eurorecognition.eu/manual/ear_manual_v_1.0.pdf

6. Useful sources and links

Links to official/national sources

Website of the Ministry of Education

- http://moed.gov.sy/site/ (in Arabic)

Website of the Ministry of Higher Education

- http://www.mohe.gov.sy (in Arabic)

Guide to the system of Higher Education (in Arabic)

- http://mohe.gov.sy/SD08/msf/1416124099_part11.pdf

Admission guidelines for students 2016-2017

- http://www.mohe.gov.sy/MEHO/file/final%20book.pdf (in Arabic)

Existing country profiles

Education System Syria, EP-Nuffic.

- https://www.epnuffic.nl/en/publications/find-a-publication/education-system-syria.pdf

Syria Educational Profile, WES.

- http://www.wes.org/ca/syriaprofile/syriacountryprofile.pdf

World Data on Education 2010/11, UNESCO

- http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Syrian_Arab_Republic.pdf

Higher Education in Syria, European Commission Tempus

- http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/participating_countries/reviews/syria_review_of_higher_education.pdf

Presentations

Recognition of Syrian Qualifications: the experience of NOKUT, EAIE Amsterdam 9-10 June, 2016

- http://www.eaie.org/dam/jcr:b2ddabce-c028-4faa-aa32-fdd340b37790/Thursday%20Practices%20in%20higher%20education%20admissions,%20recognising%20quilifications%20and%20admitting%20refugees.pdf

The Syrian Refugee Crisis, methods for Credential Assessment, WES webinar april 22, 2016

- http://www.iie.org/~/media/Files/Programs/Syria-Scholarships/The-Syrian-Refugee-Crisis-Methods-for-Credential-Assessment.pdf?la=en.

News coverage on education in the region

Al-Fanar Media, news and opinion about higher education

http://www.al-fanarmedia.org/

"Bibliography on Syrian Refugees and Higher Education." **Al-Fanar Media**. www.al-fanarmedia.org/2015/12/bibliography-on-syrian-refugees-and-higher-education/

Al-Monitor, the pulse of the Middle East (Arabic/English)

http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/home.html

7. Verification sources

General Secondary School Certificate online database

It is possible to verify the exam results achieved in secondary education for 2014 graduates onwards. Go to:

http://moed.gov.sy/site/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AC-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9

- Input government
- Input registration number

The results are displayed on the screen and include the student's names, name of the school and overall results.

Higher education

Damascus University has an **online database** for 2016 graduates. There are two ways of verification: using either the barcode or the serial number that appears on the certificates.

- Go to http://www.damascusuniversity.edu.sy/Auth
- From the pull-down menu select "English" (if preferred)
- Input serial code number
- Input Captcha code
- Click "Check"

The results are displayed on the screen and include the student's names, Date of birth, degree name, overall grade average and classification. At the bottom of the page there is a document viewer generator which can generate an Adobe PDF file of the student's graduation record.

Existing country profiles

Education System Syria, EP-Nuffic.

- https://www.epnuffic.nl/en/publications/find-a-publication/education-system-syria.pdf

Syria Educational Profile, WES.

- http://www.wes.org/ca/syriaprofile/syriacountryprofile.pdf

World Data on Education 2010/11, UNESCO

- http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Syrian_Arab_Republic.pdf

Higher Education in Syria, European Commission Tempus

- http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/participating_countries/reviews/syria_review_of_higher_education.pdf

Presentations

Recognition of Syrian Qualifications: the experience of NOKUT, EAIE Amsterdam 9-10 June, 2016

- http://www.eaie.org/dam/jcr:b2ddabce-c028-4faa-aa32-fdd340b37790/Thursday%20Practices%20in%20higher%20education%20admissions,%20recognising%20quilifications%20and%20admitting%20refugees.pdf

The Syrian Refugee Crisis, methods for Credential Assessment, WES webinar april 22, 2016

- http://www.iie.org/~/media/Files/Programs/Syria-Scholarships/The-Syrian-Refugee-Crisis-Methods-for-Credential-Assessment.pdf?la=en.

News coverage on education in the region

Al-Fanar Media, news and opinion about higher education

http://www.al-fanarmedia.org/

"Bibliography on Syrian Refugees and Higher Education." **Al-Fanar Media**. www.al-fanarmedia.org/2015/12/bibliography-on-syrian-refugees-and-higher-education/

Al-Monitor, the pulse of the Middle East (Arabic/English)

http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/home.htm