

SYRIA: Educational Profile

A Guide to Place Refugee
Students in Canadian Schools

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This publication is available at wes.org/ca/syriaprofile

Country Facts*



POPULATION:

17,064,854 (July 2014 estimate)

LOCATION:

Southwestern Asia, north of the Arabian Peninsula in the Middle East, at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea; Bordering Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan

AREA:

185,180 sq km

LANGUAGE:

Arabic (official). Additionally: Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic, Circassian, French, English

LITERACY:

Total: 86.4 percent; female 81 percent; male 91.7 percent (definition: age 15 and over that can read and write)

COMPULSORY EDUCATION:

Education is compulsory from ages 6 to 15 (grades 1-9)

CURRENCY:

Syrian Pound (SYP)

*Due to the ongoing conflict in Syria, the information in this report may not reflect current conditions in the country.

Education Overview

GENERAL OUTLINE: EDUCATION IN SYRIA

Basic Education (9 years)	
First Cycle	4 years
Second Cycle	5 years
Secondary Education	3 years
Post-Secondary Education	1-6 years

ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE:

In 2009, 5.1 percent of Syria's GDP was allocated to education. The Syrian government plays a central role in the administration, planning and supervision of education in the country.

The Syrian Ministry of Education supervises basic and secondary education, including private schools, and is directly responsible for curriculum and learning materials. The Ministry decides education policy based on the ruling party's resolutions and regulations.

Higher education is governed by the Ministry of Higher Education, which is also responsible for developing, deciding, implementing and evaluating higher education policy, laws and regulations.

All public basic and secondary education is free and funded by the government. Public higher education is also free; however, fees may be charged in some cases (For example, students who graduate with low secondary school scores can pay a fee to access certain higher education programs). Private institutions are exempt from government financial support.

SIZE:

In 2014, there were approximately 2,553,000 students enrolled in basic education and 2,875,000 enrolled in secondary education. Prior to the on-going conflict, basic education enrollment was close to 93 percent. Currently (2015), it is estimated that 2 million children are out of school in Syria and that roughly 5,000 schools cannot be used because they have either been destroyed or damaged due to war.

In the 2012/2013 academic year, there were approximately 659,394 students enrolled in higher education institutions (public and private).

STRUCTURE:

Pre-primary education is available for children aged three to five. It is not compulsory and is provided on a fee-paying basis. Most pre-primary education schools are privately owned and operated. Grassroots organizations are encouraged to establish schools to help increase pre-primary education offerings. The Ministry of Education is the governing body.

Syria follows a twelve-year system of basic and secondary education, consisting of nine years of basic education and three years of secondary education. Basic education is mandatory (grade 1-9). Secondary education is offered in three-year general secondary schools and in three-year technical/vocational schools.

Higher education in Syria is offered at the following types of institutions:

- Technical/intermediate institutes (201)
- Universities (20 private, 7 public)
- Higher Institutes (6)

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC EDUCATION:

Ninety-seven percent of basic education schools are public, while only 3 percent are private. Ninety-four percent of secondary schools are public, the remaining schools are private.

Privatization of higher education was introduced in 2001.

ACADEMIC YEAR:

The academic year runs from September to June at the basic and secondary levels. The higher education academic year runs from October to June and is divided into two semesters.

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION:

Arabic (Some higher education programs are in French and English).

TEACHER EDUCATION:

Teacher training is a priority of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry organizes continuing education for teachers in order to improve teachers' competencies and performance. Teachers are monitored by the education directorates in the various provinces (governorates) through classroom observation, and they receive guidance from education specialists.

Prior to 1999, teachers in the second cycle of basic education (then referred to as preparatory school) and technical/vocational secondary teachers earned their teaching certificates by completing a two-year post-secondary program at an intermediate institute.

Since 1999, all teacher education has been offered by the Faculties of Education at universities. Teachers at all levels are required to complete a four-year bachelor's degree, which includes teaching methodology, subject specialization, and practical training. Graduates are awarded a bachelor's degree in education, which allows them to teach up to the 12th grade. Those who hold a bachelor's degree in a non-teaching field can complete a one-year post-graduate program leading to a teaching certificate (Qualifying Diploma in Education).

A master's degree or Ph.D. is required to teach at the university level.

Basic Education

AGE OF ADMISSION:

Age 6

LENGTH:

9 years, divided into a first cycle (4 years), and a second cycle (5 years).

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Basic education, grade 1-9 (age 6-15) is compulsory and free. The Ministry of Education is the primary governing body.

ASSESSMENT AND PROMOTION:

At the end of the basic education cycle, students take a nationally set exam. Those who pass are awarded the Basic Education Certificate (*Shabadet Al-Taleem Al-Asasi*). The students' test results will decide if they are entitled to attend general secondary schools or vocational/technical secondary schools.

GRADING SCALE:

STUDENT ASSESSMENT, GRADE LEVEL 1-4		
Syrian Grades	Syrian Letter Grade Equivalency	WES Equivalency
10	Excellent	A
9	Very Good	A
8	Good	B
5-7	Medium	C
0-4	Weak	F

STUDENT ASSESSMENT, GRADE LEVEL 5-9	
Syrian Grades	WES Equivalency
70-100	A
60-69	B
40-59*	C
0-39	F

Source: Syrian Ministry of Education

*The passing grade is 40, with the exception of Arabic language, in which the passing grade is 50.

PROGRAMME OF STUDY:

The curriculum is set by the Ministry of Education and includes the following subjects:

BASIC EDUCATION: WEEKLY LESSON TIMETABLE (2014-2015)									
Number of Weekly Periods* in Each Grade									
Grade Level									
First Cycle									
Second Cycle									
Subjects	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Religious Education	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Arabic Language	10	9	8	8	7	7	6	6	6
Foreign Language	English	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
	French	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
	Russian	-	-	-	-	-	-	2**	
Mathematics	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5
Social Studies	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	4	4
Science and Health Education	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4
Music Education	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Art Education	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1
Physical Education	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Informatics	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-
Sub-total	27	27	27	27	27	27	30	30	30
Extra Activities	Physical and Science Activities	2	2	1	1	-	-	-	-
	Professional Education	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	2
	Informatics	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
	Scout Activities	2	2	2	2	2	2	-	-
Total Weekly Periods	31	31	30	30	31	31	32	33	32

Source: Syrian Ministry of Education

*Definition: Period = 45 minute class

** In grade 7, students choose between French or Russian to fulfill foreign language requirements (in addition to English).

Secondary Education

AGE OF ADMISSION:

Age 16

LENGTH:

3 years

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS:

All who pass the national exam at the end of basic education qualify for secondary education. However, students' test results will decide if they qualify for general/academic secondary schools or vocational/technical secondary schools.

STRUCTURE:

The transition rate from basic to secondary school is 57 percent (2012), of which 23 percent (2012) enroll in technical/vocational schools.

Secondary education lasts three years and is offered at general secondary schools and technical/vocational schools. Students attend this level from grade 10-12 (age 16-18). Secondary education is not compulsory.

Academic Branch

Students pursuing the general/academic branch follow the same curricula in the first year, after which they choose between two academic streams:

- Science: Biology, chemistry, informatics, logic and humanities, math, and physics
- Literature: Arabic society (including principles of economics and general philosophy), art, geography, and statistics

Students who complete the general/academic branch qualify for higher education offered at universities and higher institutes.

Technical/Vocational Branch

Students pursuing the technical/vocational branch choose between the following specializations:

- Commercial: accounting, administration, advertising, book-keeping, commercial law, computing, economics, financial math, secretarial skills, statistics, tax
- Feminine Arts: Carpet making, childcare, clothing and textiles, dressmaking, embroidery, and home economics

- Industrial: Computing, circuitry, electronics, television and radio, satellite maintenance (TV), video recorders

Graduates of technical/vocational secondary schools can choose to start employment or continue onto two-year technical institutes, sometimes also referred to as intermediate institutes, where they can study toward an associate degree.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS:

Both secondary school branches end with a national exam administered by the Ministry of Education, and all who pass – regardless of branch – are awarded a General Secondary Education Certificate (General/academic Branch: *Al-Shadâda Al-Thâna'wiyya-Al'Amma*, Technical/Vocational Branch: *Al-Shahâda Al-Thâna'wiyya Al-Fanniyya*), equivalent to a high school diploma in the U.S. and Canada. Diplomas have different names depending on the subject area (i.e., General Secondary Education Certificate, Industrial Secondary School Diploma, and Secondary School of Commerce Diploma). Students who scored low on the national exam have the opportunity to retake the national exam once to increase their opportunities in admission to higher education.

PROGRAMME OF STUDY:

Curriculum is set by the Ministry of Education and is consistent across schools.

ASSESSMENT AND PROMOTION:

Students must pass all courses in order to continue to the next grade level. Final secondary education grades are based on a student's score on the final secondary education exam.

GRADING SCALE:

SYRIAN GRADES	WES EQUIVALENCY
70-100	A
60-69	B
40-59*	C
0-39	F

Source: World Education Services

*The passing grade is 40, with the exception of Arabic language, in which the passing grade is 50.

COMMON COURSES:

Common courses in the academic branch (science and literature streams):

SECONDARY EDUCATION: WEEKLY LESSON TIMETABLE (2014-2015)						
Subject		Number of Weekly Periods* in Each Grade				
		10th Grade – Common Year for Both Streams	11th Grade – Science Stream	11th Grade – Literature Stream	12th Grade – Science Stream	12th Grade – Literature Stream
Religious Education		2	2	2	2	2
Arabic		5	4	7	4	8
Foreign Language	English	3	3	4	4	5
	French	2	2	3	4	5
Philosophy and Human Science		1	2	3	-	5
History		2	1	3	-	3
Geography		2	-	3	-	3
Math – Statistics		4	5	1	8	-
Science Education (for Literature Branch)		-	-	1	-	-
Informatics		2	2	2	-	-
Physics		2	4	-	5	-
Chemistry		2	2	-	2	-
Biology		2	3	-	3	-
Art Education		1	-	1	-	-
Physical Education		1	1	1	-	1
National Education		1	1	1	1	1
Total		32	32	32	33	33

Source: Syrian Ministry of Education

*Definition: Period = 50 minute class

Common courses for the vocational branch are unknown.

Higher Education

ACCESS:

By law, holders of a General Secondary School Certificate qualify for access to higher education.

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS:

Admission into higher education is highly competitive. Each year, the University Admissions Committee determines how many students will be admitted to the higher education system and how they will be distributed.

All students with a General Secondary School Certificate are guaranteed admission to higher education. However, the institution to which they are admitted depends on the results obtained in the secondary-school examination (Grades from previous years of secondary school are not factored into admissions). Admission is also based on student preferences. Students typically select programs that correspond to their upper-secondary specialization (science for engineering, professional programs and humanities/literature for humanities programs).

RECOGNITION/ACCREDITATION:

Because institutions cannot operate without government approval, all operating institutions are recognized by default. A list of recognized higher education institutions can be found [here](#) (Arabic).

LENGTH:

Two years of study for associate degrees; four years for bachelor's degrees (some disciplines require additional years); two years for master's degrees (extensions available); and a minimum of three years is required for doctoral degrees.

PROGRAMMES OF STUDY:

LEVEL	DEGREE	INSTITUTION TYPE	PROGRAM LENGTH	GRADUATION REQUIREMENT
Stage I	Diploma	Technical Institutes	2 years	- Minimum GPA 50%
	Bachelor's degree	Universities	4-6 years	- Minimum GPA 50% or 60% - Project/research/training/ Internship
Stage II	Higher Diploma	Universities	1-3 years	- Minimum GPA 60% - Project/research
	Master's degree	Universities	2 years	- Minimum GPA 60% - Thesis
Stage III	Doctoral degree	Universities	3 years (min)	- Minimum GPA 60% - Dissertation

Source: World Education Services

Intermediate studies are offered at Technical/Intermediate Institutes. These institutes offer specialization in a variety of fields: industry, agriculture, technology, administration, economics, business, teacher training for basic and lower level secondary education, transportation, tourism and more. The programs are typically two years in length, and students are awarded an associate degree (Diploma or *Musaed Mujaz*) upon completion. To graduate, students are required to have a minimum GPA of 50 percent. Top performing students are eligible to apply for a bachelor's program.

Undergraduate degrees are typically four years in length with some programs, such as architecture, engineering, dentistry, pharmacy and veterinary studies (5 years), and medicine (6 years), being longer. Most programs follow a set curriculum with no electives. Students need to achieve a minimum GPA of 50 percent (or 60 percent, depending on the program of study) in order to graduate. Students are awarded a bachelor's degree upon completion (*Al-Ijaaza* in Arabic, and *License* in French).

Master's programs are typically two-years in length. Master's degrees are either academic or professional in nature. Those who follow the academic track are eligible to continue on to a doctorate degree. A minimum GPA of 60 percent is required to graduate.

Doctoral programs require a minimum of three years of study after a completed master's degree. The dissertation is evaluated by an external panel, which includes at least one overseas academic. A minimum GPA of 60 percent is required to graduate.

Language of instruction is Arabic and English.

ASSESSMENT AND PROMOTION:

Students are assessed based on their performance in the final semester exam. Master's programs typically require the completion of a thesis in addition to the final exam. Completion of an internship may also be required depending on the program of study.

In order to progress from one academic year to the next, students cannot fail more than four subjects.

GRADING SCALE:

The passing grade is 50, sometimes 60, depending on the program of study.

SYRIAN GRADES	WES EQUIVALENCY
70-100	A
60-69	B
50-59	C
0-49	F

Source: World Education Services

Grade-by-Grade Comparison

Comparative statements made here are generic, based on comparisons between the education systems of the country featured above and Ontario, Canada.

For specific and individualized Evaluation Reports, please contact [WES Canada](#).

Please see the Programme of Studies description in the section on Secondary Education for guidance awarding Ontario Secondary School Credits.

These guidelines are non-binding and intended only to assist Secondary Schools. The ultimate responsibility for making a placement decision with respect to a particular student rests with the applicable Secondary School.

GRADE-BY-GRADE COMPARISON, SYRIA – CANADA

Grade 9	It is suggested that students who have completed grade 9 in Syria have completed the equivalent of grade 9 in the Ontario Secondary School Education System.
Grade 10	It is suggested that students who have completed grade 10 in Syria have completed the equivalent of grade 10 in the Ontario Secondary School Education System.
Grade 11	It is suggested that students who have completed grade 11 in Syria have completed the equivalent of grade 11 in the Ontario Secondary School Education System.
Grade 12	It is suggested that students who have been awarded the Secondary School Certificate have the equivalent of an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.

Entry into Ontario Colleges/Universities will depend on the requirements of the receiving institution.

Additional Resources

EDUCATION SYSTEM AND BACKGROUND

- [Education System Syria](#), NUFFIC
- [World Data on Education – 2010/11](#), UNESCO
- [Higher Education in Syria](#), European Commission
- [Country Education Profiles](#), Australian Government, Department of Education and Training

STATISTICS

- [The World Factbook – Syria Country Profile](#), CIA
- [Syria Overview](#), Education Policy and Data Center (EPDC)
- [Country Profiles: Syrian Arab Republic](#), UNESCO Institute for Statistics

SYRIAN GOVERNMENT PAGES (ARABIC)

- [Central Bureau of Statistics](#)
- [Guide to the System of Higher Education](#), Ministry of Higher Education
- [Number of Basic Education Schools by City – 2006-2010](#), Central Bureau of Statistics
- [Internal Regulations for Basic Education Schools \(Chapter 6\)](#), Ministry of Education
- [The Ministry’s Announcement for the Start of the School Year 2014-2015](#), Ministry of Education

EDUCATION FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES

- [Regional Report: On Out-of-School Children](#), UNICEF
- [Helping Immigrant Students to Succeed at School – and Beyond](#), OECD
- [Access To Education For Syrian Refugee Children And Youth In Jordan Host Communities](#), UNICEF
- [Scaling Up Quality Education Provision for Syrian Children and Children in Vulnerable Host Communities](#), UNICEF
- [Curriculum, Accreditation and Certification for Syrian Children in Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt](#), UNICEF
- [Field Study on the Effects of the Syrian Struggle on the Community – Study on Syrian Student Refugees in Lebanon](#), Democratic Republic Studies Center
- [Uncounted and Unacknowledged: Syria’s Refugee University Students and Academics in Jordan](#), UC Davis, Human Rights Initiative and the Institute for International Education (IIE)

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