

Education system

# Syria

described and compared with  
the Dutch system

This document contains information on the education system of Syria. We explain the Dutch equivalent of the most common qualifications from Syria for the purpose of admission to Dutch higher education.

### Disclaimer

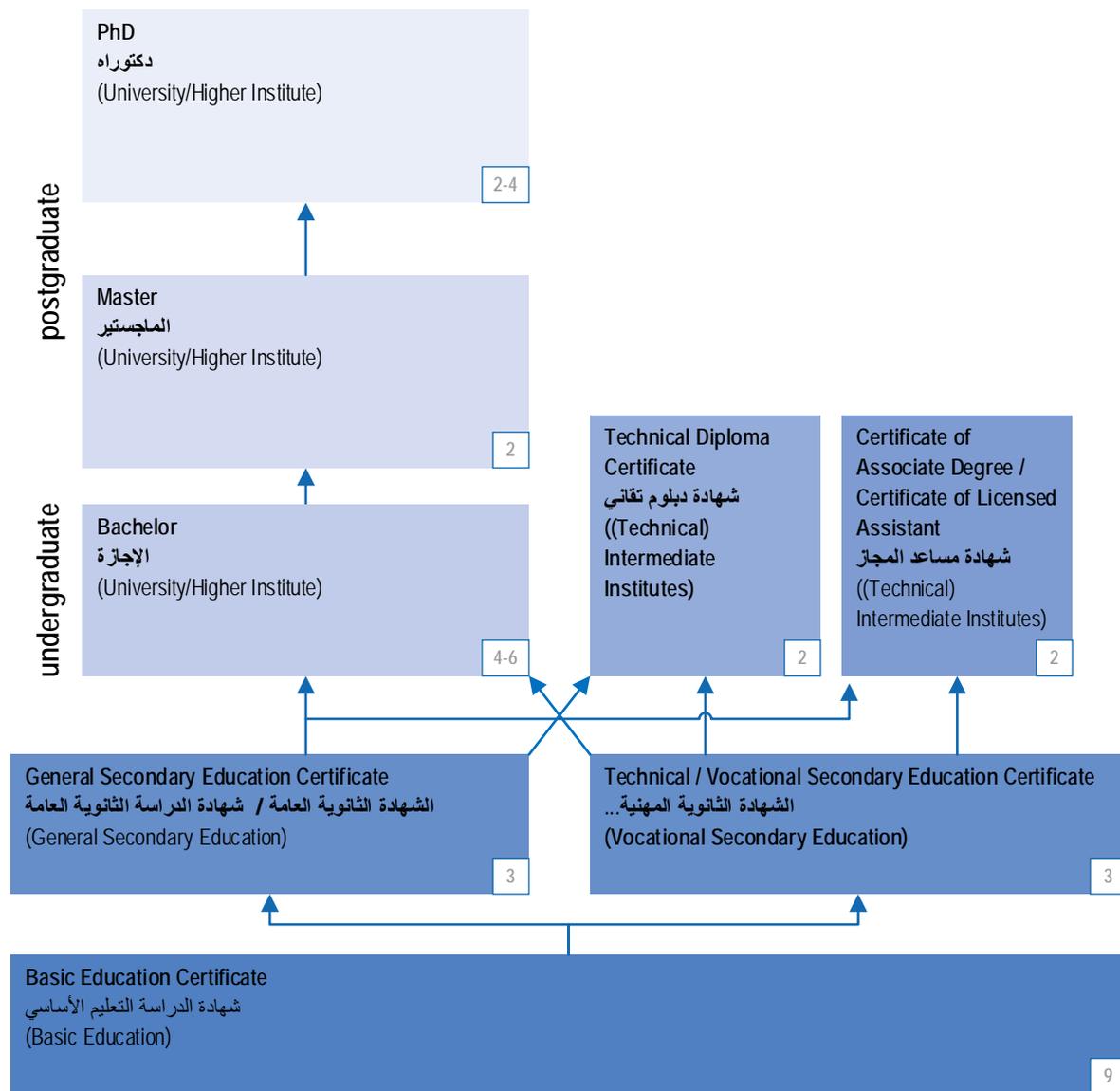
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0 Duration of education

## Evaluation chart

The left-hand column in the table below lists the most common foreign qualifications applicable to admission to higher education. The other columns show the Dutch equivalent along with the comparable levels in the Dutch and European qualifications frameworks.

Degree or qualification	Dutch equivalent and NLQF level		EQF level
<i>Basic Education Certificate</i> شهادة الدراسة التعليم الأساسي	approximately 2 years of senior general secondary education (HAVO)	2	2
<i>Technical/Vocational Secondary Education Certificate</i> ... الشهادة الثانوية المهنية ...	MBO diploma (qualification level 2 or 3)	2-3	2-3
<i>Technical Diploma Certificate</i> شهادة دبلوم تقني	MBO diploma (qualification level 4)	4	4
<i>Certificate Associate Degree/ Certificate of Licensed Assistant</i> شهادة مساعد المجاز	MBO diploma (qualification level 4)	4	4
<i>General Secondary Education Certificate</i> الشهادة الثانوية العامة/ شهادة الدراسة الثانوية العامة	HAVO diploma	4	4
Bachelor's degree (4 years) الإجازة (4 years)	HBO bachelor's degree or 2 years of WO	6	6
Bachelor's degree (5 years) in architecture, engineering, dentistry, pharmacy and veterinary medicine الإجازة (5 years) في الهندسة المعمارية، الهندسة، طب الأسنان، الصيدلة والطب البيطري	WO bachelor's degree	6	6
Master's degree الماجستير	1-year WO or HBO master's degree	7	7

NB

- The information provided in the table is a general recommendation from which no rights may be derived.
- NLQF = Dutch Qualifications Framework. EQF = European Qualifications Framework.

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- The EQF/[NLQF level](#) is not so much a reflection of study load or content; rather, it is an indication of a person's knowledge and skills after having completed a certain programme of study.
- Information about Dutch equivalent qualifications can be found on our website: [the Dutch education system](#).
- [The Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market \(SBB\)](#), evaluates statements on foreign qualifications and training at VMBO and MBO level. The evaluation may vary if SBB evaluates the diploma for admission to VET schools or the labour market in the Netherlands.

## ■ Introduction

**Syria is located in the Middle East and borders Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Israel. The Syrian Arab Republic is around 4.5 times the size of the Netherlands and until recently had more than 21 million inhabitants<sup>1</sup>.**

The population of the country is diverse. The official language is Arabic. Many educated Syrians also speak English or French. Kurdish and Armenian are also spoken in certain regions.

Syria's strategic and central position in the region means it's a country with a long history. In its current form, Syria was founded after World War I as a French mandate. In 1946 it gained independence from France and from 1958 it became part of the United Arab Republic, along with Egypt. This came to an end with a military coup in 1961, which led to the Ba'ath party taking power in 1963.

Syria has been in the grip of a large-scale armed conflict since March 2011. The conflict has developed into a complex civil war with a profound impact on the Syrian people and on the availability of public services, including access to education.

The Syrian government plays a major role in the supervision and control of education. Primary and secondary education are overseen by the Ministry of Education. Education is compulsory to the age of 15. Higher education comes under the Ministry of Higher Education, with the Council for Higher Education being the coordinating body. The education system is governed by national legislation.

Recognised private universities have been authorised to provide education since 2001. Syria does not have a binary higher education system: no strict distinction is made between academic and higher professional education. Some study programmes contain elements of both higher professional education and academic education.

The language of education is Arabic. Some graduate-level programmes are provided in English or French as well as Arabic. The academic year runs from September to June.

Since the outbreak of violence in Syria in 2011, there's been limited scope for independently researching and verifying any facts, events or circumstances in Syria.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the UNHCR the civil war has led to the displacement of more than 11 million people within and beyond Syria (October 2015).

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This document presents a general description of the Syrian education system, and is not exhaustive. For any questions about education in the light of recent events, please contact the [Nuffic](#) country experts.

## Primary and secondary education

All Syrian schools providing primary and secondary education, including private and UNRWA<sup>2</sup> schools, are closely supervised by the Syrian Ministry of Education. This ministry is directly responsible for the curriculum and the learning materials used. The language of education is Arabic. All public primary and secondary education is free. Education is mandatory between the ages of 6 and 15 (up to the 9th grade).

Up until 2002 there was a three-part system in primary and secondary education (6+3+3 years), with each phase concluding with a diploma. The first phase was 6 years of primary school (التعليم الابتدائي), the second phase 3 years of general secondary education (lower level) (الدراسة الإعدادية العامة) and the third phase 3 years of general secondary education (upper level) (الدراسة الثانوية العامة).

Since 2002 the first two phases have been merged and this phase is mandatory for all pupils aged 6 to 15. This phase of education concludes with a centrally set national exam. Upon passing this exam, pupils are awarded the *Basic Education Certificate* (شهادة الدراسة التعليم الأساسي).

In terms of level, the *Basic Education Certificate* (شهادة الدراسة التعليم الأساسي) is comparable to approximately 2 years of senior general secondary education (HAVO).

Depending on the results achieved in the national exam for the *Basic Education Certificate*, pupils can either pursue Vocational Secondary Education or General Secondary Education. The Syrian state provides 95% of secondary education, with the rest provided by private institutions and the UNRWA.

Vocational Secondary Education is provided by technical schools and is further divided into a number of main specialisations such as industry, trade and agriculture. These programmes of study conclude with a *Technical/Vocational Secondary Education Certificate*. Diplomas have different names depending on the subject area, such as the *Industrial Secondary School Diploma* (الشهادة الثانوية المهنية الصناعية), the *Secondary School of Commerce Diploma* (الشهادة الثانوية المهنية التجارية) or the *Secondary School of Agriculture Diploma* (الشهادة الثانوية المهنية الزراعية).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. This [UN organisation](#) provides primary, secondary and post-secondary professional education for Palestinian students in Syrian refugee camps.

In terms of level, the *Technical/Vocational Secondary Education Certificate* (الشهادة الثانوية المهنية ...) is comparable to an MBO diploma at qualification level 2 or 3, depending on the specialisation.

The upper level of general secondary education lasts 3 years and pupils are usually aged 15 to 18. This phase of education concludes with a centrally set exam conferring the *General Secondary Education Certificate* (الشهادة الثانوية العامة / شهادة الدراسة الثانوية العامة), which is also referred to as the *Baccalaureate*. This phase of education prepares pupils for academic higher education, and in principle those who complete it successfully are admitted to universities and other higher education institutions. The first year is a common introductory year, after which students choose a subject cluster in either arts or sciences.

The academic year runs from September to June and has 32 teaching weeks, excluding exam weeks.

In terms of level, the *General Secondary Education Certificate* (الشهادة الثانوية العامة / شهادة الدراسة الثانوية العامة) is comparable to a HAVO diploma.

### Post-secondary education

Following completion of vocational secondary education students can either start work or apply to a Technical or other Intermediate Institute (معهد متوسط / معهد تقني). These educational institutions offer programmes with a professional focus in industry, agriculture, technology, administration, economics, business, teacher training for primary and lower level secondary education, transport, tourism etc. These study programmes have a nominal duration of 2 years.

In Syria these programmes are considered higher vocational education, but in Dutch terms the level and objectives are more akin to senior secondary vocational education (MBO). There are 16 ministries involved in providing this education, though most Intermediate Institutes come under the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education. Policymaking is the responsibility of the Supreme Council of Intermediate Institutes, which is part of the Ministry of Higher Education.

Study programmes conclude with a *Technical Diploma Certificate* (شهادة دبلوم تقني) or *Certificate of Associate Degree* (شهادة مساعد المجاز), often also translated as the *Certificate of Licensed Assistant*.

Admission criteria vary considerably. Intermediate Institutes connected to a university usually require a *General Secondary Education Certificate* or a *Technical Secondary Education Certificate* with an exceptionally high score. At the other end of the spectrum, there are Intermediate Institutes which accept students with a low score on their *Technical Secondary Education Certificate* or even those who don't have one.

In terms of level, the *Technical Diploma Certificate* (شهادة دبلوم تقني) is comparable to an MBO diploma at qualification level 4, in a similar specialisation.

The *Certificate of Associate Degree* or *Certificate of Licensed Assistant* (شهادة مساعد المجاز) is comparable to an MBO diploma at qualification level 4, in a similar specialisation.

## ■ Admission to higher education

The *General Secondary Education Certificate* (also known as the *Baccalaureate*) is a prerequisite for admission to higher education in Syria. In principle, any student who passes their final exam can continue on to higher education. Individual faculties do set minimum final scores each year, and applicants need to have taken the right subject cluster for their study programme.

Students who have taken the science subject cluster can usually apply for admission to any study programme offered within higher education. Those who take the arts subject cluster can only apply for degree programmes in literature, art, humanities, economics and law. Students with very high scores for the *Technical Secondary Education Certificate* can be admitted to university bachelor's degree programmes in a comparable area, but this is rare.

Admission to the faculties of medicine, dentistry, architecture and natural sciences requires high scores on the final exam for the *General Secondary Education Certificate*. The scores required for admission vary each year and are set centrally by the University Admissions Committee at the Council of Higher Education (Ministry of Higher Education).

No entrance examinations are required for admission into higher education, but certain programmes might have a draw procedure. Some faculties set additional requirements, such as having a passing grade in a second foreign language or a particular course.

Students with very high scores on their final exams can be admitted to university bachelor's degree programmes in a comparable subject area.

## ■ Higher education

Syrian higher education is provided by universities and higher institutes. Higher education institutions are the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher Education. For example, any developments related to a curriculum must be approved by the Ministry. New private universities also have to adhere to certain guidelines when they're set up, and are closely monitored in their initial phases. The Council for Higher Education is the overarching body coordinating the education provided by higher education institutions. Syria has both public and private universities. There are currently 8 public universities and 22 private universities.<sup>3</sup>

Education at public universities is free and is provided in Arabic. The University of Damascus was founded in 1903 and is the oldest and largest university. The Syrian Virtual University is an unusual public university. It was founded in 2002 by the Ministry of Higher Education to offer online education in partnership with international institutions.

The programmes offered by the Syrian Virtual University are usually vocational. Private universities have been around since 2001. These must be recognised by the Ministry of Higher Education before they can deliver any education. Tuition fees are charged and the education may be provided in English as well as in Arabic. Higher institutes are regarded as 'centres of excellence' and are usually directly supervised by public universities or the Ministry of Higher Education. Admission requires higher scores on the *General Secondary Education Certificate* than for public universities. Higher institutes offer degree programmes at the bachelor's, master's and PhD level. The number of students attending these institutes is relatively low.

## ■ University education

### **Bachelor's programme**

Syrian universities and higher institutes provide both academic and higher vocationally-oriented programmes. Bachelor's degree programmes usually have a nominal duration of 4 years. Architecture, engineering, dentistry, pharmacy and veterinary medicine have a nominal duration of 5 years. Medicine has a nominal duration of 6 years.

Completion of the degree programme confers a bachelor's degree: this is *al-'ijāza* (الإجازة) in Arabic; the term Licence may also be used. The usual English

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Higher Education, May 2018

translation is a bachelor's degree. The degree indicates the field of study. For example, following a degree programme in an economic field, one would be awarded a bachelor's degree in economics (الإجازة في الإقتصاد), and following a degree programme in the field of mechanical engineering one would be awarded a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering (الإجازة في الهندسة الميكانيكية).

The bachelor's degree represents a completed level of qualification, after which one might enter employment or be qualified for further study. Degree programmes usually start with a preparatory year of foundational courses. During this year, students are prepared for further study in a specific field. The academic year is divided into 2 semesters with a total study load of 30 weeks.

In terms of level, the *bachelor's degree* (الإجازة) following a 4-year programme is comparable to 2 years of university education (WO) in a similar specialisation, or to an HBO bachelor's degree, depending on the type of study programme (professional or academic).

In terms of level, the *bachelor's degree* (الإجازة) following a 5-year programme in architecture, engineering, dentistry, pharmacy and veterinary medicine is comparable to a WO bachelor's degree in a similar specialisation.

### Master's programme

Those students who have performed well on their bachelor's degree can continue on to a master's degree programme (الماجستير). Admission to a master's degree programme requires a final average of 70% in the bachelor's degree programme and a pass in an English or French language test. For dentistry, engineering and medicine, an additional admission test is required covering knowledge and skills in the relevant subject area.

Master's degree programmes have a nominal duration of 2 years. In certain circumstances this may be extended by 1 year with the approval of the faculty board. An attendance rate of 90% at lectures is required in order to take exams. A score of 60% on each exam is required for a pass and to be able to start on a final paper. Final papers must be defended in public in the presence of an assessment committee. The final paper must be completed within 1 year of its proposal being approved. The names of master's degrees follow those of bachelor's degrees. The degree indicates the field of study: for example a master's degree in accounting (الماجستير في المحاسبة) or a master's degree in civil engineering (الماجستير في الهندسة المدنية).

In terms of level, the *master's degree* (الماجستير) is comparable to a 1-year WO master's degree or HBO master's.

### PhD

Upon completion of a master's degree, students can apply to work towards a doctorate (الدكتوراة). The doctoral programme includes a taught programme of research skills, the writing and defending of a thesis and the publication of at least 2 academic articles. The programme requires at least 2 years of research work, which must be completed within 4 years. This may be extended by 1 year with the approval of the faculty board.

Admission requires a master's degree in a similar specialisation with a score of at least 75% and a language test in a modern foreign language.

## Assessment systems

Secondary education uses the following assessment scales:

- The maximum number of points that can be achieved in secondary school exams is 240 for the arts subject cluster, with 102 as the minimum required.
- For the science subject cluster the maximum number of points that can be achieved is 260, and 104 must be achieved to pass the exam.

NB Diplomas have also been issued with a maximum number of 290 or 2900 points, and a minimum of 116 or 1160, respectively.

A percentage scale is used at higher education institutions and at Intermediate Institutes. The scales vary depending on the type of institution and level of study.

### Intermediate Institutes

In numbers	Description	Definition
0 – 49%	راسب (rāsib)	Fail
50 – 64%	مقبول (maqḅūl)	Pass
65 – 74%	جيد (jayyid)	Good
75 – 84%	جيد جداً (jayyid jiddan)	Very good
85 – 100%	إمتياز (imtiyāz)	Excellent

**Undergraduate Studies**

In numbers	Description	Definition
0 – 49%	راسب (rāsib)	Fail
50 – 59%	مقبول (maqbûl)	Pass
60 – 69%	جيد (jayyid)	Good
70 – 79%	جيد جداً (jayyid jiddan)	Very good
80 – 89%	إمتياز (imtiyâz)	Excellent
90 – 100%	شرف (sharaf)	Honours

**Graduate Studies**

In numbers	Description	Definition
0 – 59%	راسب (rāsib)	Fail
60 – 64%	مقبول (maqbûl)	Pass
65 – 74%	جيد (jayyid)	Good
75 – 84%	جيد جداً (jayyid jiddan)	Very good
85 – 94%	إمتياز (imtiyâz)	Excellent
95 – 100%	شرف (sharaf)	Honours

## ■ Quality assurance and accreditation

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the quality assurance of educational institutions providing primary and secondary education. The Ministry of Higher Education fulfils this role for higher education. A list of recognised Syrian universities is available in the [List of higher education institutions](#) and on the [website](#) of the Ministry of Higher Education. Syria does not provide official recognition at the programme level.

## ■ Composition of file

A file for Syria should include a diploma or declaration of graduation and a grade list in Arabic plus a translation of both documents. Sometimes Syrian higher education institutions will issue a diploma and associated grade list in English. The qualifications for general secondary education are usually only issued in Arabic. Exam results for secondary school students from 2011 onwards can be verified online through the [website](#) for the Ministry of Education. Syrian qualifications need to be checked closely for authenticity. If in doubt, contact [Nuffic](#).

## List of higher education institutions

Recognised university institutions<sup>4</sup> are:

### Public institutions

- Damascus University (جامعة دمشق)
- Aleppo University (جامعة حلب)
- Tishreen University (جامعة تشرين)
- Al-Baath University (جامعة البعث)
- Al-Furat University (جامعة الفرات)
- Syrian Virtual University (الجامعة الافتراضية السورية)
- University of Hama (جامعة حماه)
- University of Tartous (جامعة طرطوس)

### Private institutions

- University of Kalamoon (جامعة القلمون الخاصة)
- Cordoba Private University (جامعة قرطبة الخاصة)
- Ittihad Private University (جامعة الإتحاد الخاصة)
- Arab International University (الجامعة العربية الدولية الخاصة)
- International University for Science and Technology (الجامعة الدولية الخاصة للعلوم والتكنولوجيا)
- Syrian Private University (الجامعة السورية الخاصة)
- Al-Andalus University for Medical Sciences (جامعة الأندلس الخاصة للعلوم الطبية)
- Al-Sham Private University (جامعة الشام الخاصة)
- Al-Jazeera University (جامعة الجزيرة الخاصة)
- Al-Hawash Private University (جامعة الحواش الخاصة)
- Wadi International University (جامعة الوادي الدولية الخاصة)
- Ebla Private University (جامعة إيبلا الخاصة)
- Al-Shahbaa Private University (جامعة الشهباء الخاصة)
- Yarmouk Private University (جامعة اليرموك الخاصة)
- Arab University for Science and Technology (الجامعة العربية الخاصة للعلوم والتكنولوجيا)
- Arab Academy for Science and Technology and Maritime Transport (الأكاديمية العربية للعلوم والتكنولوجيا والنقل البحري)
- Al-Wataniya Private University (الجامعة الوطنية الخاصة)
- Al-Rasheed International University for Science & Technology (جامعة الرشيد الدولية الخاصة للعلوم والتكنولوجيا)
- Qasyoun University for Science and Technology (جامعة قاسيون الخاصة للعلوم والتكنولوجيا)
- University of the Levant (جامعة بلاد الشام للعلوم الشرعية)
- Manara University (جامعة المنارة الخاصة)
- Arab Academy for E-Business (الأكاديمية العربية للأعمال الإلكترونية)

<sup>4</sup> Updated in May 2018.

### Higher Institutes

- Higher Institute of Business Administration (المعهد العالي لإدارة الأعمال)
- The National Institute of Public Administration (المعهد الوطني للإدارة العامة)
- Higher Institute for Demographic Studies & Researches (المعهد العالي للدراسات والبحوث السكانية)
- Higher Institute for Water Management (المعهد العالي لإدارة المياه)

### Higher Institutes Damascus University

- Higher Institute for Research into Lasers and their Applications (المعهد العالي لبحوث الليزر وتطبيقاته)
- Higher Institute of Earthquake Studies and Research (المعهد العالي للبحوث والدراسات الزلزالية)
- Higher Institute for Administrative Development (المعهد العالي للتنمية الإدارية)
- Higher Institute for Translation and Interpretation (المعهد العالي للترجمة والتربية الفورية)
- Damascus University Higher Language Institute (المعهد العالي للغات)

### Higher Institutes Aleppo University

- Higher Institute for the History of Arabic Science (معهد التراث العلمي العربي)
- Higher Institute of Languages (المعهد العالي للغات)

### Tishreen University

- Higher Institute for Sea Research (المعهد العالي للبحوث البحرية)
- Higher Institute for Environmental Research (المعهد العالي لبحوث البيئة)
- Higher Institute of Languages (المعهد العالي للغات)

### Al-Baath University

- Higher Institute for Languages (المعهد العالي لتعليم اللغات)

### University of Hama

- Higher Institute of Languages (المعهد العالي للغات)

### Useful links

- [Website](#) of the Ministry of Education (in Arabic).
- [Website](#) of the Ministry of Higher Education (in Arabic and English).
- [Verification](#) of exam results achieved in secondary education (from 2014, in Arabic).
- [Website](#) of the Association of Arab Universities (in Arabic).
- Admissions policy for Syrian universities on the [website](#) of the Ministry of Higher Education (in Arabic).