

# Higher Education for Syrian Refugees in Tripoli, North Lebanon

## Introduction and background

Testimonies by young Syrian men and women in Tripoli, are increasingly indicating that **accessing higher education for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon is becoming very challenging and complicated, and it is a real threat facing their community.**

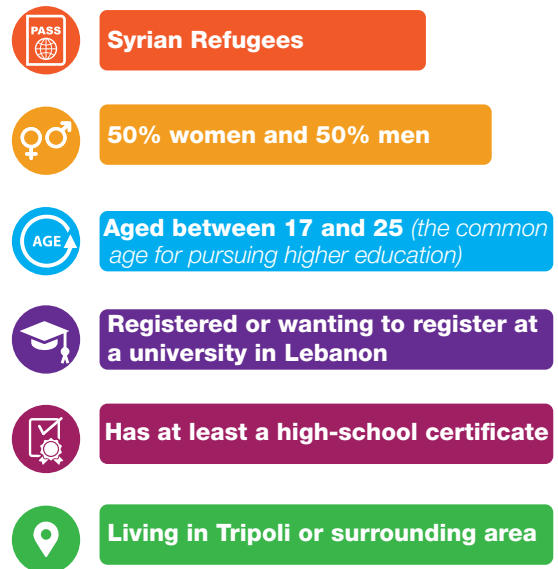
Back in 2017-2018, the number of Syrian refugees aged between 18-24 was 117,420, compared to 7,135 Syrian refugees enrolled in Lebanese universities. This indicates that only 6% of the Syrian refugee community aged between 18 – 24 are enrolled in universities in Lebanon.<sup>1</sup>

Utopia association under the campaign “Right to Access”, conducted with the support of Oxfam a study to understand the challenges that are preventing Syrian Refugees from accessing higher education in Lebanon, specifically in Tripoli to assess the implications imposed by such problems on individuals and communities, and to capture the recommendations of the concerned group that might ease or possibly solve the problem.

## Methodology

The findings of this report are based on a survey conducted by a Protection Youth Group in Tripoli, supported by Utopia and Oxfam. It is a group of 12 young men and women Syrian Refugees residing in Tripoli, that took part in several group discussions, proceeding Protection Threat Identification and Advocacy Training sessions. They are all educated with one or more university degrees, attained in both Syria and Lebanon. The adopted methodology is a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data, collected over the months of October, November and December in 2019. An indicative sample of 180 individuals was followed (50% with women and 50% with men) using the snowballing technique.

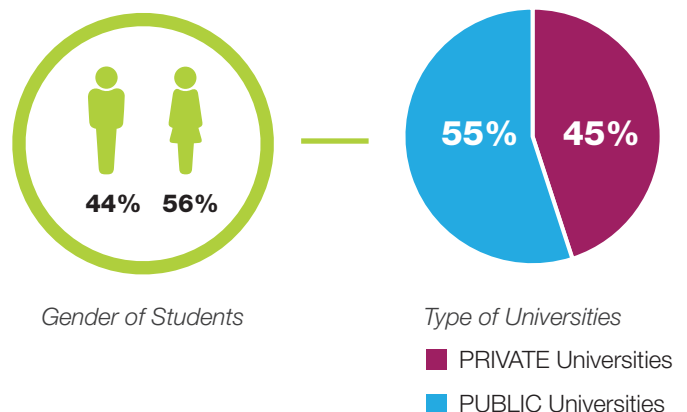
Participants’ selection criteria included the following:



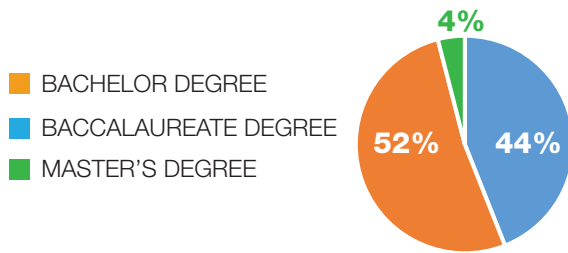
The Protection Youth Group members conducted 180 surveys with their peers in Tripoli and the surrounding; 93 with females and 87 with males. The findings of the surveys were validated by the youth group during several discussions between them and their peers.

## Respondents Profile

● **University Enrollment:** 45% of the surveyed population reported that they are enrolled at university (44% men and 56% women). Out of those students, 45% are enrolled at private universities and 55% are enrolled at public universities.



● **Educational attainment:** 44% of the respondents have a baccalaureate degree, 52% have a bachelor degree, and 4% have a Master's degree.



27% of the respondents with only a baccalaureate degree are aged between 26 and 35 years, probably attained baccalaureate in Syria, which may indicate that pursuing education in Lebanon was not possible for them for some reasons.

“ Most of the Syrian Students choose to enroll at the Faculty of Humanities, since:

- 1) It requires less attendance, so students can work and study simultaneously.
- 2) Most of the curriculums are in Arabic.
- 3) Syrians are more likely to be accepted in these majors than in others.
- 4) Syrians with these majors are more likely to find jobs since these fields are not syndicated.”

● **Scholarship:** 63% are pursuing their degree through a scholarship. Out of the aforementioned, 55% are enrolled in private universities while 45% are enrolled in public universities.

This percentage is considered high, possibly indicating public universities are also considered expensive by Syrian Refugees, and require financial support.

### Speaking About the Challenges

Through several parts of the survey, respondents were asked about the challenges that Syrian Refugees face, while enrolling at universities, and/or what prevents them from getting enrolled. 48% of the surveyed population enrolled in universities have reported that they have faced challenges while registering. 95% of those who are not enrolled in universities, agreed that there are many challenges that have prevented them

from registering in universities. 48% reported that a high rate of their peers also faced challenges when enrolling in universities.

The most repeated challenges, as shown in the chart and elaborated in the report below, are those related to registration fees, scholarships, legal residency, legal and Identification Documents, and university admission.

The financial challenges were the most common in the survey. The registration fees are considered high both at private universities, and the Lebanese University (Public University). In fact, the registration fees for Syrian Refugees at the

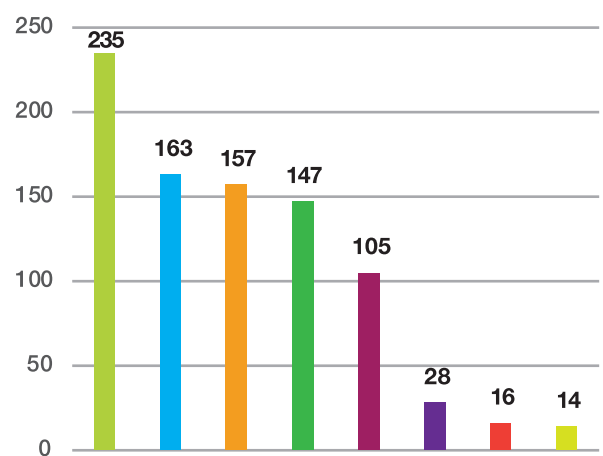


Table showing the ratio of challenges of Syrian Refugees in registering in Universities in Lebanon repeated by respondents in the surveys.

- Financial Challenges
- Shortage in scholarship opportunities and blurry or mismatching scholarship criteria
- Challenges in obtaining an equivalence certificate for the Syrian Baccalaureate and the Coalition Certificate
- Lack of Legal Stay
- Lack of legal and Identification documents
- Difficulties in university admission including foreign languages use and high prerequisite required.
- Discrimination on the basis of gender, nationality and political affiliation including "Wasta"
- Unclarity of university registration criteria.

Lebanese University varies between LBP 945,000 and LBP 995,000 for the undergraduate studies (Bachelor Degree) and up to LBP 1,745,000 for the graduate studies (Master's and Ph.D.), which is relatively high compared to the university fees for the Lebanese and Palestinian Students that range between LBP 245,000 and LBP 745,000, respectively.<sup>2</sup>

This can be linked to the second most common challenge mentioned in the survey, lack and difficulty in attaining scholarships. The qualifications and requirements set for getting a scholarship such as the age criteria that was mentioned 56 times in the survey, are considered very strict and hard to meet, which reduces the chances of actually receiving a scholarship.



**In the past, there were several organizations that offer University Scholarships for Syrian Refugees but not anymore. The scholarship opportunities now are very few.**

The process remains challenging for Syrian refugees who have the Syrian Bacculaureate, although obtaining an equivalence of the Syrian certificate in Lebanon is possible. It requires providing a new stamped civil extract, along with the Syrian Bacculaureate Certificate, from both the Lebanese and the Syrian Ministries of Foreign Affairs and The Syrian Embassy in Beirut, which is deemed difficult and risky for some. Furthermore, a certificate of the past scholastic years has to be provided as well, which might be impossible for those whose schools are located in destroyed or warzone areas in Syria.

This process is also problematic, due to the fact that this certificate can only be issued for the concerned person and not all refugees are capable of traveling and obtaining it in person, as crossing the borders is a major protection threat identified by most refugees. On the other hand, the Lebanese University does not recognize The 'Syrian Coalition' Bacculaureate Certification<sup>3</sup>, therefore students holding such certificates do not have the chance to enroll at the Lebanese University. Even if a private university allowed the student with 'Syrian Coalition' Bacculaureate to register, they will not be able to officiate their Bachelor Degree unless they manage to present a Lebanese or a Syrian Bacculaureate Certificate in parallel. This adds up to more complications and challenges affecting the admission process, such as the language. The Syrian and 'Syrian Coalition' Bacculaureate graduates complete their studies in Arabic, while proficiency and fluency in foreign languages, whether English or French, is a major requirement at the Lebanese public and private universities, since the language of instruction among most majors is foreign, not Arabic.

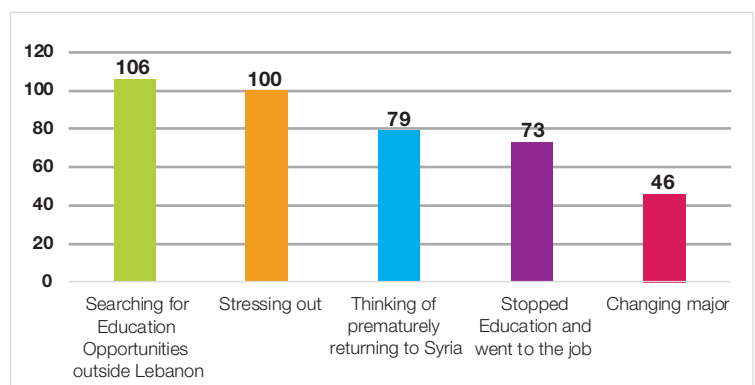
While presenting a residency permit is one of the main documents required for the registration of non-Lebanese students, including Syrian refugees at the Lebanese University, not having a legal status is preventing many Syrian refugees from getting enrolled at the Lebanese University and pushing some to consider private universities. The UNHCR Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon VASyR 2019, shows that the percentage of Syrian individuals aged 15 years and above holding legal residency permits in the North in 2018 and 2019 is only 22%.<sup>4</sup>



**My Friend, in order to continue his education in a private university, tried studying intermittently. He studied a year, and worked the year after, in order to save money for the next year of study..**

### What are the consequences?

The university registration situation and its challenges provoke undesirable emotions and coping mechanisms for Syrian refugees. When students are not able to find learning opportunities in Lebanon, they tend to look for alternatives, such as going abroad to pursue an education or returning back to Syria, where the situation remains unsafe and holds no prospects for a dignified future.



*Table showing the ratio of consequences of the challenges faced in the university registration, repeated by respondents in the survey*

As a result, youth tend to lose hope in building a future in Lebanon, a country where their dreams were not realized.

“A fair access to tertiary education is a right. Without it, we risk disorienting an entire

generation, and killing their dreams for a better future”. Ensuring a dignified access to universities in Lebanon for young Syrians is the key to build a strong leading generation for the future. It is the only way to empower them and to develop their capacities to become the agents of change, that would contribute to the development and re-building of their country in the future.

## Recommendations

### To the Ministry of Education and High Education (MEHE):

- Develop a clear and just framework for the enrolment of Syrian refugees in universities in Lebanon.
- Decrease the current fees and waive the residency permits requirements impeding access to the majority of refugees.
- Recognize non-formal education certification such as diplomas from Syrian Informal schools

with the minimal requirements of legal documentations.

### To the international community including LCRP donors:

- Increase funding to tertiary education through making scholarship opportunities more accessible to a greater number of refugees, and increase flexibility in terms of legal documentation and age caps.

### To donors, UN agencies, NGOs and the aid community:

- Improve timely dissemination of information on tertiary education and scholarship opportunities to interested parties.
- Increase accessible, free and timely learning opportunities and programs for Syrian Refugees.
- Improve coordination mechanisms in order to ensure complementary efforts, and accessibility to more community members.

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### References:

<sup>1</sup> Policy brief 2/ February 2019 - Tertiary Education for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon – AUB Policy Institute

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ul.edu.lb/students/registration.aspx?lang=1>

<sup>3</sup> This refers to an Unofficial Certificate issued by temporary Syrian Government’s Ministry of Education knew by the Syrian Coalition in Lebanon.

<sup>4</sup> <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/73118>

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For more information, or to comment on this publication please email [suha.allouche@utopialebanon.org](mailto:suha.allouche@utopialebanon.org).

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