This brief is part of a larger study investigating interventions that support lower and upper secondary school aged youths’ transition through school to higher education (HE), to technical and vocational training (TVET), and/or to prepare youth (including out of school youth of secondary school age) to pursue career and livelihood pathways in 11 selected countries across the MENA region. This research does not examine the quality of education, but rather, the knowledge and skills needed to make successful transitions. Therefore, this study focuses on support that wraps around general and technical education curricula.

**TECHNICAL EDUCATION.** Students can opt to enter secondary level technical or vocational studies after completion of Grade 9, with technical education consisting of three additional years of study. Technical secondary education comprises the following branches: technical industrial, agricultural, commercial, and technical education for girls. Technical secondary education also requires passing a final examination. Successful students are awarded a Technical Secondary Education Certificate (*al-Shahâda al-Thânawiyya al-Fanniyya*) and an occupation title of technician (*Fanni*). Students with a score of 70 percent and above on the final examination have access to university education in affiliated fields. Students with a lower score can enter a two-year intermediate institution (*ma’ahid mutawassita*). Graduates of nursing field receive a Nursing Certificate (*al-Shahâda fi al-Tamridh*). Vocational education includes two or three years of study, based on the field. The vocational secondary education branch includes industrial and vocational education for girls. A commercial field was offered...

CAREER COUNSELING. Historically, career counseling did not play an important role and was restricted mainly to the higher education sector and consisted of group-based training workshops and limited internship programs. Post-conflict, the situation has deteriorated further, with no overall plan or systematic approach in place for career counseling. Pre-war the government acknowledged the need to improve outcomes of the transition from education to employment, although the vast majority of the interventions targeted higher education graduates or the unemployed population in general. Participants in the program to develop national employment offices and extend their employment and career guidance services were the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MOSAL) and international donors, UNDP, ILO, EU. The Ministry of Higher Education with funding from EU initiated the Modernization of Vocational and Educational Training (MVET) project through its VET council. The program was to include modernizing the curriculum to incorporate skills training and internships in industry. Other ministerial initiatives designed to improve employability outcomes were considered: initiative that involve employers in the development of the curriculum and develop a national virtual career guidance center in higher education.

Due to the conflict situation, these initiatives were not applied into practice. Post-conflict, the creation of career guidance services at all levels of the education system faces numerous challenges: the lack of a culture of career planning, career choices being determined by exam grades and family and social pressure; lack of administrative support on the part the government; inadequate infrastructure and lack of trained staff; lack of financial investment. In order to create a functional careers guidance service, careful planning and consultation of all relevant stakeholders are necessary. While career guidance at the secondary school level does not exist in any meaningful sense in Syria, an online guide, Career Path Step by Step offers careers guidance and support. It includes resources for teachers and schools, but, overall, it is very generic in nature and does not focus on specific career interventions.

Support is offered by United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in the form of the Engaging Youth Project. This program chronicles the individual support that career guidance practitioners can offer to young refugees, aged 13 to 35, in supporting their transition from school to work.

KEY STATISTICS. A majority of data for Syria are from before the civil war; however, they reveals some interesting trends. The most recent data are from net enrollment data from 2013 and show a significant difference between lower and upper secondary school enrollment of almost 30 percent, while the enrollment rates between males and females are essentially the same. Similarly, the out-of-school rates show that, before the civil war, there were over 30 percent more children of upper secondary school age out of school at 58 percent, compared to around 20 percent out of lower secondary school. The attainment rates show more of a gender disparity, with 10 percent more males than females completing at least one level of secondary school. Finally, the dropout rates show a decline in lower secondary dropout in the year leading up to the civil war, decreasing from 38 percent dropout in 2008 to 33 percent in 2011.

![Total net enrollment rate by level of education (2013)](image)
TVET STATISTICS. Between 2011 and 2015, the number of students enrolled in vocational programs has decreased by more than half; however, this is likely due to the impact of the civil war on school enrollment.¹²

Numerous systems-wide factors impact youth transitions and the interventions designed to support youth through this period. Notable strengths and weaknesses related to the general and technical education systems include:
Macro-environment factors impact the lived experiences and decision-making of secondary-age youth, including the political and economic context, conflict/crisis, demographics, environmental constraints, etc. A selection of key factors include:

**Opportunities and Threats of the Macro-Environment**

**Opportunities**
- Conclusion of war in certain areas allow for investment in the education system and infrastructure.
- During the war, more women were forced to take up economic and livelihood activities, which could be an avenue to target training and support to upskill women and secure their roles in education and the economy.
- Aleppo is considered a hub for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurial sectors, which presents an opportunity for training and supporting out-of-school youth who are interested in business startup.
- There is a strong culture of vocational education in the northeast and northwest concentrated around livestock and agriculture. Reviving the TVET sector in these areas could create sustainable jobs for TVET students.
- Some interventions, e.g. DFID Syrian Education Program, incorporate mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services and referral systems. The need for these services remains acute for children and youth across all grade levels.

**Threats**
- Security is fragile in the Northeast, especially in Raqqa and Dier ez-Zor, and donors are concerned about the potential for ISIS to return.
- Jabhit Al Nusra is active in the Northwest and promotes Jihadi philosophy in schools.
- The government continued to pay teachers’ salaries even in non-regime-controlled areas as a control measure and to gauge loyalty. Teachers receive salaries from Damascus regardless of whether they show up to teach.
- IDP camps across Syria have limited access to education, extracurricular activities, and basic school supplies.
- Huge needs for mental health programs. According to the International Rescue Committee (IRC), around 6.7 million people are still displaced inside Syria and 14 million need humanitarian aid. Women and children are particularly vulnerable to a range of safety issues including sexual violence, early marriage, child labor, and physical and mental trauma.
- Very limited capacity of private sector to absorb out-of-school youth or recent graduates in the labor market.
- Syria ranks 152 out of 156 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index, which assesses progress towards gender parity.
Interventions targeting the secondary school age group in Syria focus on:

**Enhance Learning & Education Outcomes.** Programs offer curriculum development, enhance governance, improve quality, and strengthen linkages with the market. Programs focus on improving access and quality of education through school rehabilitation, provision of accelerated learning and re-integrate out-of-school youth into the formal education system. Programs offer market-based vocational education through blended learning and innovative technologies to combine online and in-person instructions.

**Enhance Access & Learning Environment.** Programs provide intranet to support digital materials and virtual classrooms, facilitate social and emotional learning for students and their caregivers, and create child-friendly safe spaces. There is collaboration with local education officials and civil society organizations to restore and provide proper learning environments, with basic education supplies for students.

The following tables provide a non-exhaustive list of general education and TVET-focused interventions targeting secondary school aged youth in Syria.

**Key General Secondary Education and Foundational Skill Development Interventions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>The Syrian Education Program, DFID</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Supports children’s return to learning in parallel (to government) to safe environments, ensure teachers are paid and receive training and support, and work on the psychological problems of vulnerable children. Operates in the Northeast and Northwest regions of Syria.</td>
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<th><strong>Injaz II Project, U.S. Department of State</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>• Project provides remedial education, distance learning in IDP camps, social and emotional learning for children and their caregivers, and manages school rehabilitation to form child-friendly spaces, with the aim to support foundational literacy and numeracy in both formal and informal education settings, including IDP camps.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provides market-based vocational education through blended learning, and innovative technologies to combine online and in-person instruction.</td>
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<th><strong>Engaging Youth Project, UNRWA</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>• Offers continuing education – including TVET, career guidance, business development, and life-skills to Palestinian youth aged 17 to 33 to support their transition from school to work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Operated 12 youth centers in Syria, 10 of which remain operational, providing youth a space for culture, art, and sport.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
KEY SECONDARY-LEVEL TVET AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS

**Education Programs in Syria, UNICEF**

- Focused on improving access and quality of education through school rehabilitation, teacher training, provision of accelerated learning and re-integrate into the formal education system.
- Offers alternative learning programs for out-of-school children with no access to formal education to bring them back into the education system.
- Addresses the critical lack of education supplies and economic barriers to parents enrolling their children in school.\(^{21}\)

**CITATIONS**

3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
11. The effects of the crisis on education in areas controlled by the government of Syria (2010-2015)
15. IRC. Syria: Country Facts.
18. Chemonics. Strengthening Education for Youth in Syria: Injaz II.
19. UNRWA. Engaging with the Youth of Syria.