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# Views of Education Outside the Formal System among Syrian Refugees in Jordan

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Syrian refugee children in Ramtha, Jordan; credit DFID



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## Overview

The Arab Barometer fourth wave survey in Jordan conducted interviews with 300 Syrian refugees living amongst the general population in Jordan.<sup>1</sup> These data offer insight into the degree to which Syrians are making use of informal education as a means to address educational challenges for their children who may have missed years of education because of the war in Syria, or who may not have been eligible for participation in the formal system in Jordan. Understanding the conditions facing this community can help develop policy solutions to improve the educational outcomes for this vulnerable community.

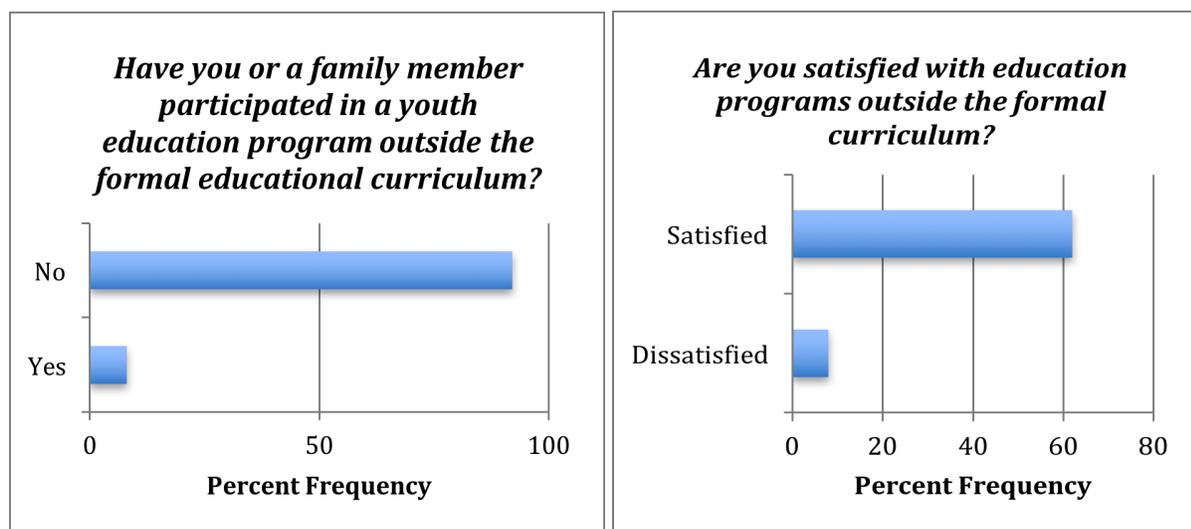
Nevertheless, the relatively small number of interviews means that the results should be interpreted with some caution. Although the sample is a random selection of Syrian refugees, the statistical power is less than among the sample of Jordanian citizens (1200 respondents). Despite this constraint, the results of the survey reveal surprisingly similar views of the educational system for both Jordanian citizens and Syrian refugees in Jordan, suggesting that similar types of educational programs outside the formal system might benefit of both communities.

## Youth Education Programs

The vast majority of Syrian refugees living in Jordan have not received education outside the formal system (92 percent). Thus, the sample size of those who have participated is relatively small and results should be interpreted with some caution. However, of those who have participated in such programs, 91 percent are satisfied with the experience. Only 2 of the 23 respondents who live in a household with a participant in such a program are dissatisfied.

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<sup>1</sup> Arab Barometer data. 2016. "Jordan. Wave 4." Available at <http://www.arabbarometer.org>. The sample did not include Syrians living in refugee camps.

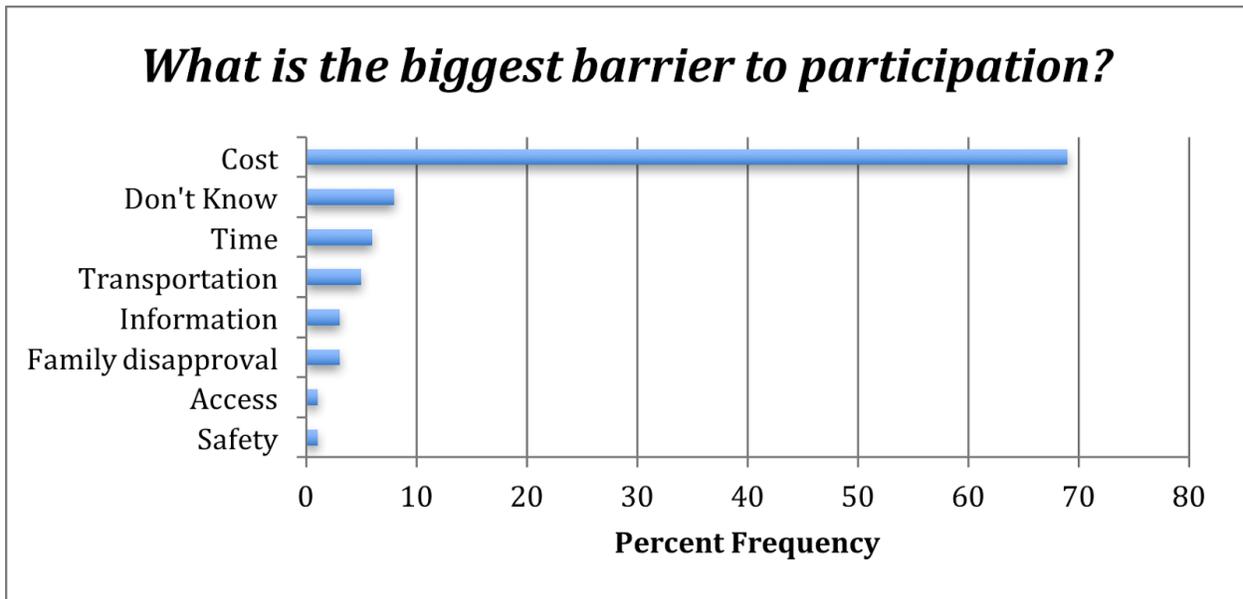


Among those who have participated or had a family member participate in such a program, when asked who organized the program, whether it is a private or a public institution, the plurality of respondents say it is a public organization (39 percent) while 26 percent say they do not know who organized the program. Meanwhile, about a third of respondents say that a private institution organized the educational program (35 percent).

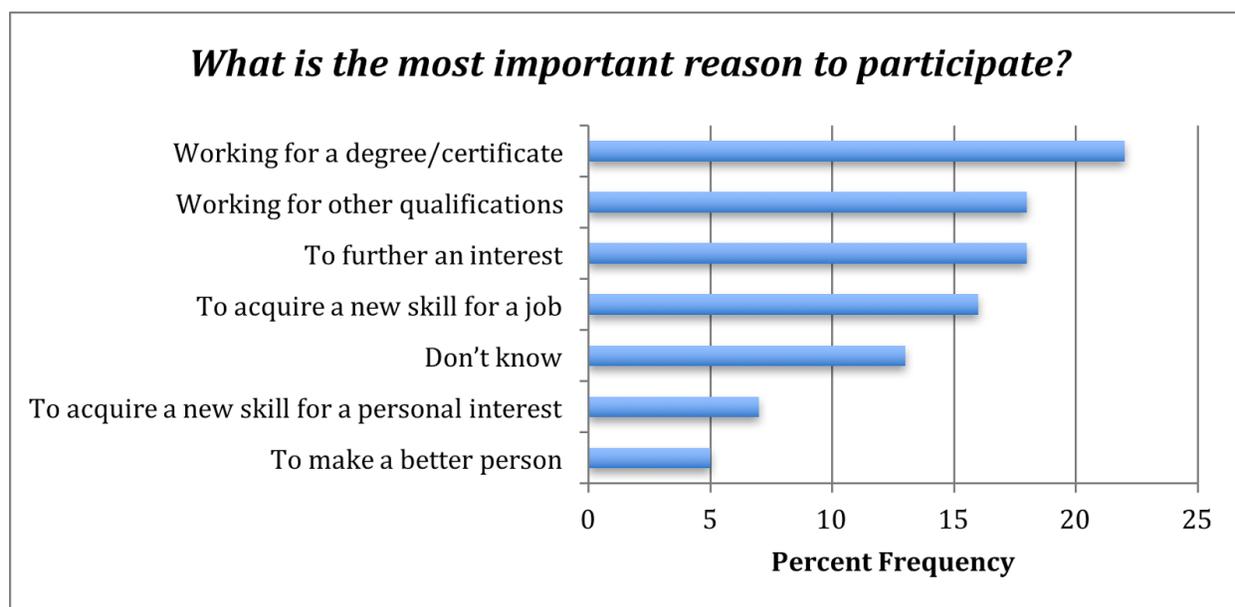
Among those who say that they themselves have participated in youth education programs, the two most common types of programs are those emphasizing life skills such as financial literacy, and social skills including tolerance and effective communication (7 percent, each). Math, languages and literacy are the next most common with about 4 percent participation in each. Among the 23 people who say that while they themselves have not participated in a youth education program a member of their household has, the most common programs were those focusing on literacy (7 people) and social skills (6 people), followed by languages (5 people), computers (4 people) and life skills (3 people). Only one person said a family member participated in a program for numeracy and no one cited participation in a program teaching science.

## Barriers to Youth Education Programs

Examining why relatively few Syrians may have participated in youth education programs, the survey results make clear that cost (69 percent) represents the largest barrier to participation in such programs, followed by time and transportation (6 percent and 5 percent respectively). Meanwhile, the second biggest barrier to participation is transportation (21 percent), followed by time (16 percent), cost (14 percent), lack of information (10 percent) and family disapproval (6 percent).



In terms of factors that would make them more likely to participate in a program outside the formal system, Syrians are relatively similar to Jordanians in their views. About two-fifths of Syrians say the most important reason to participate is in order to receive a degree, a certification or a qualification (41 percent). A quarter said it was either to further an interest or to acquire a new skill to further a personal interest. Slightly less than one-fifth say acquiring a new skill for a job is the most important reason to participate (16 percent). As for the second most important reason to participate, a plurality of Syrians says acquiring a new skill for a job (22 percent), followed by to further an interest (16 percent) and to acquire a new skill for an interest (15 percent). Meanwhile, Syrians list the importance of these programs for working for a degree or certificate and working for other qualifications at an equal rate (14 percent each).



Given the challenges Syrian refugees face, including limited work opportunities and limited savings, it is unsurprising that cost and transportation access are viewed as the biggest challenges to taking part in programs outside the formal system. It is also clear that programs that programs designed for this population must target skills that could help to achieve employment upon completion. In fact, this design is relatively similar to the considerations for the Jordanian population, suggesting that similar programs could attract youth from both populations living in Jordan.

## Views on Education

When asked about the kind of education system they prefer, Syrian respondents are divided, much like Jordanians, over whether the education system should emphasize the development of scientific skills, or if it should stress emotional skills equally. Overall, 45 percent prefer the former, whereas 50 percent prefer the latter. In another question asking about the importance of learning social skills, three-fifths of respondents say an education system that places primary importance on learning skills such as the ability to understand the perspectives and feelings of others is better than one that places primary importance on academic achievement (60 percent vs. 35 percent).

We see much the same trend with regards to analytical skills. There is a clear preference for critical thinking as opposed to rote memorization, which is a similar trend to what is found among Jordanians. Syrian respondents stress the importance of learning to think about how to answer a question versus a focus on simply obtaining the correct answer (72 percent vs. 22 percent). Syrians also show a strong preference for a system where examinations allow students to demonstrate how well they have made their own sense of

		Strongly Agree or Agree
5A	<b>Statement 1:</b> The education system should focus primarily on developing the scientific skills of pupils and students	45%
	<b>Statement 2:</b> Just as there are courses to teach scientific skills there must be courses to teach students how to recognize and express their own emotions and respond to others' emotions	50%
5B	<b>Statement 1:</b> Giving the correct answer to a question remains the most important goal for pupils and students	22%
	<b>Statement 2:</b> It is not important for pupils and students to always reach the correct answer. What is most important is that they learn to think about how to answer the question	72%
5C	<b>Statement 1:</b> A good education system is one that encourages the student to accept the answer offered by the teacher because it is the best answer, there is no need for alternatives.	31%
	<b>Statement 2:</b> A good education system is one that encourages students to think for themselves even when it goes against what the teacher is saying.	63%
5D	<b>Statement 1:</b> Examinations that allow students to demonstrate how well they have memorized what has been taught in class are the best test of learning.	19%

	<b>Statement 2:</b> Examinations that allow students to demonstrate how well they have made their own sense of what has been taught in class are the best test of learning.	75%
5E	<b>Statement 1:</b> The education system should place primary importance on academic achievement and certificates recognizing completion.	35%
	<b>Statement 2:</b> The education system should place primary importance on learning social skills such as the ability to understand the perspectives and feelings of others.	60%

what has been taught as opposed to examinations that allow students to demonstrate how well they have memorized what has been taught in class (75 percent vs. 19 percent).

A small difference is found between the Jordanians and Syrian respondents on one question. While 63 percent of Syrians say a good education system is one that encourages students to think for themselves even when it goes against what the teacher is saying, 70 percent of Jordanians say the same. This difference, however, is relatively small and suggests a generally similar trend to Jordanians. Thus, on the whole, Syrian refugees living in Jordan are open to both critical thinking and an emphasis on emotional intelligence in the education system.

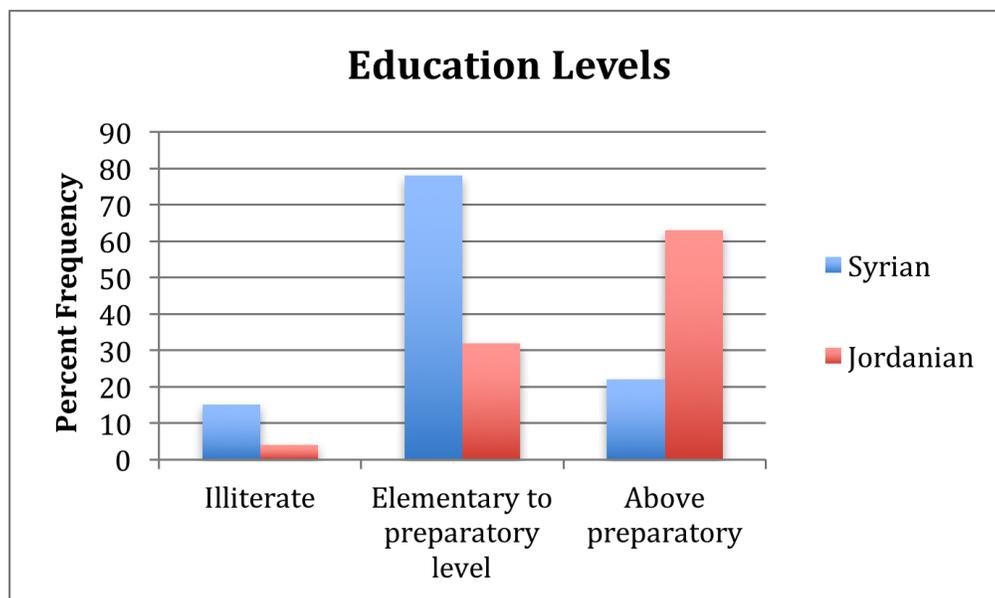
## Beliefs and Social Attitudes

Syrian respondents hold similar views about women's roles in Muslim countries compared with Jordanians. Over three-quarters of Syrians say that men are better at political leadership than women (75 percent). Around one-fifth disagree or strongly disagree with this sentiment (23 percent). Despite supporting this conservative view about women in leadership roles, nearly three-quarters of Syrian respondents say that a woman can become president or prime minister of a Muslim country (68 percent) compared with 65 percent of Jordanians who say the same. In terms of education, four-fifths of Syrians disagree with the notion that university education is more important for a boy than it is for a girl. Despite this, Syrian respondents are divided when it comes to men and women attending university classes together. Slightly more than half (56 percent) say it is acceptable while 42 percent say it is not, which is similar to results for Jordanians. Though

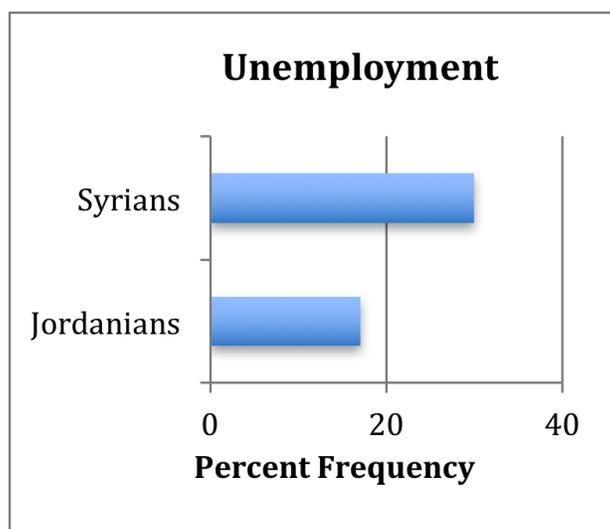
there are some clear exceptions, like men and women attending class together and women's ability to lead as compared to men, it seems that Syrians living in Jordan, much like their Jordanian counterparts, have relatively liberal views on women pursuing higher education. This finding suggests that the Syrian population would be relatively open to youth educational programs outside the formal system that target both boys and girls.

## General Demographics

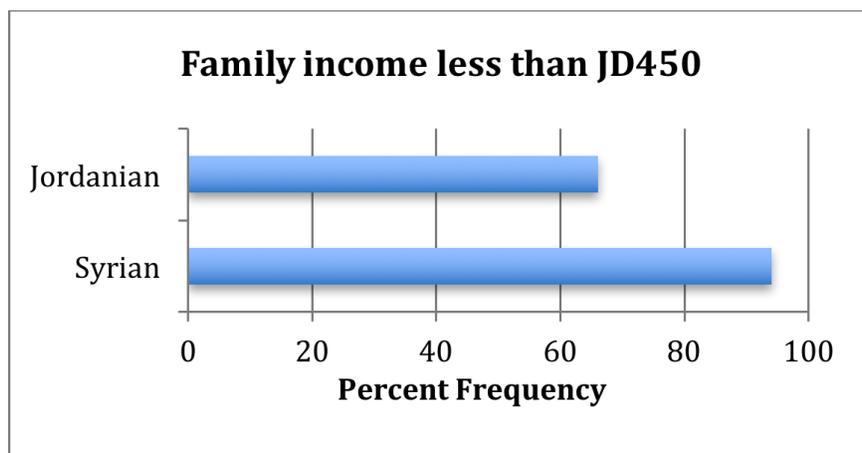
Compared to Jordanians, the Syrian respondents are on average slightly younger (mean age of 38 as opposed to mean age 42). Perhaps not surprisingly, Jordanians have significantly higher levels of education than do Syrian refugees residing in Jordan. While 15 percent of the Syrian respondents say they are illiterate, less than 5 percent of Jordanians say the same (4 percent). Most Syrians report having an education at the basic level or below (78 percent), whereas most Jordanians have an educational level above the preparatory/basic level (63 percent).



Another important difference is in income. Syrian respondents are overwhelmingly poorer than Jordanians. For example, 94 percent have a monthly family income of less than JD450 a month as opposed to 66 percent of Jordanians. In part, this difference can be linked to restrictions placed on Syrian refugees being formally employed in Jordan. Perhaps unsurprisingly, 30 percent of Syrians are unemployed compared with 17 percent of Jordanian respondents.



When asked whether their household income covers their expenses almost three times as many Jordanians as Syrians say that it does. While 13 percent of Syrians say their household income covered their expenses without notable difficulties, 35 percent of Jordanians say the same. Among those whose household income does not cover expenses, 56 percent of Syrians say they face significant difficulties in meeting their needs, compared to 21 percent of Jordanians saying the same. Thus, Syrians are in a much more difficult economic position than their Jordanian counterparts, as the majority struggle to cover even basic expenses.



## Conclusion

Though Syrians living in Jordan are overwhelmingly poorer, have lower education levels and a higher unemployment rate than their Jordanian counterparts, we see that the views

of both groups are relatively similar on topics relating to education outside the formal system, with few exceptions. While most Syrians living in Jordan have not received education outside the formal system, there are nonetheless some interesting findings in the data. The vast majority of those who have participated in programs are satisfied, and the most popular programs are those emphasizing life skills and social skills, followed by math, languages and literacy.

The most pronounced barrier Syrians living in Jordan face in participating in these programs is cost, followed by time and transportation. With regards to why they view participation in educational programs outside the formal system as important, the plurality of Syrians says it is to receive a degree, certificate or some type of qualification. We find that much like Jordanians, Syrians have divided views on what kind of education system they prefer. Though there is a clear preference for critical thinking as opposed to rote memorization, Syrians are more divided on whether an ideal education system emphasizes the development of scientific skills or if it should stress emotional skills equally. Thus, overall, Syrian refugees living in Jordan are open to both critical thinking and an emphasis on emotional intelligence in the education system. Finally, with regards to social attitudes and belief, though there are some clear exceptions like men and women attending classes together and women's ability to lead as compared to men, it seems that Syrians living in Jordan have relatively liberal views on women pursuing higher education.

An educational program outside the formal system would need to account for some of these perceived barriers. It is also clear that programs designed for Syrians must target skills that could help to achieve employment upon completion. An emphasis on practical skills is important. The similarity between the considerations for an educational program targeting Syrians living in Jordan and those for the Jordanian population suggests that comparable programs could attract youth from both populations.