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Overview of Higher Education

The higher education system in Jordan comprises 10 public universities, 19 private universities, one online university, the World Islamic University, and 51 private and public community colleges. The first public university in the Kingdom - the University of Jordan - was opened in 1962, followed in 1976 by the University of Yarmouk. In 1989, the Ministry of Higher Education authorised Jordan's first private university, now known as the University of Amman. The first community colleges were established in 1981, following a decision to convert and expand the existing network of Teaching Colleges offering specialised career-orientated training to prepare students for mid-level professions.

Total enrolment in tertiary education in Jordan has grown rapidly in recent years. The gross enrolment rate in tertiary education has increased from 38.8 percent in 2006 to 44.9 percent in 2015, higher than regional averages with rates among females consistently higher than those of males. During the 2000/2001 academic year, 77,481 students were enrolled in universities and community colleges, rising to 384,730 by 2013/2014. Over this period, enrolments at community colleges have declined, with young people increasingly favouring academic qualifications over vocational ones.

University versus Vocational Education

Secondary students are streamed into universities or vocational colleges based on their final secondary school exam results (*tanjibi*). Public universities favour traditional academic disciplines such as the sciences (medicine, engineering etc.) and humanities (education, economics, law etc.), whereas private institutions offer a more diverse range of subjects, ranging from engineering and commerce, to more modern subjects such as Information Technology (IT), design, animation and tele-marketing. Medicine, dentistry and veterinary sciences are only taught at public universities, which are viewed as offering a higher quality of education than their private counterparts. Public universities are less expensive for Jordanians, and thus more competitive in terms of entrance requirements. Private universities impose slightly lower entry requirements, offer one price to all students and, as a result, have a higher ratio of

international students.

Jordan's 51 community colleges are open to any holder of a General Education Certificate (*tanjibi*). Community colleges used to only offer vocational courses but in recent years have expanded the range to attract students. They offer two year programmes in a wide range of subjects, including the arts, sciences, management, business administration and engineering, as well as more vocational courses such as IT, design, interior design, business, upholstery and culinary arts. At the end of the programme, students take an exam (*al-shameh*) and those who pass receive a vocational or technical diploma.

Entry Routes into Universities

There are two entry routes into universities for Jordanians: (1) the national competition and (2) the parallel (or second chance) system. Under the national competition, places are awarded based on *tanjibi* results. Those who fail to secure the grades they need, can apply under the parallel system, where entry to the same courses costs over three times more than under the national competition.

Students can apply for financial scholarships if they meet certain criteria, related to income levels and their parents' profession (e.g. the children of government employees, military personnel and teachers). Student loans are available, and need to be repaid within five years of graduating.

Access to Higher Education for Foreign Students

Foreign students are an important source of financing for higher education in Jordan, across the private and public universities and community college streams. Education is an important regional export; the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has reported that more than 10 percent of all students enrolled in public or private universities are foreign.

Overall, there are many incentives for universities and community colleges to accept foreign students. First, the high fees imposed offset university running costs. Second, university rankings depend on the ratio of national/international students. Third, at least in the case of Syrians and other refugee groups, there is a sense of humanitarian responsibility for Jordanians to support their Arab neighbours.

2017	Public/ Private	No. of Students Enrolled	% of Foreign Students Enrolled
University of Jordan	Public	26,532	17%
Jordan University of Science and Technology	Public	24,889	20%
Hashemite University	Public	29,803	1%
Al Quds Community College	Private	1751	13%
Khawarismi College	Private	1142	21%
Islamic Community College	Private	477	25%
Arab Community College	Private	954	19%
Irbid College	Public	1144	2%
Zarqa	Public	913	4%

Access to Higher Education for Syrian Refugees

As the Syria crisis has continued, the international community has increasingly recognised the importance of supporting refugee higher education. At the end of 2015, a Tertiary Education Coordination Group (TECG), was established, composed of UN agencies and other higher education groups. This is consistent with a progressive inclusion of higher education in the Jordan Response Plan (humanitarian plan for Syrian refugees in Jordan) and an increased focus on longer term resilience programming, alongside lifesaving humanitarian assistance. Indeed, the 2016 JRP call for funds emphasises higher education (including vocational education) as an integral component of the education sector.

Numerous agreements between donors and individual universities have resulted in a range of scholarships for Syrian students who are typically enrolled under the parallel system, and hence are required to pay higher fees. A number of universities have taken steps to reduce fees for Syrian refugees in line with national students.

Many different schemes are available for Syrian refugees. Currently, the main donors are the Deutsche Akademische Austausch Dienst/German Academy

Exchange Service (DAAD), the EU, UNHCR, the Jubilee Centre for Excellence in Education, and UNESCO. Programmes are designed to support Syrian refugees as well as Jordanians from refugee hosting communities. The largest single initiative is the EU's EDU-SYRIA initiative, comprising two 15 million Euro grants. Funded through the Madad Trust Fund, it aims to engage 1,390 students in higher education (diploma, bachelor and master level at universities and community colleges) through partnerships with the German Jordanian University, Yarmouk University, Zarqa University, Al Quds College and the Jordan University for Science and Technology. It is aimed at Syrian refugees and a smaller number (300) of underprivileged Jordanians.

Higher Education and Syrian Refugees in Jordan

- As at December 2016, there were 656,000 Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR in Jordan.
- 12 percent (84,000) were aged between 18-24.
- Only 13.30 percent of these aged 19-23 were enrolled in higher education courses.
- The gross enrolment rate in higher education in Syria in the years leading up to crisis: 22.59 percent in 2007, 24.22 percent in 2008, 24.3 percent in 2009, 26 percent in 2010 and 25.94 percent in 2011.
- There is no regulatory framework pertaining to refugees and higher education in Jordan.
- Jordan is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention.
- The 1998 Memorandum of Understanding between Jordan and UNHCR makes no explicit reference to higher education, only going so far as to state that "refugees should receive a treatment as per the internationally accepted standard".

Syrian refugees are treated as international students and, apart from the fact that they may have access to more assistance from donors, they are not distinguished in any way either by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research or by universities and colleges themselves.