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EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM, PARTI-  
CIPATION, AND ATTAINMENT IN  
PRE-CRISIS SYRIA

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# **Educational system, participation, and attainment in pre-crisis Syria**

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# Educational system, participation, and attainment in pre-crisis Syria

## Abstract

Pre-migration conditions can have important consequences for refugees' societal integration in the arrival country. In the case of Syrians, information about the conditions under which they lived prior to migration is often scarce. This paper aims to give an overview over various educational aspects in pre-crisis Syria: The educational system, the educational participation of children and adolescents, and the educational attainment of the adult population. Our findings mainly rely on aggregate data from the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics and univariate and bivariate analyses of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) carried out in Syria in 2006. We find that early childhood education (ECE) was much less common in Syria compared to Germany. In regards to school enrollment in Syria, most 7- and 8-year-olds attended primary school, whereas dropout rates among 14- to 16-year-olds were high. As common patterns in the educational participation of children and adolescents, we find strong inequalities by Syrian regions and parental educational background. Regional disparities also characterize the educational attainment distributions of the adult population. In addition, our findings show the extent of educational expansion among the Syrian population, with average educational levels rising among younger cohorts.

## Keywords

Educational system, educational participation, educational attainment, Syria

## 1. Introduction

The recent years have seen a rising interest in research on refugees and their integration into the German society. While several surveys such as the project “ReGES – Refugees in the German Educational System” emerged to collect data on the newcomers and their situation at the place of arrival (e.g., Will, Balaban, Dröscher, Homuth & Welker, 2018), information about the conditions under which they lived prior to migration is often scarce. However, pre-migration conditions can have important consequences for the refugees’ integration at destination (Ichou, 2014). Most importantly, educational aspects such as the family’s educational background and an individuals’ previous educational trajectory in the place of origin play an important role in shaping educational success in Germany.

In a country such as Syria, opportunities to acquire a good education may have been limited by structural barriers such as a lack of infrastructure. The Syrian government started tackling educational inequalities decades ago (Drysdale, 1981). Previous research found, for example, that participation rates in primary education were among the highest in the Middle East (Smits & Huisman, 2013; Fayek, 2017), whereas participation in secondary schooling was characterized by high dropout rates (Gebel, 2012). However, the available studies only shed light on selected areas of the Syrian education system. In this working paper, we try to give a more comprehensive picture of educational participation in Syria, with a particular focus on regional, gender, and social inequalities. The paper describes the situation on the eve of the Syrian civil war, shortly before millions of Syrians left their country.

We proceed as follows: The educational system is shortly described in Chapter 2, before Chapter 3 presents empirical findings on the educational participation of children and adolescents and on the educational background of adults. The data sources which we used are presented in Chapter 3.1. In terms of educational participation, we look at three exemplary age groups: Children aged 3 to 5 years and their participation in early childhood education (ECE; Chapter 3.2), children aged 7 or 8 years and their enrollment in primary education (Chapter 3.3), and 14- to 16-year-old adolescents who were supposedly at the end of lower secondary education (Chapter 3.4). The remaining subchapters focus on students’ performance (Chapter 3.5), and the educational attainment of the adult population (Chapter 3.6).

## 2. Syria’s educational system

### 2.1 Early childhood education (ECE)

ECE in Syria is non-compulsory and not free of charge (Al Hesan, Bengtsson & Kohlenberger, 2016). Children may start attending kindergarten at the age of 3 years, with a duration of 3 years (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2020a). Before the outbreak of the civil war, official statistics reported a total number of 1,866 kindergartens in Syria in 2010 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011b). Due to the scarcity of official data it is difficult to put these numbers into perspective. However, with an estimated total population of 20,619,000 inhabitants (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011c), we calculated a ratio of 1 kindergarten per 11,050 inhabitants. In Germany, the ratio was 1 kindergarten per 1,444 inhabitants in 2020 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2020; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021). Although a direct comparison is limited by factors such as different age structures between both countries, potentially different

definitions of kindergartens, and the time difference between the Syrian and the German data, these numbers suggest that kindergartens were less common in Syria than in Germany.

In addition, early childhood education in Syria does not seem to be strongly regulated by the state, as there is no common definition of kindergartens or common regulations according to which they operate. We therefore assume that Syrian kindergartens may be quite diverse in terms of aspects such as organization. This assumption is backed by the fact that kindergartens relied on a variety of affiliations, ranging between private and public forms of sponsorship. Among the abovementioned 1,866 kindergartens, a majority of 63.0 percent was run on private funds in 2010 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011b). A further 14.0 percent were affiliated with the Syrian Ministry of Education, 12.2 percent with the Teachers' Syndicate, 9.6 percent with the Women Union, and 1.1 percent<sup>1</sup> with other sponsors. To take into account that we do not dispose of a clear definition of Syrian kindergartens, we refer to the broader term ECE in the empirical chapter (3.2).

## 2.2 Basic and secondary schooling

At the age of 6 years, children enter the Syrian school system and pass through a 9-year basic educational stage that is free of cost. In theory, schooling is compulsory until the age of 15; that is, until the end of basic education (Ministry of Education, 2015). Almost all basic education schools – 97.1 percent of 17,120 schools that existed in 2010 – are run by the state, whereas only 2.2 percent of basic educational schools are privately owned<sup>2</sup> (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011a). The basic stage consists of two cycles: The first cycle lasts from grade 1 to grade 6. Its completion is equivalent to primary education or ISCED 1 (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2020a)<sup>3</sup>. The second cycle of basic education covers grades 7 to 9 and concludes with a general exam in which the students who pass are awarded a certificate of basic education (equivalent to lower secondary or ISCED 2).

The basic education stage is followed by a secondary education stage with a duration of 3 years, starting from grade 10 and ending after grade 12. Like basic education, secondary education is free of charge (Ministry of Education, 2016). The share of private secondary schools is slightly higher than in basic education: 6.2 percent of secondary schools in Syria were privately owned in 2010, vs. 93.8 percent of state-owned secondary schools (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011d).

The secondary stage differentiates between general and technical/vocational schools. Students are tracked based on their results of the exam at the end of the basic educational stage: To be admitted to general secondary school, students need to achieve a score of at least 50 percent (Al Hessian et al., 2016). Students can choose between two branches: scientific or literary (Ministry of Education, 2016). At the end of grade 12, students acquire a general secondary education certificate which is equivalent to ISCED 3 and gives access to higher education<sup>4</sup> (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2020a). Students who score below 50 percent at the basic education exam are sent to vocational or technical schools. These schools provide

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<sup>1</sup> Totals in this paper may not always equal 100 percent because of rounding.

<sup>2</sup> The remaining 0.7 percent is run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

<sup>3</sup> ISCED levels in this paper refer to ISCED-2011. For further information, see UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2012).

<sup>4</sup> For further information on the system of higher education in Syria, see Al Hessian et al. (2016).

vocational education in various branches such as industrial or commercial, which are further subdivided into specializations such as electrical techniques or nursing (Al Hessian et al., 2016). Although some parts of vocational education may be covered by practical training such as internships, vocational education mostly takes place at school and is not comparable to the German dual system (Gebel, 2012). After 3 years of vocational school – that is, at the end of grade 12 – students acquire a vocational secondary education certificate which is equivalent to ISCED 3 (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2020a). Like students with a general secondary education certificate, those who acquired a vocational certificate may go on into higher education. In practice, vocational secondary degrees rarely gave access to universities, but their holders usually ended up in postsecondary technical institutes (Kabbani & Salloum, 2011).

Figure 1 presents an overview of the Syrian school system. For further information, see, e.g., Al Hessian et al. (2016), Fayek (2017), and Gebel (2012).

Grade	School type		Theoretical entry age
1	Basic educational school First cycle		6
2			7
3			8
4			9
5			10
6			11
7	Basic educational school Second cycle		12
8			13
9			14
10	General secondary school	Vocational/technical secondary school	15
11			16
12			17

Figure 1. The Syrian general school system; Source: own illustration

### 3. Educational participation and attainment in pre-crisis Syria

#### 3.1 Data sources

Our analyses mainly rely on quantitative data from a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) conducted in Syria in 2006 (Central Bureau of Statistics, UNICEF, & Pan-Arab Project for Family Health/League of Arab States, 2008). MICS is an international household survey program developed by UNICEF to provide comparable quantitative data on a range of indicators – for example, on the well-being of children. Because the aim of our paper is to describe

educational participation and attainment as it was before the war, we believe these data from 2006 to be a valuable source for our purposes.

The sample was drawn on a two-stage random sampling procedure. With a household participation rate of 95.7 percent, the data cover 107,369 individuals in 19,019 households of the general Syrian population. These high case numbers allow for analyses with various age-specific subgroups. To collect information, several instruments such as a household questionnaire and a questionnaire for children under 5 years were used. Among other topics, questions on each individual's education such as the highest grade level and the highest attended educational level were asked in the household questionnaire, while the children questionnaire contained some questions on participation in early education (Central Bureau of Statistics et al., 2008). We applied weights in all analyses of the MICS data.

The findings that we present are complemented by official aggregate data provided by the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics as well as findings of the TIMSS 2011 study (Mullis, Martin, Foy & Arora, 2012) and of the Syrian Youth Transition Survey 2009 (Gebel, 2012).

### **3.2 Participation in ECE**

To measure ECE participation of children aged 3 or 4 years, the MICS participants were asked whether their child currently “[attended] any organized learning or early childhood education program, such as a private or government facility, including kindergarten or community child care” (Central Bureau of Statistics et al., 2008, p. 189). In the case of children aged 5 years or older, the equivalent information was collected in the household questionnaire and referred to the educational level attended during the current school year. Here, respondents could indicate the option “preschool”. Despite coming from different sources, we assume that both variables measure comparable concepts because of their broad framing. We therefore combined both variables in order to prevent redundancies in the following presentation of descriptive analyses.



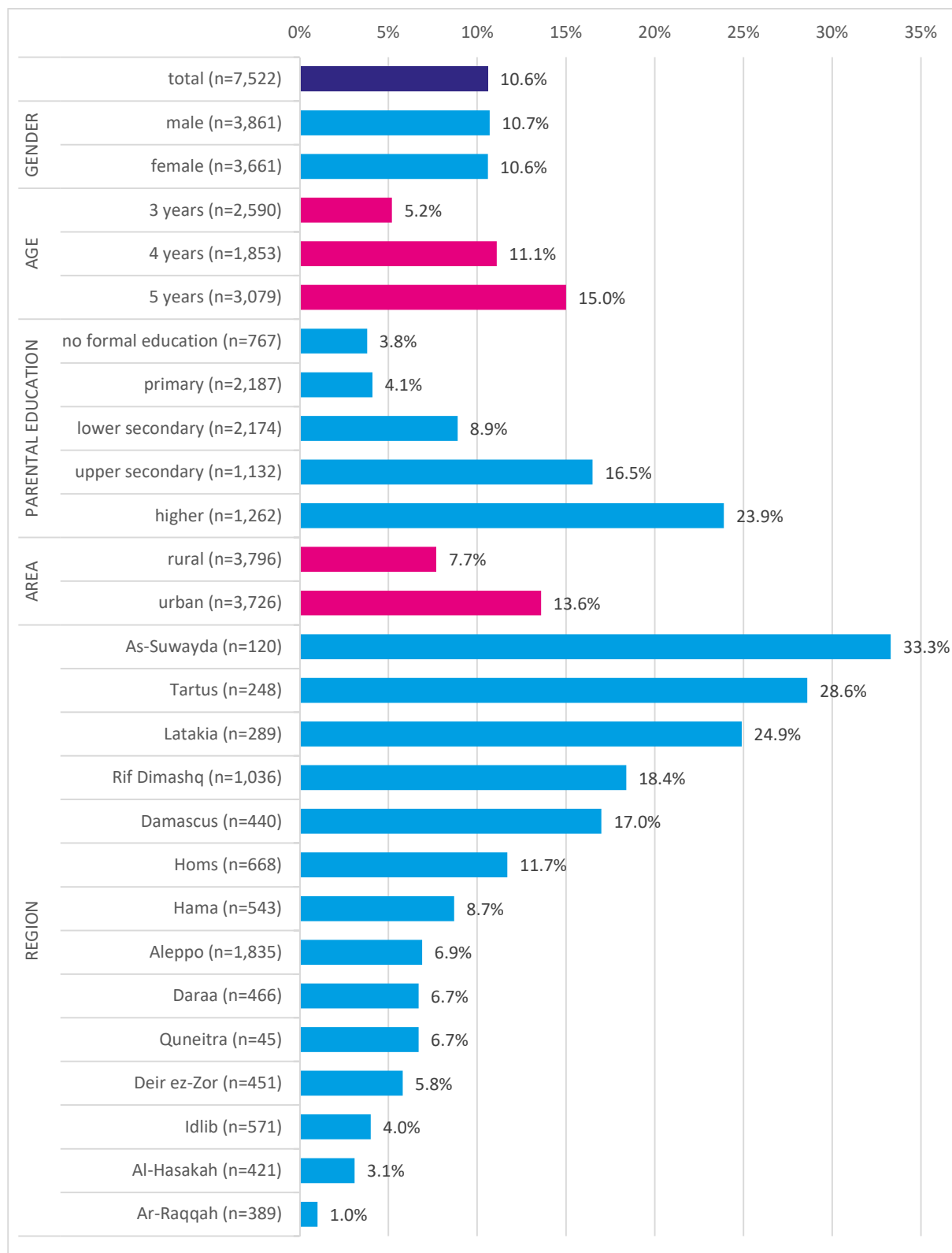


Figure 2. Participation of 3- to 5-year-olds in early childhood education by gender, age, parental education, area, and region;<sup>5</sup> Source: MICS Syria 2006, own calculations

<sup>5</sup> The low case number for the region of Quneitra can be explained by the Golan Heights conflict with Israel, leaving this region largely abandoned.

Compared to Germany, where 86.9 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds attended ECE in 2006 (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, 2007), the Syrian data show very low participation rates. A total of 10.6 percent of children aged between 3 and 5 years attended some kind of early education, without virtual differences between the participation rates of boys and girls (see Figure 2). These data draw a similar picture as official UNESCO data (see UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2020b). Participation rates steadily increase by age – only 5.2 percent of 3-year-olds attended, compared to 11.1 percent of 4-year-olds, and 15.0 percent of 5-year-olds – and are much higher in urban than in rural areas.

More strikingly, however, ECE participation strongly depends on the family background<sup>6</sup>. Only 3.8 percent of children whose parents never attended formal education and 4.1 percent of children whose parents attended primary school participated in ECE. The participation rates then strongly increase by each category of parental education and reach a maximum of 23.9 percent among children whose parents attended higher education.

Further differences become apparent as we compare the participation rates in the 14 regions of Syria: At the top of the ranking, every third child in the region of As-Suwayda attended ECE, followed by Tartus and Latakia, where approximately every fourth child attended. On the other hand, participation rates were as low as 1.0 percent in Ar-Raqqah. These disparities may be explained by social and economic factors. For instance, research has shown that a great share of women was inactive on the pre-crisis Syrian labor market, engaging in unpaid housework and family duties instead (Gebel, 2012). Families where mothers take care of the children at home may see no additional need for institutional childcare. Indeed, ECE participation is the lowest in regions where female labor market participation is low, whereas regions with higher ECE participation rates also display higher rates of female participation in the labor market (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010b).

In addition to ECE participation, the child-related questionnaire asked mothers or caretakers about the amount of hours that the child spent in these educational institutions within the previous 7 days before the interview. By survey design, this information is available only for children aged 3 or 4 years. Children who attended an early education program spent an average of 19.2 (sd = 11.8) hours there. We find only slight differences between subgroups (see Figure 3): Boys attended 1.6 hours more than girls, 4-year-olds attended 0.7 hours more than 3-year-olds, and children from urban contexts attended 2.4 hours more than children from rural areas. Because the comparatively low participation rates in early childhood education result in low case numbers for the analyses of ECE hours, we do not present the average amount of hours by parental education and regions.

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<sup>6</sup> To account for family background, we rely on parental education, which is measured as the highest educational level of either the household head or his or her wife or husband. The MICS data do not account for completed educational levels, so the measure reflects the highest educational level attended.

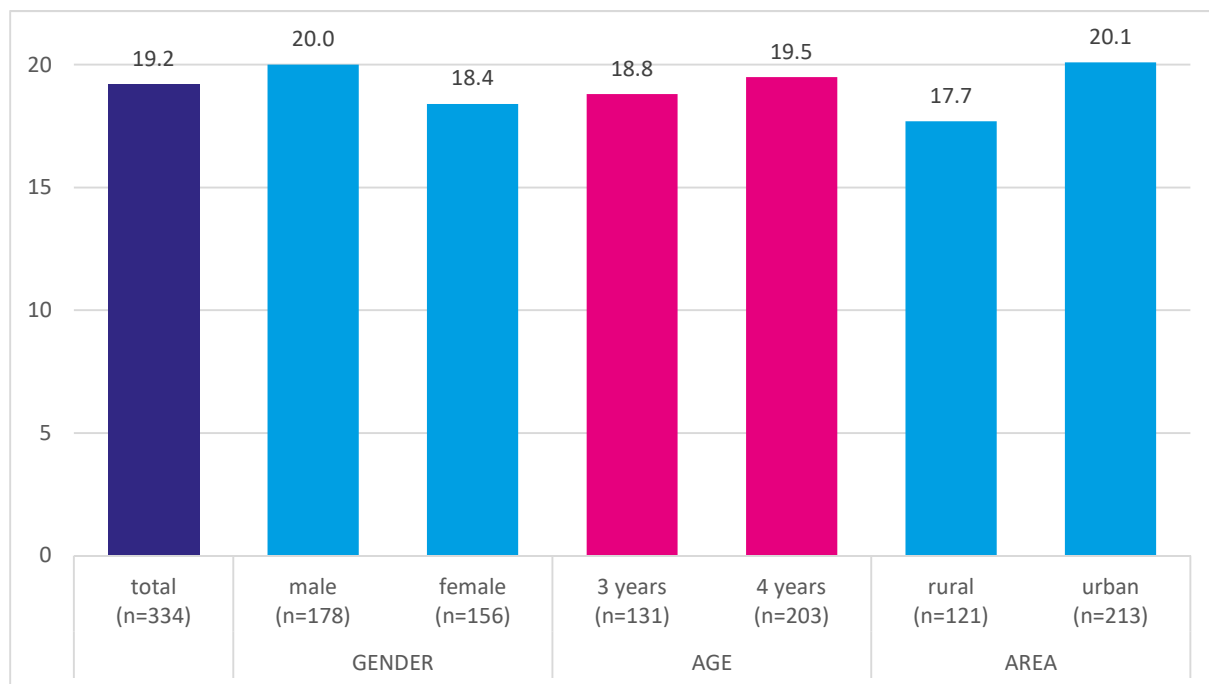


Figure 3. Weekly average amount of hours spent in ECE by gender, age, and area; Source: MICS Syria 2006, own calculations

### 3.3 Primary school enrollment

To account for children’s transition into primary school, this chapter analyzes the relationship between primary school enrollment and various sociodemographic aspects. The bivariate analyses focus on children aged 7 or 8 years<sup>7</sup>. Enrollment is measured by a dummy question in the MICS surveys asking whether the child attended school during the current school year.

<sup>7</sup> While schooling in Syria is mandatory from the age of 6 years, many 6-year-olds in the data attended neither primary school nor preschool at the time of the interview. The previous chapter therefore only included children until the age of 5 years, while this chapter only considers children from the age of 7 years.

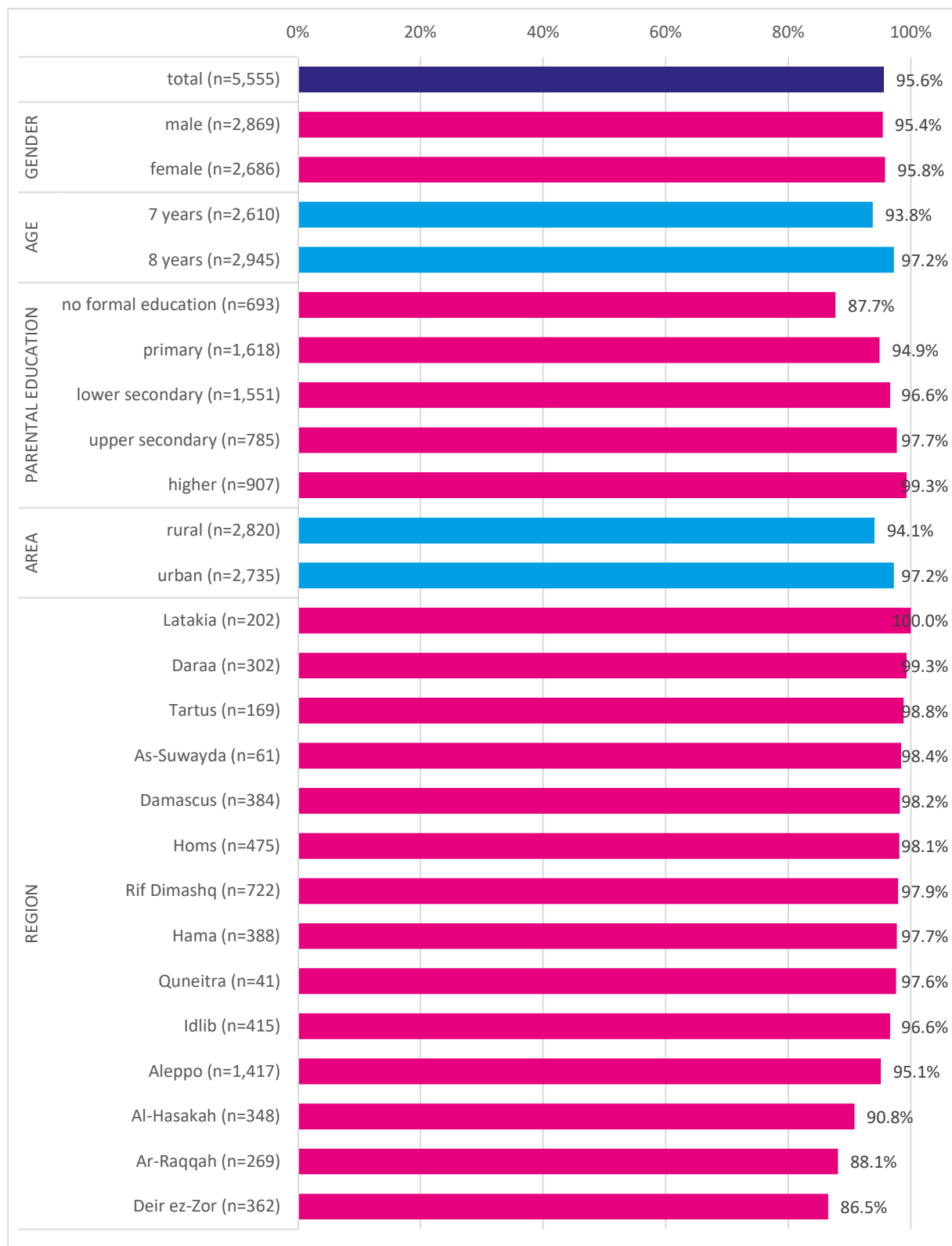


Figure 4. School attendance of 7- to 8-year-olds by gender, age, parental education, area, and region; Source: MICS Syria 2006, own calculations

Although children’s enrollment rates in primary schools generally were on a very high level, there was still a share of approximately four percent among children aged 7 or 8 years that did not attend school (see Figure 4). We see no significant differences between the enrollment

rates of boys and girls, but apparently, some differential can be explained by age since enrollment rates increase from 93.8 percent among 7-year-olds to 97.2 percent among 8-year-olds. According to Smits and Huisman (2013), it was quite common among Syrian parents to send their children to primary school at a later age than legally required.

More importantly, there are some differences with regard to the children's family background and between regions. Children to parents who never attended school were themselves by far less frequently enrolled in school (87.7 percent) compared to children from families with a primary (94.9 percent), lower secondary (96.6 percent), or upper secondary educational background (97.7 percent). Among children whose parents attended higher education, almost everybody attended primary school (99.3 percent).

In most Syrian regions, more than 95 percent of children attended primary school. At the bottom of the list, however, there are few regions where participation was by far lower. In Al-Hasakah, only 90.8 percent of children aged 7 or 8 years attended primary school, in Ar-Raqqa, only 88.1 percent, and in Deir ez-Zor, only 86.5 percent. We assume these differences can again be traced back to aspects such as conservative orientations among parts of the population. Furthermore, economic aspects could play a role. Among the regions with the lowest participation rates, many have traditionally been characterized by a strong agricultural sector (Sheikh Oghli & Ismail, 2007). Families that work in agriculture often require a lot of helping hands, which includes younger children, and may attach less importance to the education of children.

### **3.4 Schooling of adolescents**

School enrollment of adolescents is measured as a dummy, identically to the measure of school enrollment of children (see Chapter 3.3). In this section, we consider all adolescents regardless of the educational level they attended, but we restrict the analyses to individuals aged 14 to 16 years. We choose this age range because these adolescents should theoretically be at the end of lower secondary schooling. As previously mentioned, schooling in Syria is mandatory until the end of lower secondary education. Analyzing the enrollment rates of 14- to 16-year-olds should help clarify to what extent Syrians conformed to mandatory schooling in real life.

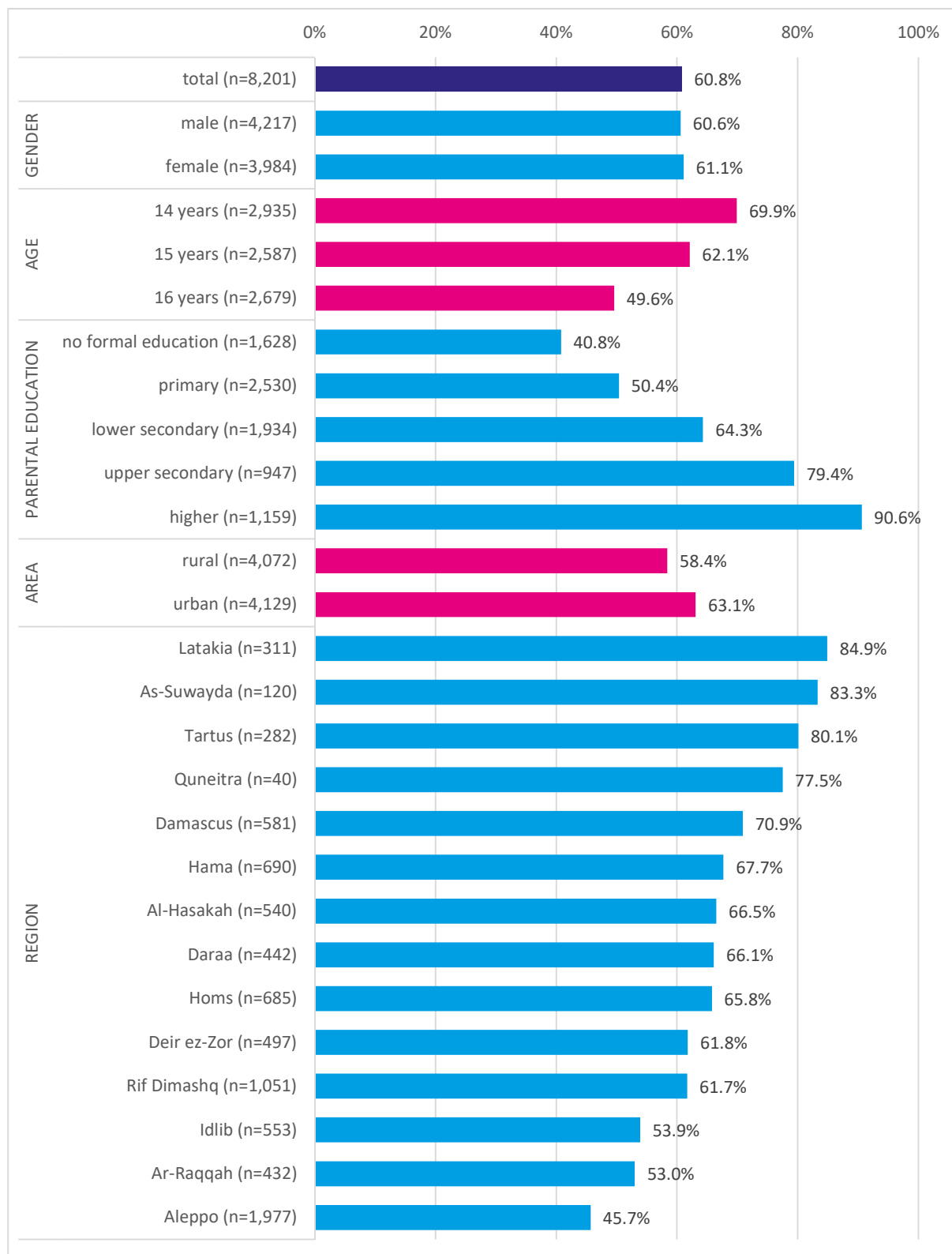


Figure 5. School attendance of 14- to 16-year-olds by gender, age, parental education, area, and region; Source: MICS Syria 2006, own calculations

In this age group, 60.8 percent of Syrians attended school. Participation rates of male and female adolescents were almost identical (see Figure 5), but strongly declined by age from 69.9 percent among 14-year-olds to only 49.6 percent among 16-year-olds. On the one hand,

this may partly be explained by the end of compulsory schooling after 9 years. On the other hand, the great extent of adolescents who left school is striking. Already at the age of 14, more than two fifths of Syrian adolescents did not attend school. However, this finding is line with previous research, which showed that high dropout rates were common in the pre-crisis Syrian educational system, where many young people left school before even finishing compulsory lower secondary education (Gebel, 2012).

Again, school participation appeared to be a matter of the family background, as its share was only 40.8 percent among adolescents whose parents never attended school, compared to 90.6 percent among adolescents whose parents attended a higher educational institution.

Further differences become apparent as we look into regional attendance rates. While school participation rates ranged between 60 and 70 percent in most regions, the three regions on top of the distribution – that is, Latakia, As-Suwayda, and Tartus – show rates above 80 percent. At the bottom, not even half of the adolescents in the observed age group attended school in Aleppo. Economic aspects could again be one source that explains why some regions display particularly low participation rates as many of these regions have traditionally been characterized by a strong agricultural sector (Sheikh Oghli & Ismail, 2007).

The MICS data also allow for some basic analyses with regard to the adolescents' educational level. Because the stages of the Syrian educational system are closely related to grade levels, this section presents data on the highest grade level completed by adolescents aged 14 to 16 years. On average, they completed 7.1 grade levels (sd = 2.0), but there is an important gap of approximately two grade levels between adolescents who were out of school (mean = 5.9; sd = 2.2) and enrolled students (mean = 7.9; sd = 1.3). Because the latter were still in the educational system at the time of the interview, many of them likely completed higher grade levels in subsequent years, further widening the gap to those who left school early.

In Figure 6, we compare the grade levels of school leavers to those who were still enrolled. Almost half of the former group left school after grade 6; that is, at the end of primary education, while 15.2 percent did not finish primary education and 7.3 percent never attended school. Approximately every fifth left school during lower secondary education (i.e., after grade 7 or 8) and 6.9 percent finished lower secondary education (i.e., grade 9). In contrast, approximately four out of five enrolled adolescents had completed at least one grade level in lower secondary education, with the modus (38.3 percent) having finished grade 8. Among the remainder, minor shares had at most completed grade 5 (2.8 percent) or grade 6 (6.8 percent), and 11.2 percent had already completed at least one grade level in upper secondary education; that is, grade 10 or higher.

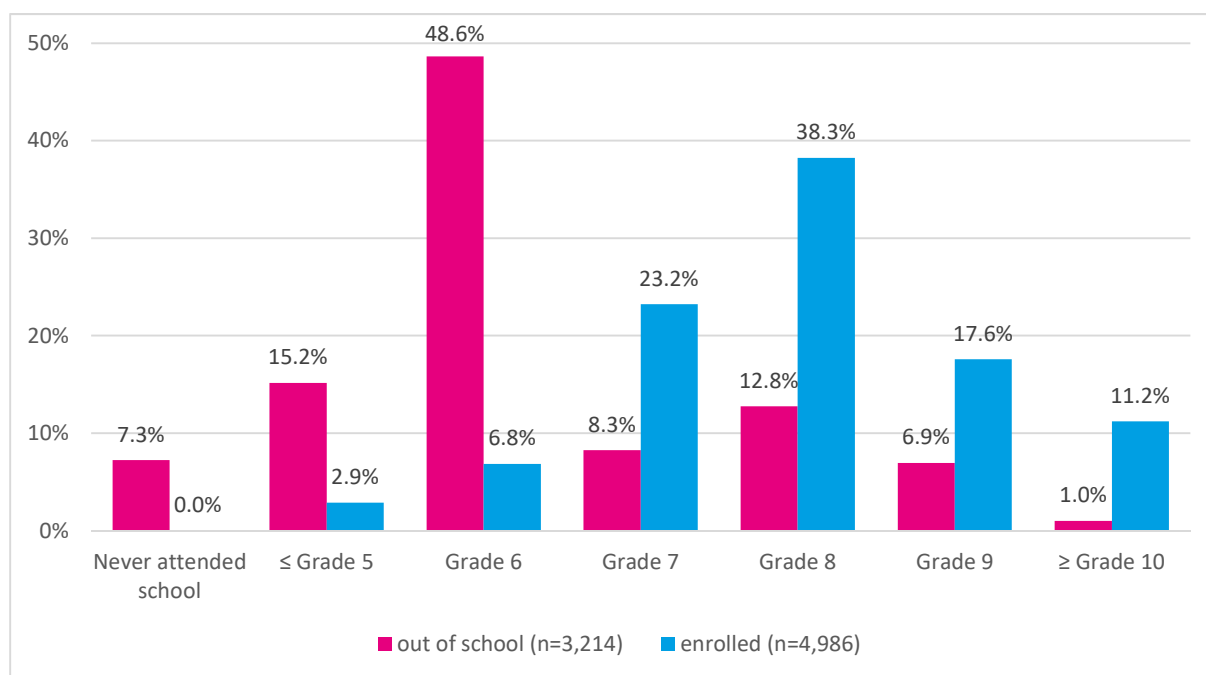


Figure 6. Highest grade level completed by 14- to 16-year-old school leavers and enrolled students; Source: MICS Syria 2006, own calculations

While many adolescents at the age of 14 to 16 years had already left school, the MICS data do not allow to find out why these young people did not invest in education longer. Previous research from the Youth Transition Survey (Gebel, 2012), in which 3,847 Syrians aged between 15 and 30 years were interviewed about their transition from education to work in 2009, has shown that most students who dropped out of the Syrian educational system felt unable to succeed in education (40.6 percent) or were tired of studying (22.3 percent). Other school factors were the most important reason among 9.7 percent of adolescents. Work-related reasons were of some importance, with many adolescents dropping out because they wanted to work (11.9 percent) or needed to work (7.0 percent), whereas family-related factors played only a minor role (getting married: 2.9 percent; other family factors: 3.9 percent)<sup>8</sup> (Gebel, 2012).

The MICS data neither allow to look at Syrian adolescents' transition from school to work. Previous research has shown that besides finding a paid job, self-employment or working as a family helper were quite common strategies to enter the labor market. However, youth unemployment and working in the informal economy – that is, without written contract – were also widespread phenomena in pre-crisis Syria. Furthermore, many female adolescents engaged in housework, thus being inactive on the labor market (Gebel, 2012).

### 3.5 Students' performance

To shed light on the educational background of Syrians, it is not only relevant to know about participation rates and grade level completion. Information about students' performance is another important aspect. Grade point averages would obviously be an interesting indicator in this respect. However, such data are not available for Syria and would be of limited

<sup>8</sup> Further categories: health factors (0.8 percent), other economic or work factors (0.3 percent), other (0.5 percent) (Gebel, 2012).



informative value anyway because it would be impossible to put them into a comparative perspective. Instead, we rely on internationally comparable data from the TIMSS survey. TIMSS is an international assessment of students' competencies in mathematics and science. Among 44 other countries, Syria participated in the assessment of eighth graders in 2011. 4,413 students from Syria were assessed, yielding a participation rate of 93 percent (Mullis et al., 2012).

In this section, we focus on the participants' test results in mathematics. The assessment in mathematics covered two dimensions: First, a content dimension which assesses subject matter relevant to mathematics and which comprises four domains (number, algebra, geometry, and data and chance). Second, a cognitive dimension which relates more strongly to students' ability to abstract and comprises three domains (knowing, applying, and reasoning). In total, students can achieve a score that ranges between a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 1,000 points. For further details on the assessment, see Mullis et al. (2012).

Among the countries that participated in the grade 8 assessment in mathematics, Syria ranges at the bottom end of the distribution (see Figure 7). Students from Syria achieved an average score of 380 points. In relation to international benchmarks (625 points = advanced; 550 = high; 475 = intermediate; 400 = low), this means that on average, the Syrian students did not even achieve the low benchmark. This benchmark is defined as followed: "Students have some knowledge of whole numbers and decimals, operations, and basic graphs" (Mullis et al., 2012: 113).

Further comparisons of subgroups among Syrian students would be interesting. However, such comparisons are only possible between boys and girls. While girls achieved an average score of 375, boys did only slightly better and achieved 385 points on average. This difference is statistically insignificant (Mullis et al., 2012).

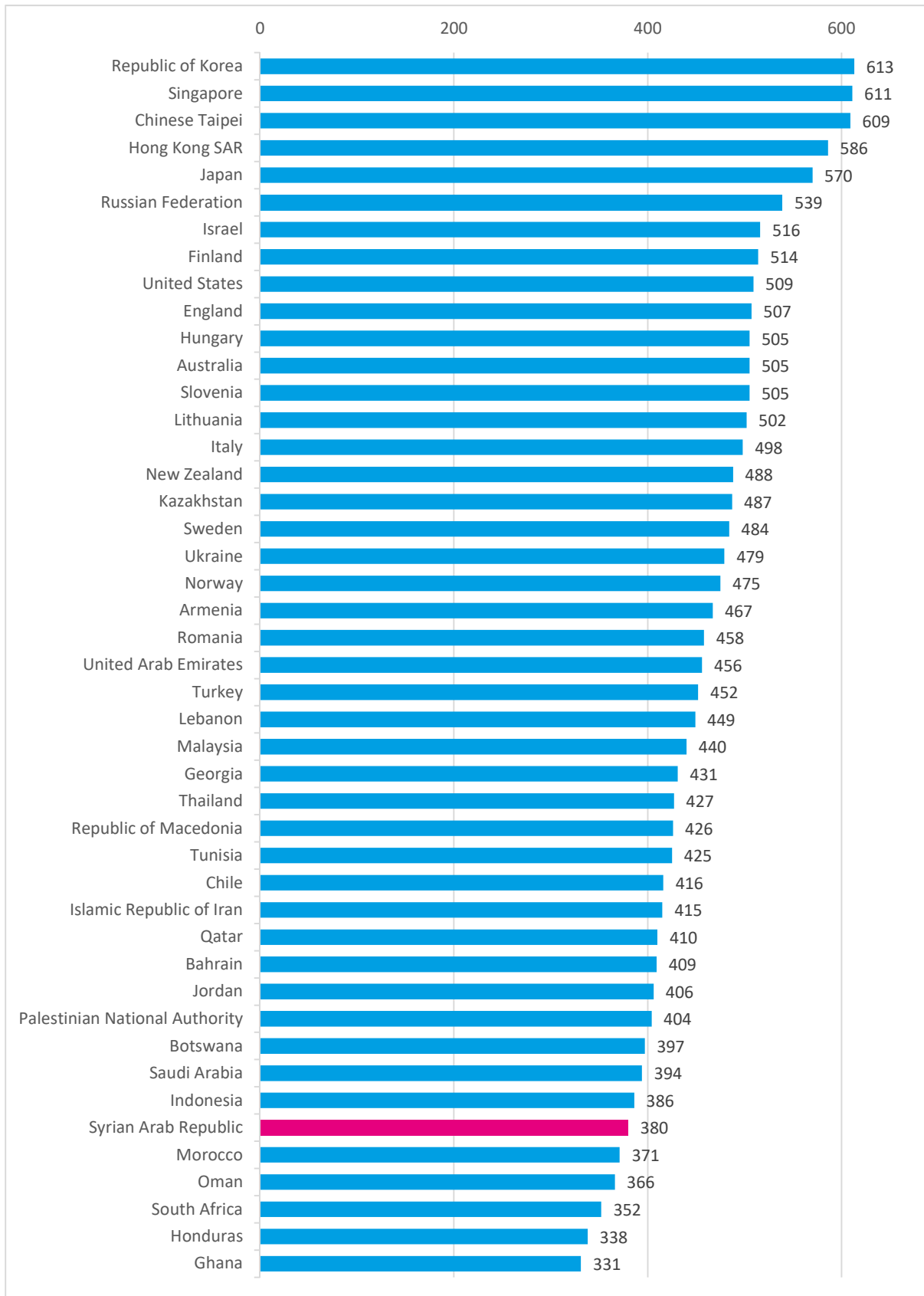


Figure 7. Mathematics achievement average scale score of eighth graders; Source: Mullis et al., 2012, own illustration

### 3.6 Educational attainment of the adult population

In the following section, official aggregate data of the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics serve as data source to depict various distributions of educational attainment of the population aged 15 years or older (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010a). These data are from 2010, shortly before the outbreak of the crisis in Syria. Above all, compared to European countries, the average educational attainment of the Syrian population is clearly lower (see Figure 8). Almost one third of Syrians acquired no formal education – these can be further grouped into illiterates (15.6 percent) and literates (17.0 percent) – and more than one quarter only completed primary education. Taken together, these groups make up for three fifths of the Syrian population. At the upper end of the distribution, 17.4 percent completed lower secondary education (i.e., 9 school years), 12.6 percent completed secondary, and 9.5 percent acquired higher than secondary education.

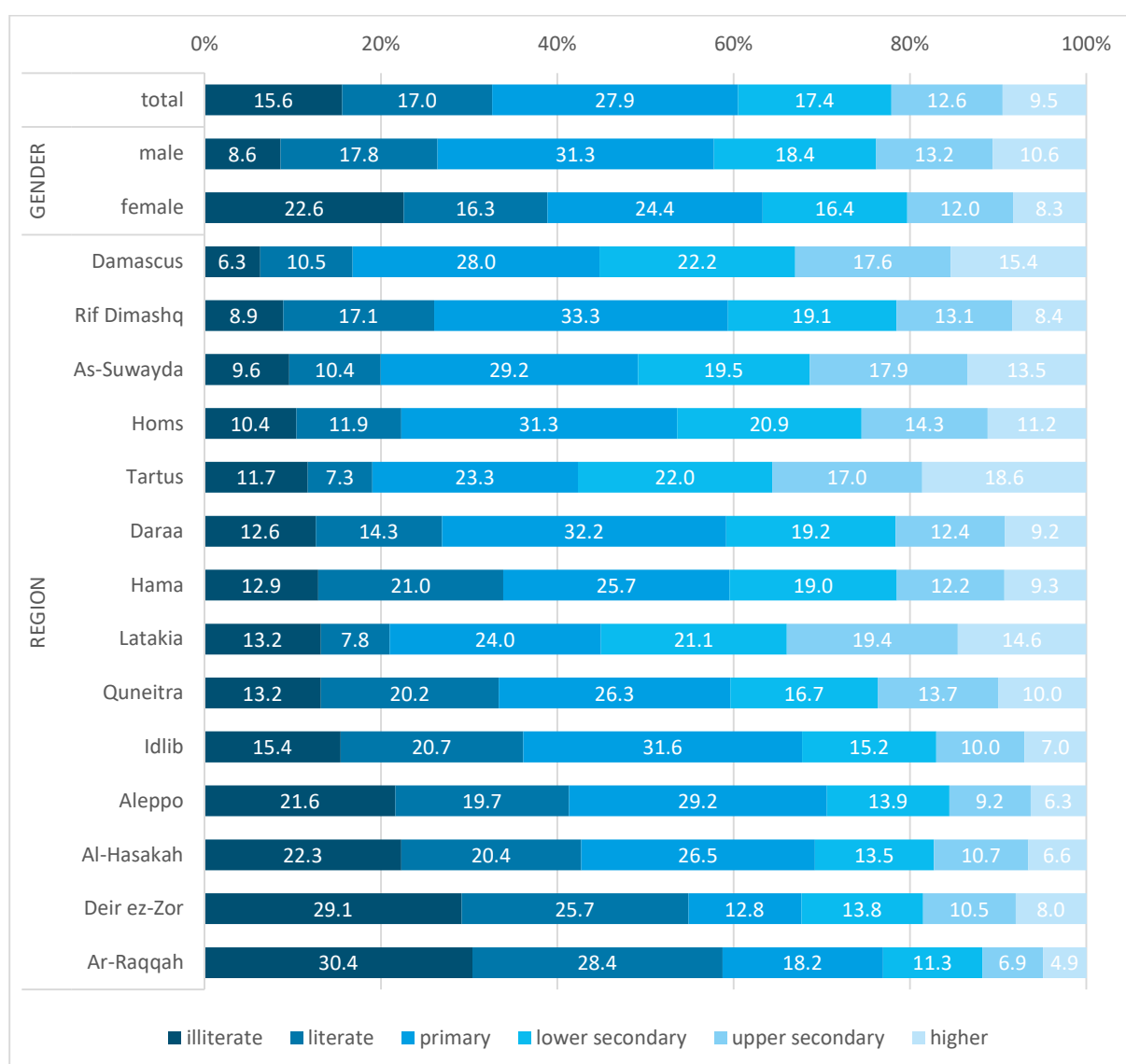


Figure 8. Educational attainment of the population aged 15 years or older by gender and regions; Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010a, own illustration

While the distributions of male and female attainment are more or less similar with regard to secondary and higher educational levels, they display massive differences at the bottom where the share of illiterate males (8.6 percent) is 14 percentage points lower than the share of illiterate females (22.6 percent).

Again, there are also tremendous differences between Syrian regions. For example, in pre-crisis Damascus, only one sixth of the population had no formal education (i.e., illiterates and literates taken together), but approximately one third acquired secondary or higher education. At the bottom of the distribution, the region of Ar-Raqqah displays a population share of almost 60 percent who acquired no formal education, while no more than 12 percent completed secondary or higher education.

Distributions of educational attainment by age groups may yield further insight. Unfortunately, the Central Bureau of Statistics provides no official aggregate data on this. Instead, we rely on bivariate analyses of the MICS data (Central Bureau of Statistics et al., 2008). This procedure has one important limitation: Instead of the highest educational level attained, the questionnaire only asked for the highest educational level attended. However, our main aim of presenting educational distributions by age groups is to show the extent of educational expansion in the Syrian pre-crisis society. We believe that this can also be achieved by presenting distributions of the highest educational level attended. Readers should however keep in mind this important difference between the previous and the following figure.

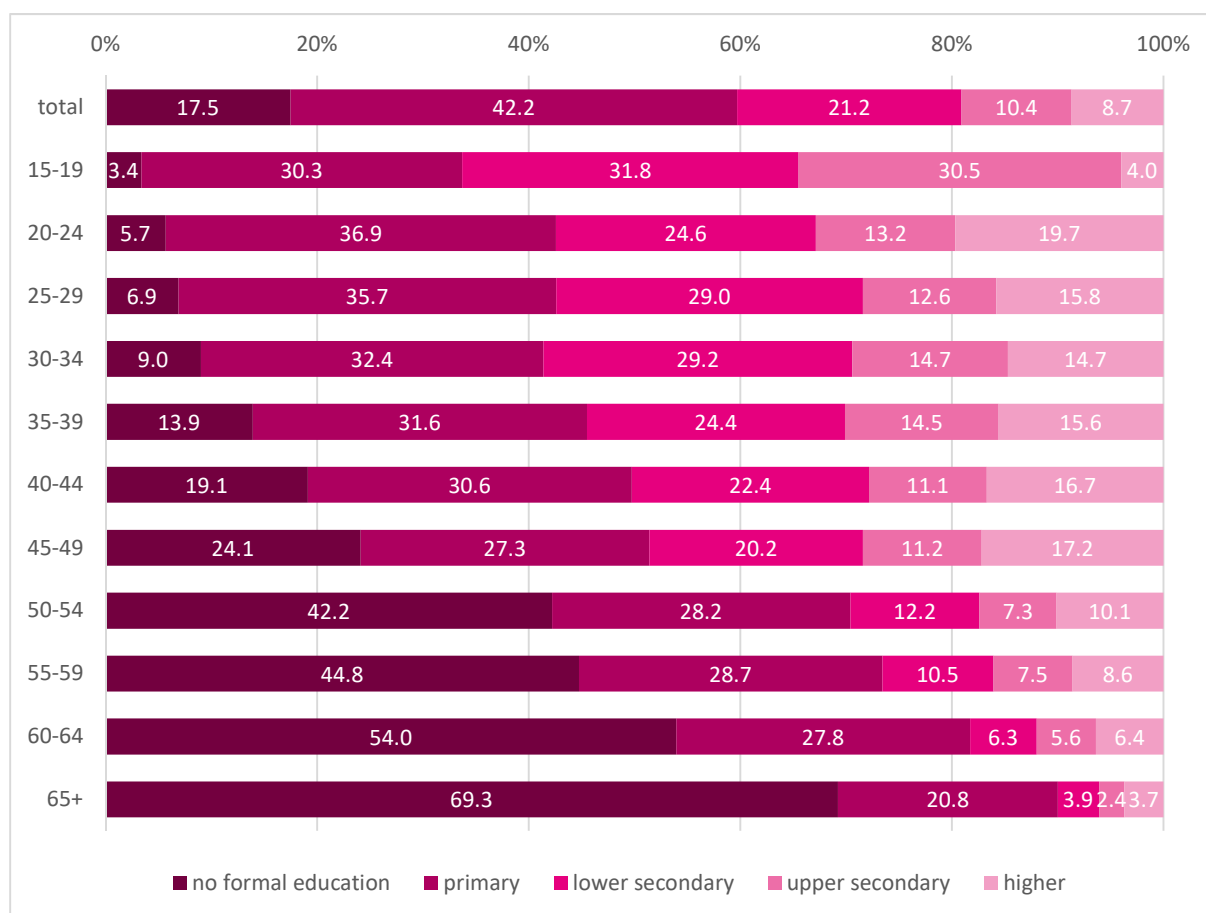


Figure 9. Highest educational level attended by age groups; Source: MICS Syria 2006, own calculations, n=96,203

The impact of educational expansion is most striking for the shares of those who did not attend any kind of formal education (see Figure 9). At 3.4 percent, the share is at its lowest point for Syrians aged 15 to 19 years. By each age group, it steadily increases and reaches a maximum of 69.3 percent among the oldest age group under study – that is, more than two third of individuals aged 65 or more years have never attended school. Simultaneously, secondary or higher education is more common among younger age groups. For example, almost one fifth of individuals aged 20 to 24 years have attended higher than secondary education, compared to only 3.7 percent among individuals aged 65 years or older.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this paper, we described various aspects of education in pre-crisis Syria, giving an overview of the educational system, of the educational participation of children and adolescents, and of the educational attainment of the adult population. While it was not common for children to attend early education in Syria, participation rates in primary schooling were high. In contrast, many adolescents left school by dropping out or completing only low levels of education. Low levels of education also characterized the adult population, although the educational expansion contributed to higher educational levels among younger age cohorts. We found no gender differences in regards to the educational participation of children and adolescents. Rather, educational inequalities seemed to be driven by other aspects – most importantly, parents’ socioeconomic status – and strongly varied between regions. In the case

of adults, on the other hand, we see significant gender differences, especially in the significantly higher proportion of illiterates among women.

We believe that it is important to be informed about such aspects as we look into characteristics of Syrians who came to Germany over the past years. For example, the educational qualifications that Syrian migrants brought with them should always be interpreted in light of the generally lower educational levels among the Syrian origin population (e.g., Welker, 2021). Furthermore, as we mentioned before, these aspects may reflect on Syrians' societal integration in Germany. First results show that adolescents who recently migrated to Germany benefit from their previous educational achievement as well as from their parents' educational background (Will & Homuth, 2020).

It is undisputed that the integration of refugee children and adolescents into the education system is an important prerequisite for their further participation in all areas of the host society. In addition, the available data suggest that many Syrian adults who have come to Germany did not complete vocational training or higher education either. Therefore, adults should also be viewed as a target group for educational measures.

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