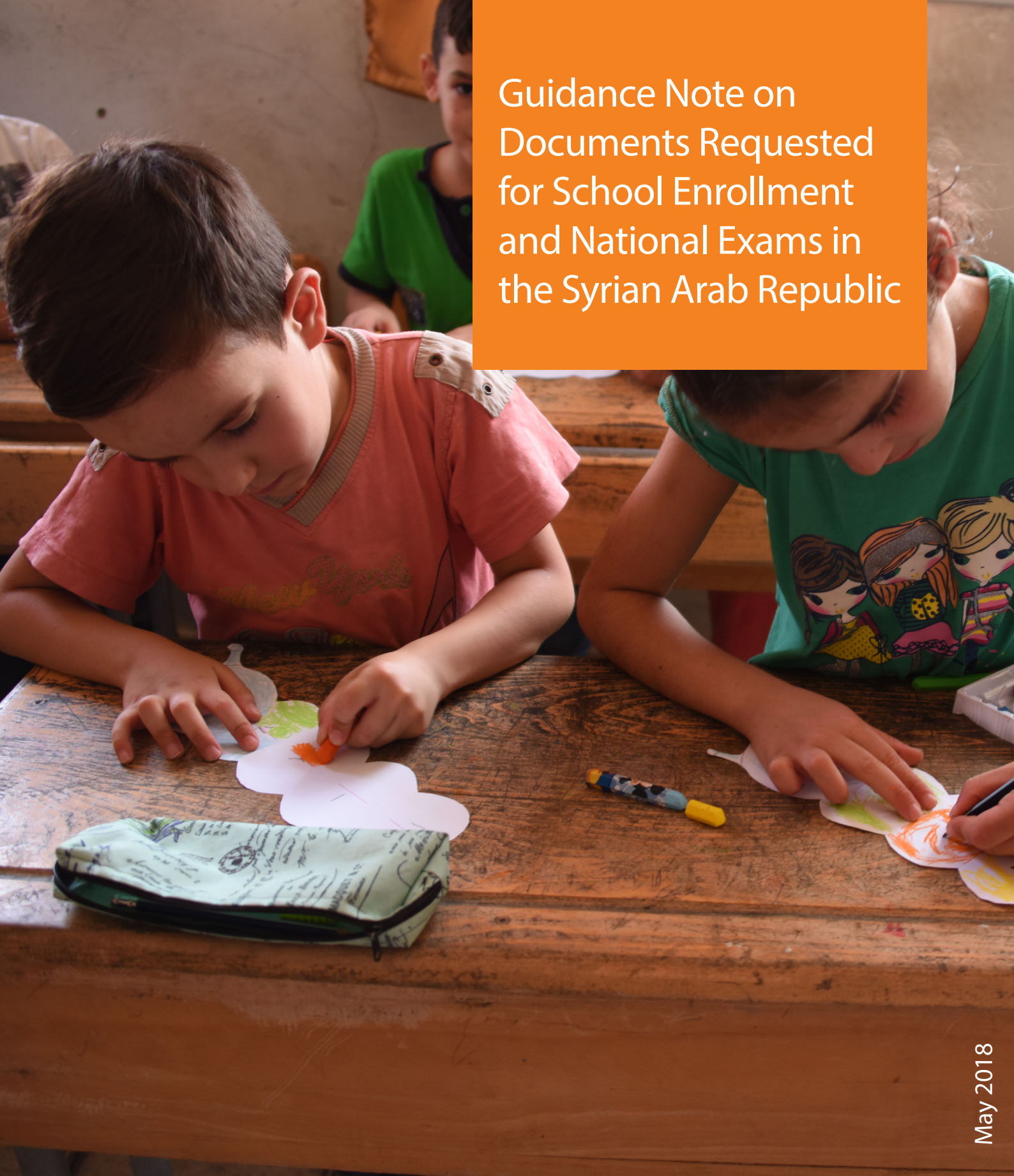


# Guidance Note on Documents Requested for School Enrollment and National Exams in the Syrian Arab Republic



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NORWEGIAN  
REFUGEE COUNCIL

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## A. OVERVIEW

With the crisis in Syria now entering its eighth year, the protracted nature of the conflict has weakened the capacity of the educational system to address critical education needs in the country. It is estimated that approximately 5.8 million children are in dire need of education services,<sup>1</sup> with an estimated 1.75 million children out of school,<sup>2</sup> and another 1.35 million at risk of dropping out.<sup>3</sup>

NRC recognises that there is a gap in information available about out of school children (OOSC) across Syria and it is in the process of completing an assessment on OOSC which will provide area specific data, ultimately informing NRC's education programming. In the meantime, during a quick assessment carried out by NRC during October/November 2016, respondents said that the top three reasons why children are not attending school were displacement, lack of teachers and school capacity, and safe access. Sixty-two percent of the respondents said that they would need a safe environment to resume education.<sup>4</sup>

A large number of Syrian children have missed multiple school terms due to the ongoing conflict and displacement. The Ministry of Education has instituted several measures to continue providing basic education, such as encouraging displaced children to register at any school in the country, and allowing children without official documents typically required for enrollment to sit for placement tests and register in school.<sup>5</sup> In cooperation with UNESCO and UNICEF, the Government of Syria has worked to address the situation of students unable to access schools through alternative education programs that include intensive education, self-learning, compensatory education and remedial lessons in school clubs, and vocational training courses.<sup>6</sup> However, these remedial and accelerated courses are not certified unless students take the official national exams. All students are eligible for national certificates as long as they study the official curriculum and pass the formal exams, which are offered at the end of grades 9 and 12.<sup>7</sup>

The Education Sector aims to provide crisis-affected children with a relevant and high quality education, to prevent the emergence of a lost generation, and to enhance the capacity of the education system to manage and maintain a meaningful education response inside Syria.<sup>8</sup> This Guidance is offered to provide clarity to education actors working in the Syria response on the documents that are needed by Syrian students to enroll in formal education and register for national exams. This Guidance outlines the Government of Syria's requirements for school enrollment and national exam registration as per Syrian laws and regulations.

### Existing Regulations

This Guidance is based on 2017-2018 regulations where available, and 2016-2017 regulations where no updated versions could be obtained. Humanitarian actors in the field note that such regulations have remained substantially unchanged in the past, and based on observed practice, feel that it is appropriate to continue relying on these regulations. The analysis in this document is based on Syrian law, but actors should be advised that there may be variation in how the regulations are interpreted and applied in different areas of Syria. For example, some school administrators are sensitive to the challenges posed by the ongoing conflict and will allow children without documentation to register, while others take a more rigid approach.

1 Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview (2018), p.49.

2 In the 2015-2016 school year, 920,000 boys and 830,000 girls between 5 and 17 years of age were out of school inside Syria.

3 Syria Humanitarian Needs Overview (2018), p.49.

4 NRC Youth Assessment (2016). The data was based on surveys with approximately 390 persons, 50 of whom lived in youth-headed households.

5 UNICEF (2015). "Curriculum, Accreditation and Certification for Syrian Children in Syria, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt," p102, A/HRC/WG.6/26/SYR/1.

6 Human Rights Council (2016). "National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21 – Syrian Arab Republic," available at [http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/alldocs.aspx?doc\\_id=27440](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/alldocs.aspx?doc_id=27440).

7 While this Guidance cannot change the reality that many students may be deterred from sitting for exams due to fear of arrest or detention, or risks in crossing conflict lines to do so, it does seek to ensure that those who choose to do so can have accurate information about the documentation requirements.

8 Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (2017).

## B. BACKGROUND

### Legal Framework

According to Syria's Constitution, education is a right guaranteed by the state, and is both free and mandatory until the end of the basic education stage;<sup>9</sup> this right is also protected by other national laws.<sup>10</sup> For example, Law No. 35 on Compulsory Education (1981), stipulated that children must enter primary school at the age of six years, and allowed for penalties to be imposed on families who fail to send their children to school;<sup>11</sup> however, there has been varied application of this law since the start of the conflict.<sup>12</sup> Law No. 32 of 2002 introduced the current 9-year "basic education cycle," making these 9 grades mandatory and free of charge. Under the terms of this Law, compulsory education in the Syrian Arab Republic starts at the age of 6 and finishes by the age of 15 years, which is also the minimum age for employment or work.<sup>13</sup>

Syria has a 12-year-long education system: 9 years of compulsory basic education, and 3 years of secondary education.<sup>14</sup> Basic education is divided into two cycles, and consists of grades 1 through 9.<sup>15</sup> After completion of grade 6, **students receive a Basic Education 1st Cycle Completion document.**<sup>16</sup> After completion of grade 9, students sit for a national exam in order to obtain a **Basic Education Certificate.**<sup>17</sup> These test results determine whether the student is entitled to attend a general or vocational/technical/religious secondary school.<sup>18</sup>

Secondary education consists of grades 10 through 12, and is offered at general secondary schools or technical/vocational schools. It is also free, but is not compulsory.<sup>19</sup> The age of admission is 16 years.<sup>20</sup> Students in general

or vocational/technical/religious secondary schools must sit for a national exam at the end of grade 12, and those who pass are awarded a **General Secondary Certificate.**<sup>21,22</sup> Students who fail the exam may retake the exam until they pass.<sup>23</sup> Students who pass but want to improve their grades can retake the exam one additional time.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for pre-university education,<sup>24</sup> and defines educational policy on the basis of resolutions of the Party's Congress and the general plan of the State.<sup>25</sup> Five deputy ministers assist the Minister of Education, and each one supervises several directorates and technical offices.<sup>26</sup> The Ministry of Education relies on the 14 Directorates of Education to manage the system of school supervision and inspection.<sup>27</sup>



9 Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic, Art. 29.

10 See e.g., Law 32 for the year 2002: the Basic Education Law, which provides that basic education is free of charge; and Law 7 for the year 2012, Law of the Mandatory of Basic Education, which requires all parents to enroll children between the ages of 6 and 15 years in basic education schools.

11 UNESCO (2011). "World Data on Education. Données mondiales de l'éducation. Datos Mundiales de Educación." 7th Ed.

12 Since the start of the crisis, field staff have observed that sanctions have not been imposed as consistently as before the crisis.

13 Report of the Committee of Experts (CEACR), 93rd ILC Session (2005), on the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (ratified 2001), available at International Labour Organization, NORMLEX, [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/es/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:13100:0::NO:P13100\\_COMMENT\\_ID,P13100\\_LANG\\_CODE:2242593,en](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/es/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:13100:0::NO:P13100_COMMENT_ID,P13100_LANG_CODE:2242593,en)

14 Al Hesan, M., et al. (2016). "Understanding the Syrian Educational System in a Context of Crisis," Vienna Institute of Demography Working Papers, Austrian Academy of Sciences.

15 World Education Services (2016). "SYRIA: Educational Profile. A Guide to Grade Equivalencies between Canada and Syria."

16 In Syrian regulations, this certificate is referred to as a "primary completion certificate."

17 In Syrian regulations, this certificate is referred to as a "primary certificate."

18 World Education Services (2016), op. cit.

19 UNESCO (2011), op. cit.

20 World Education Services (2016), op. cit.

21 This is the equivalent of a high school diploma in the U.S. and Canada.

22 World Education Services (2016), op. cit.

23 Ibid.

24 The Ministry of Education is not responsible for agricultural secondary schools, which are under the purview of the Ministry of Agriculture.

25 UNESCO (2011), op. cit.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

## Terminology

The tables below summarize the common terms used with regard to grades and education certificates.

As of 2016 ابتداء من 2016				
Grades	Stage	National Exams required after completion	Certificate Received	الشهادة التي يتم الحصول عليها
1st – 6th	Basic Education 1st cycle	No	Basic Education 1st cycle completion document	وثيقة إتمام الحلقة الأولى من مرحلة التعليم الأساس
7th – 9th	Basic Education 2nd cycle	Yes	Basic Education certificate	شهادة التعليم الأساسي
10th – 12th	Secondary education	Yes	General Secondary certificate	الشهادة الثانوية

From the year 2000 Up to 2016 <sup>28</sup> من عام 2000 حتى بداية 2016			Before the year 2000 قبل عام 2000		
Grades	Previous certificate/s name	اسماء الشهادات السابقة	Grades	Previous certificate/s name	اسماء الشهادات السابقة
1st – 4th	4th grade school statement	الجلء المدرسي للصف الرابع	1st – 6th	Elementary certificate	الشهادة الابتدائية
5th – 9th	Basic education certificate	شهادة التعليم الأساسي	7th – 9th	Preparatory certificate	الشهادة الإعدادية
10th – 12th	Secondary certificate	الشهادة الثانوية	10th – 12th	Secondary Certificate	الشهادة الثانوية

<sup>28</sup> There is some disagreement as to whether this curriculum lasted until 2014 or 2016 among different sources, but most Syrians consulted believe that 2016 is the correct date.

## C. DOCUMENTS FOR SCHOOL ENROLLMENT/REGISTRATION

The “Instructions of Enrollment and Acceptance in Schools of Basic Education for Academic Year 2016-2017,” No. 543/(4/6), issued by the Ministry of Education in 2016, identifies the procedures and documentation needed to register students in Grades 1 through 9.

### 1. Required Documents for Registering Syrian Children and Children of Equivalent Status <sup>29</sup>

To register a Syrian child for school, the parent or legal guardian must submit the following documents:

- Written Request for Registration (form) with the stamp of the Teachers’ Union from the school;
- Written Pledge from the parent (or other legal guardian) stating that (s)he has read the provisions of Law No. 7 of 2012 and Law No. 32 of 2002; and a pledge to continue sending the child to school until the end of the basic education stage. This pledge must be signed by the Principal and sealed with the seal of the school;
- Copy of the student’s family booklet with legal stamps <sup>30</sup> and the seal of the school affixed;
- Copy of the page of the father and mother in the family booklet;
- Copy of the parent’s (or other legal guardian’s) ID card;
- 3 photographs of the student;
- Health card obtained from the school health directorate, or generalized school card of the previous academic year.

### 2. Registering Students Who Have Lost Official School Documents

According to a recent UNICEF report, there is a Syrian national education database that manages certification data for Syrian teachers and students, and the Ministry of Education can re-issue and redistribute official education certificates (particularly for the grades 9 and 12 exams) to those who have lost them.<sup>31</sup> The Ministry has instituted the following procedures to register or re-register students who have lost their official documents

or school certificates. To apply for replacement documents, parents must provide:

- Civil status record for the child ;
- A certified document by the headmaster of the school where the parents want to register the child;
- The semester sequence that shows a child’s grade or school records;
- If parents insist on registering children in a specific school they claim is close to their residence, the official residence document to show the child lives in the area of the school. <sup>32</sup>

After providing these documents, the Basic Education certificate and/or General Secondary certificate can be re-issued, if available.<sup>33</sup> If these documents are not available, children are permitted to take a placement test to determine their education grade level and secure admission. Children who missed some years of schooling can enroll in the available accelerated learning program (Curriculum B),<sup>34</sup> which is managed by the Ministry of Education and provides formal certification. Notwithstanding age restrictions, those who have never been to school can enroll in a non-formal program (the facilitated self-learning program),<sup>35</sup> which will allow them to integrate into the formal school system (normal or accelerated) and sit for a national exam after completion.

Additionally, in light of the large numbers of displaced Syrian children, UNICEF reported that **the Ministry of Education issued a regulation in September 2012 to encourage Directorates of Education and all school headmasters to accept students in public schools at the beginning of (or even during) the academic year, even if they did not have official school documents.**<sup>36</sup> A copy of the Ministry of Education regulation could not be obtained for this guidance.

29 Ministry of Education, (2016). “Instructions of Enrollment and Acceptance in Schools of Basic Education for Academic Year 2016-2017,” No. 543/(4/6). [hereinafter Ministry of Education (2016a)]. “Children of equivalent status” generally refers to Palestinian children.

30 The government issues different kinds of stamps, the revenues of which go to various funds. Such stamps may include: financial stamps, martyr stamps, etc., which can be purchased from any library. All copies of civil documents should be attested and affixed with stamps; the clerk at Nofous determines which stamps go on the various documents. The appropriate stamps should be affixed to the copy of the family booklet, and sealed with the school’s seal.

31 UNICEF (2015), op. cit.

32 Generally, a child can be registered in any school. However, some schools have a limit on the number of students that can be admitted, and if there is a problem with capacity, a residency document showing the child lives in the area will be required.

33 UNICEF (2015), op. cit.

34 The alternative formal, accelerated learning program covers grades 1-8 and allows students to complete two years/grades of schooling in one. The aim is for these children to reintegrate into the formal schooling system. Practically speaking, children cannot be older than 15 years old when they start the accelerated learning program, as the Ministry of Education limits the age a student can be at school (i.e., an 18 year old cannot be in a classroom with other grade 5- age children.) Students that are 15 years and older can be students of free education.

35 The non-formal, self-learning program has a curriculum that covers grades 1-9 and is for students aged 6-19 years. The curriculum is developed by the Ministry of Education, but given to students in a non-formal way (e.g. through NGOs). The program does not lead to formal accreditation for the student. The student must pass the grade 9 exam as a student of free education to get a certification.

36 UNICEF (2015), op. cit.

### 3. Syrian Students Not Registered at Birth <sup>37</sup>

Children who are unregistered at birth can be enrolled in basic education schools under age estimation documents, issued by committees formed in accordance with the executive regulations of the Law on Compulsory Education. To obtain such documents, the parent/guardian must submit:

- A written request for age estimation documents, stating that the child is

unregistered, and that the parent(s) will continue the registration of the child in the Civil Status Records before the end of the ongoing school year;

- Photocopy of the parent’s ID card. <sup>38</sup>

Despite the provisions above, it has been reported that some schools are not accepting the enrollment of unregistered children.

<sup>38</sup> NRC staff in the field note that generally, only one parent’s ID card is needed, and in the current context, some schools are demonstrating significant flexibility regarding this requirement.

<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Education (2016a), op. cit.





## D. DOCUMENTS FOR NATIONAL EXAMS

Students are eligible for national certificates if they study the official curriculum and pass placement tests and formal exams. Various remedial and accelerated courses have been developed by the Ministry of Education, UN agencies and NGOs to assist students whose schooling has been interrupted due to the crisis. However, these courses are not certified, so the student will only receive credit if (s)he takes and passes the official national exams.<sup>39</sup>

The "Registration Instructions for the General Certificate Examination," 2017 G Session, identify the procedures and documents needed for students to register for national exams. These instructions articulate two categories of students:

(1) regular students, and (2) students of free education.<sup>40</sup> There are different documentation requirements for these two categories.

### Students of Free Education ("Tullab Al Derasah Al Hurra")

These students have typically spent some number of years out of school studying independently (i.e. "freely") before registering for an exam. While in some instances such students may be older than their peers, this is not always the case. They may be the same age, but cannot be younger than, their peers. These students may require greater attention in current times, given the significant number of children whose education has been disrupted because of the conflict and ongoing displacement.

#### 1. Registration Conditions for Basic Education Certificate<sup>41</sup> Exams<sup>42</sup>

**Regular students:** Students of the last year of basic education (through grade 9), and regular students of the third year of religious basic education who have already completed at least three years after receiving the Basic Education 1st cycle completion document or its equivalent, shall be allowed to register for the Basic Education certificate exam.

<sup>39</sup> UNICEF (2015), op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> The 2017-2018 regulations have specific instructions regarding place of registration for students of free education by governorate. It is recommended that any students in this category confirm their place of exam registration with the relevant Education Directorate.

<sup>41</sup> The Syrian regulations refer to this as the Primary Certificate. However, the term Basic Education Certificate is used here as sources from Damascus report that it is the commonly used term to refer to this certificate.

<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Education (2016). "Registration Instructions for the General Certificate Examination," No. /543 (4/9). [hereinafter Ministry of Education (2016b)].

**Students of free education:** Students who have reached the age of 15 years old or more will be allowed to register for the Basic Education certificate exam by providing one of the following documents:

- Basic Education 1st cycle completion document, or its equivalent;
- Any document proving the successful completion of grade 6, such as the following:
  - School outcomes proving the successful completion of grade 6;
  - Academic year certificate proving successful completion of grade 6;
  - Information test document provided by the Information Test Committee proving the successful completion of grade 6 according to the ministerial resolution No. 297/543 (4/6) dated 27/11/2013;
  - Third level document for students of basic education; the intensive curriculum, class B, issued by the directorates of education;
  - Third level document of adult education, level of command, issued by the Ministry of Culture; or
  - Any equivalent document approved by the directorates of education.
- Notice of basic education failure;
- Notice proving that the student has submitted an enrollment application for the Basic Education certificate exam but withdrew, and did not actually take the exam.



The above documents are considered duly authorized if one of the following conditions are met:

- At least 3 years have passed since the student obtained any of the above documents;
- Student is at least 15 years old.

## 2. Registration Conditions for General Secondary Certificate Exams <sup>43</sup>

**Regular Students:** Third year students of secondary schools who have completed at least 3 years of schooling after obtaining the Basic Education certificate, Religious Basic Education certificate, or their equivalent, shall be allowed to register for the General Secondary certificate exam.

**Students of Free Education:**<sup>44</sup> Students who are either: (a) more than 18 years old and have obtained a Basic Education certificate, Religious Basic Education certificate, or their equivalent, or (b) those who have waited at least 3 years after obtaining the Basic Education certificate (or religious Basic Education certificate), can register for the General Secondary certificate exam by providing one of the following documents:

- Duly authorized academic year certificate showing successful completion of grades 10 and 11;
- Notice of failure in the examination of grade 12;
- Certified copy of General Secondary certificate;<sup>45</sup>
- Certified copy of religious secondary certificate;
- Academic year certificate that proves the successful completion of the first and second religious secondary grades, so that (s)he can apply for the exam of the General Secondary certificate;
- Student's proof of success in the nomination test held by the Ministry of Education to apply for a General Secondary certificate;
- A technical, vocational, agricultural, veterinary, or equivalent high school diploma after passing the nomination test for the General Secondary certificate as per Decree No. 350 of 2014;
- Certified notice of general exams proving that the student has submitted an application to attend the 2014 exam session as a regular student, or the 2015, 2016, or 2017 exam

43 Ibid.

44 In this case, "Students of Free Education" are those who wish to apply for the general secondary certificate exam, but had been either out of school after obtaining their primary certificate, or were in the religious/vocational school.

45 Students who have already received a general or religious secondary certificate are allowed to register for the exam for a second time to improve their grades. In such instances, the student only has the right to repeat the exam once.

sessions as a free education student.<sup>46</sup>



**Note:** Students who have a vocational or religious Basic Education certificate, and who wish to register for the General Secondary Exam (rather than the vocational or religious secondary exam) must also take a nomination test.<sup>47</sup>

## 3. Required Documents to Register for all Certificates (Basic Education, Religious, and Secondary) <sup>48</sup>

**Regular Students:** These students must provide:

- 2 recent identical photographs (3 x 4 cm) with student's name and school's stamp on the back;
- Copy of the identity card approved by the school administration (to verify conformity with the original and validity of its information);
- Copy of the family booklet (including the student and father on one sheet) with a photograph<sup>49</sup>;
- Education stamp affixed to the registration list;
- Exam fees (SYP 200 for primary and religious certificates; SYP 300 for all branches of the General Secondary certificate);
- From the Directorate of Finance for the total fees due for each of the general certificates:<sup>50</sup>
  - A financial receipt if the amount exceeds SYP 500, or
  - A financial stamp if the amount is less than SYP 500.

**Students of Free Education:** These students must provide:

- Subscription application, provided by the Exam Administration, where the student details all required information including valid address and phone number (and national service recruitment division for male students). The back of the application form must be affixed with a financial stamp, an education stamp, and a stamp of the Red Crescent;
  - Students of Free Education registering for secondary certificates need stamp of the war effort, and must pay a registration fee of SYP 3000 ;
  - Students of Free Education registering for

46 As noted above, updated regulations are not available, but have in past years generally remained the same. Thus it is expected that the equivalent documents from 2017 would be accepted.

47 This nomination exam determines whether the student meets the requirements to enter the general secondary program.

48 Ministry of Education (2016b), op. cit.

49 If the photograph on the family booklet is not clear, the student (or father) shall extract a civil record approved by the Nofous after verifying conformity with the original, and affixing a financial stamp and the required stamp.

50 Ministry of Finance Decree No. 222/B/15 dated 6/8/2002.

- Basic Education certificate and religious Basic Education certificate must pay a registration fee of SYP 1500.
- Certified copy of the certificate needed to register for the exam (as per conditions listed above);
  - 3 recent identical photographs measuring 3x4 cm, with the student's name inscribed on the back;
  - Copy of the ID card (for civilians) with a financial stamp, and a stamp of the Red Crescent;
  - For males only:
    - Military service card to identify the recruitment division of the registrar. (If the student is under the age of commissioning, he should provide the military service card of his father or brother);
    - 2 military records of military persons developed by the unit command (including the name of the recruitment department to which the student belongs). Each record must have a financial stamp, Red Crescent stamp, and a copy of the photograph attached to application, sealed with the unit stamp;
    - A statement of validity to sit for the exam in the governorate (where the recruit performs his military service), sealed with the unit stamp.



