



**OVERVIEW**  
**VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING  
IN SYRIA AND ITS RELEVANCE TO  
THE LABOUR MARKET**



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# **VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN SYRIA AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE LABOUR MARKET**

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A great deal of additional information on the European Union is available on the Internet. It can be accessed through the Europa server (<http://europa.eu.int>).

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## INTRODUCTION

This report is one of a series produced by the European Training Foundation on the state of play of vocational education and training (VET) systems in the countries of the Mediterranean region. In the second half of 1999 reports were developed on Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, the Republic of Cyprus and Turkey. This report on the Syrian system continues the series and incorporates a new dimension to the analysis on the relevance of the VET system to labour market needs.

## OBJECTIVES

These reports were prepared at the request of the European Commission and aim to provide a complete overview of the national vocational education and training systems. They also indicate the key challenges the systems face in a wider socio-economic development strategy.

More precisely, the report aims to describe and analyse:

- the main characteristics of the Syrian vocational education and training system;
- the role VET plays in the wider socio-economic Syrian context and, in particular, its links with and relevance to labour market and the development of human resources;
- recent developments within the framework of programmes funded by the European Union and other donors;
- the Syrian labour market.

## METHODOLOGY

Staff from the European Training Foundation and a number of external experts worked in teams to produce the report.

Work began with an analysis of existing reports produced for the European Commission or other international organisations. This form of desk research was used to identify the main issues faced by each country and to select key interlocutors.

The second phase of preparation involved visits to the main stakeholders in the countries themselves.

In the case of Syria, the conclusions drawn from these first two stages were discussed and agreed in a workshop held in Syria in November 2001 involving the main stakeholders.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report owes much to the active cooperation with the European Commission, its local delegation, whose advice and practical help proved essential to the project and to the many interviewees throughout the country, who helped the focus on key issues.





## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# 1

### 1.1 THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LABOUR MARKET

Syria is one of the oldest inhabited countries in the world. In 2001, its population was estimated at 17.5 million of which no less than 41% were aged under 14. Syria has one of the highest population growth rates in the region (approx. 2.6%).

As is well known, the Syrian economy was centrally planned with a large public sector.

The composition of GDP per economic sector is as follows: agriculture 29%, industry 22% and services 49%. This only partly matches the distribution of the workforce by occupation: agriculture 40%, industry 20% and services 40%.

Although it is difficult to find statistics on the public and the growing private sector contributions to GDP, many estimate that the private sector contributes more than the public sector (the figure of 70/30 was

suggested by one of the interviewees). These percentages would be reversed in terms of the contribution to employment: the public sector remains the main employer in the country.

In 1999, the total number of workers in Syria was estimated at 4,095,000 (male and female) of which at least 43% were in the informal sector. Female participation in the labour force is estimated at less than 30%, but is slowly but steadily increasing. The unemployment rate is estimated at between 12 and 15% (1998 estimates), although official registered unemployment remains very low.

Finding relevant data on labour market development and future economic growth indications for the key sectors of the Syrian economy and the expectations for the school system is difficult. Some institutions invest a lot of effort in looking for relevant data. However, the relevance of the information available for the direction of the labour market in the coming years and for training needs is very limited.

## 1.2 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE VET SYSTEM

Education in Syria is in five stages: pre-school, primary (grades 1 to 6), preparatory (grades 7 to 9), secondary (10 to 12) and post-secondary (or tertiary). The 1973 constitution guarantees free education for everyone at all levels<sup>1</sup>. From the academic year 2002, compulsory education will last for nine years<sup>2</sup>.

Almost all children reaching compulsory school age attend the first year of primary school, apart from the nomad population. However, and in spite of the widespread provision of school facilities and the high attendance, the literacy rate is still 71%, with a considerable difference between males (85.7%) and females (55.8%).

**The Syrian VET system** is basically made up of two sections: secondary (vocational secondary school) and post-secondary (intermediate institutes).

### 1. *First level: secondary vocational education and training (grades 10 to 12)*

Secondary VET programmes last for three years. Secondary vocational school graduates are granted a vocational secondary certificate as skilled workers. The graduates can either join the labour market or continue their studies at post-secondary vocational institutes or (in a very limited numbers) at universities.

Secondary VET is provided by technical secondary schools. As many as 11 ministries participate in the provision of secondary VET. However most VET provision (up to 90%) falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

### 2. *Second level: post-secondary vocational education and training (grades 13 to 15)*

Post-secondary VET is provided at technical intermediate institutes. The

post-secondary programmes last for two years. Entry requirements include a general or vocational secondary school degree. Intermediate institute graduates are granted a degree of "high grade technician". After that they can join the labour market or (in limited numbers) begin university.

A total of 16 ministries are involved in the provision of post-secondary VET, although the majority of institutes fall under the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education (approx. 35% and 20% respectively). The Higher Council for Intermediate Institutes, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher Education, is the policy body in charge of post-secondary VET.

### **Governance**

The regulation and organisation of the two sub-sectors are under the overall supervision of the Higher Ministerial Committee for technical education and vocational training, headed by the Deputy Prime Minister for Service Affairs and which includes ministers from all the ministries involved in VET. A follow-up committee headed by the Ministry of Education's Vice Minister for technical education and vocational training, acts as the executive body of the Higher Committee<sup>3</sup>.

The governance and administrative system is highly centralised. Both secondary and post-secondary institutions have very limited autonomy: the main decisions regarding the supply, content, personnel, finance, equipment and buildings are taken by the central authority.

**The position of VET in the Syrian education system** is, in theory, a crossroads leading from and to various routes. However, in practice current regulations limit this particular role. As a result, VET has become a second-best type of education with only tenuous links to

<sup>1</sup> A recent decree allows the set up of private universities on a fee-paying basis.

<sup>2</sup> According to Law No 32 approved on 7 April 2002.

<sup>3</sup> A June 2002 decision of the Higher Ministerial Committee for TVET approved the creation of two different boards, one in charge of vocational education under the leadership of the Ministry of Education and one in charge of vocational training under the leadership of the Ministry of Industry.

more promising streams<sup>4</sup>. The absence of a lifelong learning facility makes it almost impossible to re-enter the school system.

### 1.3 RELEVANCE OF THE VET SYSTEM TO LABOUR MARKET NEEDS

This study concentrates on the architecture of the VET system and its relation to the overall education system, its governance and relevance to labour market needs. The main conclusion is that the current Syrian VET system is not sufficiently geared towards the needs of the labour market. The lack of responsiveness of the VET system can be attributed, on one hand, to the current economic context in which it operates.

- Given the challenges of globalisation, Syria must contemplate the gradual replacement of the government-planned economy with a market-oriented approach. This inevitably makes it difficult for vocational institutions to know which way to turn.
- Labour market mechanisms are, in some respects, distorted. The reasons for this include the facts that a large part of the labour market (public companies and services) is centralised; another large part of it is informal; the services linking supply and demand (employment services, labour offices, etc.) are not performing as they should or are simply inexistent.
- To find a viable market approach, the availability of qualitative and quantitative data to steer the system or to guide the institutions is vital. The current data compilation system does not provide the analysis needed. The absence of other checks and balances (e.g. systematic involvement of companies in the design and delivery of training, functioning employment and vocational guidance services, etc.) that could provide some kind of automatic response to the labour market exacerbates the problem.

There are also a number of elements intrinsic to the current VET system that hinder better links with the labour market.

#### 1. *Governance and management of the system*

The current system is complex and fragmented. No less than 11 ministries have responsibilities for VET and run their own schools or institutes. Although some mechanisms exist to enhance co-ordination, the co-ordination and co-operation between government agencies could be greatly improved. The recent decision (see footnote 3) to set up two different boards dealing separately with vocational education and training, under the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Industry, respectively, may prove to be an additional burden.

As far as the governance of vocational schools and institutes is concerned, the lack of autonomy in decision-making relating to the implementation of curricula, management of human and financial resources and relations to the local labour market, hinders their performance.

Furthermore, in this complex picture, social partners (such as representatives from the employers associations) are not involved in the management, design and delivery of training.

#### 2. *The structure of the VET system and its relation to the overall education system in Syria*

The VET system consists of two sub-systems (secondary and post-secondary) that do not always inter-relate well. The fragmentation of VET governance does not help this situation.

There are few effective and efficient educational routes between VET and other types of education. VET is in many cases a “dead end”, and rarely leads to further education.

<sup>4</sup> In its June 2002 meeting, the Higher Ministerial Committee for TVET adopted a number of measures to improve the connection between VET and the other education sub-systems, i.e. the number of VET students allowed to join university has been increased from 2% to 5%. In addition, the so-called Applied Colleges, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher Education, providing post-secondary education will start in the academic year 2002/03.

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There is an absence of a clear qualification structure in which a limited number of educational modules and efficient study pathways lead to an education which is flexible and relevant to the labour market.

### 3. *Lifelong learning: youth education and continuing training for workers and/or unemployed*

By tradition and regulation, vocational schools are oriented towards young people. This in itself resembles the situation in many countries. However, in Syria, although there are some attempts to open education for all (e.g. open learning facilities at universities), and there are some facilities for retraining, a structured system for retraining the existing workforce (continuing training) does not exist. To develop the economy, much of the existing labour force (both workers and the unemployed) should be retrained, and participate in lifelong learning.

### 4. *The institutional side and size of the VET system*

The present system is comprised of a remarkable number of institutions: over 800 vocational institutions (including both vocational secondary schools and intermediate institutes). With an estimated 300,000 VET students in total, the average size of an institute is around 370 students. Much larger institutions are needed for them to be well-equipped, well-staffed, efficiently run, multi-disciplinary, innovative and have high service levels and active interaction with the labour market. As it is, schools are now too small to offer a wide range of educational options or to forge strong links between VET and the labour market.

### 5. *The content of the system: the curricula and the teachers*

Syrian vocational institutions lack updated equipment. The current pre-service training system for vocational teachers does not provide the required qualifications. Although there are some in-service courses, based on ad hoc requests, there is no system for systematic in-service training that allows a continuous upgrading of skills.

Although some attempts are being made to involve trade and industry in the revision of curricula, more often than not curricula

usually fail to generate the future skills that will be required by the labour market. The fact that the VET system is almost fully school-based with little room for practice in “the real world of work” and in which both theory and practical skills are provided in the classroom limits its ability to respond quickly to social and labour market change.

### 6. *Labour market information systems*

The availability of statistical material to support the future choices of VET management needs to be strengthened. The process of information gathering and analysis on expected labour market developments (in close interaction with the world of work and providing suggestions on what vocational institutions should teach) is more important than actual figures. The strive for better statistics should therefore be included in the search for modern interactive governance and management practice.

## 1.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions above show a picture of a VET system that can be optimised and made ready for the country’s future needs.

### 1. *Improve the governance of VET*

It has been explained that the present governance system faces two key problems. The first is the large number of actors (ministries) involved in governance, and the second is the limited involvement of the social partners. Other related challenges include the need for integration between the different VET sub-systems; the need for higher educational coherence in the architecture of courses and learning pathways and the need to revise the scale and size of vocational institutions.

There is, therefore, a clear need to improve the governance of the system by increasing the co-ordination between the concerned parties, involving social partners and establishing a clear allocation of responsibilities.

A solution could involve the creation of a single governing board representing both government and social partners (trade and industry representatives). This board would play a major role in steering the reform of

the system and have a decision-making power.

### 2. *Revision of the educational structure: the need for a new qualification structure*

As mentioned above, the current educational system is flawed in a number of ways. Its structure is monolithic and lacks a qualification structure that is varied enough to satisfy the different skills needs of the labour market. The current two-level monolithic system should be substituted by a multi-level qualification structure, which would allow a wider variety of course lengths, educational routes and diplomas.

### 3. *Involvement of economic actors in the provision of VET: alternative pathways for school and company based training*

At present, the VET system is mainly school-based. Practical experience is limited. For VET to be relevant, contact with “the real world” is of key importance and in the new system only courses with a significant period of practical training outside the school should be included. The introduction of school and company based training models should be considered where different models (e.g. traineeship, apprenticeship, etc.) are applied according to the different needs and characteristics of occupations. Co-operation with companies can also be applied to, for instance, handling equipment. If the equipment of training and industry is co-shared, the proposed investment in new school equipment can be used for other useful purposes.

### 4. *A continuing training system within the context of lifelong learning*

Syria still has no system of continuing training, although some retraining courses are provided by a variety of centres. A number of initiatives in the direction of “open education” are proposed, but they are yet to be implemented and it will take some time before they show results. Using the advised qualification structure, re-schooling and all other aspects of lifelong learning can be dealt with by existing vocational institutions. This is much more efficient and cost-effective and

will help to make education more flexible and relevant to the labour market.

### 5. *Revising the VET system to include large-scale multi-disciplinary institutions*

The average school has some 370 students. This is far less than the minimum number needed to create a well-equipped educational environment that facilitates efficient and effective learning. A significant reduction in the number of schools through mergers is essential to improve efficiency and quality and strengthen service levels. The merged institutions could provide multi-level VET for both young people and adults. The process should be accompanied by a number of measures to empower the larger institutions with the proper management skills to enable an efficient use of resources.

### 6. *Curriculum reform and upgrading teachers*

Proper institutional management is only one aspect of successful innovation. Teachers to transfer knowledge, experience and competencies to their students is another. A revision of the current pre-service system and the introduction of a system for in-service training is necessary for the teaching force is to be successfully revitalised. An improvement of working conditions must be made in parallel. A conducive learning environment in large-scale, multi-disciplinary institutions with strong ties to the labour market is vital. Working with competencies rather than with knowledge and applying modern teaching methods are pre-conditions for relevant training.

### 7. *Labour market information mechanisms*

As mentioned above, the current labour market information system is not relevant for training purposes. It is not only a matter of the type and methodologies used for compilation of the statistical data but also, and more importantly, the need to develop an interactive network of stakeholders that can put the information to its best use. A raising of awareness on the importance of information for VET policy development would also contribute to the process.



## **2. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LABOUR MARKET**

# 2

### **2.1 ABOUT SYRIA**

Syria is one of the oldest inhabited countries in the world. It has occupied a position of importance in the fields of science, culture, politics, art, commerce, and industry from the earliest times. Damascus became the capital of the first Arab State at the time of the Omeyyads in 661 A.D. It gained independence in 1941 after a period of a French rule, which formally ended by the departure of French military forces in 1946. The current constitution that forms the basis of the juridical and political system was implemented in 1973.

The country has a centralised political system. Since July 2000, Bashar al-Assad, son of the previous president Hafez al-Assad has been the Head of State and the President. The President is elected by popular vote for a seven-year term and he appoints the Vice Presidents, the Prime Minister, deputy Prime Ministers and other cabinet ministers.

Syria has a unicameral Parliament (People's Council or Majlis al-shaab) with 250 seats. Its members are elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms. In the last elections (1998) the National Progressive Front (which includes the Baa'th Party) gained 167 seats. Other parties gained 83 seats. The constitution guarantees that the Baa'th party receives half of the seats.

Since Bashar Al Assad came to power, some steps have been taken (see below) to boost economic growth.

The current population of Syria is 17,460,000, of which at least 41% is under 14. This is due to a high population growth rate of 2.58%. Life expectancy is 68.46 years (male 67.35 and female 69.64), which explains the relatively low percentage of population over 65.

With a size of 185 square kilometres, Syria can be considered as a sparsely populated

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country. The map shows the main country features.



Around 71% of the population over the age of 15 can read and write. Of these 85.7% are male and 55.8% female.

Syria has freedom of religion. Muslim is the dominant religion: around 90% of the population are Sunni Muslim (74%), Alawite, Druze, and other Muslim branches comprise 16%. The further 10% are predominantly Christian.

## 2.2 THE SYRIAN ECONOMY

### Key economic facts and figures (see also Annex 1)

Syria is rich in agricultural land and minerals essential to industry. In developing the economy, attempts have been made to promote the manufacturing sector. It is assumed that agriculture will continue to contribute economically and that commerce and tourism will progress and thereby meet the socio-economic needs of the rapidly growing population. In terms of external trade, Syria is slowly but surely opening up and seeking new means to increase the capital necessary to sustain continued economic development.

According to the World Bank classification, Syria is a lower middle-income country<sup>5</sup>. In 1999, GDP per capita was estimated at US\$ 1,030 (€1,160)<sup>6</sup>. It has one of the highest population growth rates (2.6%) in the region, and it is estimated that the population will increase from 17 million to approximately 32 million by 2025. A tendency towards urbanisation continues, while opportunities arise in rural economic development.

For the last few years, Syria has been in economic decline. Over the past few years growth has been low (0.5% in 2000). An increase is expected in 2001 (up to 2%). Economic growth has been dependent on the fluctuations in oil price and the results of agriculture crops. The inflation rate is moderate, and has been around 2 to 3% for the last few years.

The composition of GDP shows three main sectors: agriculture (29%), industry (22%) and services (49%). This is only partly consistent with the breakdown of the workforce by occupation: agriculture 40%, industry 20% and services 40%.

Within the agricultural sector, livestock, fruit and cereal production are the main components. The industrial products are: petroleum, textiles, food processing, beverages, tobacco, phosphate rock mining, while the agricultural products comprise: wheat, barley, cotton, lentils, chickpeas, olives, sugar beet, beef, mutton, eggs, poultry, and milk. Most of the agro-industry is centred in the area north of Damascus. The main trading centres are Damascus and Aleppo and to a lesser extent Latakia, Tartous, Deir al Zour and Homs. The oil sector is mainly concentrated on the Deir al Zour region, and around the refineries at Aleppo and Baniyas, where some related heavy industry has developed. Damascus and Aleppo are also home to light industry, such as textiles and ceramics.

The export level in 1999 was \$3.3 billion, the import slightly less: \$3.2 billion. Exports concentrate strongly on petroleum (65%), while a smaller role is reserved for

<sup>5</sup> *Country Support Strategy: Syrian Arab Republic*, UNIDO, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> *Economist Intelligence Unit Report*, EIU, July 2001.



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textiles (10%), manufactured goods (10%), fruits and vegetables (7%), raw cotton (5%), live sheep (2%), phosphates (1%). Exports are mainly destined to Germany 14%, Turkey 13%, Italy 12%, France 9%, Lebanon 9%, Spain<sup>7</sup>.

Imported goods are predominantly equipment or raw materials for industrial activities. The imported goods can be defined as machinery and equipment (23%), foodstuffs/animals (20%), metal and metal products (15%), textiles (10%) and finally chemicals (10%) (1998 est.). Importing parties are: Ukraine 16%, Italy 6%, Germany 6%, Turkey 5%, France 4%, South Korea, Japan, US (1998 est.).

The Syrian economy has been based on a centrally planned model with a large public sector. Although it is difficult to find statistics as to the GDP contributions of the public and the growing private sectors, many estimate that the private sector contribution to the GDP is higher than that of the public sector (the figure of 70/30 was suggested by one of the interviewees). These percentages can be reversed in terms of contribution to employment: the public sector remains by far the main employer in the country.

### A change at hand

Despite the gradual pace of reform, the Syrian economy is changing radically. A number of laws have been passed to promote economic growth: the 1991 Investment Law No 10 has been modified to allow for foreign ownership of real estate, tax incentives, etc.; foreign exchange regulations have been simplified and progress made on the conversion towards a unified exchange rate; a 2001 law has been passed for the liberalisation of the banking sector allowing joint private-public banks, etc. A debate is currently ongoing to bring the public sector up to market standards. However, a comprehensive economic policy is still to be put in place.

Globalisation has not left the Syrian economy untouched. As its policies show, the country is ambitious and enthusiastic

about participating in the larger network of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership which aims, among others, at the establishment of an open trade zone by 2010. Other commercial agreements are being discussed with countries in the region.

The country is at a watershed and in many fields there is still debate about future aims and actions. However, there is agreement on some points.

- Syria's economy has evolved into a predominantly low wage and low skill production model.
- Economists in both the public and private sectors are well aware that if the country is to survive in global markets, the economy needs to deliver higher "value added" and better quality products and services.
- As a hangover from the past, the economic system and its actors are not market-orientated. Not being subject to much competition in the past, productivity levels are low and production methods are not cost-effective, let alone competitive in many fields.
- These changes require a better-qualified workforce. Therefore, a major change in the education system is essential for future generations as well as the current workforce.
- The future role of the public economy will gradually have to adapt to a higher skilled, more productive and more efficient system. In fact, public enterprises will have to be fundamentally reviewed to prevent them from becoming a millstone for future economic development.

Syria has major economic challenges ahead, and this will significantly change the economic landscape in the coming 5 to 10 years. The emphasis will be on increasing productivity and value added in order to be competitive in the region. Major investments in infrastructure and technology and the modernisation of public administration and the public economic sector as well as massive investment in the whole education system will be required.

<sup>7</sup> These breakdowns are based on 1998 figures.

## 2.3 THE LABOUR MARKET

In 1999, the total number of workers in Syria was estimated at 4,095,000 (male and female) of which no less than 43% are in the informal sector. Female participation in the workforce is estimated at less than 30% although it is slowly but steadily increasing. Official registered unemployment remains low at around 8 to 10%, but unofficial reports put the unemployment rate at around 20%<sup>8</sup>.

In October 2002, the Government of Prime Minister Mustapha Miro adopted a US\$ 1 billion plan to create 440,000 new jobs over the next five years. Funds will be used to finance small-scale investment projects, mainly in rural areas<sup>9</sup>.

As mentioned before, the composition of the workforce by occupation is estimated at 40% in the agriculture sector, 20% in the industrial sector and 40% in services. Precise data on public versus private employment was not available but the state remains the main employer in the country. Data for regional or local levels are not available.

The difference in payment between the public and private sector is substantial. According to the statistics, the wages paid in the private sector are twice as high for unskilled workers, three times as high for semi-skilled workers and four times higher for highly skilled workers. The payment of civil servants (as well as teachers) is in the semi-skilled worker range.

Finding relevant data on labour market development and future economic growth indications for the key sectors of the Syrian economy and the expectations on the desired outcome of the school system is difficult in Syria. Some institutions (like the State Planning Commission or the Central Bureau of Statistics) invest a lot effort in making relevant data available. Nevertheless, it has proven almost impossible to make accurate predictions.

### Distorted labour market mechanisms

In the past in a planned economy, many organisations “planned” the future. The economy developed along the lines set by the governmental plans. The general guidelines for production were the markers for resource planning, including the need for graduates of certain disciplines. This time is long gone and has been replaced by a promising but much more uncertain economic future. The value of the information about the future of the labour market is very limited. It has proven very difficult to find this information in Syria for several reasons.

- As explained before, Syria still has a large public industrial sector. These industries are centrally directed and steered. Human resources management policies are implemented by government. While this policy may have some social benefits (e.g. employment security), it does not contribute to the understanding of the true market needs nor to the formulation of successful economic and employment policies.
- The economy is shifting from a planned economy to a more market-oriented one. Private industry has been an option for over a decade. At the same time, public companies still benefit, for example, from special pricing or production subsidies. In this complex situation, predictions on the development of economic sectors are difficult.
- The focus of data compilation has often been for registration purposes rather than for policy design. One example is the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour for unemployment. Until now, their work has focused on the registration of unemployed. However, this information has not been used for the development of other active or passive employment policies.

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<sup>8</sup> *The Syria Report*, [www.Syria-report.com](http://www.Syria-report.com), 8 August 2002.

<sup>9</sup> A first loan of US\$ 100 million by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development was signed by Mr Hussein al-Amash, Head of the “Agency for combatting unemployment” in Spring 2002. Another US\$ 1.4 million loan was agreed by UNDP in mid 2002. (*The Syria Report*, Thursday, 8 August 2002).

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- Social partner organisations are not yet organised or ready to play an active role as representatives of the labour market (supply and demand). At present, the Chambers of Industry are starting to take up this role, but there is not yet a clear tri-partite network nor a social dialogue culture.
- On a totally different note, but no less important, is the large-scale informal sector in Syria.

### **The informal workforce**

A complex factor in the understanding of the economy in general and the labour market in particular, is the existence of a huge informal sector. As mentioned above, 43% of the workforce has a place in the informal market, and this figure seems to be increasing (from 40% in 1995 to 43% in 1999). There is no single definition of the informal sector, but the one used in the 1999 census was those who are “playing a role in the economic activities outside the institutions“. This implies all small units and individuals producing and distributing goods and/or services, working for themselves, with a very small capital (if any), using primitive methods requiring low level technologies and low skilled workers.

The existence of the informal sector can be attributed to the high population growth rate, the sluggish economy, the lack of adequate services and/or new projects in rural areas and an environment that discourages business start-ups.

The main economic fields covered by the informal sector are agriculture, transport, mining and converting industries, trading, maintenance, building and construction, sewing, household, food preparation and service, personal services and subcontracting. Agriculture (41%), building and construction (24%), and trade (14%) account for 80% of the informal sector.

Over half the workers in the informal sector are aged between 15 and 29, and about 19% are between 15 and 19. This latter group points at a high dropout percentage from secondary education. Furthermore, at least 4% of the informal sector may well be children.

It may come as no surprise that the educational background of most of the informal sector workers is low. Around 77% of them are below primary school level, and some are even illiterate and, therefore, highly vulnerable.



## 3. THE SYRIAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

# 3

### 3.1 STRUCTURE OF THE SYRIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Syrian education system is in five stages (see diagram in annex 3): pre-school, primary, preparatory, secondary and post-secondary (or tertiary) education.

The 1973 constitution guarantees free education for everyone at all levels<sup>10</sup>, and compulsory education for six years, this was raised to nine years by Law No 32 approved in April 2002.

Almost all children reaching compulsory school age attend the first year of primary school, apart from the nomad population. However, in spite of the widespread provision of school facilities and the high attendance, the literacy rate is still only 71%, with a considerable difference between males (85.7%) and females (55.8%).

**Pre-school education** is voluntary.

Schools are run by the Ministry of Education, by associations such as the General Union of Syrian Arab Women and Teachers' Union, and by private organisations.

**Primary education** lasts for six years. The main provider is the Ministry of Education, while UNRWA<sup>11</sup> or private organisations provide the rest (1% each). The curriculum comes from the Ministry of Education and is compulsory for all providers.

**Preparatory school** lasts for three years (grades 7 to 9). It is considered the first step of secondary education. All pupils who successfully complete primary education can join the preparatory school (there is no entrance examination). It is estimated that around 70% of a given age group succeed in reaching secondary school. Some 95% of preparatory school provision is state run, while the rest is

<sup>10</sup> A recent decree allows the set up of private universities on a fee-paying basis.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Relief and Works Agency (for Palestinian Refugees).

## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN SYRIA AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE LABOUR MARKET

divided between UNRWA and private organisations. It can be estimated that half of the schools are co-educational, except for UNRWA schools.

**Secondary education** lasts for three years (grades 10 to 13) and is divided<sup>12</sup> into two segments:

- general secondary school (GSS): leading to the Baccalaureate diploma, which entitles pupils to go onto higher education, subject to *numerus clausus*;
- technical secondary schools (TSS).

The main provider is the State (approx. 95%), the rest being covered by UNRWA and private organisations.

According to the policy decision of 2000 the distribution of students between general and technical secondary education should be 50/50. The selection is done on the basis of the final examination results after the preparatory school.

**Post secondary** (or tertiary) education can be divided into two branches:

- university education, which usually lasts for four years but can go up to six depending on the subject;
- technical education: lasting for two years.

### 3.2 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVISION

As described above, the Syrian VET system is basically in two parts: secondary level (vocational secondary school) and post-secondary level (intermediate institutes).

#### **First level: secondary vocational education and training**

Following the 2000 policy decision, all secondary VET programmes last for three years. A preparatory school certificate is the entrance requirement. Secondary vocational school graduates are granted a vocational secondary certificate as skilled

workers. The graduates can either join the labour market or continue their studies at post-secondary vocational institutes or (in rare cases) at universities.

Secondary VET takes place at technical secondary schools. As many as 11 ministries participate in the provision of secondary VET. However most (up to 90%) is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

Secondary VET includes five major specialisations: industrial, commercial, agriculture, women's studies and religion.

#### **Second level: post-secondary vocational education and training**

Technical intermediate institutes provide this type of training, which lasts for two years. Entry requirements include a general or vocational secondary school degree. Intermediate institute graduates are granted a degree of "high grade technician". After that they can join the labour market or in rare cases, university studies.

A total of 16 ministries are involved in the provision of post-secondary VET, although the majority are under the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education (approx. 35% and 20% respectively). The Higher Council for Intermediate Institutes, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher Education, is the policy body responsible for post-secondary VET.

As shown in the diagram below, **the position of VET in the Syrian education system** is, in theory, an important crossroads leading to and from various routes. However, in practice government regulations limit this role and VET marks the end of a student's education. VET is in most cases an end route for students. The Higher Ministerial Committee for VET, the highest policy making body (see below), has approved a number of decisions to improve the links between VET and the other education sub-systems.

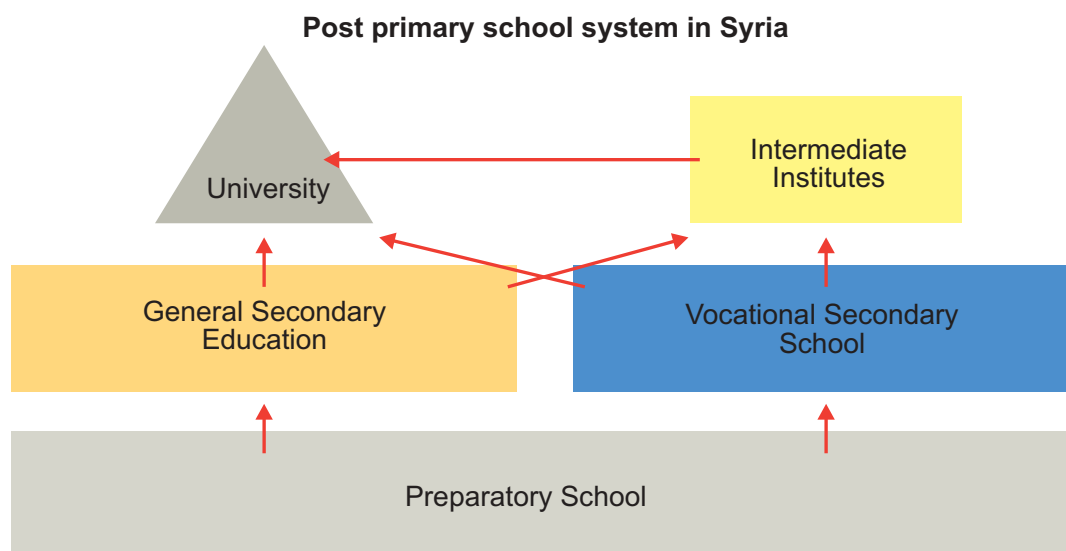
<sup>12</sup> The professional secondary school, of two years and with a vocational orientation, was abolished in 2000. All vocational schools and programmes were unified under the technical secondary system lasting three years.

### 3. THE SYRIAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

This includes the increase (from 2 to 5%) of the number of VET graduates that are allowed to join universities and the creation of “applied colleges” under the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher Education. The new entrances to the colleges will be distributed as follows: 50% graduates from vocational secondary

schools, 25% of graduates from intermediate institutes and 25% from general secondary schools.

The absence of a lifelong learning facility makes it almost impossible to re-enter the school system.



The table below summarises basic figures of VET provision under the Ministry of Education:

VET secondary schools	Year 2000
Number of students	Approx. 113,750
Number of schools	647
Number of professions/specialisation	135
Technical intermediate institutes	Year 1999
Number of students	33,947 (number of secondary graduates accepted in institutes)
Number of institutes	131
Number of professions	119

Source: Ministry of Education.

**The number and the average size of the institutions, is one of the main challenges for the future.** The institutions are now small scaled and usually concentrate on just one discipline. The lack of equipment and the general poor condition of school buildings leaves much room for improvement in the future. One of the reasons given for the expansion in the number of centres has been government policy towards education for girls, who have a right to receive education within a limited distance from home.

This well-intentioned measure has forced the authorities to open a vast number of small-scale institutions, causing problems in terms of quality and relevance of education.

**The number of VET students is rising.** The figures show that in nearly all types of school student numbers increased over the 1990 to 1999 period. The 1999 figures point to a participation level of around 300,000 students (all ministries included) in the various stages of vocational education.

That in itself, with a population of around 17 million people, is a rather low figure, compared to western European and neighbouring Middle Eastern countries. The government has been trying to increase the number of students in VET for a number of years and, as the figures show, has been partially successful.

### 3.2.1 STAFFING AT VOCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Theoretical subject teachers (e.g. mathematics, physics, Arabic, etc.) are recruited from universities. Professional subject teachers are university engineering graduates. Practical teachers (workshop trainers) are graduates from intermediate institutes and, in some cases, university graduates. Prior practical experience in industry is not required in any of these three cases, not even in the case of workshop trainers.

Prior pedagogical training is not compulsory to enter the teaching profession. Therefore, the pedagogical skills rely on the individual teacher's personality.

School and institute directors can ask the Ministry of Education for upgrading courses for new teachers if considered necessary. Pedagogical courses can also be requested. These courses are provided by the pedagogical faculties at universities.

Teacher recruitment is centrally organised by the government. The management of the vocational institution concerned participates in the final selection of candidates.

The social and economic status of teachers is fairly low. Salaries are often not high enough to cover the cost of living of a standard family. Teachers therefore need to find a second wage earning occupation. While this could have a negative impact on the quality of the tuition, a parallel activity in industry is often considered as a positive input for the teaching process, particularly as regards practical training.

Administrative staff is also centrally appointed. No prior specific management skills are required.

### 3.2.2 METHODS AND APPROACHES

VET in Syria is one-dimensional.

- School-based education with very limited (and in most cases voluntary) work-based training. Intermediate institute students are supposed to spend a three-month period in a company. However, this is not compulsory and has little influence on the final evaluation. The only exception to this rule is the current pilot apprenticeship scheme.
- The world of work has a very limited influence on the government decisions regarding the content of courses and curricula. Mixed curriculum committees with involvement from enterprises have only been created for new professions.
- There is a shortage of modern pedagogical material. The pedagogical climate (didactics, methodology, etc) is also influenced by the lack of modern equipment and outside influence. Conditions for modernisation, e.g. through the use of e-learning, are poor.
- Curricula and educational material are centrally designed. There is little autonomy for schools to adapt to local conditions.

The infrastructure is weak. The equipment and other facilities show a gap between the level of equipment at the schools/institutes and companies. The small scale of the institutions and the inadequate budget for equipment and services has caused this situation. A few exceptions can be noted, in which companies donated equipment and expertise to individual vocational schools.

### 3.2.3 STANDARDS, ASSESSMENT AND CERTIFICATION

Within the legal framework, almost all vocational education is centrally designed and administered and at a standardised level. There is a unified system of certification: one certificate for graduates of vocational secondary schools and one for graduates of intermediate institutes. Even if issued and signed by different ministries, certificates of the same level have the same value.



### 3. THE SYRIAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

However and beyond this formal standardisation, the involvement of different ministries in the provision of initial secondary and post-secondary VET has, in reality, resulted in a difference in quality. For example, certain specialisations are offered at the same time by different ministries, resulting in graduates with similar diplomas having received different levels of training in qualitative terms.

The public accountability of the system is very low. The present system of inspection, through a form of inspectorate, does not seem to be able to direct and control the issues of quality in an active and persuasive way. Financing issues are not linked to qualitative but quantitative criteria.

The current evaluation and certification system is centrally based with no involvement from social organisations.

The system should relate more to openly discussed standards and skills relevant to the future labour market. Assessment methods and forms of certification and benchmarking should be revised both nationally and internationally. This way all concerned could be motivated to reshape the vocational education and training system in the most appropriate way for the future.

#### 3.3 CONTINUING TRAINING

Syria has no organised system of continuing training for the existing labour force. When required, e.g. when new equipment needs new skills, continuing training takes place in the workplace and is organised by the company itself. Although according to the regulations the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour should organise training for the unemployed, in practice this does not yet happen. A forthcoming change of policy might lead to a more active role by this Ministry<sup>13</sup>. The current training infrastructure and the inexperience of vocational schools in dealing with the unemployed is a serious challenge for the future.

There are **however, a number of courses provided by several ministries that cater for a small proportion of current workers and education dropouts.**

Alongside standard vocational education and training provision in secondary schools and intermediate institutes, a number of more flexible vocational training courses ranging from two weeks to nine months are regularly provided by other ministries at vocational training centres (VTC).

In concrete terms, the Ministry of Industry has four VTCs, (specialising in electronics, metals, spinning and weaving, and motor vehicles), in four regions (Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Deir El-Zor). They cater for 1,500 trainees per year, for ages ranging from 16 to 35.

The Ministry of Building and Construction has 11 such centres in 11 places. These centres provide training in the area of building and construction and cater for 1,000 trainees a year. Training costs are met from the State budget, and training is provided free.

Ministry of Agriculture centres offer a different training profile. Courses last for around 40 days and are open to both to farmers and engineers. In 1996 approximately 19,000 people benefited from these courses.

Some of these courses fall outside regular education path and cater for both education dropouts and workers.

*For the sake of clarity it must be understood that the above-mentioned ministries (and many others) are also involved in the provision of regular secondary and post-secondary VET.*

**In the private sector** there are currently about 400 small training centres nationwide, which depend on fees from trainees. They cover subjects including languages and computer sciences. This type of training is outside the formal system.

<sup>13</sup> Although the 2000 Government plan to fight unemployment is led by an ad hoc Agency, a revision of the role of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour is expected.

### 3.4 LEGISLATIVE, REGULATORY, ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCING FRAMEWORK

#### 3.4.1 LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Vocational education and training in Syria is controlled by a complex legal and regulatory system. A summary of the main legal and political acts that were (in their time) milestones in the development of VET in the country is provided below.

- The 1955 law No 47 was the first legal act on VET.
- Following the political set up in the 1960s, the 1973 constitution became the point of reference for education policy development.
- Law No 4 of 1978 created a co-ordinating body involving representatives from the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Education and other ministries to decide on curricula, examination arrangements and entrance requirements for intermediate institutes. The body is managed by the Ministry of Higher Education.
- The 1998 ministerial decree issued by the Prime Minister was a major milestone in the history of VET. The decree approved the creation of a Higher Ministerial Committee for Vocational and Technical Education (HMC, see below). The HMC deals with policy development in VET issues. It is supported by a follow-up committee, chaired by the Vice Minister for VET at the Ministry of Education.
- In 1988/89 a plan was set by the Higher Ministerial Committee that fixed the target for the intake of students at VET secondary schools at 70% of the total number of preparatory students. The remaining 30% were to enter general education. This plan underlined the priority given to VET as an alternative. The Ministry of Education, in close co-operation with the State Planning Commission, was to take the lead in preparing executive plans for implementation of the policy.
- In 1994, the presidential decree No 13 was issued (by the President of the State) to

set the legal basis for the modernisation of vocational education and training provision. It aims at improving the condition of vocational schools and their graduates; identifying a certificate for the graduates; giving VET graduates priority in employment in both private and public sectors, etc. To improve the implementation of VET provision and to increase co-ordination, the decree foresaw the creation of the following committees that are still in place:

- (i) a committee to initiate new vocational schools and technical and vocational professions and establish its by-laws; as a result, a total of 115 professions were defined;
  - (ii) an inter-ministerial curriculum co-ordination committee;
  - (iii) an examination committee to follow up exams and establish a unified examination system.
- A decision was taken in 2000 to distribute preparatory school graduates equally between VET and general education (instead of 70/30). Furthermore, all specialist studies at secondary vocational level were lengthened to three years, thus abolishing the two-year programme.

#### 3.4.2 GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

To summarise what has been said in previous chapters, as many as 11 ministries are involved in the provision of secondary VET. The Ministry of Education is, however, principally responsible for the school system up to and including secondary level.

Various ministries (16) provide and organise post-secondary VET. The Higher Council for intermediate institutes headed by the Minister of Higher Education co-ordinates post-secondary VET provision.

Besides the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Industry plays an important role in VET not only through the vocational schools and institutes but also through its vocational training centres.

The regulation and organisation of the two sub-sectors is under the overall supervision

### 3. THE SYRIAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

of the Higher Ministerial Committee for technical education and vocational training, headed by the Deputy Prime Minister for Service Affairs. As mentioned before, the committee was created in 1988 following a ministerial decree issued by the Prime Minister reflecting the boost given to VET provision at that time. This committee includes the ministers of education, agriculture, industry, health, construction and building, communications, transportation, electricity, tourism, oil and mineral resources, and irrigation. The committee is in charge of policy setting. A follow-up committee headed by the Ministry of Education's, Vice Minister for technical education and vocational training, was created as the executive body of the Higher Committee. This follow up committee includes the directors general of the ministries listed above.

The governance and administrative system is, therefore, highly centralised. **Both secondary and post-secondary institutions have very limited autonomy:** the main decisions regarding education supply and content, personnel, finance, equipment and buildings are taken by the central authority. Although regional sections of the Ministry of Education exist, they are responsible for policy implementation rather than formulation.

With the exception of the pilot apprenticeship scheme (where an ad hoc committee has been created involving representatives from the Damascus Chamber of Industry) there is **no participation from social partners** (employers and employee organisations) in the governance or management of the VET system, either at national or at local-school level. Given the lack of external input in VET provision, and the lack of contacts between the schools and their local environment, schools are distanced from the real world of work. This poses a serious threat to the social relevance of VET.

#### 3.4.3 FINANCING

According to the 1973 Syrian constitution, education in Syria is free in its entirety – from pre-school to university.

The percentage of public expenditure on education rose steadily from 7.64% in 1970 to 12.8% in 1994. However, since then it has been falling reaching 10% in 1998, in spite of the large absolute increase in the Ministry of Education's budget. Education expenditure as a percentage of GDP can be estimated at 4.5% and has remained fairly steady over the years.

Of the overall education budget, the share for elementary education varied from 42% to 55% between 1970 and 1998, while the share for intermediate and secondary education varied between 20.5% and 28.6% over the same period.

The Ministry of Education's budget for technical and vocational education rose from about 6% in 1970 to 13.48% in 1981. In recent years (1994-98) it has varied from 7.6% to 8.8%. The marked increase in 1981 was as a result of an expansion plan to build and equip a number of technical and vocational schools. In 1997 expenditure was 71.5%, the rest went on investments.

It can be estimated that the cost of a VET student is four times that of a general secondary student (due to the high cost of equipment, buildings, training material, consumables and the low student teacher ratio).

With regard to the financing of VET in the other ministries involved in technical and vocational education, despite the fact that the growth rate of government funding in these ministries rose by about 18% over the 1992 to 1998 period, the actual funding amounted to less than 10% of government outlay in that area.

As for training provided by private institutions, the 1998 job market survey on the distribution of training funding in private sector establishments revealed that 71.2% was spent on in-service training, 20.9% on private training centres and 7.9% abroad.

#### 3.5 VET POLICY AIMS

Over the years, VET had a relatively important place in the education system and attracted special political attention.

## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN SYRIA AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE LABOUR MARKET

The government considered it as one of the important tools for economic prosperity. Despite this commitment in many policy documents, actual political priorities do not back this up. VET was, as most other types of education in Syria, subject to budget reductions and increases of scope. The fragmentation of the system between the different ministries, the high level of centralisation and the limited capability to respond to changing labour market needs, clarifies that the VET policies are still very much in need of a well-defined position.

The Syrian Ministry of Education has recently taken a number of steps to develop a comprehensive strategy aiming to increase the relevance of the Syrian technical and vocational education and training system for labour market needs. Amongst the areas of focus, special attention was given to the development of apprenticeship schemes that could bring initial training, which is at present mostly school based, closer to industry and companies, thus increasing the active participation of the production sector in the development and delivery of training. The strategy also includes the creation of new specialist areas for existing studies, emphasis on the skills of teachers and trainers, and the upgrade of equipment (with computer equipment a priority).

**The pilot apprenticeship scheme** (which began in September 2000 and developed with the support of the European Training Foundation) has brought VET in Syria to the forefront of discussions: the weak relationship between curricula and the labour market, the need to revise subjects within the curriculum, the strong school-based orientation of VET provision, the need to upgrade teaching staff so that they can play a more interactive role with the world of work, the need for competence-based training and the need for investment in school infrastructure and equipment.

The high level of commitment from all parties involved in the pilot scheme is a good sign of support for change. The Damascus Chamber of Industry plays a vital role bridging the gap between private industry and the VET system. However, the roles of the different partners (the Chamber

of Industry, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Industry, schools and institutes) need to be institutionalised to ensure sustainability beyond the commitment of the group of individuals currently involved. The recent agreement of a draft memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Education and the Chamber is a good sign of the commitment to move forward.

The main challenge is the development of local capacities to manage the implementation of the process. The creation of a joint Ministry of Education/social partner apprenticeship 'secretariat' to deal with operational tasks linked to the recruitment of apprentices and companies, curriculum development, standards, assessment, information to stakeholders and the public etc. is to be encouraged.

Recently, the government has published a **new policy document** outlining the general objectives for education:

- helping young people to teach themselves to achieve a continuing learning process;
- approving a comprehensive policy for developing the educational process, encompassing new technologies, the environment, and population education;
- encouraging the use of the Arabic language (particularly in scientific subjects), and unifying the scientific terms locally and among the Arab countries;
- taking care of special groups such as disabled students.

This was translated into the following policy lines:

- realising the principle of democracy in education;
- applying the compulsory education policy;
- giving special attention to computer skills, foreign languages, scientific subjects;
- enhancing the quality of education through improving the competencies of teaching staff and innovating teaching methods;
- improving the relevance of VET to labour market requirements;

- encouraging the private sector to participate in education.

It is still to be seen how the policy statements will translate into concrete implementation plans.

The pilot apprenticeship scheme and the new policy document are signs of an awareness of the needs of the Syrian VET system and even of a commitment to change. In that sense, it can be considered that **VET must be made more prominent on the political agenda**. However, it must be concluded that **the government is not (yet) prioritising many of the key elements of the VET system**, nor it is successfully bridging the gap between the involvement of the stakeholders and the management of the system. Neither has it been able to position VET clearly and unambiguously as a key issue in the debate regarding future economic policy.

#### 3.6 MAIN CONSTRAINTS OF THE SYRIAN VET SYSTEM

As mentioned above, the Syrian Government has taken important steps over the last decade to update the VET system and is still striving for improvements. But the task is a difficult one, especially under the sometimes harsh conditions in which the VET system, its schools and teachers have to work. Fundamental changes will have to take place in order to drastically upgrade the system to the level that it can contribute to the desired economic changes in the country.

Weighing up the problems of the system, the following issues are the most pressing (see also Chapter 6 – Conclusions).

- The current VET system is not an attractive alternative to general secondary education. For students wanting to continue their studies after the first or second cycle, it is virtually a dead-end.
- The education model is one-dimensional. It provides only (secondary) three-year courses and (intermediate level) two-year courses, while the labour market requires a wider variety of skills and levels varying from assistant level to higher management.
- The gap between education and the real world of work is substantial. More importantly, there are few integrated mechanisms to fill the gap (limited involvement of social partners in the management, design and delivery of training; no vocational guidance systems; limited performance of employment services and labour market information systems, etc.).
- The schools are small and poorly equipped. The situation does not promote innovation and educational routes for students are not well designed and restrict choice and opportunity. Teachers are working under difficult conditions. Pre-service training and recruitment procedures do not ensure the best match of skills for the teaching profession. There is no systematic in-service training that would allow a constant updating of skills.
- A large number of ministries are involved in the centrally managed VET system. In a rapidly changing market, switching from a public economy to a growing private sector, the involvement of the social partners is needed to make the system more relevant. The large number of government actors involved calls, at the same time, for simplified management mechanisms.
- Given the desire for economic progress and the shift from a low-wage, low added value production to products of a higher standard and added value, the retraining of many adults will be the automatic consequence. The present VET system has limited potential to address the issues of lifelong learning, including the continuing training of the existing workforce.
- The high number of schools and their small size hinder any possible quality improvements and reduce the overall cost-effectiveness of the system. A re-dimensioning of the VET system is needed in terms of quantity of institutions and their profile to cover a variety of specialisations.



## **4. THE INTERFACE BETWEEN VET AND THE LABOUR MARKET**

# 4

Chapter 1 outlined the state of the Syrian economy and the characteristics of its labour market.

From that it can be inferred that many of the issues that this chapter should address (e.g. demand for training, vocational guidance services, employment services) can be dealt with briefly as much of the information required is simply not there.

### **4.1 VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SYSTEM**

At present, there is no vocational guidance and counselling system in place. The links between the labour market and the VET system are weak. This implies that if any vocational guidance and/or counselling system were to exist, it would be destined for a short life. In other words there is a mismatch between the current system – based exclusively on two skill levels – and the variety of skills levels required by the labour market.

### **4.2 EMPLOYMENT SERVICES**

In Syria, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour is responsible for the mediation of the unemployed. Although legislation suggests that this ministry should play an active role in looking for jobs and/or the (re)schooling of clients, in practice its work has consisted in registering the unemployed. Even so, registration is not compulsory and since there are no visible unemployment benefits (e.g. no unemployment subsidy) people do not often register themselves.

Recent changes in legislation and the reorganisation of the Ministry should put this important task more in the spotlight. A main concern is whether the existing capacities and network structure will allow for a change. Beyond that, another problem will be to find relevant courses for the unemployed. The current vocational institutions do not provide much education of that sort.

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Furthermore, the link between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and the mainstream of the VET system is lacking.

### 4.3 CURRENT SYSTEM FOR THE COLLECTION OF INFORMATION ON THE LABOUR MARKET

The collection of relevant and reliable data on the present and future labour market is

one of the weakest parts of the data collection in Syria. The institutions responsible for gathering statistical information are the Central Bureau of Statistics, the State Planning Commission and the statistics departments in various ministries.

The table below shows their status and their main products:

	Organisational profile	Products	Main users
Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS)	Governmental with access to all ministries and institutions	Year Book, periodic census, and individual surveys	The Cabinet, some ministries and private institutions
State Planning Commission (SPC)	Governmental with access to all ministries and institutions	Different studies and survey results	
Statistical and planning departments in different ministries	Governmental	Year book of information	

Although the quality and quantity of the material collected is high, it has little relevance for labour market policies or VET planning. In fact, most of this material was never meant to serve that purpose. Therefore, there is a problem of availability and compilation of data relevant to labour market needs. This in itself has to do with the lack of local mechanisms to make data available (lack of vocational guidance, employment services, enterprises, etc.). Beyond that there is also a need to reinforce local capacities for data analysis and to raise awareness on the use of that analysis for policy development. Furthermore, there is the problem of the use of the information. At present there is no culture or an established network of stakeholders that could make use of the data for policy making.

Confronted with the gradual transformation from a planned economy with a mass of public industries to a more market-driven economic system, the ministries responsible for the planning of facilities (including educational forecasts) are now trying to get a better understanding of the market. The growth of private industries and the insecure future of public industries create even more difficulties in making reliable future predictions.

In short, there is limited information on the likely developments in the labour market to the extent that government agencies cannot provide clear signals to the VET system and its schools, nor can it inform the public and private industries on future workforce needs.

### 4.4 ATTITUDE OF FIRMS, ORGANISATIONS AND SOCIETY IN GENERAL TOWARDS VET

VET in its present state is not considered an important part of the education system. Society regards it as a second choice education. This second choice nature is due, on the one hand, to the architecture of the education system that makes VET a dead-end and, on the other hand, to the irrelevance of the education provided.

Companies endorse this view and usually assume that they will have to invest a certain amount of time and financial resources in "re-training" young graduates joining their services.

Another difficulty is that there is limited understanding among companies on the need and benefits of training. Size and a



#### 4. THE INTERFACE BETWEEN VET AND THE LABOUR MARKET

family management style may be behind this approach. Most of the private companies are small. By their nature they are unlikely to have much interest in external support, in general, and training in particular. Many of these companies do not have outside capital, use locally-produced materials and sell in local markets. The investment in technology is low and therefore, the need for external support is not felt. These companies are more concerned with survival than with long-term development that could justify investment in training. Family ownership implies that the companies are family run. They are not

used to getting advice from external sources.

In the case of bigger companies with a clear management structure, owners are more willing to invest in training because they recognise the benefits. In this case the problem is the inability to identify the key training needs.

Both aspects – the recognition of the benefits of training and the reinforcement of the ability to analyse training needs – will need to be reinforced if a continuing training market is to be put in place.



## 5. DONOR ACTIVITIES

# 5

Unlike many other countries in the region, Syria has not been one of the traditional recipients of donor assistance. The European Union is the main multilateral donor in the country. However, this situation may change in parallel to the political developments in the country.

Most of the donor assistance has been targeted to priority economic sectors, such as textiles, agriculture and chemicals. More recently tourism, health, water management and environmental issues have been integrated into the priority areas. Local rural development has been a constant priority for UNDP assistance. On the basis of the economic reform programme launched by the Syrian government, donor assistance is now focusing on support to economic policy advice (SME development, support to WTO membership) and to the reform of public administration, as a cornerstone for the overall process of economic modernisation. Education has not been a main sector (although higher education is one of the key sectors under an Italian bilateral agreement), and very little has been done in the area of vocational education and training.

Focusing on the field of vocational education and training, although quite a number of donor projects include a training component for upgrading of skills, there are very few initiatives that address the VET sector specifically. Furthermore, VET initiatives remain fairly limited in scope, focusing on the provision of support to individual institutions (cf. below French and German co-operation) or on the development of sectoral studies that could be of use in policy development. So far the European Union programme for the Modernisation of VET in Syria currently under preparation and funded under the MEDA programme, is the only attempt to provide support for wide systemic reform.

Summary of donor activities in the field of VET:

### 5.1 EUROPEAN UNION

Most of the current EU projects include a training component aiming at the upgrading of skills of the current workforce in different sectors (tourism, health, public administration).

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### *The Syrian European Business Centre*

The Syrian European Business Centre (SEBC) is a significant initiative which supports the development of the private sector. Started in 1996, the SEBC is currently in its second phase for the period 2000-04. SEBC plays a key role in the development of private companies' awareness and understanding of the importance of investment in human resources as a key factor for their competitiveness. To this end, the SEBC provides support in four key areas: business upgrading, business information and co-operation, export development and management training. A fifth component on institutional and policy support aims at strengthening the chambers and other entrepreneurial organisations to be able to act as representative organisations active in the definition of national policies, including human resources.

### *Higher Institute of Business Administration*

Also in the field of management training, the EU is supporting the establishment of the Higher Institute of Business Administration (HIBA) that will provide graduate diploma and MBA courses.

### *ETF support: the pilot apprenticeship scheme and the observatory function*

As mentioned in previous sections, the EU, via the ETF, is financing a small pilot project to introduce a pilot apprenticeship scheme. Against a background of a highly school-based VET system, the pilot project has been a breakthrough. Although very limited in its coverage (three pilot schools and four pilot trades) it has developed a basis for wider reform: joint public-private structures both at decision (steering committee) and operational (curriculum committees) levels, innovative elements in the design and delivery of training, etc. Furthermore, the ETF is providing support to the establishment of an observatory function. Although at an early stage, it has provided a forum for public and private vocational and labour market institutions to meet and discuss. Further support will concentrate on exchange of practices with

neighbouring countries and on supporting the development of methodologies for the analysis of information.

### *Regional MEDA programme: Education and Training for Employment*

The European Union is also working on the preparation of a regional project, covering the whole MEDA region on "Education and Training for employment". The project aims, among others, at combating and preventing unemployment, supporting the integration of young people and promoting shared understanding and increased co-operation at region level on issues related to training and labour market systems. The project is currently under the identification phase and, therefore, the activities are still to be defined.

## 5.2 UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP)

The 2002-06 Country Co-operation Framework, identifies three key priority areas: (1) poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihood, (2) sustainable use of natural resources and environmental conservation and (3) institutional development and good governance. Among the first priority area, support is being provided to the Agency to Combat Unemployment (ACU). UNDP support focuses on the preparation of an unemployment map (to identify the most critical areas in the country), the preparation of a national employment creation strategy and capacity building for the ACU staff to manage micro-credit schemes. UNDP is also involved in a rural development project in the Jabal al-Hos region based on the concept of village funds.

In the field of VET, UNDP had previously supported the development of a comprehensive study on VET in Syria (1998) that resulted in a draft National Strategy and the creation of a training centre for the textile industry at the Damascus Chamber of Industry.

The United Nations provide, through UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees), assistance to Palestinian refugees in several countries in the Middle East, i.e. Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and Gaza. The education programme, covering school education, vocational education and technical education and teacher training, is UNRWA's largest single activity, accounting for about half of the Agency's regular budget. VET activities are however rather limited if compared to basic education. In the case of Syria UNRWA has one training centre catering for roughly 800 students.

### 5.3 GERMAN CO-OPERATION

German co-operation in Syria in the field of VET has a long history through the support to the Third Industrial Intermediate Institute (providing post-secondary VET) in Damascus. The co-operation that started in 1978 and lasted over 20 years, provided technical assistance, equipment and staff retraining, for the introduction of new specialisations based on the dual system approach.

Due to problems with external debt, German co-operation stopped but was resumed in 2001 following the signature of an "Agreement on the consolidation of debts owed to the Federal Republic of Germany by the Syrian Arab Republic" in November 2000. Current priorities include the water sector and the setting up of an institute for water management. Through the CIM programme, a German consultant is based at the Damascus Chamber of Industry to support the establishment of continuing training.

GTZ is launching a regional project in vocational education and training involving Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority and Syria. The project aims at strengthening regional co-operation in VET by promoting the exchange of experiences at policy, organisational and implementation level in VET. The dual training arrangements and the necessary measures that go with it (occupational profiles, standards, curriculum

development, training of trainers, etc.) are specifically mentioned as one of the areas for exchange. The total project duration will be eight years divided in three phases. The first project phase will run between April 2003 and March 2006 with a budget of €2 million.

### 5.4 FRENCH CO-OPERATION

**A pilot project to update technical training at industrial intermediate institutes** (*Projet pilote de rénovation de l'enseignement technique des instituts moyens industriels en République arabe syrienne*) was carried out in the framework of a co-operation agreement signed by the French and Syrian Governments in 1996. Following a first phase for project identification, it was agreed that one single pilot project would be carried out. The project methodology could then be applied to other sectors and/or establishments. The pilot project aims at the provision of support for the introduction of three new specialisations (*fabrication mécanique, construction métallique, mécanique automobile*) at the Second Industrial Intermediate Institute. The project activities include the modernisation of programmes, retraining of teachers and trainers, and the upgrade of workshops, laboratories and teaching equipment.

The five-year project started in 1998. It suffered some delays so its duration may be extended.

### 5.5 ITALIAN CO-OPERATION

Italy remains, by its financial volume, one of the key bilateral donors in the country. The 2001-03 bilateral cooperation agreement includes a financial package of approximately €84 million for grants and soft-loans. The following sectors have been earmarked for support: agriculture, environment, health, industry and cultural heritage. Support to sectoral training is a key component in all its projects. Higher education is also a key priority area. Support to the development of master level studies in the tourism and cultural heritage fields are currently in the pipeline.

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A separate agreement has been signed with the Ministry of Higher Education to support academic co-operation and scientific and technological research. The latter includes support to the new ICT initiatives, such as the e-village and the Syrian Virtual University.

### 5.6 JAPANESE CO-OPERATION

Japanese co-operation (JICA) has carried out some projects in the field of continuing training and some field studies on key economic sectors (tourism in 1998, textiles in 1998).

Projects related to training included the development of an electronics training centre, improvement of equipment for vocational training for people with

disabilities and a study for rehabilitation and manpower training for power plants.

JICA has also carried out some projects in the field of continuing training, including technical training in Japan. This programme is targeted at key administrators, technicians and researchers and foresees the provision of training courses in Japan. Around 65 trainees benefited from this type of aid in 2000.

JICA is currently carrying out the identification for an SME, employment and vocational training support programme.

**Toyota centre at the Second Intermediate Institute.** Toyota has financed the equipment and rehabilitation of a workshop and a classroom on car repairing.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

# 6

### 6.1 BACKGROUND: THE CHALLENGES OF FUTURE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The relationship between VET and the labour market is developing in the context of present and future economic development in Syria. Many studies and policy analysis have been devoted to this issue. Although the views and proposed solutions vary considerably, there is a common understanding on the following three points.

- Syria's economy is largely characterised by low wages and low skill production. If Syria is to survive in the global market, it must ensure higher "value-added" products and services.
- The economic system, including both public and private companies, is trying to reach a clear understanding of the market. Without much competition in the past, productivity levels are low in many fields and production methods are not cost-effective, let alone competitive. Globalisation and future free trade

areas involving several countries in the region and with Europe, will call for a major change.

- The public economy will also have to switch to a higher skilled, more productive and more efficient system.

The present low-skill economy requires relatively low training skills. The future economy will demand a major shift in the skill-level of the population and thus the education system both for future generations as well as for current workers and the unemployed (continuing training). Emphasis will be on substantially increasing productivity, quality and added value in order to be competitive in the region, particularly in the context of the establishment of the Euro-Med free trade area. A further increase in investments in infrastructure and technology, modernisation of the public administration and the public economic sector and massive investment in the education levels of the population will be required. There is no choice: progress will require a fundamental change.

## 6.2 THE SYRIAN VET SYSTEM: MAIN CONCLUSIONS

Given the ambitions for the economy, the existing VET system faces a number of challenges if it is to adapt to the requirements of global markets. This fact is not disputed. None of the actors interviewed were satisfied with the current system. However, the definition of problems and policy analysis shows a wide variety of opinions. International examples show how much time it takes to fundamentally restructure (vocational) education systems. Given the swift improvement expected of the economy, the rethink of VET “should have started yesterday and the implementation of change should start tomorrow”. Certainly, important proposals for change are already in hand or in the pipeline. In that respect, the experiment with the introduction of apprenticeship modalities comes at a good time.

VET systems and the way they are governed, their content and methodology are subject to permanent change. This is an index of the need to have a close and interactive relationship with society in general and the labour market in particular. Like many countries with public education systems, Syria is also struggling to find the balance. At the same time, the interviews and visits showed involved institutional management, dedicated teachers and high level ministerial officials looking constructively towards the future. In themselves, these are preconditions for any type of innovation.

### Main conclusions

The study focussed on the architecture of the VET system and its relationship with the overall education system, its governance and relevance to labour market needs. The main conclusions can be divided into six categories.

#### 1. *Governance and management of the system*

The current VET governance system is complex and fragmented: no less than 11 ministries are responsible for VET and

run their own schools and institutes. Although some mechanisms exist to enhance co-ordination (e.g. the Higher VET Ministerial Council), the co-ordination and co-operation between government agencies could be greatly improved.

With regard to the governance of vocational schools and institutes, the lack of autonomy in decision-making as far as the implementation of curricula, management of human and financial resources and relations to the local labour market are concerned, hinders their performance.

Furthermore, in this complex picture, social partners (such as representatives from the employers associations) are not involved in the management, design and delivery of training. Policy instruments that are available to strengthen the relationship between the labour market and the VET system are not optimally applied. In short, the present governance and management system is barely able to facilitate or create the conditions for an improved relationship between VET and the labour market.

#### 2. *The structure of the VET system and its relationship with the overall education system in Syria*

The VET system comprises two sub-systems (secondary and post-secondary), which are not always well integrated. The fragmentation in VET governance does not help this situation.

There are few effective and efficient continuing education pathways between VET and other educational routes. VET is in many cases a “dead end” as far as further education is concerned.

There is no clear qualification structure in which a limited number of educational modules and efficient study pathways would ensure labour market-relevant and flexible educational content. The vast distance between educational practices in VET and the labour market makes the VET system a poor alternative to general education, leading to university. In conclusion, the structure and culture of education limits the possibilities for an



## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

improved relationship between VET and the labour market.

### 3. *Lifelong learning: youth education and continuing training for workers and/or unemployed*

By tradition and regulation, vocational schools are youth-oriented. This in itself resembles the situation in many countries. In the case of Syria, although there are attempts to open up education to all (e.g. open learning facilities at universities), and there are some facilities, there is no structured system for retraining the existing workforce (continuing training). To ensure economic development, much of the current labour force (both workers and unemployed) must be retrained through lifelong learning opportunities.

### 4. *The institutional side and size of the VET system*

The present system contains over 800 vocational institutions (including both vocational secondary schools and intermediate institutes). With an estimated 300,000 VET students each institute averages 370 students. Well-equipped, well-staffed, efficiently run multi-disciplinary institutions in which the education climate is innovative and service levels are high, need to be much larger. The present size (and thus the educational opportunities in the broadest sense) limits active relationships between VET and the labour market.

### 5. *The content of the system: the curricula and the teachers*

It is well known that vocational institutions lack updated equipment. The current pre-service training system for vocational teachers does not lead to the required qualifications. Although there are some

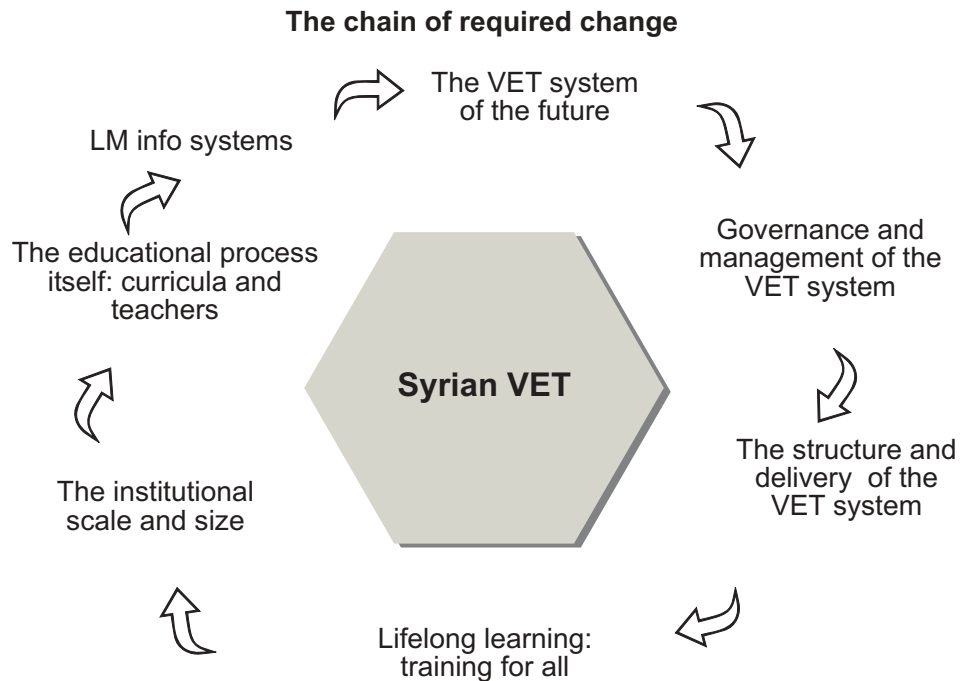
in-service courses, based on ad hoc requests, there is not a system for systematic in-service training of teachers to constantly upgrade their skills. Although some attempts are currently taking place to associate trade and industry in the revision of curricula, in most cases it still lacks relevance to future labour market requirements. The VET system is almost fully school-based with little practical experience in "the real world of work". Both theory and practice are provided on the school campus which prevents quick responses to social and labour market change.

### 6. *Labour market information systems*

More statistics to support the future choices of VET management are necessary. This information is the basis of all decisions taken regarding the development of government controlled VET systems. The process of information gathering on the expected labour market developments (in close cooperation with the world of work, leading to a view on what vocational institutions should teach) is more important than actual figures. The strive for better statistics should thus be included in the search for modern interactive governance and management practices.

## 6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusions above show a picture of a VET system that can be optimised to make it ready for the country's future needs. The changes required vary in nature, but they are to be considered as a "package" of required change. Success can only be achieved if significant progress is made on all issues. All issues are strongly intertwined and interactive and, so to speak, "a chain of required change".



**1. Improve the governance of VET**

The current governance system has two important problems. The first is the large number of actors (ministries) involved and the second is the limited involvement of the social partners. Other related challenges include the need for integration between the different VET sub-systems, the need for higher educational coherence in the architecture of courses and learning pathways, and the need to revise the scale and size of vocational institutions.

There is, therefore, a clear need to improve the governance of the system by increasing the co-ordination between the concerned parties, involving social partners and establishing a clear allocation of responsibilities.

A solution to these problems could foresee the creation of a single governing board representing both government and social partners (trade and industry representatives). The board should play a major role in guiding the system reform and should have decision-making power.

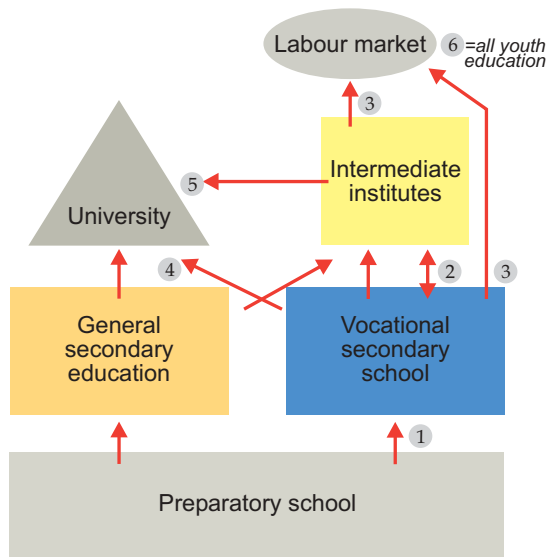
**2. Revision of the educational structure: the need for a new qualification structure**

As explained before, the present educational model has several flaws.

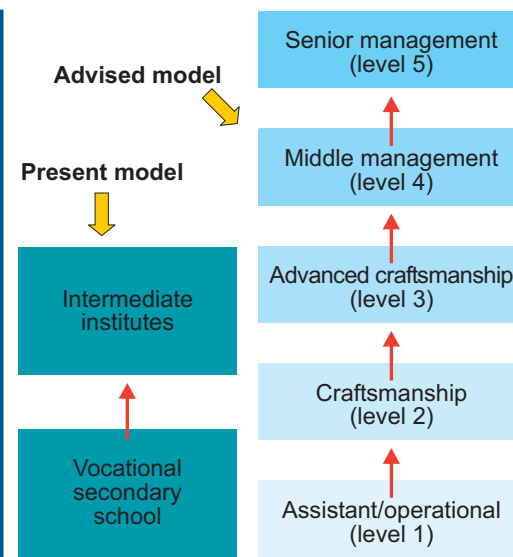
Amongst those is its monolithic structure, lacking a differentiated and varied qualification structure able to satisfy the different skills needs (in terms of levels) of the labour market. There is a need to create a multi-level qualification structure with a wider variety of course lengths and educational routes. The introduction of the new model based on a clear qualification structure will solve most of the problems linked to the present system (the numbers refer to those in the diagram below).

- (1) The connection between the preparatory school and the vocational secondary school is problematic (and subject to entry percentage limits), because VET is not an attractive choice at present.
- (2) There is no integrated educational route from vocational secondary school to the intermediate institutes.
- (3) The relevance of VET (secondary and post-secondary) to the labour market is low.
- (4) The connection from general secondary education to post-secondary VET is not appealing.
- (5) The connection from secondary VET and the intermediate institutes to university is problematic.
- (6) The present VET system targets only youth education.

**Present situation**



**Proposal for present (left) VET system into a multi-level system (right)<sup>14</sup>**



**3. Involvement of the economic actors in the provision of VET: alternative pathways for school and company based training**

At present the VET system is mostly school-based. Practical experiences are limited. For relevant VET, contact with “the real world” is of key importance and in the new educational model only courses with a significant period of practical training outside the school should be designed. Co-operation with companies can also be applied to, for instance, handling equipment. If the training and industry equipment is co-shared, the required investment for new equipment for schools can be used for other purposes.

In light of the above, the introduction of apprenticeships is an important step. However, the meaning and limitations of apprenticeships have to be fully understood. Apprenticeship is the most structured and established form of work-linked training but it is by no means the sole option<sup>15</sup>. In apprenticeship, the student (called the apprentice) has a contractual relationship with the company. The practical training forms a major part of the VET study programme.

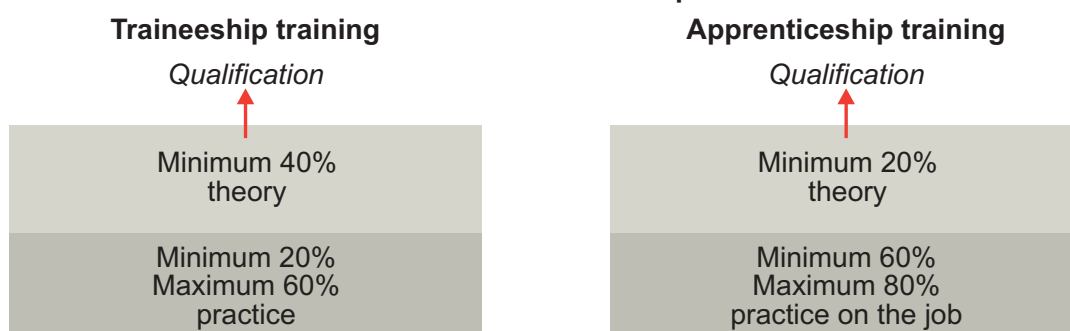
The responsibility for training is fully co-shared between the school and the company. In many of the western European countries, VET always contains a level of practical training in the workplace. Other alternatives or work-linked training include, for example, the so-called traineeship. The student (called the “trainee”) spends a certain amount of time outside the school in a work-related environment to learn and experience. So it is working and learning (apprenticeship) and learning and working (traineeship).

Both routes (traineeship and apprenticeship), lead to the same diploma, but the educational pathway is different. With traineeships, the time spent in school is dominant; in the apprenticeship system, the time at work is (see diagram below). Choosing a single apprenticeship route can put in danger the whole sustainability of the VET system because it implies a high dependence on companies (and, therefore, to a large extent on the prosperous economic situation of the country) to be able to train youngsters. A combination of both pathways is preferable for long-term sustainability.

<sup>14</sup> The five-level qualification structure is based on the European model and should only be used as an example. The Syrian qualification structure should, of course, be based on an analysis of the qualification needs in the market.

<sup>15</sup> Discussion paper for DGVT meeting September 1999, Rovaniemi, Finland - Cedefop.

### Two educational routes to VET qualifications



#### 4. Continuing training system within the context of lifelong learning

Syria still lacks a system of continuing training, although some retraining courses are provided by a variety of centres. A number of initiatives in the direction of "open education" are proposed, but they are yet to be implemented and it will take some time before they will show results. In nearly all western European countries an expensive mistake was made by setting up two (basically separate) systems: one for youth education and one for continuing training. Such a mistake should be avoided. Using the suggested qualification structure, re-schooling and all other aspects of lifelong learning can be taken on by the existing vocational institutions. This is much more efficient and cost-effective and will be a great educational stimulus in the direction of flexible and labour market-relevant education.

#### 5. Re-dimensioning the VET system: multi-disciplinary large-scale institutions

The system is currently on too small a scale, with an average of less than 300 students per school. This is way under any minimum student number to create a well-equipped educational environment that can facilitate efficient and effective learning. A large merger operation in which the number of institutions is significantly reduced is essential for any progress in efficiency, quality and service levels. The merged institutions could provide multi-level VET for both young people and adults. The merger should be accompanied by a number of measures to empower the centres with the proper management skills that would ensure an efficient use of resources.

#### 6. Curriculum reform and upgrading teachers

Apart from institutional management, teachers able to transfer knowledge, experience and competencies to their students are an essential element in the process. A conducive environment to learning in large scale, multi-disciplinary institutions with strong ties to the labour market is vital. It is equally important to teach educational modules structured in a qualification structure in different educational pathways (see proposals 2 and 3 above) in which social partners are involved in the design and delivery of the training. Working with competencies rather than with knowledge that is quickly outdated and applying modern teaching methods are pre-conditions for relevant training. A revision of the current pre-service system and the introduction of a system for in-service training would be necessary if the teaching force is to successfully undergo a massive revitalisation. An improvement of working conditions needs to be carried out in parallel. A well-trained and motivated teaching force will be the basis for a successful VET system.

#### 7. Labour market information mechanisms

As mentioned above, the current system for labour market information is not relevant for training purposes. It is not only a matter of the type and methodologies used for data compilation but also, and more importantly, the search and development of an interactive network of stakeholders that can put the information to best use. The importance of raising awareness on the need and best use of that information for VET policy development should also be recognised.

## ANNEXES

### ANNEX 1. STATISTICAL DATA

#### A. Main economic and social indicators

##### A.1 Economic data

<b>GDP:</b> purchasing power parity - \$42.2 billion (1999 est.)
<b>GDP - real growth rate:</b> 0% (1999 est.)
<b>GDP - per capita:</b> purchasing power parity - \$2,500 (1999 est.)
<b>GDP - composition by sector:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● agriculture: 29%</li><li>● industry: 22%</li><li>● services: 49% (1997)</li></ul>
<b>Population below poverty line:</b> 15%-25%
<b>Household income or consumption by percentage share:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● lowest 10%: NA%</li><li>● highest 10%: NA%</li></ul>
<b>Inflation rate (consumer prices):</b> 2.3% (1999 est.)
<b>Labour force:</b> 4.7 million (1998 est.)
<b>Labour force - by occupation:</b> agriculture 40%, industry 20%, services 40% (1996 est.)
<b>Unemployment rate:</b> 12%-15% (1998 est.)

Source is also <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/sy.html#Econ>

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<b>Budget:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● revenues: \$3.5 billion</li> <li>● expenditure: \$4.2 billion, including capital expenditures of \$NA (1997 est.)</li> </ul>
<b>Industries:</b> petroleum, textiles, food processing, beverages, tobacco, phosphate rock mining
<b>Industrial production growth rate:</b> 0.2% (1996 est.)
<b>Agriculture - products:</b> wheat, barley, cotton, lentils, chickpeas, olives, sugar beets; beef, mutton, eggs, poultry, milk
<b>Exports:</b> \$3.3 billion (f.o.b., 1999 est.)
<b>Exports - commodities:</b> petroleum 65%, textiles 10%, manufactured goods 10%, fruits and vegetables 7%, raw cotton 5%, live sheep 2%, phosphates 1% (1998 est.)
<b>Exports - partners:</b> Germany 14%, Turkey 13%, Italy 12%, France 9%, Lebanon 9%, Spain (1998 est.)
<b>Imports:</b> \$3.2 billion (f.o.b., 1999 est.)
<b>Imports - commodities:</b> machinery and equipment 23%, foodstuffs/animals 20%, metal and metal products 15%, textiles 10%, chemicals 10% (1998 est.)
<b>Imports - partners:</b> Ukraine 16%, Italy 6%, Germany 6%, Turkey 5%, France 4%, South Korea, Japan, US (1998 est.)
<b>Debt - external:</b> \$22 billion (1999 est.)
<b>Economic aid - recipient:</b> \$199 million (1997 est.)
<b>Currency:</b> 1 Syrian pound = 100 piastres
<b>Exchange rates:</b> Syrian pounds per US\$1: 50.6 (2001); 46 (1998); 41.9 (1997)
<b>Fiscal year:</b> calendar year

### A.2 Social data

#### *Facts and figures regarding the population*

<b>Population:</b> 17,460,000 (2001)
<b>Age structure:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 0-14 years: 41% (male 3,410,417; female 3,210,215)</li> <li>● 15-64 years: 56% (male 4,688,967; female 4,476,022)</li> <li>● 65 years and over: 3% (male 254,448; female 265,590) (2000 est.)</li> </ul>
<b>Population growth rate:</b> 2.58% (2000 est.)
<b>Birth rate:</b> 31.11 births/1,000 population (2000 est.)
<b>Death rate:</b> 5.29 deaths/1,000 population (2000 est.)
<b>Net migration rate:</b> 0 migrant(s)/1,000 population (2000 est.)
<b>Gender ratio:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● at birth: 1.05 male(s)/female</li> <li>● under 15 years: 1.06 male(s)/female</li> <li>● 15-64 years: 1.05 male(s)/female</li> <li>● 65 years and over: 0.96 male(s)/female</li> <li>● total population: 1.05 male(s)/female (2000 est.)</li> </ul>
<b>Infant mortality rate:</b> 34.86 deaths/1,000 live births (2000 est.)
<b>Life expectancy at birth:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● total population: 68.46 years</li> <li>● male: 67.35 years</li> <li>● female: 69.64 years (2000 est.)</li> </ul>

Source: <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/sy.html#People>

<b>Total fertility rate:</b> 4.06 children born/woman (2000 est.)
<b>Religions:</b> Sunni Muslim 74%, Alawite, Druze, and other Muslim branches 16%, Christian (various branches) 10%
<b>Languages:</b> Arabic (official); Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic, Circassian widely understood; French, English somewhat understood
<b>Literacy:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● definition: age 15 and over can read and write</li> <li>● total population: 70.8%</li> <li>● male: 85.7%</li> <li>● female: 55.8% (1997 est.)</li> </ul>

## B. Labour market

### B.1 Labour force and unemployment

<b>Labour force:</b> 4.7 million (1998 est.)
<b>Labour force - by sector:</b> agriculture 40%, industry 20%, services 40% (1996 est.)
<b>Unemployment rate:</b> 12%-15% (1998 est.)

Source: <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/sy.html#Econ>

### B.2 Distribution of the employed population by sector

Distribution of active labour force 1991	As % of GDP	No	In %
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishery	30	917,000	28.2
Mining, quarrying and oil refinery	10	6,700	0.2
Manufacturing	5	456,200	14.0
Electricity and water	1	8,400	0.2
Construction	4	340,800	10.4
Trade, hotel industry and gastronomy	24	378,300	11.6
Transport and communication	9	167,000	5.1
Finance and insurance	3	24,700	0.7
Governmental, social and personal services	14	951,000	29.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3,249,900</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: *Regional Study on Labour Market Oriented Training – submitted to the Regional Economic Development Working Group of the Middle East Peace Process – Country Monograph, Technical Education and Vocational Training in The Syrian Arab Republic, September 1995, p.6* (No information available regarding employment by region).

### B.3 Percent distribution of labour force by economic activity and gender, 1999

Economic activity	Male	Female	Total
Agriculture and forests	23.5	51.2	28.5
Mining industries	0.3	0.0	0.2
Converting industries	14.1	6.2	12.7
Electricity gas and water	0.1	0.0	0.1
Building and construction	17.0	2.0	14.3

Source: Central Bureau of statistics, *statistical abstract 2000*, p. 76 – Table 1/3.

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Economic activity	Male	Female	Total
Internal and external trade	18.3	3.5	15.7
Storage transport and communication	6.4	1.1	5.4
Insurance finance and real estates	0.8	0.8	0.8
Community and personal service	19.5	35.2	22.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

### B.4 Wages and salaries in the public and private sector

Status of occupation	Nominal income (public sector)	(private sector)
Unskilled or semi-skilled worker	1,000	2,000
Semi-skilled worker	2,500	7,000
Engineer	3,500	15,000
Civil service and administration	2,500 – 3,500	
Teacher in governmental schools	2,500 – 3,500	

Source: *Regional Study on Labour Market Oriented Training – submitted to the Regional Economic Development Working Group of the Middle East Peace Process – Country Monograph, Technical Education and Vocational Training in The Syrian Arab Republic, September 1995, p. 8.*

### B.5 Percent distribution of labour force by category's age and gender, 1999

Age	Urban			Rural			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	total
10-14	1.7	1.2	1.6	2.9	8.8	4.2	2.2	6.0	3.0
15-19	11.3	5.8	10.5	14.1	24.7	16.5	12.7	17.7	13.5
20-24	13.9	17.0	14.3	14.3	18.3	15.2	14.1	17.8	14.7
25-29	13.9	19.3	14.6	14.0	12.7	13.7	14.0	15.2	14.1
30-34	12.8	18.0	13.5	11.6	10.0	11.2	12.2	12.8	12.3
35-39	11.0	14.8	11.5	10.0	8.7	9.7	10.5	11.0	10.6
40-44	10.0	10.2	9.6	8.5	5.2	7.8	9.0	7.1	8.7
45-49	8.1	7.3	8.0	7.2	4.0	6.5	7.7	5.2	7.3
50-54	7.0	4.0	6.6	6.0	3.3	5.3	6.5	3.5	6.0
55-59	4.0	1.5	4.1	3.5	1.8	3.1	4.0	1.7	3.6
60-64	3.0	0.7	2.7	3.2	1.3	2.8	3.1	1.2	2.7
65+	3.3	0.2	3.0	4.7	1.2	4.0	4.0	0.8	3.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: *Central Bureau of statistics, statistical abstract 2000, p. 77 – Table 2/3.*

### B.6 Percent distribution of labour force by gender and kind of profession, 1999

Profession	Male	Female	Total
Technician and professional	9.0	27.4	12.2
Administrators clerical works	9.3	9.6	9.4
Sales workers	12.8	2.0	10.9
Service workers	5.9	2.8	5.4
Agriculture workers	23.2	51.1	28.2
Product workers	39.8	7.1	33.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: *Central Bureau of statistics, statistical abstract 2000, p. 78 – Table 3/3.*



**B.7 Percent distribution of labour force by gender and occupation status, 1999**

Employment status	Male	Female	Total
Employers	9.5	1.7	8.1
Own account	27.9	7.2	24.2
Paid worker	52.2	54.1	52.6
Family unpaid worker	10.4	37.9	15.1
Unpaid worker	Not available	Not available	Not available
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Central Bureau of statistics, statistical abstract 2000, p. 80 – Table 5/3) feasibility study.

**B.8 Rates of economic activities by age and gender, 1999**

Age group	Gender		Place of residency		
	Male	Female	Urban	Rural	Total
10-14	7.3	4.4	3.5	7.9	5.9
15-19	43.4	13.9	22.6	35.4	29.1
20-24	69.9	19.9	41.0	50.1	45.3
25-29	89.9	21.3	54.4	56.8	55.6
30-34	96.6	21.9	58.6	59.7	59.1
35-39	98.7	21.2	58.0	60.0	59.0
40-44	98.1	16.6	56.5	58.0	57.2
45-49	97.3	16.0	57.8	61.0	59.2
50-54	92.5	11.8	52.1	55.5	53.6
55-59	87.4	9.2	49.4	53.4	51.1
60-64	68.7	6.7	35.4	48.9	41.3
65+	49.4	3.8	24.5	42.1	32.4

Source: Central Bureau of statistics, statistical abstract 2000, p. 81 – Table 6/3.

**B.9 Percent distribution of labour force by gender, educational level and business sector, 1999**

Work sector		Element.	Preparat.	Secondary	Post. sec. VET	University	Total
Governmental	M	13.0	24.1	43.4	70.6	58.6	23.7
	F	6.8	45.5	70.4	92.0	74.9	36.5
	T	12.0	26.7	48.1	97.1	62.2	26.0
Private organised	M	33.5	34.0	27.9	16.6	31.0	32.0
	F	28.5	19.9	12.9	5.1	19.9	21.6
	T	32.7	32.2	25.3	12.1	28.5	30.1
Private non-organised	M	52.9	41.6	28.3	12.6	10.0	43.8
	F	63.3	34.5	16.4	2.5	4.2	40.9
	T	54.6	40.8	26.2	8.6	8.7	43.3
Collective co-operative	M	0.6	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.4	0.5
	F	1.4	0.1	0.3	0.4	1.0	1.0
	T	0.7	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.6	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Central Bureau of statistics, statistical abstract 2000, p. 83 – Table 7/3.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN SYRIA AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE LABOUR MARKET

**C. Education**

**C.1 Global number of students in the technical and professional secondary schools, and technical institutes, 1997-2000**

	Class	1997/1998	1998/1999	1999/2000
Secondary technical industrial	1st	13,743	13,147	15,840
	2nd	11,405	9,807	11,501
	3rd	10,214	10,236	11,099
	total	35,362	33,190	38,440
Secondary commercial	1st	10,217	11,471	11,430
	2nd	8,195	8,751	10,240
	3rd	7,934	8,204	9,070
	total	26,346	28,426	30,740
Secondary for women	1st	15,168	16,071	17,103
	2nd	12,006	11,662	12,380
	3rd	11,807	10,789	10,340
	total	38,981	38,522	39,823
Total technical secondary	1st	39,128	40,689	44,373
	2nd	31,606	30,220	34,121
	3rd	29,955	29,229	30,509
	total	100,689	100,138	109,003
Professional industrial	1st	2,255	2,632	2,965
	2nd	2,169	1,664	1,782
	total	4,424	4,296	4,747
Professional commercial	1st	0	0	0
	2nd	0	0	0
	total	0	0	0
Professional for women	1st	0	0	0
	2nd	0	0	0
	total	0	0	0
Total professional	1st	2,255	2,632	2,965
	2nd	2,169	1,664	1,782
	total	4,424	4,296	4,747
Global technical & professional		105,113	104,434	113,750
Intermediate institutes, technical industrial	1st	2,960	3,178	3,393
	2nd	2,087	2,472	2,561
	total	5,047	5,650	5,954
Intermediate institutes, technical commercial	1st	1,194	1,434	1,499
	2nd	968	1,097	1,294
	total	2,162	2,531	2,793
Intermediate institutes, technical feminine	1st	1,774	2,136	2,286
	2nd	1,669	1,705	2,005
	total	3,443	3,841	4,291
Total intermediate institutes	1st	5,928	6,748	7,178
	2nd	4,724	5,274	5,860
	total	10,652	12,022	13,038
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>115,765</b>	<b>116,456</b>	<b>126,788</b>

Source: Ministry of Education, Planning and statistics department.

**C.2 Number of graduates of intermediate schools, 1990-1996 (Ministry of Education)**

	1990	1992	1994	1996
<b>Total</b>	<b>97,281</b>	<b>104,565</b>	<b>113,714</b>	<b>122,240</b>

Source: Ministry of Education

**C.3 Pupils by gender***Primary*

Year	Total	Male	Female
1994	2,651,247	1,413,911	1,237,336
1995	2,672,960	1,426,130	1,246,830
1996	2,690,205	1,433,385	1,256,820

*Secondary*

Year	Total	Male	Female
1994	928,882	516,014	412,868
1995	935,048	508,541	426,507
1996	957,664	513,927	443,737

Source: Statistics Unesco, [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

**C.4 Pupils by grade***Primary*

Year	Total	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1994	2,651,247	504,374	476,654	450,064	430,849	410,767	378,539	-	-	-
1995	2,672,960	513,441	477,260	453,356	431,947	410,468	386,488	-	-	-
1996	2,690,205	502,114	485,064	456,236	436,429	418,347	392,015	-	-	-

*Secondary (including preparatory school)*

Year	Total	Grade 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1994	841,964*	266,823	195,926	213,073	49,452	44,268	72,422	-	-	-

\* Including UNRWA.

Source: Statistics Unesco, [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

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### C.5 Pupils by programme orientation and gender (secondary)

Year	Total		General		Vocational	
	M/F	F	M/F	F	M/F	F
1994	928,882	412,868	841,964	373,481	869,918	393,387
1995	935,048	426,507	846,778	381,750		
1996	957,664	443,737	865,042	396,010		

Source: Statistics Unesco, [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

### D. Expenditure on education and training

#### D.1 Current and capital expenditure on education (in million)

Year	Currency	Total	Current	Capital
1994	Pound	17,987.0*	15,621.0*	2,366.0*
1995	Pound	18,182.0*	15,403.0*	2,779.0*
1996	Pound	25,555.2	16,424.2*	3,380.5*
1997	Pound	21,164.1*	17,703.3*	3,460.7*

\* Not including third level education.

Source: Statistics Unesco, [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

#### D.2 Current public expenditure by level of education (in million)

Year	Currency	Total	Pre-Primary	Primary	Pre-Primary + Primary	Secondary	Pre-Primary + Primary + Secondary	Tertiary	Other Types	Not Distributed
1994	Pound	15,621.0*	..	..	10,245.0	4,993.0	15,238.0	0.0	0.0	383.0
1995	Pound	15,403.0*	..	..	8,773.0	6,073.0	14,846.0	0.0	0.0	557.0
1996	Pound	22,174.7*	..	..	9,289.1	6,599.2	15,888.2	5,750.5	0.0	536.0
1997	Pound	177,03.03*	..	..	9,610.0	7,529.6	17,139.6	0.0	0.0	563.7

\* Not including third level education.

Source: Statistics Unesco, [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)

#### D.3 Budgets for the period from 1987 to 1992

	Consolidated budget		Consolidated budget for education		As % of 1	Higher education		As % of 1	Pre-higher education		As % of 1
1987	41,703		3,666		8.8	1,273		3.05	2,392		5.74
1988	51,545	(+23.6%)	4,165	(+13.6%)	8.0	1,840	(+44.5%)	3.57	2,325	(+ %)	4.5
1989	57,000	(+10.6%)	5,053	(+21.3%)	8.9	2,042	(+11.1%)	3.58	3,010	(+ %)	5.3
1990	61,875	(+8.5%)	5,660	(+12.0%)	9.1	2,288	(+11.9%)	3.7	3,372	(+ %)	5.45
1991	84,690	(+36.9%)	5,968	(+5.4%)	7.0	2,411	(+5.4%)	2.85	3,557	(+ %)	4.2
1992	93,042	(+9.9%)	7,594	(+27.2%)	8.2	3,126	(+29.6%)	3.36	4,468	(+ %)	2.8

(i) The data in brackets shows changes in percentage with respect to the previous year.

Source: Regional Study on Labour Market Oriented Training – submitted to the Regional Economic Development Working Group of the Middle East Peace Process – Country Monograph, Technical Education and Vocational Training in The Syrian Arab Republic, September 1995, p. 35.

## ANNEX 2. LIST OF CONTACTS

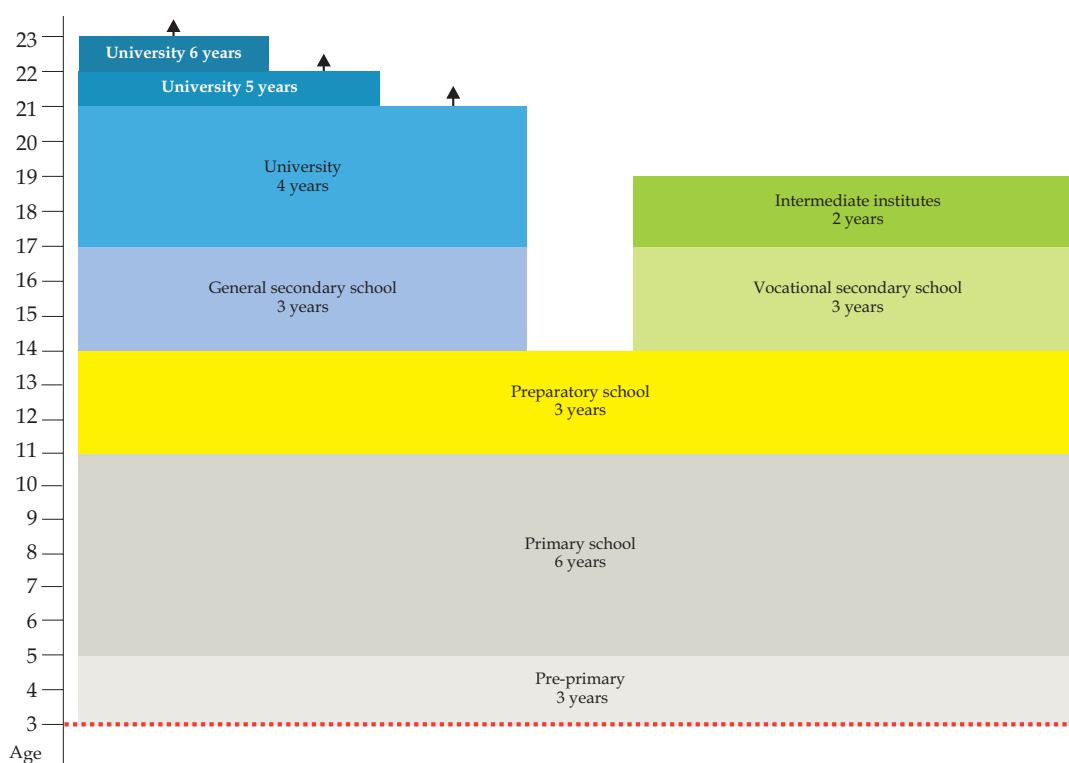
Institution	Contact Person	Title
Ministry of Education	Samir Habbabah	Deputy Minister for VET
	Haswan Al Waz	Director of VET Department
Ministry of Higher Education	Omar Karmo	Deputy Minister
Ministry of Industry/ General Organisation for Engineering Industries (GOEI)	Ziad Kutayni	Director General
	Nidal Fallouh	Assistant to Director General
Ministry of Labour & Social affairs	Rakan Ibraheem	Director of Labour office
State Planning Commission	Sheih Oughli	Director of Labour Force and Population Department
	Maher. Al Rez	Director of Training Department
Vice Prime Minister for Services Office	Hatem Al Homsy	Advisor on TVET Affairs to Vice Prime Minister
Syrian European Business Centre (SEBC)	Alf Monaghan	Director
	Nawaf Zeidan	Training and Development Manager
Second Intermediate Institute	A.K. Khudr	Director
Bassam Hamsho School for Women Education	Manal Bisharah	Director Assistant
First Commercial School	Fakrieh delli	Director Assistant
Damascus Training Centre of Ministry of Industry	M.K. Jasayri	Director
General Company for Cables Industry	M. Balsheh	Director General Assistant
General Converting Industries Company	Salah Zaza	Director General
Al - Rasheed Factory (private)	Haytham Al Yafi	Director General
Al - Hafez Factory (private)	Nael Hammami	Production Director
Damascus Chamber of Industry	Samer Debs	Chairman
	Haytham Al Yafi	Board Member
	Said Al-Halabi	Consultant

## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN SYRIA AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE LABOUR MARKET

### List of participants to discussion meeting of 11 November 2001<sup>16</sup>

Institution	Contact Person	Title
Al Hafez Company	Said Al Hafez	Director General
Minister for Social Affairs	Hatem Al Homsy	Consultant to Vice Prime
Ministry of Education	Haswan Al Waz	Director of Vocational and Technical Education
Damascus Chamber of Industry	Said Al Halabi	Economic and Social Consultant
Damascus Chamber of Industry	Haytham Al Yafi	Board Member
Ministry of Industry	Nidal Fallouh	Director General Assistant of GOEI
Ministry of Education	Samir Habbabeh	Deputy Minister for Vocational Education and Training
European Training Foundation	Eva Jimeno Sicilia	ETF Country Manager
European Training Foundation	Mustafa Kazziha	ETF Expert
European Training Foundation	Olaf Mc Daniel	ETF Expert
European Training Foundation	Karl Axel Skjolstrup	ETF Expert
Second Intermediate Institute	A. K. Kudhr	Director
European Commission Delegation in Damascus	Gregory Kehailia	Junior Expert
Al Hafez Company	Ahmed Shrineh	Training Advisor

### ANNEX 3. STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN SYRIA



Source: Report on VET in the Syrian Arab Republic, Ministry of Education, 1999-2000.

<sup>16</sup> The following people were invited but could not attend the meeting: Mr Karmo, Deputy Minister Higher Education, Mr Qutainy, Director General of General Organisation for Engineering Industries, Ministry of Industry, Representative from State Planning Commission, Department of Labour and Population and Messrs Al Bahra and Daaboul, private industrialists.

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>ACU</b>	Agency to Combat Unemployment
<b>DGVT</b>	Directors General for vocational training
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GDP</b>	Gross domestic product
<b>GOEI</b>	General Organisation for Engineering Industries
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communication technology
<b>LM</b>	Labour market
<b>SEBC</b>	Syrian European Business Centre
<b>TVET</b>	Technical vocational education and training
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNRWA</b>	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
<b>VET</b>	Vocational education and training
<b>VTC</b>	Vocational training centre

