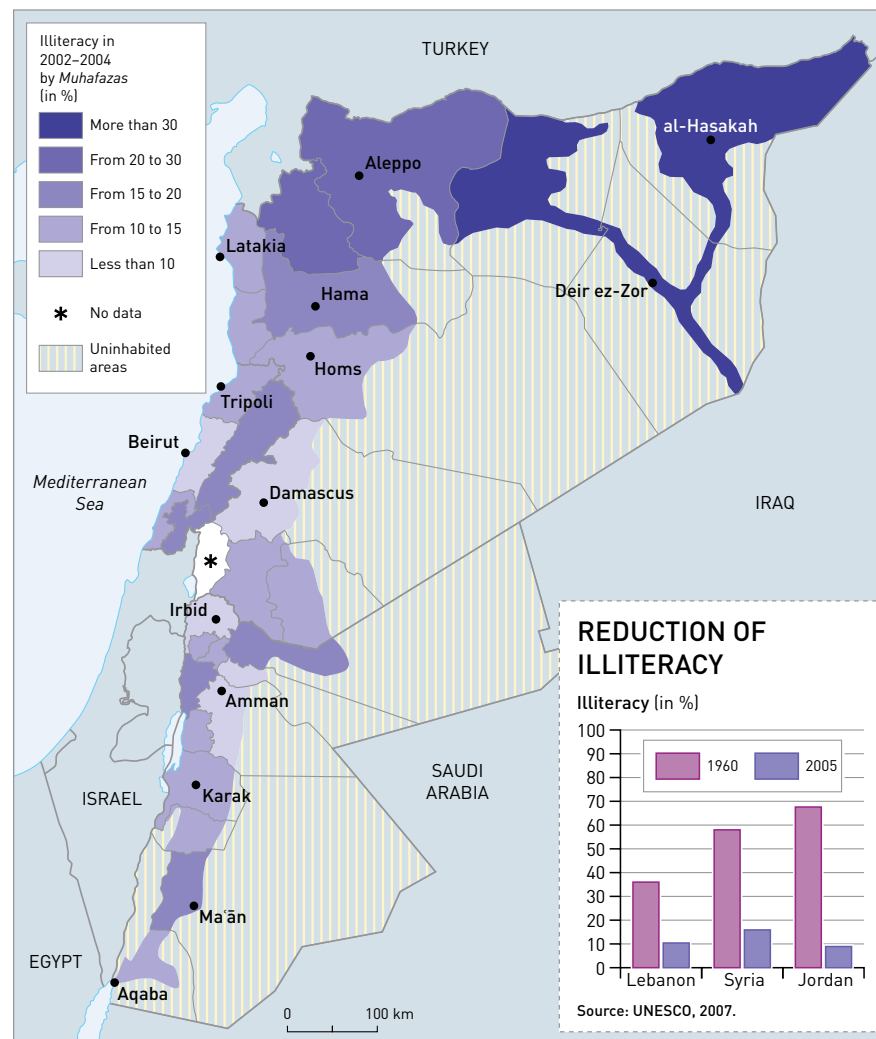


An Educated Population

From the 1960s the countries of the Arab Near East made significant progress in matters of education. Illiteracy declined dramatically in all three countries. Hence approximately 90 per cent of the population achieved literacy and women almost caught up with men. Certainly substantial differences still exist between the cities and the countryside, the centre and the peripheries. The rate of illiteracy is still over 20 per cent in Jazira and in North Lebanon. It is also high in the Kurdish and Turkmen regions because education is often equated with Arabisation, which continues to inspire cultural resistance. The degree of access to primary education is greater than 90 per cent in Jordan and Syria but only 80 per cent in Lebanon, although the Land of the Cedars had the highest GDP per inhabitant and the highest rate of urbanisation. Unlike Syria and Jordan, Lebanese public authorities were too weak to impose compulsory education. In Jordan and Lebanon more than 75 per cent of girls as well as boys are enrolled in secondary education. The lowest rate was in Syria: 65 per cent, but the number was increasing significantly—having been only 32 per cent in 1998. The spread of secondary education produced bloated university enrolments, since public higher education was practically free.

In Syria public education was dominant. Only a few private Christian schools remained after the complete nationalisation and Arabisation of the educational system in 1970. Education became a priority for the Ba'athist regime and, consequently, the network of primary and secondary schools spread over the entire territory. Jordan also developed an excellent educational system but there, in contrast to Syria, private education remained prominent. The latter absorbed 30 per cent of the students at the primary level but only 10 per cent at the secondary level. Public secondary schools were of good quality and few Islamic secondary schools were licensed by the government. In Lebanon, most students attended private schools because the quality of public education was often mediocre. Private schools provided instruction in foreign languages from kindergarten on, enabling students to become fully bilingual, even trilingual. When the schools were licensed by the French Ministry of National Education, the students had the option of taking the French Baccalaureate, which directly opened doors to higher education in France.

ILLITERACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



Sources: UNDP 2002 for Jordan, UNDP 2004 for Lebanon and the 2004 general population census for Syria.

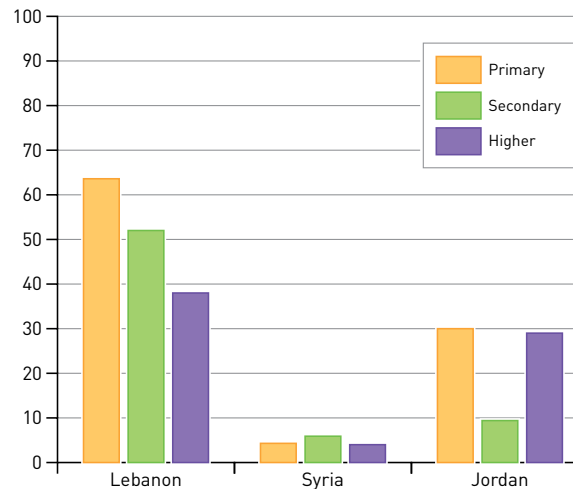
In the Near East higher education has become a very competitive market. State universities are invariably the most important because of the number of registered students, but dozens of private universities compete for students. In Syria, in Jordan, and for certain academic fields (especially medicine and

architecture) in Lebanon, access to public higher education is selective. Depending on the marks obtained in the baccalaureate, students are directed toward one or the other faculty. The most sought-after majors are medicine and architecture, followed by engineering programmes, and finally the humanities and languages; the latter are not very lucrative as they invariably lead to teaching jobs. Despite this selectivity, state universities cannot properly accommodate massive student bodies; amphitheatres are packed and the seminars are unmanageable because public universities lack funds. Bureaucracy and low salaries also demotivate the teaching staff and lead to increased external employment. The wealthier students and the better teachers prefer private universities where the selection is made less according to the marks obtained on the baccalaureate than on the ability to pay registration fees: medical school in Lebanon costs between \$10,000 and \$20,000 a year. Since the recent opening of higher education to the private sector, some 20 private universities opened their doors in Syria alone. By 2009 they had 16,000 students or 4 per cent of higher education enrolment. The average registration fees amount to \$10,000 per year, the equivalent to three years of a Syrian public servant's salary.

Education is a priority for a population that does not hesitate to make enormous sacrifices to offer their children a quality education as a path to professional success. Knowledge of foreign languages

PRIVATE EDUCATION

Distribution of students in 2007 (in %)

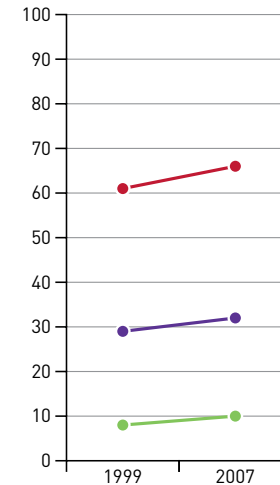


Source: UNESCO.

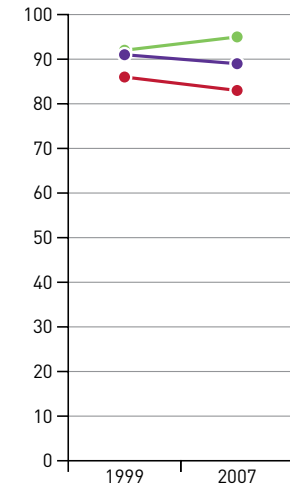
is one of the selection criteria for private schools. In Lebanon, the majority of private schools ensure that instruction is entirely in French, though for higher education English prevails. In Syria and Jordan private schools and universities are bilingual in English and Arabic. Private universities have increasingly established agreements with western universities because the equivalence of diplomas facilitates the pursuit of studies abroad, emigration, and employment in the Gulf. These prospects attract students and, in their eyes, justify the prohibitive registration fees.

HIGHLY EDUCATED NEW GENERATIONS

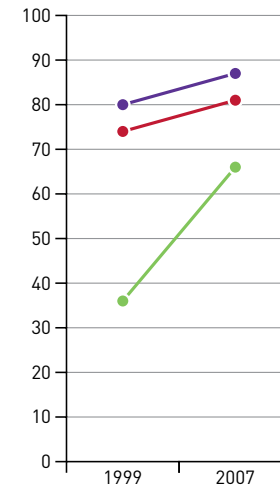
PRESCHOOL Enrolment rates (in %)



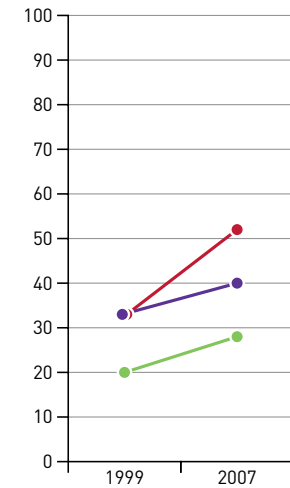
PRIMARY Enrolment rates (in %)



SECONDARY Enrolment rates (in %)



HIGHER Enrolment rates (in %)



Legend: Lebanon (red), Syria (green), Jordan (purple)

Source: UNESCO.