Study Objectives

- Establish the status of literacy and numeracy of Syrian youth refugees (15-24 years)
- Understand the life skills levels of Syrian youth refugees (15-24 years)
- Provide recommendations on addressing literacy concerns of Syrian youth refugees

Statistical Unit, Sampling Methodology & Questionnaires

The statistical unit in this study is a Syrian refugee household, selected through a two-stage cluster sampling methodology\(^1\), with at least one member belonging to the age group of 15-24 years, who was randomly selected from the household. The sample size was 400 households, i.e. 400 youths, and the survey of households and tests were conducted in four regions, namely Bekaa (Bekaa and Baalbek-El Hermel governorates), Mount Lebanon (Mount Lebanon governorate), North (North and Akkar governorates) and South (South and El Nabatieh governorates).

\(^{1}\) In a two-stage cluster sampling design, a random sample of clusters (usually a naturally occurring geographic unit such as a village, neighborhood or town) is selected, followed by a random sample of units (in this case households) within each cluster. The selection of clusters is done through a method known as ‘probability proportionate to size’. This means that villages/neighborhoods that have higher concentrations of youth are more likely to be selected as part of the sample.
Three background questionnaires were administered, of which two were administered at household level; (1) the household questionnaire collected data on socio-economic characteristics of the household and (2) the youth questionnaire collected data on the educational background of youth (15-24 years old) living in the household. Additionally, the institutional questionnaire was administered to 35 heads of education centres, out of which 31 provide Non-Formal Education (NFE) programmes, to assess the centre's infrastructure, learning facilities and the role of instructors/facilitators.

Tested Domains

- The literacy skills assessed three critical cognitive domains:
  1. Narrative (continuous text that aims to tell a story, fact or fiction)
  2. Expository (continuous text that aims to describe, explain, or otherwise convey facts or opinions to the reader)
  3. Document (structured information organised in such a way that the reader is required to search, locate, and process selected facts, rather than read every word of a continuous text).

- The numeracy skills assessed three main cognitive domains:
  1. Numbers (square roots, rounding, fractions, percentages, ratios, etc.)
  2. Measurements (distance, length, area, capacity, money, time, etc.)
  3. Space data (geometric shapes, charts (bar, pie, and line), tables of data, etc.)

- The life skills assessed a range of life skills falling under three broad categories:
  1. Inter-personal communication (verbal/non-verbal communication, active listening, expressing feelings, giving and receiving feedback)
  2. Decision-making and critical thinking (information-gathering skills, evaluating future consequences of present actions for self and others, determining alternative solutions to problems, analysing peer and media influences, analysing attitudes, values, social norms, beliefs, and factors affecting them, etc.)
  3. Coping and self-management (skills for increasing personal confidence, abilities to assume control and take responsibility, self-awareness, skills for managing feelings, skills for managing stress, etc.)

- Test Items: Cognitive test items were developed using five levels of competencies for both literacy and numeracy. The literacy booklet, which incorporated life skill items, had 20 items, and the numeracy booklet had 20 items. The final test items were selected from a pool of items which were pre-tested and validated.

Main findings

1. Household Characteristics
   The average household size is 6.6 persons. About 50% of household members are less than 18 years of age. A high percentage (60.4%) of household members are single and 35.4% are married. Most respondents (95%) live in rental buildings. 57.8% of respondents have reported inadequate water supply. The average total household income of the sampled households is USD 338 per month (i.e. LBP 510,630.00 based on the exchange rate at the time of the study). Most of the employed individuals are working in construction (29.1%), other general services (23%), or agriculture (19%). As for other sources of livelihood, about 22.8% get assistance from humanitarian organizations, 8.4% get help from charitable organizations and 21% make use of food vouchers as part of their living. Most households have access to television (76.4%) and mobile phones (87.7%). However, only 30.8% have reported having internet access at household level. There is hardly any use of computer/laptop reported.

2. Profile of Syrian Refugee Youth
   63% of the randomly selected youth respondents were female and 37% were male. The selected youth were between 15 and 24 years of age with a mean and median age coinciding at 19. All respondents had attended school at some point in time. However, 85.8% were no longer enrolled at the time of the study and only 14.3% are enrolled in some form of education. The average age of dropout is 13 years. Out of all respondents who are or were ever enrolled in some form of education, 93% reported having attended public schools, while only 2.25% respondents...
mentioned NFE and 1.25% mentioned private schools. The level of educational attainment remains relatively low; almost 65% of the selected youth have had an educational attainment that did not exceed the primary cycle and only 26% had reached the intermediate cycle. 14% reported holding a Brevet certificate. More importantly, 83% of those with primary education and 92% of those with intermediate education reported to have received that education in Syria. Only 18% of the respondents reported being currently employed, and 44% of them are looking for another job, while only 24% of those without employment are doing so. 96% of the youth have not been involved in any voluntary work in the past 12 months. Most respondents rated their health positively with only 6.5% reporting being in bad health. Almost all the respondents have chosen Arabic as their mother tongue (99%) and a small minority (16%) have reported speaking English and/or French in addition to their mother tongue.

3. Personal and Social Skills of Refugee Youth
When assessing the life skills of youth, 60% agreed with the statement “I like learning new things”, 24% agreed with the statement “When I hear or read about new ideas, I try to relate them to real life situations to which they might apply” and 36% agreed with the statement “When I come across something new, I try to relate it to what I already know”. More than 90% of young respondents felt that there were only a few people who could be trusted completely and that people are likely to take advantage of one’s trust. Moreover, the interviewed youth seem to feel like they have some care-taker agency in their own families and communities, but not in their country of residence. Hence, 63% expressed the desire to resolve conflicts in their families or neighborhoods, while 69% stated that people like them (refugees) do not have any say about what the Lebanese government does. 85% of the youth have reported being strongly or very strongly able to show respect for other cultures/languages/religions/ethnicities. Even the skill with the lowest rating (adaptability) has been claimed by a sizeable 58% of the interviewed youth.

4. Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills Test Results
Average literacy scores for all regions were relatively higher than numeracy scores. The average overall literacy score was 0.56, meaning that 56% of the respondents answered questions correctly on an average. The average overall numeracy score was 0.28, meaning that only 28% of the respondents answered all the questions correctly. The North region had significantly lower literacy and numeracy scores compared to other regions; while other regions were not significantly different from each other. The highest average literacy (13.89/20), life skills (3.56/5), and numeracy scores (7.26/20) were recorded in the South region. There is no significant difference in the performance of literacy, numeracy and life skills between male and female respondents.

4.1 Literacy Test Results
The average literacy score is 11.73/20. The majority (69.25%) of the respondents met the minimum expected proficiency literacy levels of getting 10 or more items right out of a possible score of 20. Only 6 respondents (1.5%) obtained the maximum literacy score of 20. Twenty-nine percent of respondents got less than 10 items correct. In other words, performance scores show that 46.05% of respondents have performed in line with proficiency level 3, while only 30.10% (level 4) and 24% (level 5) of respondents demonstrated higher levels of proficiencies. The average score decreased significantly with increasing levels of difficulty. The youth’s ability to use several pieces of information to describe and act, and read and explain
procedures is low for most respondents. The performance of literacy items by male and female respondents don’t show significant difference, with female youth generally doing better. The average literacy score for female youth was 11.85/20 and 11.53/20 for male youth.

The results highlight room for improvement in the expository domain; youth seem to lack competencies to use several pieces of information to describe and act. Their ability to read and explain procedures and information, which are critical in many work situations, is low for most respondents.

### 4.2 Numeracy Test Results

The average numeracy score is 5.66/20. Most respondents lack basic numeracy skills and fall short of the minimum proficiency levels. Only one respondent reached the maximum score, while nearly 82.7% of respondents had less than 10 out of 20 possible correct questions. Again, the distribution of scores per region underscores the fact that the North is behind other regions, with an average score of 4/20, as opposed to 7/20 in the South and Bekaa and 6/20 in Mount Lebanon.

The only significant point to note is that males (6.14/20) performed slightly better than females (5.38/20). The overall numeracy skill levels are alarmingly poor among most youth irrespective of gender. Many respondents fell short of the minimum proficiency levels. Low skills were identified in the domains (1) numbers and (2) measurements. It is of concern to note that large percentage of respondents didn’t attempt questions.

### 4.3 Life Skills Test Results

Out of 400 respondents, only 54 received the maximum life score of 5/5. Over 60% of respondents getting 50% or more on the life skills score is remarkable and shows the positive attitude towards life by the youth, who otherwise seem to suffer from average literacy and low numeracy proficiency levels. This shows the positive, adaptive behavior and coping strategy of the youth.

Again, the distribution of scores per region, underscores the fact that the North is behind other regions, with an average score of 2/5, as opposed to 4/5 in the South and 3/5 in the remaining regions. Only 8.5% of respondents in the North region achieved the maximum score of 5/5 on the life skills test, as opposed to 23.2% in Mount Lebanon. There were no statistically significant differences between the performance of male and female respondents.

### 5. Implications for Policy

- There is a need to further study the use of ICTs for educational activities, in view of the large number of youth population. Leveraging modern technological advancements has an immense potential to enhance the access and quality of youth and adult literacy programmes by contributing to the creation of literate environments in all possible situations, like homes, community spaces, etc. This can help addressing the low literacy levels among youth.
- There is a need for innovative ways of teaching to help students to perform better. With many students having started their education in Syria, there is a need to look at both curriculum design and instructional methods in mathematics to resolve this gap in learning and improve performance.
- Suitable interventions appear warranted to develop contents on literacy and numeracy and other life skills and put them to use via mobile phones to educate the Syrian youth refugees.
- Youth education programmes for Syrian refugees would do well to lay emphasis on citizenship education, which would motivate them to act when they perceive a public/civic problem in their community.
- Youth enrolled in education programmes, including NFE, would benefit from being taught specific skills, which are relevant in the current job market. The introduction of a system to recognize their NFE may help youth to get motivated to learn and enter suitable jobs.
- Conducting a literacy assessment of youth in Syria would enable a comparative analysis between these two groups and give better insights on learning gaps and challenges that need to be addressed.