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## Letter to the Editor

# Lifting sanctions: A pathway to rebuilding academic research in Syria

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Dear Editor,

Syria suffered from the isolation of researchers and limiting access to global knowledge and collaboration in response to sanctions that impeded academic progress during that period. In 2025, the United States will issue a new order aimed at lifting these sanctions on Syria, potentially leading to significant advancements in education, healthcare, and technology.<sup>1</sup> This development offers optimism that many Syrian researchers will integrate into the global scientific discourse, contributing new perspectives and innovative solutions to various pressing scientific challenges. Furthermore, this change could play a pivotal role in rebuilding Syria's intellectual and economic infrastructure, promoting innovation and growth. The lifting of sanctions would empower academics by enhancing international collaboration with other countries, which could be advantageous for Syria and enrich global scientific endeavors.<sup>2</sup>

The imposition of sanctions has severely affected Syrian academics by restricting their access to international funding, collaborative opportunities, and vital resources for many years.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, these sanctions have stifled innovation, reduced publication output, and posed many challenges for developing new technologies and medical treatments across all areas in Syria. Tragically, these sanctions have barred many scholars and researchers from accessing global networks, effectively isolating them from the international scientific community.<sup>4</sup> The prolonged duration of sanctions has adversely influenced academia, healthcare, and other critical sectors, all of which rely heavily on research and innovation that have been entirely damaged and limited during these years. For example, the ability to treat many diseases was notably constrained, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to restrictions on access to medical equipment and pharmaceuticals. Moreover, sanctions create a long-term gap in expertise due to restricted training opportunities and a scarcity of educational resources over many years.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 1 shows the scholarly output from 1996 to 2025 for Syria and its neighboring countries, Jordan and Lebanon. Beginning with 2011, which marked the onset of the Syrian revolution, the data reveal stark contrasts in research productivity trajectories across the three countries. From 2011 onwards, Jordan demonstrated the most pronounced growth, with a sharp increase in scholarly publications, reaching a peak of nearly 15,000 publications in 2024. This surge likely reflects the impact of sustained political stability, increased investment in higher education, and enhanced national research infrastructure.

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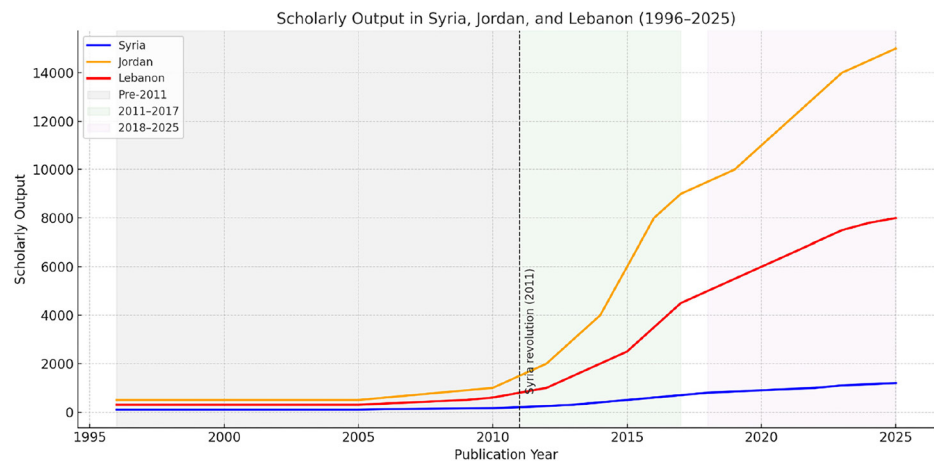
<http://doi.org/10.5339/avi.2025.8>

Submitted: 04 May 2025

Accepted: 11 May 2025

Published: 29 May 2025

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**Figure 1. A graphical representation of the scholarly output (y-axis) over time by publication year (x-axis) for Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon from 1996 to 2025. The analysis is based on Scopus-indexed publications as evaluated through SciVal (Elsevier), accessed on May 6, 2025.**

In contrast, Lebanon showed a moderate but steady increase in academic output. Although its growth rate was not as rapid as that of Jordan, Lebanon’s publication volume reached approximately 8,000 by 2023. However, persistent economic challenges and periodic political instability may have limited its ability to fully capitalize on its academic potential, resulting in a slower and less stable upward trend. Similar to Jordan, the decline observed in 2025 should be interpreted with caution, as the data for that year may be incomplete.

In stark contrast, Syria has exhibited consistently low research output throughout the observed period. Despite a modest increase beginning around 2017, its scholarly activity remains significantly constrained, peaking at just over 1,500 publications. The devastating impact of the war, coupled with the displacement of academics, and restricted access to international funding and collaborations have significantly hindered the country’s progress. The prolonged conflict has severely undermined Syria’s academic institutions, placing it at a considerable disadvantage relative to its more stable neighbors.

An analysis of the three countries across key periods – 1996 to 2010 (pre-revolution), 2011 to 2017 (during conflict escalation), and 2018 to 2024 (post-peak) – reveals a clear divergence. While Jordan and Lebanon have advanced in various ways, Syria’s academic output has remained minimal, underscoring the compounding effects of political instability and conflict on the country’s research capabilities.

Many individuals anticipate that the lifting of sanctions will bring many advantages for the scientific community by reintegrating them into the global arena, thereby enabling them to address pressing local and regional challenges.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, this development will create transformative solutions to Syria and its neighboring countries concerning various emerging issues such as water scarcity, renewable energy, and public health. Such progress may stimulate economic growth and innovation, leading to job creation and fostering a culture of creativity and entrepreneurship by infusing international funding and resources.<sup>6</sup> As a result, many academic institutions will receive funding and participate in global collaborations, thereby integrating scholars and researchers into global publishing and contributing to the advancement of knowledge across a wide range of essential disciplines, such as technology, education, environmental sustainability, social sciences, engineering, and beyond. Disseminating the insights and innovations from researchers and scholars will enrich the global knowledge pool and address international challenges with distinct perspectives and solutions.<sup>7</sup>

The lifting of sanctions on Syria will not only revitalize academic research within the country and in neighboring countries, but also yield multiple benefits. This progress is crucial for rebuilding Syria’s intellectual and economic foundations, fostering innovation, and supporting sustainable development. By prioritizing knowledge and collaboration rather than isolation, global initiatives aimed at addressing common challenges will contribute to Syria’s recovery and that of its neighboring countries.

**Keywords:** Academic reconstruction, international collaboration, sanctions’ impact, post-conflict recovery, research revitalization

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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