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U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants World Refugee Survey 2005 - Syria

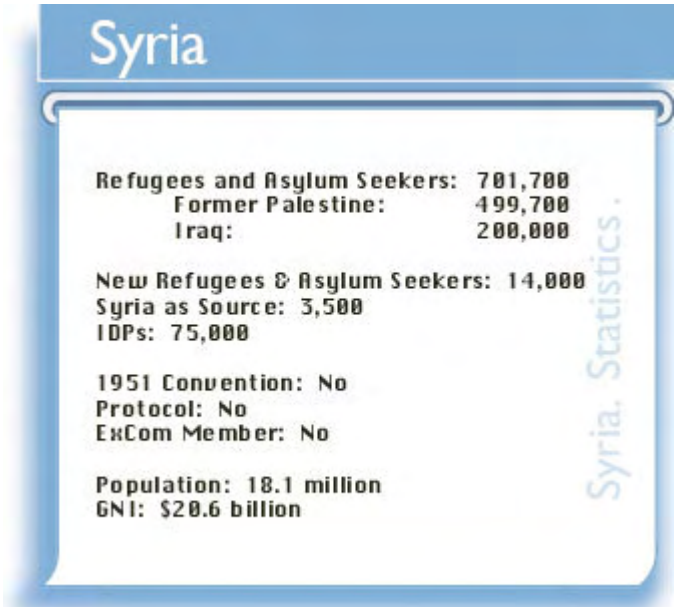
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Syria

Refugees and Asylum Seekers: 701,700
 Former Palestine: 499,700
 Iraq: 200,000

New Refugees & Asylum Seekers: 14,000
 Syria as Source: 3,500
 IDPs: 75,000

1951 Convention: No
 Protocol: No
 ExCom Member: No

Population: 18.1 million
 GNI: \$20.6 billion

Syria Statistics

Refoulement/Asylum According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Syria deported some Iraqis during the year but denied deporting any refugees. While Syrian law had no provision for refugee protection, the Government generally respected UNHCR's call for temporary protection for Iraqi refugees and allowed it to make refugee status determinations, although it had not conducted them since March 2003. Although just 14,000 Iraqis applied to UNHCR for temporary protection, Syria estimated some 400,000 Iraqis were in the country. UNHCR attributed the relatively low number of applications to the fact that many Iraqis had family in Syria or little need for assistance.

A 1957 law provided that "Palestinians residing in the Syrian Arab Republic territories are considered as Syrians by origin in Syria, in all matters pertaining to the laws and regulations." As such, Syria allowed Palestinian refugees rights on par with nationals, including mandatory military service but excluding the right to vote. The law and subsequent legislation specifically excluded naturalization or political rights for Palestinians in Syria. The Government also restricted nonresident Palestinian refugees from entering the country.

Citizens of Arab League states – including refugees and asylum seekers – could enter Syria without a visa and remain for a three-month renewable period. They could only receive residency permits, however, if they showed proof of employment and a permanent address in Syria.

Syria deprived some 200,000 to 250,000 stateless Kurds of citizenship, passports, and birth certificates, thus disqualifying them from property or business ownership, voting rights, and public sector employment. In addition, they could not travel outside of Syria, and those who left could not reenter. Syria did not require military service on their part.

Detention The Government occasionally notified UNHCR of the detention of refugees and asylum seekers, including two refugees arrested in June. One was an unidentified refugee detained on criminal charges and the other, an Iraqi with temporary protection. But Syria generally revealed little regarding the detention of citizens or refugees. According to the U.S. State Department, "In cases involving political or national security offenses, arrests were often carried out in secret.... Detainees have no legal redress for false arrest [and] security detainees did not have access to lawyers prior to or during questioning. Lawyers were not assured access to their clients before the trial."

Right to Earn a Livelihood Palestinian refugees could work freely but a 1959 law required other foreigners, including refugees, to obtain work and residency permits in order to work legally, and prohibited their work in the public sector. Since the Government restricted the number of permits and controlled much of the economy, most refugees had little choice but to work in the informal sector without legal protection. A 2001 law reversed the Syrian labor laws that specifically prohibited the employment of foreign domestic workers and regulated their residency.

Syria also restricted noncitizens from owning property beyond one residence, and did not allow foreigners to own any arable land. In cases where this limitation interfered with Palestinians' business management, Syria allowed citizens to purchase property and transfer control to Palestinian refugees through binding agreements. Following an increase in Iraqi arrivals late in the year, the Government reportedly planned to bar Iraqis from purchasing real estate.

Freedom of Movement and Residence Syria did not confine refugees to camps or segregated settlements, although more than one-quarter of

Palestinian refugees in the country lived in 14 camps and settlements. Syria closed el Hol camp on the Iraqi border and permitted the remaining residents to move to urban centers.

Palestinian refugees registered with the General Authority for Palestinian Arab Refugees could obtain Syrian travel documents valid for six years and renewable at Syrian consular offices abroad. Additionally, Palestinians could travel between Syria and Lebanon using state-issued identity cards, and were also entitled to Arab League travel documents.

Public Relief and Education Primary education was mandatory for Palestinian children. Most of them attended UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) elementary schools and Syrian secondary schools and universities. Syria provided non-Palestinian refugees with free primary education and public health services. Palestinian refugees generally used UNRWA health services, which made referrals to Syrian hospitals as warranted.

The Syrian government allowed UNHCR and UNRWA to assist refugees in the country, but strictly controlled nongovernmental organizations – especially those assisting stateless Kurds or monitoring human rights violations.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) The 1967 war with Israel displaced about 100,000 people from the Golan Heights. Projections indicated that perhaps 75,000 remained in 2004. This number, smaller than the figure in last year's Survey, reflected the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants' decision, in general, no longer to count descendents of IDPs who were never themselves displaced, rather than a decrease through any actual return or reintegration. Most Golan Heights IDPs lived in housing projects in the suburbs of Damascus, Dara, and Homs.

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