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Immigration and
Refugee Board of CanadaCommission de l'immigration
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

Lebanon and Syria: Situation of Syrians in Lebanon; violence against Syrians; political affiliation of Syrians; naturalization of Syrians in 1994 (1994-2009)

Sources indicate that hundreds of thousands of Syrians work in Lebanon (UN 3 Dec. 2007; *ibid.* 13 Apr. 2009; Daily Star 8 Nov. 2005; IWPR 21 May 2008). Estimates as to how many Syrians have worked in Lebanon vary (UN 3 Dec. 2007; Daily Star 8 Nov. 2005; Chalcraft 2009, 145-148). In his book *The Invisible Cage: Syrian Migrant Workers in Lebanon*, John Chalcraft, a Reader at the London School of Economics, states that estimating the number of Syrians working in Lebanon is challenging because Syrian workers rarely obtain work permits and the issue has been sensitive to the Lebanese government, Syrian workers and Lebanese employers (*ibid.*, 145). While some estimate that as many as 1.4 million Syrians worked in Lebanon in the 1990s (*ibid.*, 147-148; see also Daily Star 13 June 2005), Chalcraft asserts that the most convincing estimates are 200,000 Syrian workers in 1992; 450,000 to 700,000 in 1995-96, and 225,000 to 450,000 in 2000 (Chalcraft 2009, 147-148). According to the United Nations (UN) Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), Beirut-based economists estimate that there were 500,000 Syrian workers in Lebanon prior to February 2005 and that "hundreds of thousands" remained as of 2007 (UN 3 Dec. 2007). Other sources estimate that there are 300,000 (UN 13 Apr. 2009) to 400,000 Syrian workers in Lebanon (Daily Star 8 Nov. 2005; IWPR 21 May 2008). According to IRIN, 15 percent of Syria's workforce is employed in Lebanon (UN 13 Apr. 2009).

Not all Syrians are workers; Chalcraft indicates that some Syrians in Lebanon are students, professionals, and tourists (Chalcraft 2009, 147). Estimates of the number of Syrians residing in Lebanon who are not workers could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources indicate that Syrians in Lebanon work for lower wages than Lebanese workers (Gambill Fall 2005; AFP 23 Oct. 2001; Los Angeles Times 10 Aug. 2001), but earn higher wages than they would in Syria (*ibid.*; IWPR 21 May 2008). The majority of Syrian workers in Lebanon work as manual labourers (*ibid.*; UN 3 Dec. 2007; *ibid.* 13 Apr. 2009), particularly in construction (*ibid.*; *ibid.* 3 Dec. 2007; Gambill Fall 2005) and seasonal agriculture (*ibid.*; Daily Star 13 June 2005; UN 3 Dec. 2007). Many Syrian workers in Lebanon live in poor conditions; several workers may share small apartments (Gambill Fall 2005; UN 13 Apr. 2009), while other workers live in tents (Los Angeles Times 10 Aug. 2001; UN 3 Dec. 2007; Chalcraft 2009, 196), shacks (*ibid.*, 179; UN 3 Dec. 2007) or on the construction sites where they work (UN 13 Apr. 2009). Two sources report that Syrians in Lebanon have few labour rights (*ibid.*; Chalcraft 2009, 142).

Sources indicate that Syrians in Lebanon face "discrimination" (UN 13 Apr. 2009; US 25 Feb. 2009, Sec. 5; Chalcraft 2009, 224). According to Chalcraft, conditions for Syrian workers are "hostile and precarious" in Lebanon (Chalcraft 2009, 205). Sources suggest that some Lebanese take out their frustrations with the Syrian regime on the Syrian workers (UN 3 Dec. 2007; IWPR 21 May 2008).

Violence against Syrians in Lebanon

Several sources report cases in which Syrian workers in Lebanon were the target of violence (UN 13 Apr. 2009; *ibid.* 3 Dec. 2007; IWPR 21 May 2008; Chalcraft 2009, 145, 200-205; Daily Star 19 July 2007). Chalcraft reports several attacks against Syrian workers which occurred in 2000 in the towns of Sidon, Zahrany, Nabatiyyeh, Shebaa, Zahleh and North Metu (Chalcraft 2009, 200-201). Three of these attacks, which occurred in Sidon, Zahrany and Nabatiyyeh, were believed to be organized by a group called Citizens for a Free and Independent Lebanon (*ibid.*). After carrying out a dynamite attack on a shanty town housing approximately 1,500 Syrian workers in the outskirts of Sidon, the group issued a statement calling for the withdrawal of foreign troops and citizens from Lebanon (*ibid.*).

Several sources indicate that violence against Syrians in Lebanon was most prevalent following the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, which was widely blamed on Syrian authorities (UN 3 Dec. 2007; Chalcraft 2009, 202; IWPR 21 May 2008; Daily Star 8 Nov. 2005). According to IRIN, "tens" of Syrian workers were killed at this time (UN 3 Dec. 2007). The Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), a not-for-profit international network promoting free and fair media (IWPR n.d.), reports that a number of Syrians went missing after the assassination of Hariri (IWPR 13 April 2008). Chalcraft states that there were violent attacks against Syrians throughout Lebanon at this time, causing the majority of Syrians to flee (Chalcraft 2009, 202). According to Chalcraft, the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon in April 2005 helped defuse hostility against Syrian workers and that by autumn of 2005, the majority of Syrian workers had returned, despite sporadic outbreaks of violence (*ibid.*, 204).

IRIN reports that Syrians were attacked, robbed, beaten, and sometimes killed between 2006 and 2009 (UN 13 Apr. 2009; *ibid.* 3 Dec. 2007). In addition, IRIN states that Syrian workers housed in tents and shacks have been subject to arson attacks (UN 3 Dec. 2007). The Lebanese newspaper Daily Star reports that in July 2007, two Syrians in the Chouf town of Hamana were stabbed, resulting in one death and one serious injury (19 July 2007). IRIN reports that five Syrian workers were murdered in Lebanon in 2007 (UN 3 Dec. 2007).

According to IWPR, Syrian newspapers reported that 12 Syrian workers were shot, stabbed and beaten after the pro-Syrian Hezbollah militia occupied some parts of Beirut in May 2008, but that there were few details available about the attacks (IWPR 21 May 2008; see also Xinhua News Agency 12 May 2008). IRIN reports that two Syrians were murdered in December 2008 (UN 13 Apr. 2009).

Chalcraft indicates that the pattern of attacks against Syrians in Lebanon crossed sectarian lines; Shia, Sunni, Maronite, Greek Orthodox and Armenian groups expressed hostility towards Syrian workers (Chalcraft 2009, 201).

According to Chalcraft, some Syrians in Lebanon felt vulnerable to attack after the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon (Chalcraft 2009, 210). IRIN reports that in May 2007, after receiving a report that there were approximately four incidents per day against Syrians in Lebanon, Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora called on the Lebanese people to refrain from attacking Syrians (UN 3 Dec. 2007). Sources indicate that robberies of Syrian workers are common (*ibid.*; *ibid.* 13 Apr. 2009; Chalcraft 2009, 203). IRIN reports that many incidents against Syrian workers go unreported (UN 13 Apr. 2009). According to some legal experts in Lebanon, as reported by IRIN, most attacks against Syrians are not investigated or prosecuted (*ibid.* 3 Dec. 2007).

Political affiliation

Information on the political affiliation of Syrians in Lebanon was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate on 19 October 2009, an editor of Mideast Monitor, a non-profit publication that provides political analysis on Middle East issues (n.d.), stated that most Syrians in Lebanon are there for economic reasons rather than for political reasons. He claimed that many stay away from local politics, but that they often participate in pro-Syrian rallies, which he asserted was an expectation of Syrian authorities (Mideast Monitor 19 Oct. 2009). The Washington Institute for Near East Policy reports that in November 2004, a pro-Syrian demonstration in Beirut, which was led by Hezbollah, the Amal Movement, the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party and the Baath Party, included a large number of Syrian immigrants and workers (18 Feb. 2005). According to the Editor of Mideast Monitor, Syrian workers also demonstrated in a pro-Syrian rally on 8 March 2005 (19 Oct. 2009).

The Globe and Mail reports that there are "a growing number of young Syrian dissidents" settling in Lebanon (21 Nov. 2007). Daily Star and the Jordanian newspaper The Star also report that Syrian human rights activists and dissidents reside in Lebanon (Daily Star 13 June 2005; The Star 27 Dec. 2008). The Globe and Mail states that some Syrian dissidents have discussed forming a political group based in Lebanon to advocate for change in Syria (The Globe and Mail 21 Nov. 2007). Some dissidents reportedly claim to have greater freedom of expression in Lebanon (*ibid.*; Daily Star 13 June 2005). However, one Syrian human rights activist expressed concern that Syrian intelligence agents may continue to monitor his activities in Lebanon (The Star 27 Dec. 2008).

Naturalization of Syrians in 1994

Sources indicate that the Naturalization Act of 1994 granted Lebanese citizenship to many Syrian Muslims in Lebanon (Washington Institute for Near East Policy 6 Sept. 1996; LIC 2003, 5). Sources report that this increased Lebanon's population by approximately 10 percent (El Khazen Winter 2001; Washington Institute for Near East Policy 6 Sept. 1996; Daily Star 22 Apr. 2005). Estimates as to how many Syrians were naturalized vary (Farha Mar. 2008; Washington Times 15 Aug. 1996). According to an article in Mideast Monitor, over 160,000 Syrians and Palestinians were naturalized at this time (Farha Mar. 2008). A representative of the Council of Lebanese American Organizations claimed that approximately 200,000 of the 300,000 naturalized citizens were Syrian (Washington Times 15 Aug. 1996).

Information on the requirements and procedures of the Naturalization Act of 1994 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. According to the Editor of Mideast Monitor, the requirements for naturalization in 1994 were never clearly defined and were controversial (19 Oct. 2009). An article in Middle East Quarterly states that the process was "problematic" and that the government did not follow legal procedure or properly investigate applications (El Khazen Winter 2001; see also Daily Star 22 Apr. 2005).

Information on the requirements and procedures for Syrians residing in Lebanon to become naturalized Lebanese citizens after 1994 could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Oral Sources: Attempts to reach officials at the Embassy of Lebanon in Ottawa and the Embassy of the Syrian Arab Republic in Ottawa, and representatives of the Syrian Human Rights Committee and the London School of Economics were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response. A professor at the University of Oklahoma was unable to provide information.

Internet sources, including: Al Bawaba, Al Jazeera, Amnesty International (AI), European Country of Origin Network (ecoi.net), Human Rights First (HRF), Human Rights Watch (HRW), International Crisis Group, Office of the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Refworld, Syrian Human Rights Committee, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), UN Development Programme (UNDP).

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