

Syria

Geography

Location: Middle East, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, between Lebanon and Turkey

Area:

total area: 185,180 sq km

land area: 184,050 sq km

Land boundaries: total 2,253 km, Iraq 605 km, Israel 76 km, Jordan 375 km, Lebanon 375 km, Turkey 822 km

Coastline: 193 km

Maritime claims:

contiguous zone: 41 nm

territorial sea: 35 nm

Climate: mostly desert; hot, dry, sunny summers (June to August) and mild, rainy winters (December to February) along coast; cold weather with snow or sleet periodically hits Damascus

Terrain: primarily semiarid and desert plateau; narrow coastal plain; mountains in west

Natural resources: petroleum, phosphates, chrome and manganese ores, asphalt, iron ore, rock salt, marble, gypsum

Land use:

arable land: 28%

permanent crops: 3%

meadows and pastures: 46%

forest and woodland: 3%

other: 20%

Irrigated land: 10,000 sq km (1992)

Environment:

current issues: deforestation; overgrazing; soil erosion; desertification; water pollution from dumping of raw sewage and wastes from petroleum refining; inadequate supplies of potable water

natural hazards: dust storms, sandstorms

Note: there are 42 Jewish settlements and civilian land use sites in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights (August 1994 est.)

People

Population: 15,451,917 (July 1995 est.)

Age structure:

0-14 years: 48% (female 3,639,776; male 3,826,154)

15-64 years: 49% (female 3,691,862; male 3,854,989)

65 years and over: 3% (female 219,251; male 219,885) (July 1995 est.)

Population growth rate: 3.71% (1995 est.)

Birth rate: 43.21 births/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Death rate: 6.07 deaths/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Net migration rate: 0 migrant(s)/1,000 population (1995 est.)

Infant mortality rate: 41.1 deaths/1,000 live births (1995 est.)

Life expectancy at birth:
total population: 66.81 years
male: 65.67 years
female: 68.01 years (1995 est.)

Total fertility rate: 6.55 children born/woman (1995 est.)

Nationality:
noun: Syrian(s)
adjective: Syrian

Ethnic divisions: Arab 90.3%, Kurds, Armenians, and other 9.7%

Religions: Sunni Muslim 74%, Alawite, Druze, and other Muslim sects 16%, Christian (various sects) 10%, Jewish (tiny communities in Damascus, Al Qamishli, and Aleppo)

Languages: Arabic (official), Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic, Circassian, French widely understood

Literacy:
total population: 64%

male: 78%
female: 51%

Government

Names:

conventional long form: Syrian Arab Republic

conventional short form: Syria

local long form: Al Jumhuriyah al Arabiyah as Suriyah

local short form: Suriyah

former: United Arab Republic (with Egypt)

Capital: Damascus

Independence: 17 April 1946 (from League of Nations mandate under French administration)

National holiday: National Day, 17 April (1946)

Constitution: 13 March 1973

Suffrage: 18 years of age; universal

Flag: three equal horizontal bands of red (top), white, and black with two small green five-pointed stars in a horizontal line centered in the white band; similar to the flag of Yemen, which has a plain white band and of Iraq, which has three green stars (plus an Arabic inscription) in a horizontal line centered in the white band; also similar to the flag of Egypt, which has a symbolic eagle centered in the white band

Economy

Industries: textiles, food processing, beverages, tobacco, phosphate rock mining, petroleum

Agriculture: accounts for 30% of GDP and one-third of labor force; all major crops (wheat, barley, cotton, lentils, chickpeas) grown mainly on rain-watered land causing wide swings in production; animal products - beef, lamb, eggs, poultry, milk; not self-sufficient in grain or livestock products

Illicit drugs: a transit country for Lebanese and Turkish refined cocaine going to Europe and heroin and hashish bound for regional and Western markets

Transportation

Railroads:

total: 1,998 km

Highways:

total: 31,569 km

Inland waterways: 870 km; minimal economic importance

Pipelines: crude oil 1,304 km; petroleum products 515 km

Ports: Baniyas, Jablah, Latakia, Tartus

Airports:

total: 107

Defence Forces

Branches: Syrian Arab Army, Syrian Arab Navy, Syrian Arab Air Force, Syrian Arab Air Defense Forces, Police and Security Force