

## MOROCCO UPDATE

# INFORMATION NOTE ON SYRIANS APPLYING FOR ASYLUM IN MOROCCO

September 2015

## BACKGROUND

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- By 31 August 2015, UNHCR had **1,763 Syrians (453 families)** registered and active in its database. This group does not constitute the total number of Syrians living in Morocco. The population of Syrian nationals living in the country is higher.
- As per the request of the Government of Morocco (GoM), Syrians registered with UNHCR Rabat are issued with UNHCR asylum-seeker certificates (as opposed to refugee certificates). However, they are considered as refugees on a *prima facie* basis by UNHCR and are treated as such by the Office for the purpose of assistance and durable solutions. The GOM is aware of, and respects UNHCR's position and the documents issued by UNHCR.
- The profile and background of Syrians present in Morocco is notably different from what it is in some of Syria's neighbouring countries. A significant proportion was already present legally in the country before the crisis (refugees "*sur-place*").
- The question and treatment of Syrians in Morocco are sensitive from a security perspective. The Syrian Ambassador has been expelled from Morocco in July 2012 and, in December 2012, Morocco hosted a meeting of the "Friends of Syria". President Al-Assad subsequently issued negative statements about Morocco's top leadership.
- Since long, Morocco has been an attractive destination for Syrian migrants seeking job opportunities, especially in the field of agriculture and well drilling. Many of those who arrived before the uprising in March 2011 had friends or relatives who were already working in the country and were able to secure a job for them, prior to their arrival. The majority of this particular group has been staying in Morocco for 5-10 years, speaks the Moroccan Arabic dialect (*darija*) and is quite well integrated in the Moroccan society. Some of them are married to Moroccan women. Before the beginning of the unrest in Syria, almost none of those economic migrants were interested to apply for asylum.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

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### Travel route from Syria to Morocco

- The majority of Syrian applying for asylum in Morocco departed Syria legally using their national passport. The two main exit points from Syria were Aleppo and Damascus airports.
- Syrians are subject to a visa to enter Morocco. A few number travelled directly from Damascus to Casablanca. Algeria did not require visa for Syrian nationals until beginning of 2015. As a consequence, there has been a high percentage of onward movers, travelling first to Algeria, staying there for few weeks/months before crossing the border to Morocco (illegally) mainly through Oujda bordering town.
- Since August 2014, 302 Syrian nationals were referred from Oujda (Oriental Province) to register with UNHCR Office in Rabat through a referral mechanism that was put in place with UNHCR implementing partner OMDH and other NGOs in Oujda.
- Since January 2015, over 4,000 Syrians have arrived to the Spanish enclave Melilla to seek asylum to the Spanish Asylum Post. Syrians have to either pay or pretend to be Moroccans in order to be able to cross the border post.

### Travel documents

- The majority of Syrians is in possession of genuine national passports. Some passports are still valid while other passports are already expired. During the reporting period, UNHCR Morocco did not come across any forged document.

## Regularisation process

- On 26 June 2014, the Moroccan authorities initiated a regularisation process for Syrians registered with UNHCR. The body in charge of this process is an *ad hoc* inter-ministerial commission, chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and includes representatives from the ministries of Interior, Justice and Employment, the Inter-ministerial Delegation for Human Rights and UNHCR. The commission holds its sessions at the Bureau for Refugees and Stateless Persons.
- As of August 31, the commission had examined the cases of **459 persons**. The GoM has not decided yet on the status these persons will receive. UNHCR advocates with the authorities to issue Syrians with Moroccan refugee cards.
- In 2014, the GoM launched an exceptional regularisation process for irregular migrants. 27,332 migrants from 116 countries applied for regularisation to the Offices for Foreigners of the Ministry of Interior. In total, 17,916 applications were accepted, including around 5,000 emanating from Syrians (informal source of information).

## PROFILE OF SYRIANS REGISTERED WITH UNHCR IN MOROCCO

Age and Gender		Specific need	
○ Minor population:	50.8%	○ Unaccompanied minor:	0
○ Adult population:	49.2%	○ Child-at-risk:	31
○ Female population:	47.7%	○ Older-at-risk:	26
○ Male population:	52.3%	○ Woman-at-risk:	2
		○ Single parent:	20
		○ Disability:	12
		○ Medical condition:	37
		○ Protection needs :	9
Marital Status		Ethnicity and religion	
○ Single:	57.6%	○ Kurds:	2.7%
○ Married:	40.6%	○ Arabs:	93.8%
○ Others (engaged, separated):	1.8%	○ Others:	3.5%
<p>Many applicants stated that they are informally married to Moroccan women because they could not register their marriage while they had no legal residence in Morocco. The situation has evolved positively, since many Syrians have obtained a residence permit through the regularisation process for migrants.</p>		○ Islam Sunni:	99.5%
		○ Christians:	0.1%
		○ Others:	0.4%
Place of residence in Svria		Place of residence in Morocco	
○ Homs:	39%	○ Casablanca:	22.6%
○ Damascus:	11.8%	○ Tanger:	6.9%
○ Idlib:	8.3%	○ Rabat:	7.3%
○ Lattakia:	2%	○ Tetouan:	6.3%
○ Alep:	7.1%	○ Others:	56.9%
○ Hama:	11.8%	<p>Despite the fact that an increasing number of Syrians are in possession of a residence permit (granted through the regularisation process of migrants), still the majority are renting a place without official lease.</p>	
○ Others:	20%		
Occupation		Education	
○ Primary sector (agriculture, fisheries, etc.):	4.1%	○ Primary:	42.8%
○ Secondary sector (industry, transformation, etc.) :	4.3%	○ Secondary:	13.9%
○ Tertiary sector (services, trade, etc.):	47.7%	○ Technical/vocational:	0.6%
○ Undetermined/unknown:	5.6%	○ Post-/university:	1.9%
○ Students :	0.8%	○ No education:	38.4%
○ No occupation:	37.5%	○ Unknown:	2.4%