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Foreword

The civil war in Syria is certainly one of the gravest humanitarian crises of our times. Having a severe regional impact, refugees fleeing from war and persecution are also applying for asylum in Europe. Austria has responded to this with a resettlement initiative in cooperation with UNHCR to grant asylum to the most vulnerable victims of war. On the EU level we are working on the “Save Lives” initiative with our European partners, aiming to protect those attempting to enter the EU via the Mediterranean Sea or the Western Balkans at the mercy of traffickers.

While the Country of Origin Information Unit of the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum is monitoring the humanitarian situation in Syria closely, cooperation with the Austrian Ministry of Defence and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) made it possible to enhance the analytical framework and visualize the according data in this ATLAS.

The publication is a further step towards understanding Syria, particularly regarding the ethno-linguistic and religious composition of the population predating the beginning of the unrest, the security situation as well as refugee flows. Considering the situation in the region and the ongoing flows of refugees, an in-depth analysis of the situation on the ground is paramount to maintain the high quality standards of our asylum procedures and an informed policy debate.

Johanna Mikl-Leitner

Austrian Federal Minister of the Interior
Foreword

Mass migration and waves of refugees are currently one of the biggest challenges for security in Europe. From top level international news agency reports to everyday discussions in the coffee houses of Vienna, the difficulties of refugees, especially those of Syria, have dominated all other topics.

Who are these people? Why are they fleeing? What is their background? Their ethnicities? Religion? Language? Not all of these questions can be answered. This atlas, which is a comprehensive product including 14 separate theme maps based on excellent interdepartmental cooperation, covers these topics. The explicitly selected combination of subject maps helps us to better understand the circumstances of the Syria crisis, the outcome of which greatly will influence our everyday lives in terms of economy, politics and security.

"Knowledge is Power" is supposedly a quote by Francis Bacon (1561-1626). This quote still holds true, because for every mission or operation conducted a clear understanding of the overall situation in the area is necessary. Geo-related information, such as this Atlas, is at the core of every decision-making process at both the strategic and the interdisciplinary levels. If we want to succeed in providing security in Europe and Austria in particular, we need to comprehend all essential aspects and apply a comprehensive approach. This Atlas in combination with other supporting products provides the crucial background information about Syria for the decision makers. As a result the best possible decisions can be made.

In this way, the Atlas is an excellent resource and prime example for interdepartmental cooperation of highly competent offices pertaining to the Ministry of the Interior with two innovative institutes within my Ministry, the Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management (IFK) of the National Defence Academy (LVAk) and the Institute for Military Geography (IMG) of the HQ, Command and Support Centre (FüUZ).

Gerald Klug
Austrian Federal Ministry of Defence and Sport
Syria: Topography and administrative divisions

Source: Collins World Explorer Premium, Shuttle Radar Topography Mission
Damascus: Satellite image map

Source: OpenStreetMap
Syria: Control of territory  January 2014

Source: ISW - Institute for the study of war, SOHR - Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, CENTCOM - US Central Command, Agathocle de Syracuse - Understanding modern conflicts, Pietervanostaeyen - Musings on Arabism, Islamicism, History and current affairs

Moderate Rebels: Rebels who have been identified as „moderate” by the U.S.-led coalition and are being supported by the coalition through ongoing airstrikes against ISIS in Syria (e.g.: FSA, Syria Revolutionaries Front).

Mixed Rebels: Rebels who are being perceived as moderate but are also working alongside hardline groups (e.g. Jabhat al-Nusra). In some cases they coexist without interacting and in other cases they clash.
Syria: Major clashes  January 2014 - January 2015

Source: ISW - Institute for the study of war, SOHR - Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, CENTCOM - US Central Command
Major clash: Every military/violent confrontation between armed actors (including airstrikes, artillery fire, bombings, suicide vests, Suicide Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices [SVBIED] and Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices [VBIED]).
Syria: Religious and sectarian groups  
March 2011

This map shows only the main areas of settlement of religious and sectarian groups. The Syrian population is very heterogeneous in terms of religious and sectarian affiliation, especially in urban centers.

Source: www.ecoi.net/atlas_syria_sources.pdf
Syria: Ethnic and linguistic groups  March 2011

This map shows only the main areas of settlement of ethnic and linguistic groups. The Syrian population is very heterogeneous in terms of ethnic and linguistic affiliation, especially in urban centers.
Kurds in the Middle East

This map shows only the main areas of settlement of Kurds in the Middle East.
Camps for Syrian refugees 2015


This map only depicts official camps for Syrian refugees and does not make reference to informal tent camps set up by refugees without shelter.
Syrian citizens and Syrian-born population 2014

Source: EUROSTAT (latest update: 17 April 2015), Statistics Austria, and the UK Office for National Statistics (data available only for 2013). Map includes EU 28 as well as Switzerland and Norway. No data was available for Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Luxembourg, Malta, and Poland. In the cases of Germany, Ireland, and Portugal data was available on Syrian citizens but not on the Syrian-born population. The map only includes the top 10 countries in the categories Syrian citizens and Syrian-born population.
Asylum applications of Syrian citizens 2014

Source: EUROSTAT (latest update: 01 April 2015).
Data includes asylum and new asylum applicants by citizenship; only included if $>$ 100
Syrian refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs 2014/15
