Syria

Information about Syria’s economic situation in numbers

Area: 185,180 sq km

Population: 20.2 million (2009)

Illiteracy rate: Men: 17 %

Gross Domestic Product: approx. 27 billion USD (2008)

GDP per capita: 1,350 USD (2008)

Rate of inflation: 15.2 % (2008; estimate 2009: 7.5 %)

Unemployment: 20 % (estimate 2010)

(Sources: gtai – Germany Trade & Invest / Gesellschaft für Außenwirtschaft und Standortmarketing mbH, and http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/diplo/de/Laenderinformationen/Syrien/Kultur-UndBildungspolitik.html)

Information on book production in Syria

Sales
The book industry is not recorded or identified separately in the statistics on industrial production and domestic trade provided by the Central Department of Statistics in Damascus. The Syrian Publishers Association is very young and does not yet collect any corresponding data.

Sales can be estimated on the basis of surveys of private household income and expenditures (Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 1996/1997 and 2004, difficult to access) and on the basis of public expenditure (libraries, education). (Lack of transparency of government budget legislation).
Title production / new releases per year

The Syrian national library Al-Asad (http://www.alassad-library.gov.sy/) is the authority for documenting book production. Since 1985, it has published the Syrian national bibliography annually (unfortunately not available on their website). The U.S. Library of Congress Accession List: Middle East (since 1994) is another rather good source for Syrian publications. It is published every two months and lists the titles that the Library of Congress office in Cairo acquires in the Middle East. The acquisition list comprises state-funded, as well as private publications. The annual report provides an overview of the activities of the Cairo office and was last updated in 2009: http://www.lc-cairo.org/.

There is also no reliable older data on Syrian publications available from UNESCO, which has ceased to collect extensive bibliographic data. The regional statistics of ALECSO are extremely incomplete and thus not usable. Syrian book production increased until the year 2000 to 1,800 titles per year, but has since slackened to 1,138 titles per year as of 2004.

A breakdown by category reveals the following long-term average over the period from 1984 to 2004 (in percentages; more recent data not available):

- General knowledge / reference books: 3
- Philosophy / Psychology: 3
- Religion: 14
- Social sciences: 15
- Exact sciences: 4
- Applied sciences: 15
- Art: 3
- Language: 2
- Literature: 31
- History and geography: 10

Average book price

The following average prices were determined on the basis of a representative selection of private publishers:

- All book categories: 5.71 USD
- Computer books: 14.04 USD
- Legal books: 18.32 USD

Publications of the Ministry of Culture are sold for an average price of 2.36 USD in Syria, while the same books convert to 4.88 USD outside of the country.

Fixed book pricing

Book prices are essentially uniform in the Syrian public sector and are only reduced during specific sales events. Private publishers have a few general bookstores but primarily sell directly. This ensures that books are generally sold for the same price within Syria; the sales often only take place in one location in the country anyway. In this respect, a fixed book price does not necessarily exist in legal terms, but rather as a result of the distribution system. Because of the agency and commission system associated with selling books abroad, there are differences in price, but this is also due to different levels of purchasing power. Discounts are generally granted during the Damascus Book Fair, though not during the first days, but rather in its later stages (discounts come to around 20% of the regular price).
Copyright laws
National law Nr. 12 from 27 February 2001 for the protection of authors’ rights
Berne Convention for the protection of works of literature and art, since June 2004.
Only since the Syria’s accession to the Berne Convention have foreign copyrights been
protected. However, the enforcement of copyright protection is not ensured.

Licensing statistics
In the period from 2004 to 2008, nine German licenses were sold to Syria (Buch und Buchhandel
in Zahlen 2009). This accounts for 5 % of all licenses sold by German publishers to Arab
countries. Nearly three times as many licenses (24) were allotted to Saudi Arabia, while in
Lebanon’s case, that number is 55. Rights sales to Arab countries, however, comprise only 0.4 %
of the German licensing trade.
Licensing statistics are not administered in Syria – neither on the part of the Ministry of Culture,
nor by the Syrian Publishers Association. It is important to remember that the legal situation
until 2004 (accession to the Berne Convention) allowed translations to be published without a
license. In the 15 years from 1990 to 2004, the Ministry of Culture, for example, published 1,487
titles, 640 of which were translations (43 %). The translation activities of the public sector are
largely in decline, though they are considered to be on the rise in the private sector.

Export / Import
Exports in the category HS 4901 (Harmonized System Code for books, brochures and similar
printed products, in use in Syria since 2002) amounted to 43.5 million SYP in 2004 (exchange
rate in 2004: 1 USD = 48.65 SYP). Saudi Arabia was the largest market (12.5 million SYP), followed
by Algeria (10.9 million SYP), with Lebanon accounting for only 2.8 million SYP.
Imports in the category HS 4901 reached a value of 209.5 million SYP in 2004, of which 87.3
million SYP was attributed to European Union countries. Lebanon was the largest Arab trading
partner for book imports in 2004 at 72.3 million SYP.
Syria’s foreign trade figures are not always reliable and occasionally do not correspond with the
statistics of the relevant trading partner (export figures in Syria equal to import figures in the
destination country and vice versa). Unless a different HS classification is the underlying cause,
it must be assumed that shipments are intentionally declared to be a different value than their
actual value, be it by the bookseller or customs officials.

Number of publishers and bookstores
Around 400 private publishers are registered in the Syrian Ministry of Information, of which
about 100 are operational. In September 2005, the Syrian Publishers Association had 82
members. The Ministry of Culture in Damascus is responsible for government book projects,
similar to the GEBO in Egypt. From 1990 to 2004, the public sector accounted for around 8% of
the number of titles published annually. Thus private publishers publish a higher number of
titles, but with lower print runs of around 1,000 copies. Though the government publishes fewer
titles, the print runs are much higher (in the tens of thousands).

Sales / distribution
Books are distributed in a mixed system of direct sales by the publisher, collaborations with
other publishers and with the involvement of agents. The number of general bookstores
nationwide does not exceed 30, and these are mainly restricted to urban centres.
**Book Fair**
The Damascus Book Fair ([http://www.alassad-library.gov.sy/book_fair.html](http://www.alassad-library.gov.sy/book_fair.html)) is organised annually by the Al-Asad national library. In 2010, the 16th book fair will take place from 29 July to 8 August. In 2009, 19 countries with a total of 412 publishers and distributors were represented at the fair. The number of titles amounted to around 39,350. The book fair is primarily used for direct sales, but also offers a platform for cultivating business relationships with authors and publishers. Syrian publishers increasingly participate at international book fairs, particularly in the Gulf countries (Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Riyadh, Jeddah).

*(As of: May 2010)*