



**EASO COI QUERY
FINAL ANSWER**

Syrian in Gulf States

Date of the query 10 May 2016
Completion date 8 June 2016

Question/Subject

Syrians in the Gulf States

What is the current residence status for Syrians who entered the Gulf before 2011? And for those who entered the Gulf States after the beginning of the Syrian conflict?

Being aware that the Gulf States only allow labour migration, is it possible for Syrians to have permanent residence status or only temporary permits with renewal options? Are there differences if the arrival occurred before or after 2011?

Do Syrians who left the Gulf States and traveled to Europe maintain their residence permit valid upon return or do they lose their right of residence in the Gulf states?

If possible, kindly indicate to which Gulf state the information refers to - Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Emirates, and Oman.

Disclaimer

The response to this COI query has been elaborated according to the EASO COI Query User Guide, the Common EU Guidelines for Processing COI and the EASO COI Report Methodology. The information provided has been researched, evaluated and processed with utmost care within a limited time frame. However, this document does not pretend to be exhaustive neither conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection status. If a certain event, person or organization is not mentioned in the response, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organization does not exist.

Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

The information in the report does not necessarily reflect the opinion of EASO and makes no political statement whatsoever.

The target audience is case workers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision making authorities.

The answer was finalised in Malta, on 8 June 2016. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this answer.

Contributing Countries

The final answer is based on information provided by COI experts from CH, FI, LU, NL and NO.

Answer

Preliminary note

Two out of five responding EU+ countries do not have available information on Syrians in the Gulf States.

Three answering EU+ country shared information on Syrians in the Gulf States:

CH

In the Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2015 and 2014 on Saudi Arabia by the US State department some references are made to the status and services for Syrian refugees: Section 2d:

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=252945>

<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2014&dliid=236620>

NL

Many more Syrians are living in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States (excluding Oman) than at the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011.¹ These Syrians are technically not “refugees,” because Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf States are not signatories to the 1951 UNHCR convention. NGOs that work in the region are harshly critical of the Gulf States’ response to the Syrian crisis. Gulf States, intentions aside, allowing Syrians to live in their territory has helped relieve the humanitarian crisis somewhat.

Some Gulf States claim that they have actually relaxed their entry and residency laws to accommodate sizeable numbers of Syrian nationals since the start of the conflict.² NGOs are critical however. According to HRW refugee program director Bill Frelick:

"There's a de facto refugee system that works through migrant workers who get work visas and maybe are actually fleeing persecution and conflict, but are not recognized as such and are not protected as such," he explains. "They are there basically under the rubric of being a migrant worker."³

Refugees being treated as migrant workers also means that when a person loses his or her job, he or she will lose free access to healthcare and education for their children. They remain solely dependent on relatives already living in the country or on charity. The Gulf Countries will not send them back to Syria, but they do not grant more favorable treatment either.⁴

¹ The World Bank, *Migration and Remittances Data*, 2016, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data>

² Gulf News, *UAE has eased residency rules for Syrians*, 10 September 2015, <http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/government/uae-has-eased-residency-rules-for-syrians-1.1582025>

³ WNYC, *Gulf States Taking Heat For Not Resettling Syrian Refugees*, 9 September 2015, <http://www.wnyc.org/story/gulf-states-pressured-to-do-more-to-help-syrian-refugees/>

⁴ The Conversation, *Saudi Arabia doesn't 'do' refugees – it's time to change that*, 23 September 2015, <http://theconversation.com/saudi-arabia-doesnt-do-refugees-its-time-to-change-that-47307> ; Jane Kinninmont, Chatham House, *Why Aren't Gulf Countries Taking in Syrian Refugees?* 8 September 2015, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/why-aren-t-gulf-countries-taking-syrian-refugees> .

NO

As early as in October 2013, Landinfo was told by a diplomatic source with a good knowledge of the issue, that there were several indications that UAE policies of entry and work permit for citizens of Syria had been tightened. No official confirmation was available, however. According to the source, Syrians already staying in the UAE were reportedly experiencing more frequently that family members were being denied entry visa. Apart from this, the source had the impression that citizens of Syria, who held work permit and legal residency in the UAE for a long time, were no longer being granted renewals⁵. This is the most recent information available. According to our knowledge, modifications to immigration policies are seldom publicly announced by the UAE authorities.

⁵ Landinfo Respons 28 Feb 2014, http://www.landinfo.no/asset/2885/1/2885_1.pdf .