

Syrian Arab Republic

The Syrian Arab Republic, Al-Jumhuriya Al-Arabiya As-Souriya, has a surface area of 185,180 square kilometres and its population is around 24 million. The country is divided into fourteen Governorates, and the capital, Damascus, and its surrounding area constitute a Governorate on its own. Urban dwellers constitute about 55% of the total population and their proportion of the total is rapidly increasing.

Syria's new constitution became valid as of 27 February 2012, and the Supreme Constitutional Court is to amend existing laws in accordance with this constitution within three years. The new constitution sets cultural diversity as one of the principles upon which governance should be based, and considers it a national heritage that consolidates national unity in the frame of the unity of the Syrian land. It guarantees the freedom of scientific, literary, artistic and cultural creativity, states that all citizens have the right to contribute to cultural life and guarantees the freedom and independence of press, publishing and media institutes.

The main laws that regulate cultural expressions and their production in Syria are the bylaws of the Ministry of Culture, Local Administration Law, Associations' Law, Copyright Law, Media Law, Antiquities Law and Illiteracy Alleviation Law. Syria has ratified several UNESCO conventions, in addition to those in the field of environment. The principal area of its cultural international collaboration is archaeology and cultural heritage.

The Ministry of Culture is the authority responsible for implementing cultural projects beyond capacities of local administrative units (Governorates, cities, towns and districts), in addition to its role of planning and evaluation the cultural process, while the elected councils of administrative units are responsible for local administration and actions aiming at the development of the Governorate, based on the principles of sustainable and balanced development.

Syria's main achievements related to the Convention are in the fields of illiteracy elimination and adult education, providing infrastructure for cultural production through establishing and equipping cultural centres, increasing theatrical performances and focusing on children's theatre, establishing new museums and developing existing ones, increasing archaeological research and heritage documentation, organizing fine art exhibits, and updating the legal framework for cultural work in the country.

Main challenges related to implementing the Convention are the lack of funds allocated to culture, lack of local statistics in the field, difficulty in achieving balanced cultural development between different Governorates due to differences in available infrastructure, plus administrative challenges related to the distribution of responsibilities in the cultural field over several governmental entities, mainly the Ministries of Culture and that of Local Administration.

Priorities related to the Convention are: the institutional and legislative development, developing infrastructure, adult education, developing the cinema industry, theatre and fine arts, focusing on children's culture, improving museums and rehabilitating archaeological sites, documenting Syria's heritage, and building internal capacities.

This report was prepared through a collaborative effort between the Directorate of Popular Heritage at the Ministry of Culture and the Council of Ministers represented by the Planning and International Cooperation Commission and the Central Bureau of Statistics, and through the consultations with other governmental and non-governmental entities.