

# Syria: Country Focus

# **Syria: Country focus**

## **Country of Origin Information Report**

**July 2026**



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## Disclaimer

This report was written according to the [EUAA COI Report Methodology \(2023\)](#). It is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care within a limited timeframe. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

‘Refugee’, ‘risk’ and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither EUAA nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

On 19 January 2022, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) became the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA). All references to EASO, EASO products and bodies should be understood as references to the EUAA.

The drafting of this report was finalised on 8 June 2026. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the methodology section of the [Introduction](#)



## Glossary and abbreviations

| Term          | Definition                                                                                                                   |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>DAANES</b> | Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria                                                                 |
| <b>GSS</b>    | General Security Service                                                                                                     |
| <b>HTS</b>    | Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham                                                                                                        |
| <b>IDP</b>    | Internally Displaced Person                                                                                                  |
| <b>ISIL</b>   | Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State (IS), or Daesh |
| <b>MoD</b>    | Ministry of Defence                                                                                                          |
| <b>Mol</b>    | Ministry of Interior                                                                                                         |
| <b>SAA</b>    | Syrian Arab Army                                                                                                             |
| <b>SDF</b>    | Syrian Democratic Forces                                                                                                     |
| <b>SNA</b>    | Syrian National Army                                                                                                         |
| <b>YPG</b>    | Kurdish People's Protection Units                                                                                            |



# Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide relevant information for the assessment of applications for international protection, and in particular for use in updating EUAA's country guidance on Syria.

The report covers the period of October 2025 – May 2026, and should be read in conjunction the EUAA COI reports: [Syria - Country Focus \(July 2025\)](#) and [Syria - Country Focus \(March 2025\)](#).

## Methodology

This report was drafted by EUAA and reviewed by EUAA and national COI departments in EU+ countries, as mentioned in the [Acknowledgements](#) section.

This report is produced in line with the EUAA COI Report Methodology (2023)<sup>1</sup> and the EUAA COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2023).<sup>2</sup>

## Defining the terms of reference

The terms of reference (ToR) of this report were defined by EUAA based on discussions held and input received from COI experts in the EUAA COI specialist network on Syria and from policy experts in EU+ countries within the framework of a Country Guidance development on Syria. The ToR also build on previous EUAA COI reports on Syria covering the same topics. The Terms of Reference for this report can be found in [Annex 2: Terms of Reference](#) of this report.

## Collecting information

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources until 14 May 2026. Some limited additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 8 June 2026.

## Quality control

To ensure that the authors respected the EUAA COI Report Methodology and that the Terms of Reference were comprehensively addressed, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries and organisations listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were

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<sup>1</sup> EUAA, EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, February 2023, [url](#)

<sup>2</sup> EUAA, Writing and Referencing Guide for EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, February 2023, [url](#)

implemented in the final draft of this report, which was finalised on 8 June 2026. EUAA also performed the final quality review and editing of the text.

## Sources

In accordance with EUAA COI methodology, a range of different published documentary sources have been consulted on relevant topics for this report. These include: COI reports by governments; information from civil society, advocacy groups, humanitarian organisations, and NGOs; international and NGO human rights reports; reports produced by various bodies of the United Nations; Syrian and regionally-based media; academic publications and think tank reports and specialised sources covering Syria. All information from these sources was consulted within time constraints.

In addition to using publicly available documentary sources, this report draws on information obtained through interviews conducted with several oral sources. The sources were assessed for their background, publication history, reputability and current ground-level knowledge. All oral sources are described in [Annex 1: Bibliography](#).

# Map



Map 1: Syrian Arab Republic, © United Nations<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic, Map No. 4204 Rev. 4, August 2022, [url](#)



# 1. State structure and governance

## 1.1. Internal political developments

On 8 December 2024, a coalition of armed opposition groups led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) overthrew the government of Bashar al-Assad, bringing more than 50 years of Ba'ath Party rule in Syria to an end.<sup>4</sup> In January 2025, the Parliament and all political parties including the Ba'ath party were dissolved.<sup>5</sup> Ahmad al-Sharaa, leader of HTS, was named President for the transitional period.<sup>6</sup> In March 2025, the President signed a Constitutional Declaration replacing the 2012 Constitution<sup>7</sup> and outlining a five-year transitional period.<sup>8</sup> A permanent Constitution and national elections are envisaged by 2030.<sup>9</sup>

The Constitutional Declaration establishes a strong presidential system without a prime minister, granting the president sweeping powers with minimal oversight. The president appoints all ministers, vice presidents, and judges of the Higher Constitutional Court, and selects all members of parliament, one third by direct appointment and the rest selected by a 'high committee' he forms. The president can also issue executive orders, propose laws, declare states of emergency for up to three months (with approval from a National Security Council he appoints), and serves as head of the armed forces.<sup>10</sup> The broad presidential powers were justified in the Constitutional Declaration as 'necessary for Syria's transitional phase'.<sup>11</sup>

In March 2025, the formation of a transitional government composed of 23 ministers was announced. The cabinet was dominated by ministers associated with HTS, alongside technocrats, civil society figures and some officials from the pre-2011 administration. The cabinet included ministers from diverse ethno-religious background. However, their lack of affiliation with established political factions has prompted criticism that their inclusion is largely symbolic and does not provide meaningful representation.<sup>12</sup> A government cabinet reshuffle was announced in May 2026,<sup>13</sup> but observers noted that most new appointees worked in the former HTS-led administration in Idlib,<sup>14</sup> and key portfolios are still held by al-Sharaa associates.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>4</sup> HRW, World Report 2026; Syria, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>5</sup> Al-Jurdi, W., Syria's First Parliament After Assad: Empty Seats and Empty Promises?, BTI, 2 December 2025, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Syria's Baath party dissolved: What happens next?, 30 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>6</sup> Al Jazeera, President al-Sharaa and no more Baath party: What else has Syria announced?, 29 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>7</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 7

<sup>8</sup> Security Council Report, April 2025 Monthly Forecast, 31 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>9</sup> OSES, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Claudio Cordone - Briefing to the Security Council, 18 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>10</sup> International Crisis Group, What Lies in Store for Syria as a New Government Takes Power?, 25 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>11</sup> HRW, World Report 2026; Syria, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>12</sup> Tabler, Andrew J., Cutting Through the Fog of War (and Peace) in Syria, TWI, 10 February 2026, [url](#); International Crisis Group, What Lies in Store for Syria as a New Government Takes Power?, 25 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>13</sup> New Arab (The), Syria sets first cabinet reshuffle since Assad ouster, 12 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>14</sup> Zelin, A., Syria's New Government Appointments: More Continuity Than Change, TWI, 22 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>15</sup> Al-Tamimi, A., New Syrian Cabinet and Governor Appointments: Translation & Overview, Middle East Forum, 11 May 2026, [url](#)





Indirect parliamentary elections were held in October 2025 across most of Syria, apart from areas outside transitional government control in Sweida, Raqqa and Hasaka.<sup>16</sup> Of the 199 elected members, the majority were Sunni Muslim men, with only 13 % of seats contested won by women and minority candidates (one Christian, three Ismailis, three Alawites, four Kurds and no Druze). The elections were criticised as rushed and lacking adequate representation of women and minorities.<sup>17</sup> Indirect elections were held in Raqqa governorate in March 2026<sup>18</sup> and in Hasaka governorate and Kobane/Ayn al-Arab district (Aleppo governorate) in May 2026, while Sweida remained outside of the electoral process.<sup>19</sup> The President is expected to appoint the remaining 70 members of parliament and formally announce its opening<sup>20</sup> which is envisaged for June 2026.<sup>21</sup>

### 1.1.1. Territorial control

The transitional government expanded its control over most parts of the country, including areas in northeast Syria where, following a military operation in January 2026, it took control of large swathes of territory previously held by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).<sup>22</sup> As of early May 2026<sup>23</sup>, the government controlled the majority of the country, with the exception of large parts of Sweida governorate<sup>24</sup> and areas of Hasaka governorate around Hasaka and Qamishli cities, as well as Kobane/Ayn al-Arab in Aleppo governorate.<sup>25</sup> The transitional government has also deployed security contingents in the cities of Hasaka, Qamishli and Kobane.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 32, 34

<sup>17</sup> Security Council Report, Syria November 2025 Monthly Forecast, 2 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>18</sup> Security Council Report, Syria April 2026 Monthly Forecast, 1 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>19</sup> New Arab (The), Syria names new lawmakers after vote in former Kurdish-held northeast, 25 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>20</sup> Security Council Report, Syria April 2026 Monthly Forecast, 1 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>21</sup> New Arab (The), Syria names new lawmakers after vote in former Kurdish-held northeast, 25 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>22</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 7

<sup>23</sup> Liveuamap, Syria, 6 May 2026, [url](#)

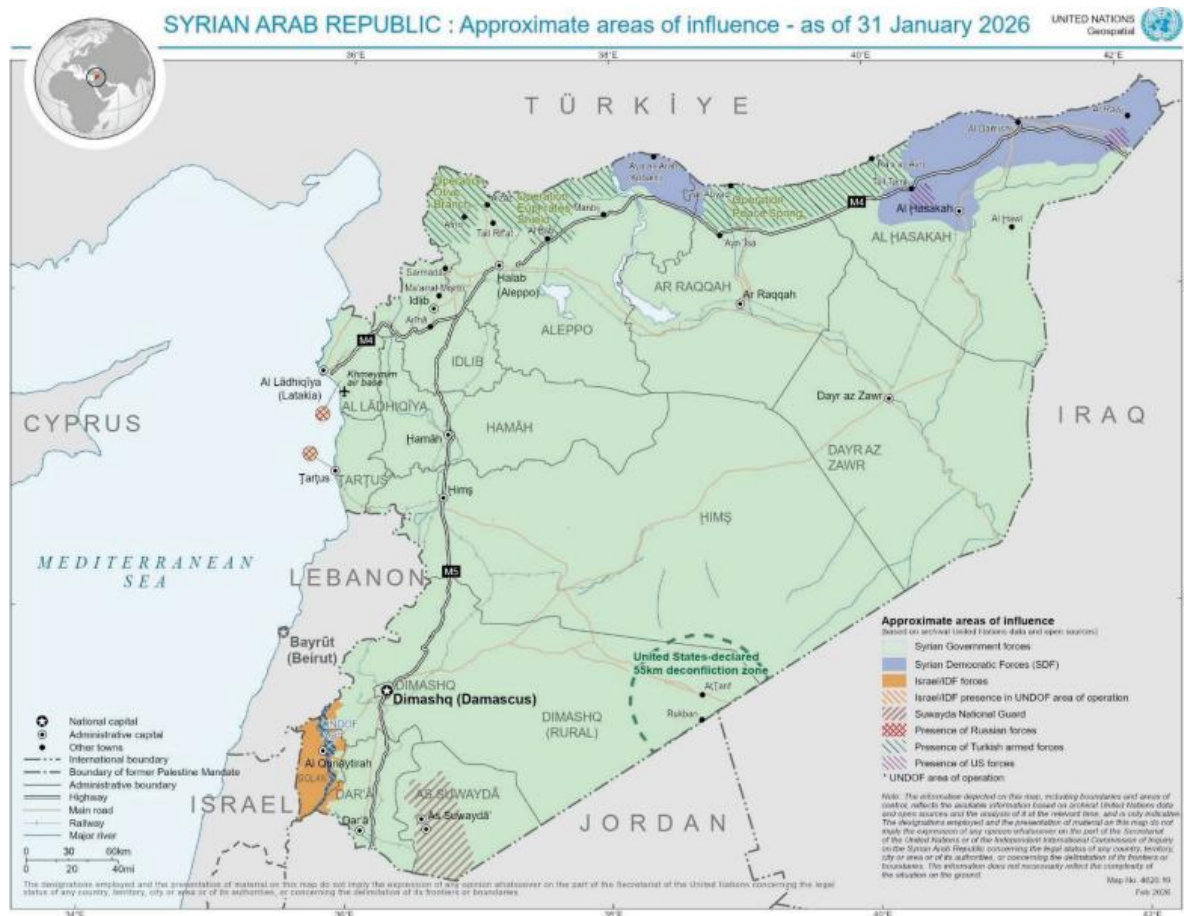
<sup>24</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 23

<sup>25</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 23; see map in Etana Syria, Brief: Recent developments in north-east Syria, 12 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>26</sup> AFP, Syria Govt Forces Enter Qamishli Under Agreement with Kurds, 3 February 2026, [url](#); Reuters, Syrian state forces deploy in Kurdish-run city under ceasefire deal, 2 February 2026, [url](#); National (The), Syrian forces begin deployment to Hasakah, Kobani and Qamishli cities under deal to integrate SDF-held areas, 2 February 2026, [url](#)







**Map 2. © United Nations, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence – as of 31 January 2026<sup>27</sup>**

### 1.1.2. Developments in the relationship between the transitional government and Druze actors

Following the July 2025 violence in Sweida governorate involving Druze and Bedouin communities, as well as military interventions by government forces and Israel,<sup>28</sup> most of the governorate remains under the control of local Druze authorities.<sup>29</sup> On 16 September 2025, the U.S., Jordan, and Syria agreed on a roadmap to address intercommunal violence in Sweida governorate and to ultimately facilitate the integration of Sweida governorate into the state.<sup>30</sup> The roadmap was rejected by the Sweida Autonomous Government who controls most of the governorate<sup>31</sup> and are calling instead for self-determination.<sup>32</sup> The progress of the

<sup>27</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), Annex III, p. 45

<sup>28</sup> OHCHR, UN Syria Commission releases report on July massacres and other grave violations committed in Suwayda and calls for expanded accountability measures, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>29</sup> Enab Baladi, “Legal Committee” rejects roadmap for solution in Suwayda, 17 September 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 7

<sup>30</sup> ISW and CT, Iran Update, 16 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>31</sup> Enab Baladi, “Legal Committee” rejects roadmap for solution in Suwayda, 17 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>32</sup> Enab Baladi, Suwayda Protest Backs al-Hijri, Seeks Self-Determination, 12 April 2026, [url](#)

roadmap has been slow<sup>33</sup> while accountability for the July 2025 violence remains a concern.<sup>34</sup> Ceasefire violations between the government forces and Druze armed groups have been reported over the reference period, at times prompting Israel strikes against pro-government forces.<sup>35</sup>

### 1.1.3. Developments in the relationship between the transitional government and SDF

Despite a March 2025 agreement to complete the integration of Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) into government institutions by year's end, clashes persisted throughout 2025 between former Syrian National Army (SNA) factions and the SDF in the northeast. After the deadline expired, a government military operation targeted Kurdish-controlled areas of Aleppo, followed by the takeover by the government of large swathes of SDF territory in northeast Syria. Subsequent ceasefire agreements between the two sides in late January 2026 largely brought the fighting to a halt.<sup>36</sup> The integration of the SDF and DAANES into state institutions is ongoing. Developments include the appointment of an SDF-nominated Assistant Minister of Defense, the start of returns to areas affected by the conflict, and an exchange of around 600 detainees between the two sides.<sup>37</sup> The transitional government has assumed control of civil administration in formerly SDF controlled areas<sup>38</sup> and in early May, four SDF brigades had officially been incorporated into the Ministry of Defence (MoD).<sup>39</sup> However, significant unresolved issues remain. Disputes over military integration,<sup>40</sup> administrative appointments, recognition of DAANES-issued education certificates, and lack of women representation in appointed positions have been highlighted by the DAANES representatives. Additional points under negotiation include the status of the Women's Protection Units (YPJ), control of border crossings, Kurdish representation in the Parliament, and participation in future constitutional drafting.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law violations committed during the July 2025 violence in Suwayda, Syria, 27 March 2026, [url](#), para. 56; Etana Syria, Brief: Recent Developments in Suwayda, 14 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>34</sup> Security Council Report, Syria May 2026 Monthly Forecast, 1 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>35</sup> Etana Syria, Brief: Recent Developments in Suwayda, 14 April 2026, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch March 2026, n.d., [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch November 2025, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>36</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 21

<sup>37</sup> Security Council Report, Syria April 2026 Monthly Forecast, 1 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>38</sup> Etana Syria, Analysis: Progress & Challenges in SDF integration, 28 March 2026, [url](#); Security Council Report, June 2026 Monthly Forecast, 1 June 2026, [url](#); SANA, Hasakah deputy governor says integration of Asayish personnel to begin soon, 5 June 2026, [url](#)

<sup>39</sup> Enab Baladi, Hamo: Four SDF Brigades Join Defense Ministry, 2 May 2026, [url](#); Rudaw, Four SDF brigades integrated, but army cohesion remains elusive: Kurdish defense official, 2 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>40</sup> Etana Syria, Brief: Recent developments in north-east Syria, 9 April 2026, [url](#); Bodette, M., YPJ Integration: What are the Obstacles?, Kurdish Peace Institute, 26 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>41</sup> Security Council Report, Syria May 2026 Monthly Forecast, 1 May 2026, [url](#)



## 1.2. International relations

At UN Security Council level, there was reportedly broad agreement that the Syrian transitional government needs international support to rebuild the country and its weakened economy, including through easing unilateral sanctions.<sup>42</sup> In 2025, the European Union (EU)<sup>43</sup> and U.S.<sup>44</sup> lifted economic sanctions on Syria. In November 2025, Syria also gained access to the international banking system SWIFT after 14 years.<sup>45</sup>

In a November 2025 vote, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2799, removing interim president Ahmed al-Sharaa and interim interior minister Anas Khattab from the UN's Islamic State and Al Qaeda sanctions list.<sup>46</sup> Syria subsequently joined the US-led Global Coalition against Daesh (ISIL)<sup>47</sup> and participated with forces in operations against the group.<sup>48</sup>

The US completed its withdrawal of forces from Syria in April 2026 after more than a decade of presence in the country<sup>49</sup>, handing over its bases to the transitional government.<sup>50</sup>

Since 8 December 2024, Israel has significantly intensified military operations in Syria through extensive airstrikes and ground incursions in southern governorates, actions criticised by the UN Secretary General as violations of the 1974 agreement.<sup>51</sup> These operations, including hundreds of incursions into Quneitra governorate,<sup>52</sup> have reportedly caused civilian casualties,<sup>53</sup> displacement, property destruction, arbitrary detentions,<sup>54</sup> transfers of detainees, and restrictions on fundamental freedoms.<sup>55</sup> Israel has also carried out strikes against transitional government forces in the context of the conflict between government forces and Druze factions, stating that the attacks were intended to protect the Druze community.<sup>56</sup> US-mediated negotiations between the transitional government and Israel took place during the

<sup>42</sup> Security Council Report, Syria January 2026 Monthly Forecast, 30 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>43</sup> Council of the EU, Syria: Council statement on the lifting of EU economic sanctions, 20 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>44</sup> US CRS, Syria: Transition and U.S. Policy, 26 February 2026, [url](#), Sanctions Relief and Remaining Authorities

<sup>45</sup> SANA, Syria's Central Bank resumes SWIFT operations after 14-year halt, 21 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>46</sup> UN Security Council, Resolution 2799 (2025) Adopted by the Security Council at its 10036th meeting, on 6 November 2025, 6 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>47</sup> Atlantic Council, Syria joining the anti-ISIS coalition is a westward pivot—with opportunities and risks, 21 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>48</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 22

<sup>49</sup> Yacoubian, M., Todman, W., The United States Withdraws from Syria | State of Play, CSIS, 20 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>50</sup> Security Council Report, Syria May 2026 Monthly Forecast, 1 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>51</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 13, 82

<sup>52</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 13, 82

<sup>53</sup> BBC News, Thirteen killed in deadliest Israeli raid for months in southern Syria, 28 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>54</sup> Security Council Report, Syria May 2026 Monthly Forecast, 1 May 2026, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 13, 82; OHCHR, Human rights update on Syria, 28 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>55</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 13, 82

<sup>56</sup> Security Council Report, Syria April 2026 Monthly Forecast, 1 April 2026, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law violations committed during the July 2025 violence in Suwayda, Syria, 27 March 2026, [url](#), paras 22, 36, 40



reporting period although no formal agreement was reached.<sup>57</sup> The transitional government continued to demand the full withdrawal of Israel forces from southern Syria.<sup>58</sup>

Since 28 February 2026, the regional escalation in the Middle East has also affected Syria, where falling debris from intercepted Iranian missiles and drones caused civilian casualties,<sup>59</sup> while intensified hostilities in Lebanon prompted more than 440 000 Syrians living in the country to cross into Syria.<sup>60</sup>

### 1.3. Security institutions

Upon assuming power, the transitional government announced the dissolution of the former regime's army and security agencies,<sup>61</sup> including the police force.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, it initiated the formation of a new unified Syrian army through the integration of former opposition factions<sup>63</sup> as well as building a new police force through rapid recruitment drives.<sup>64</sup>

Security operations are managed by both the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Ministry of Interior (MoI).<sup>65</sup> The MoD manages the Syrian Armed Forces<sup>66</sup>, and is tasked with overseeing conventional military operations.<sup>67</sup> The December 2024 agreement to dissolve former opposition factions and integrate them into the MoD was framed as ending militia rule, but in practice groups were largely absorbed intact, retaining their command structures. The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) described this arrangement as 'reflagging' rather than genuine dissolution. It has resulted in uneven discipline and weak command and control, with factions, particularly Turkish-backed SNA groups, remaining formally subordinate while maintaining significant autonomy.<sup>68</sup> As of September 2025, the new Syrian army was estimated to comprise 20 active divisions; however, the transitional government's aim of having 10 000 troops per division was assessed by ISW as unfeasible to sustain in the near term.<sup>69</sup> HTS and SNA factions constitute much of the new Syrian army's officer corps and manpower.<sup>70</sup>

On 30 January 2026, the transitional government and SDF agreed on the establishing of a new army division comprising three SDF brigades and a Kobane/Ayn al-Arab brigade within an

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<sup>57</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch January 2026, n.d., [url](#); Security Council Report, Syria February 2026 Monthly Forecast, 1 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>58</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch January 2026, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>59</sup> Security Council Report, Syria: Briefing and Consultations, 20 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>60</sup> UNHCR, UNHCR Facilitated Return of Syrian Refugees – Lebanon - 31 May 2026, 8 June 2026, [url](#)

<sup>61</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 17

<sup>62</sup> Reuters, Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police, 23 January 2025, [url](#); Economist (The), The great pretender: how Ahmed al-Sharaa won Syria, 5 March 2025, [url](#); AP, One week into a new Syria, rebels aim for normalcy and Syrians vow not to be silent again, 16 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>63</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 17

<sup>64</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 17

<sup>65</sup> Waters, G., The New Syrian Army: Structure and Commanders, Syria Revisited, 28 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>66</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 18

<sup>67</sup> Waters, G., Are Damascus' New Security Reforms a form of Federalism?, Syria Revisited, 18 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>68</sup> Tabler, Andrew J., Cutting Through the Fog of War (and Peace) in Syria, TWI, 10 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>69</sup> ISW, The New Syrian Army: Order of Battle, 14 November 2025, [url](#), p. 27-28

<sup>70</sup> ISW, The New Syrian Army: Order of Battle, 14 November 2025, [url](#), p. 11



unspecified division in Aleppo governorate,<sup>71</sup> alongside additional brigades that would operate jointly across the northeast.<sup>72</sup> In early May, it was announced that four SDF brigades had officially been integrated.<sup>73</sup>

The Mol oversees security forces tasked with law enforcement functions,<sup>74</sup> including the civil police force<sup>75</sup> and the General Security Service<sup>76</sup> (GSS, known as Internal Security Forces - ISF from 25 May 2025),<sup>77</sup> which was the main policing force of HTS in northwestern Syria, and since the overthrow of Assad became the transitional government's gendarmerie.<sup>78</sup> The Mol's two armed branches, the GSS (ISF) and the civil police, are largely composed of Sunnis, primarily former opposition fighters and personnel who had served in the opposition administration in Idlib prior to Assad's fall.<sup>79</sup> The GSS (ISF) draws heavily from the former HTS forces in Idlib<sup>80</sup> although it has also expanded with large numbers of new recruits.<sup>81</sup> New recruits reportedly initially underwent two weeks of training.<sup>82</sup> In early November 2025, an Mol spokesperson stated that 'tens of thousands' had joined the GSS (ISF), expanding it far beyond its original 8 000 personnel, though authorities indicated the force still needs to triple in size.<sup>83</sup> As part of the agreement to integrate SDF-controlled civilian and military structures into the Syrian state, the SDF-affiliated internal security forces - Asayish are envisaged to join the Mol.<sup>84</sup> In early June, authorities announced that more than 9 000 Asayish members, including 1 000 women, would undergo interviews as part of the process of integration into the state security forces in Hasaka governorate.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Bodette, M., The SDF-Damascus Deal and the Kurdish Question: Prospects for Peace, Kurdish Peace Institute, 9 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>72</sup> Reuters, Syrian government, Kurds agree integration deal, US hails 'historic milestone', 30 January 2026, [url](#); Arab Centre Washington DC, The Shrinking Space for Kurdish Autonomy in Syria, 26 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>73</sup> Enab Baladi, Hamo: Four SDF Brigades Join Defense Ministry, 2 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>74</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 18

<sup>75</sup> Waters, G., Syria's Integration of Alawi Police, Syria Revisited, 3 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>76</sup> Al Jazeera, Syria's challenges to rebuild its armed forces, 4 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>77</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 18

<sup>78</sup> ISW and CT, Iran Update, 16 April 2025, [url](#); ISW, The New Syrian Army: Order of Battle, 14 November 2025, [url](#), p. 30

<sup>79</sup> Waters, G., Syria's Integration of Alawi Police, Syria Revisited, 3 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>80</sup> Tabler, Andrew J., Cutting Through the Fog of War (and Peace) in Syria, TWI, 10 February 2026, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>81</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>82</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 18

<sup>83</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>84</sup> Bodette, M., The SDF-Damascus Deal and the Kurdish Question: Prospects for Peace, Kurdish Peace Institute, 9 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>85</sup> Enab Baladi, 9,000 Asayish Members Nominated for Integration, Including 1,000 Women, 5 June 2026, [url](#); Rudaw, Damascus releases over 1,200 SDF-linked detainees, Asayish integration interviews on agenda: official, 3 June 2026, [url](#)





Prominent HTS figures have been appointed as Minister of Defence,<sup>86</sup> Minister of Interior and head of the General Intelligence Directorate.<sup>87</sup>

### 1.3.1. Recruitment practices

The transitional government formally abolished mandatory conscription<sup>88</sup> except in situations such as national emergencies.<sup>89</sup> It also announced that individuals wanted for military or reserve service by the Assad government will not face any issues. However, those with prior civil court judgments or civil charges will still be subject to assessment.<sup>90</sup>

Recruitment to the army is voluntary.<sup>91</sup> There were no reports of forced recruitment or social pressure to enlist in the new Syrian army.<sup>92</sup> Those who join are reportedly driven primarily by financial incentives, as army salaries are relatively high.<sup>93</sup> Recruitment drives have brought tens of thousands of new recruits while creating significant challenges, according to analysts. The rapid recruitment and integration of armed factions occurred without adequate vetting, which led to individuals subjected to sanctions for human rights being integrated,<sup>94</sup> while tens of thousands of trained officers and non-commissioned officers from the former Assad army remain unlikely to be incorporated into the new security apparatus.<sup>95</sup>

The new army is predominantly made of Sunni Arabs,<sup>96</sup> with some sources assessing that Sunni Arabs with a religiously conservative profile make a large proportion of those joining its ranks.<sup>97</sup> Neither the army nor the GSS (ISF) has significantly recruited members of Syrian minority groups, a situation likely influenced both by limited outreach and by minorities' reluctance to enlist.<sup>98</sup> Systematic recruitment of non-Sunni personnel and reintegration of vetted Assad-era police officers, especially in Alawite areas, only began in late summer of 2025, while earlier minority participation had been largely ad hoc and volunteer-based.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Rudaw, Syria's new cabinet draws criticism over controversial appointments, 30 March 2025, [url](#); ISW, The New Syrian Army: Order of Battle, 14 November 2025, [url](#), p. 41

<sup>87</sup> New Arab (The), Former HTS leader Hussein Al-Salama tapped to head Syrian intelligence, 6 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>88</sup> Enab Baladi, Syria's New Army: Challenges of Uniting Opposites, 30 October 2025, [url](#); DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 68, 80 [international organisation, SNHR]; New Arab (The), Why Al-Sharaa's scrapping of conscription for Syrians matters, 16 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>89</sup> New Arab (The), Why Al-Sharaa's scrapping of conscription for Syrians matters, 16 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>90</sup> SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026; New York Times (The), In Syria, Being Wanted Went From Something to Fear to a Badge of Honor, 20 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>91</sup> Memri TV, Military Command Member In Damascus Countryside: We Are Ending Mandatory Military Conscription – The New Syrian Army Will Be An Army Of Volunteers, 11 January 2025, [url](#); DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 59, 68, 80 [Syrian human rights organisation, international organisation, SNHR]

<sup>92</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 59, 68, 80 [Syrian human rights organisation, international organisation, SNHR]

<sup>93</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 59, 80 [international organisation, SNHR]

<sup>94</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 17

<sup>95</sup> Al Jazeera, Syria's challenges to rebuild its armed forces, 4 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>96</sup> ISW, The New Syrian Army: Order of Battle, 14 November 2025, [url](#), pp. 11, 30; Tabler, Andrew J., Cutting Through the Fog of War (and Peace) in Syria, TWI, 10 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>97</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, December 2025, [url](#), p. 60 [Syrian human rights organisation]

<sup>98</sup> ISW, The New Syrian Army: Order of Battle, 14 November 2025, [url](#), p. 30

<sup>99</sup> Tabler, Andrew J., Cutting Through the Fog of War (and Peace) in Syria, TWI, 10 February 2026, [url](#)



Islamic instruction was an important part of the training received by police<sup>100</sup> and army recruits.<sup>101</sup> Most soldiers and commanders reportedly start with three weeks of basic training. The new military recruited volunteers based on set criteria (ninth-grade education, ability to read, physical fitness), though former rebel fighters were incorporated regardless of these standards. Critics say some commanders were appointed primarily on the basis of loyalty<sup>102</sup> rather than qualifications, raising concerns about professionalism within the ranks.<sup>103</sup> Sources interviewed by the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that many officers failed to properly identify themselves and in practice they often followed orders from local commanders or sheikhs, reflecting weak central control.<sup>104</sup>

Around 3 000 defected officers had applied to join or had rejoined the new army. Recruitment practices indicate that the MoD prioritises defector officers, classified in two categories by their wartime role: those who fought against Assad regime units and those who were exempted from military service in recent years due to personal reasons, while excluding thousands of personnel who remained with pro-regime forces until the regime's collapse.<sup>105</sup> In November 2025, the MoD announced the reactivation of more than 2 000 defected officers from the former regime's army as part of broader military restructuring, following interviews with over 3 100 defected officers from various specialisations, many of whom have now been integrated into active army units.<sup>106</sup>

### 1.3.2. Capacity and effectiveness of security forces

Sources reported that MoI forces had stronger command and generally exhibited higher professionalism compared to the MoD forces<sup>107</sup> who displayed weak discipline and performed poorly during the events violence in the coastal areas (March 2025) and in Sweida (July 2025)<sup>108</sup> where they engaged in human rights violations.<sup>109</sup> Early army deployments revealed unsanctioned sectarian violence and other abuses, highlighting weak command and control over certain units, including SNA factions.<sup>110</sup> According to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (UNCOI), deficiencies in control, coordination, diversity, training, and discipline among nominally integrated factions contributed to violations, including those reported in coastal areas and in Sweida.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Reuters, Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police, 23 January 2025, [url](#); Jamestown Foundation, How al-Sharaa's New Syrian Regime Masks Its Islamism Behind Bureaucracy, 25 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>101</sup> New York Times (The), Syria, Rebuilding Its Military, Relies on Loyalists and Religious Teaching, 11 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>102</sup> ISW, The New Syrian Army: Order of Battle, 14 November 2025, [url](#), pp. 9-10, 23

<sup>103</sup> New York Times (The), Syria, Rebuilding Its Military, Relies on Loyalists and Religious Teaching, 11 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>104</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 128

<sup>105</sup> ISW, The New Syrian Army: Order of Battle, 14 November 2025, [url](#), p. 30

<sup>106</sup> New Arab (The), Syria restores defected Assad-era officers amid effort to rebuild army, 6 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>107</sup> Waters, G., The New Syrian Army: Structure and Commanders, Syria Revisited, 28 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>108</sup> Tabler, Andrew J., Cutting Through the Fog of War (and Peace) in Syria, TWI, 10 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>109</sup> ISW, The New Syrian Army: Order of Battle, 14 November 2025, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>110</sup> ISW, The New Syrian Army: Order of Battle, 14 November 2025, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>111</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 19



At times, security forces reportedly operated without a clearly defined chain of command,<sup>112</sup> and security personnel manning checkpoints<sup>113</sup> or carrying out security operations often lacked uniforms or identification, blurring the distinction between state actors and affiliated armed groups.<sup>114</sup> As of September 2025, there were approximately 800 traffic officers in Damascus and 250 in Rural Damascus. Their performance has prompted criticism of weak oversight, poor organisation, and inadequate knowledge of basic duties among some officers.<sup>115</sup> In Dar'a governorate, former fighters from local armed groups were integrated in the security forces but in July 2025, Syrian authorities dismissed at least 200 of them over misconduct following a series of abuses by GSS members, including killings, mistreatment of corpses, and involvement in blood feuds and personal disputes.<sup>116</sup>

According to Syrian Women's Political Movement (SWPM), the training and discipline of police and internal security forces vary widely, with effective responses in some areas while reports of abduction or violence are ignored in others. Although authorities occasionally announce disciplinary action, accountability remains inconsistent, and it is unclear whether shortcomings stem from limited capacity or insufficient political will.<sup>117</sup>

The transitional government has taken steps to strengthen control over security forces by centralising recruitment, tightening vetting procedures, and routing salaries received from Türkiye by former SNA factions through the MoD.<sup>118</sup> Some progress has also been made in redeploying army units with records of abuse away from sensitive areas, such as the Sultan Suleiman Shah Brigade (now the 62<sup>nd</sup> Division) and Hamzat division (now the 76<sup>th</sup> Division) from the coastal areas to Hama and Aleppo, respectively, and the 42<sup>nd</sup> Division involved in the Sweida clashes to the Syrian desert.<sup>119</sup> Although the MoD's forces conduct appeared to improve during later operations such as against the SDF in Aleppo city in early 2026,<sup>120</sup> widespread distrust persists.<sup>121</sup>

Training on international humanitarian and human rights standards for army factions began in mid-2025 with support from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the UN,

<sup>112</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), pp. 19-20; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Violations against civilians in Coastal and Western Central Syria in January - March 2025, 11 August 2025, [url](#), para 61, 70; ISW, The New Syrian Army: Order of Battle, 14 November 2025, [url](#), pp. 29-30

<sup>113</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 82 [international organisation]; STJ, Syria: Arrests and Abuse of Kurds During Aleppo Escalation (January 2026), 9 April 2026, [url](#); Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), pp. 11-12

<sup>114</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, Violations against civilians in Coastal and Western Central Syria in January - March 2025, 11 August 2025, [url](#), para 70, 72, 78; UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law violations committed during the July 2025 violence in Suwayda, Syria, 27 March 2026, [url](#), paras 55, 67-68

<sup>115</sup> Enab Baladi, Damascus traffic police chief admits city has only 800 officers, 21 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>116</sup> Syria Direct, Daraa security forces plagued by vendettas, abuse and controversial recruits, 2 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>117</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 92 [Syrian Women's Political Movement]

<sup>118</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), pp. 31-32

<sup>119</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), pp. 31-32; ISW, The New Syrian Army: Order of Battle, 14 November 2025, [url](#), pp. 46, 50, 51

<sup>120</sup> Atlantic Council, Eight questions (and expert answers) on the SDF's withdrawal from Syria's Aleppo, 13 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>121</sup> Tabler, Andrew J., Cutting Through the Fog of War (and Peace) in Syria, TWI, 10 February 2026, [url](#)





but stronger accountability measures, including comprehensive vetting, lustration, and professionalisation, were still required according to the UNCOI. The MoI also reported professionalisation efforts in 2025, such as issuing a code of conduct and creating a public complaints mechanism that led to accountability for cases of violence and corruption.<sup>122</sup>

Generally, the presence and functioning of security forces and law enforcement structures are considered to be more consistent in major urban centres<sup>123</sup> such as Damascus,<sup>124</sup> Homs, Aleppo, Latakia<sup>125</sup> and Hama,<sup>126</sup> where security forces have a stronger presence. However, security conditions remain uneven across regions, with some areas still prone to instability, local tensions, and communal violence.<sup>127</sup> Rural and peripheral areas remain harder to police due to widespread weapons and limited state authority, allowing armed groups and local actors greater autonomy.<sup>128</sup> Diverse areas such as the coastal region and the Hama and Homs governorates, home to Alawite, Christian, and Ismaili communities, pose particular challenges, as intense civil war violence there has left strong grievances and desires for retribution.<sup>129</sup>

## 1.4. Judiciary

### 1.4.1. Judicial reforms

The March 2025 Constitutional Declaration asserts judicial independence but does not include specific safeguards to ensure it. Article 47 gives the president the authority to appoint all seven members of the Higher Constitutional Court without parliamentary or external oversight.<sup>130</sup> Critics of the decision have pointed out that the judiciary may be vulnerable to political interference and have limited capacity to hold the president accountable.<sup>131</sup> The Constitutional Declaration also elevated Islamic jurisprudence from ‘a main source’ of legislation, as stated in the 2012 Constitution, to ‘the primary source.’<sup>132</sup>

Government reforms included salary increases for judges,<sup>133</sup> the dismissal of judges who held political roles in the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party and the People's Assembly (Parliament),<sup>134</sup> the

<sup>122</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 19

<sup>123</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 66 [Syria Direct]; Haid, H., One year of new Syrian rule: progress and challenges, Al Majalla, 10 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>124</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 66 [Syria Direct]; International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>125</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 66 [Syria Direct]

<sup>126</sup> International Crisis Group, Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>127</sup> Haid, H., One year of new Syrian rule: progress and challenges, Al Majalla, 10 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>128</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 66 [Syria Direct]

<sup>129</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>130</sup> HRW, Syria: Constitutional Declaration Risks Endangering Rights, 25 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>131</sup> HRW, Recommendations on Next Steps for Comprehensive Justice for Syria, 17 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>132</sup> BBC News, Syria leader signs temporary constitution for five-year transition, 14 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>133</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 31; Enab Baladi, Syria raises judges' salaries up to \$1,200 in major pay hike, 4 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>134</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 31; STJ, Syria: The Minister of Justice Powers in Transitional Government: Reform Imperatives and Legal Constraints, 13 March 2025, [url](#)



abolishing of exceptional courts and nullification of their rulings,<sup>135</sup> the dissolution of the Counter-Terrorism Court,<sup>136</sup> the judicial investigation of judges linked to the Counter-Terrorism Court, and the establishment of a committee to review rulings of the former Counter-Terrorism Court.<sup>137</sup>

In early 2025, the transitional government's Ministry of Justice established the controversial role of 'Head of the Judicial Directorate' (often referred to as the '*Sheikh*') to oversee courts, surpassing the authority of previous Attorneys General. The decision has been criticised for encroaching on judicial independence, having no legal basis in older Syrian law, and being imposed via ministerial decision.<sup>138</sup> This governance model was previously used in northwestern Syria under HTS and the Salvation Government. According to judges, appointments to this role are non-transparent and often based on loyalty and prior affiliation with HTS. The position is typically held by religious jurists or individuals linked to HTS, some reportedly lacking formal legal education or judicial experience, and it exercises significant practical authority over the judiciary, including control over judges' appointments, transfers, and leave. Appointments are now reportedly subject to approval (*tazkiya*) based on past loyalty rather than merit.<sup>139</sup> The UNCOI similarly noted reports of individuals without required legal qualifications reportedly being appointed as heads of courts.<sup>140</sup>

#### 1.4.2. Capacity and effectiveness of the judiciary

According to several sources, the legal system has functioned poorly following the fall of Assad. Many judges who served under the previous regime were dismissed and replaced by new appointees, some of whom had worked in Idlib and were trained primarily in Islamic jurisprudence rather than Syrian civil law, and in some cases reportedly lacked formal law degrees.<sup>141</sup> A lawyer in Damascus interviewed by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) assessed that, while the conduct of judges became more courteous and service-oriented, corruption and bribery remain widespread, reportedly driven in part by extremely low salaries that do not cover basic living costs.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>135</sup> SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026; Syrian Observer (The), Minister of Justice Announces Abolition of Exceptional Courts and Commitment to Transitional Justice, 12 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>136</sup> Syria Direct, Shaking hands: Will the Counter-Terrorism Court's Ammar Bilal escape accountability?, 14 April 2025, [url](#); STJ, Syria: The Minister of Justice Powers in Transitional Government: Reform Imperatives and Legal Constraints, 13 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>137</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 31

<sup>138</sup> STJ, Syria – The Newly Created Position of "Sheikh/Head of the Judicial Directorate": Entrenching Loyalties at the Expense of Judicial Independence, 2 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>139</sup> STJ, Syria – The Newly Created Position of "Sheikh/Head of the Judicial Directorate": Entrenching Loyalties at the Expense of Judicial Independence, 2 October 2025, [url](#); SE, Swedish Migration Agency, Syrien Säkerhet och skydd i områden under de facto-myndigheternas control [Syria Security and protection in areas under the control of the de facto authorities], 11 November 2025, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>140</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 31

<sup>141</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 128; SE, Swedish Migration Agency, Syrien Säkerhet och skydd i områden under de facto-myndigheternas control [Syria Security and protection in areas under the control of the de facto authorities], 11 November 2025, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>142</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 89 [lawyer in Damascus]



The authorities stated that the judiciary was operating nationwide despite ongoing challenges<sup>143</sup> but it remained overstretched.<sup>144</sup> The Ministry of Justice acknowledges a significant backlog of cases and slow judicial proceedings.<sup>145</sup> For instance, in Homs, the central court reportedly handles nearly 2 000 administrative cases per month, including matters such as property transfers and civil status documentation while several sub-courts in the countryside remain damaged or only partially operational.<sup>146</sup> Court infrastructure in cities such as Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor, Idlib and Homs suffered extensive damage or destruction during the conflict, while judicial and documentation records, including case files, judgments and property records, were disrupted, destroyed or looted across large parts of the country.<sup>147</sup> The Ministry of Justice has been training a new cohort of judges and lawyers throughout the second half of 2025, with the first group expected to graduate in early 2026.<sup>148</sup>

Although some courts have resumed operations including criminal courts,<sup>149</sup> many files remained suspended as of December 2025, particularly those related to smuggling or violations committed under the former regime.<sup>150</sup>

Detention without judicial warrants persists,<sup>151</sup> and referral to the public prosecution remain subject to delay.<sup>152</sup> Judicial, security and police entities continue to restrict visitation, attendance, and legal representation despite the political changes.<sup>153</sup> At times, detainees are not informed of the reason for their arrest.<sup>154</sup> In many instances, it is not possible for witnesses to determine whether an individual is formally arrested or merely held for further investigation and later release. Detainees often disappear into the prison system, with families unable to verify their location or well-being,<sup>155</sup> while information on due process, detainees' legal status, and the conduct of justice proceedings remains limited.<sup>156</sup>

A lawyer interviewed by the independent Syrian media organisation Enab Baladi claimed that detention during investigation can extend to three months with no clarity on procedures or legal fate. Lawyers are reportedly not permitted to attend interrogations conducted in security branches until detainees are transferred to court. They are also barred from obtaining power

<sup>143</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Unlawful Detention in Transitional Syria: A System in Disarray, 22 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>144</sup> Hamilton, R., Neistat, A., Transitional Justice in Syria: Domestic-Led Accountability Efforts Cannot Function in Isolation, Just Security, 30 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>145</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Unlawful Detention in Transitional Syria: A System in Disarray, 22 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>146</sup> Waters, G., Why Syria's government must turn inward in 2026, Atlantic Council, 29 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>147</sup> SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026

<sup>148</sup> Waters, G., Why Syria's government must turn inward in 2026, Atlantic Council, 29 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>149</sup> SJAC, A Roadmap for Transitional Justice in Syria – September 2025, 24 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>150</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Unlawful Detention in Transitional Syria: A System in Disarray, 22 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>151</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 46; Syrian Observer (The), Unlawful Detention in Transitional Syria: A System in Disarray, 22 December 2025, [url](#);

<sup>152</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Unlawful Detention in Transitional Syria: A System in Disarray, 22 December 2025, [url](#); SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026

<sup>153</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Unlawful Detention in Transitional Syria: A System in Disarray, 22 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>154</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 98 [SNHR]; Syrian Observer (The), Unlawful Detention in Transitional Syria: A System in Disarray, 22 December 2025, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 46

<sup>155</sup> Waters, G., Koontz, K., Syria's Unclear Settlement Process Risks Fanning Discontent Among Ex-Regime Soldiers, 9 March 2026, New Lines Institute, [url](#)

<sup>156</sup> SJAC, Introducing SJAC's Arrests Tracker: Monitoring Detention and Criminal Justice Proceedings to Support Transitional Justice, 9 April 2026, [url](#); SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026



of attorney from detainees (especially those labelled as ‘remnants’ of former regime and held in military police and political security prisons) and denied visitation.<sup>157</sup>

### 1.4.3. Transitional justice process and accountability

In May 2025, the government announced the establishment of two government bodies tasked with investigating crimes committed during the Assad rule, compensating victims, and locating thousands of missing individuals: the National Commission on Transitional Justice and the National Commission on Missing Persons in Syria.<sup>158</sup> The scope of the National Commission on Transitional Justice’s mandate was not clear,<sup>159</sup> raising concerns that it would be limited to crimes committed by the Assad government while excluding victims of abuses by non-state actors, as well as for being unclear on the role of victims in the commission’s work.<sup>160</sup> Syrian law does not comprehensively codify crimes against humanity, war crimes, or genocide as distinct offences. As a result, acts that may qualify under international law as part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilians are likely to be prosecuted under ordinary criminal offences, such as murder, unlawful detention, or torture.<sup>161</sup>

A report prepared in consultation with 27 Syrian civil society organisations identified as major challenges of the transitional process weak judicial independence, the absence of a legal framework to prosecute crimes committed throughout the conflict, limited expertise in handling international crimes by judges and prosecutors, lack of investigative capacity by security forces, and the continued presence of some alleged perpetrators within state institutions and local communities.<sup>162</sup>

The government issued arrest warrants against Bashar Al-Assad, former high-level military and intelligence officials on charges of human rights violations, abuses and corruption.<sup>163</sup> Although Syria has not yet adopted legislation establishing a specialised transitional justice tribunal, the government has designated the Fourth Criminal Court in Damascus, which operates under the Syrian Penal Code of 1949,<sup>164</sup> to hear cases related to transitional justice.<sup>165</sup> In April 2026, the first public trial of officials associated with the Assad regime commenced in Damascus. The proceedings included the appearance in court of a former head of the Political Security Branch in Dar’a, while Bashar al-Assad and his brother Maher were charged in absentia.<sup>166</sup>

The government created the National Inquiry on the March 2025 Coastal Events and the National Inquiry on the July 2025 Sweida violence to investigate the events and hold those

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<sup>157</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Unlawful Detention in Transitional Syria: A System in Disarray, 22 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>158</sup> Reuters, Syria forms transitional justice, missing persons commissions, 18 May 2025, [url](#); <sup>158</sup> SJAC, A First Step Towards Transitional Justice in Syria, 29 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>159</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 25

<sup>160</sup> HRW, Syria’s Transitional Justice Commission: A Missed Opportunity for Victim-Led Justice, 19 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>161</sup> SJAC, Syria’s New ‘Transitional Justice Court’: Understanding the Fourth Criminal Court, 12 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>162</sup> Nahalawi, Y., Sharabati, M., Pathways to Criminal Accountability in Syria, 14 May 2026, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>163</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 25

<sup>164</sup> SJAC, One Year On: The State of Transitional Justice in Syria, 4 June 2026, [url](#)

<sup>165</sup> SJAC, Syria’s New ‘Transitional Justice Court’: Understanding the Fourth Criminal Court, 12 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>166</sup> AP, Syria’s first public trial of Assad-era officials opens in Damascus, 26 April 2026, [url](#)



responsible accountable.<sup>167</sup> The National Inquiry on the March 2025 Coastal Events published its findings and referred hundreds of suspects to the judiciary.<sup>168</sup> In November 2025, 14 alleged perpetrators linked to the violence were put on public trials facing charges including killing of civilians and attacks on public security personnel.<sup>169</sup> The National Investigation Committee on the Sweida violence released its findings in March 2026,<sup>170</sup> classifying the violations as individual rather than systematic, with 23 security and military personnel reportedly detained for trial.<sup>171</sup> Some of those arrested, including government forces, were reportedly later released following the issuance of presidential decree No. 39/2026 granting general amnesty for crimes committed before its issuance date.<sup>172</sup> According to the UNCOI, the responsibility of senior officials and commanders has not been announced.<sup>173</sup>

## 1.5. Death penalty

According to sources, Syria continued to retain the death penalty.<sup>174</sup> Sources noted that no executions were recorded during 2025 in Syria, while one individual remained under death sentence.<sup>175</sup> In November 2025, a criminal court in Deir Ez-Zor reportedly issued the first death sentence since the fall of the Assad regime, convicting a man of the rape and murder of a child.<sup>176</sup> Further information on the retention or use of the death penalty by the transitional government could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this report.

<sup>167</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 28

<sup>168</sup> Security Council Report, Syria August 2025 Monthly Forecast, 30 July 2025, [url](#); ISW and CT, Iran Update, 18 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>169</sup> SJAC, SJAC Begins Monitoring the Coastal Incidents Trial, 5 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>170</sup> Enab Baladi, Syrian national committee submits final report on Suwayda events, outlines key findings, 18 March 2026, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law violations committed during the July 2025 violence in Suwayda, Syria, 27 March 2026, [url](#), paras 138-139

<sup>171</sup> Security Council Report, Syria April 2026 Monthly Forecast, 1 April 2026, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law violations committed during the July 2025 violence in Suwayda, Syria, 27 March 2026, [url](#), paras 138-139

<sup>172</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law violations committed during the July 2025 violence in Suwayda, Syria, 27 March 2026, [url](#), para 141

<sup>173</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law violations committed during the July 2025 violence in Suwayda, Syria, 27 March 2026, [url](#), para 141

<sup>174</sup> SNHR, The Small Assad on Trial When Will the Big One Fall?, 29 April 2026, [url](#); World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, Syrian Arab Republic, last updated 15 May 2026, [url](#); AI, The State of the World's Human Rights; Syria 2025, 21 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>175</sup> World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, Syrian Arab Republic, last updated 15 May 2026, [url](#); AI, Death sentences and executions 2025, 18 May 2026, [url](#), pp. 8, 28

<sup>176</sup> New Arab (The), Syrian man to be hanged for harrowing murder of eight-year-old girl, in first death sentence since Assad ouster, 5 November 2025, [url](#); SOHR, First sentence following fall of the regime: Ra\*per and murd\*erer of little girl sentenced to dea\*th in Deir Ezzor, 4 November 2025, [url](#)



## 1.6. Prison conditions and treatment of detainees

Upon taking control, the transitional government released thousands of detainees from detention facilities,<sup>177</sup> at times without due process or oversight.<sup>178</sup> Following Assad's ousting, detention centres and prisons were left largely unprotected,<sup>179</sup> with many official records containing critical information looted or destroyed.<sup>180</sup> Although, according to an April 2025 report by Global Protection Cluster (GPC), torture practices in prisons have 'largely ceased', poor detention conditions persisted, with overcrowded and unsanitary makeshift facilities replacing looted or abandoned Assad-era prisons.<sup>181</sup>

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) documented at least 1 108 cases of arbitrary arrest or detention during 2025, including 73 children and 26 women, by different actors, including Syrian transitional government forces, and other armed opposition factions.<sup>182</sup> Sources indicated that most arrest and detention cases were linked to security operations by the transitional government security forces, particularly in Latakia, Homs, Hama and Damascus governorates.<sup>183</sup> According to the UNCOI, Alawite men and boys were arbitrarily arrested amid violence during these operations and were detained both in official and unofficial detention facilities.<sup>184</sup> In some of the cases, arrests and detention by Internal Security Forces (ISF) were linked to financial motivations, including ransom extortion, as well as seizure and confiscation of property.<sup>185</sup> In the first quarter of 2026, at least 210 cases of arbitrary arrest or detention, including 11 children and 3 women were recorded by SNHR.<sup>186</sup>

The UNCOI noted that places of detention were 'severely overcrowded'.<sup>187</sup> According to the same source, several cases in which detainees were held incommunicado were recorded.<sup>188</sup> Torture and ill-treatment practices were documented in detention facilities,<sup>189</sup> as well as in makeshift facilities and checkpoints in Aleppo, Dar'a, Homs, Hama, Latakia, Tartous, Idlib, and Rural Damascus governorates.<sup>190</sup> The majority of these documented cases involved Alawite

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<sup>177</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 19 March 2025, [url](#), para. 5

<sup>178</sup> GPC, Protection Landscape in Syria – A Snapshot: March 2025, 3 April 2025, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>179</sup> AI, The State of the World's Human Rights 2024, 29 April 2025, [url](#), pp. 353-354

<sup>180</sup> AI, The State of the World's Human Rights 2024, 29 April 2025, [url](#), p. 354; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 19 March 2025, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>181</sup> GPC, Protection Landscape in Syria – A Snapshot: March 2025, 3 April 2025, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>182</sup> SNHR, Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria, 3 January 2026, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>183</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), para. 44; SNHR, Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria, 3 January 2026, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>184</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras. 44, 46

<sup>185</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), Annex I paras. 40, 41

<sup>186</sup> SNHR, Quarterly Report on Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention in Syria, 5 April 2026, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>187</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), para. 51

<sup>188</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), Annex I paras. 42-49

<sup>189</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), para. 48; HRW, World Report 2026, Syria: Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>190</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras. 48, 49





men, who were reportedly later released.<sup>191</sup> Several cases of deaths in detention were also reported during 2025. The transitional government announced investigations into four of the cases and confirmed 21 cases in Homs, Hama and Damascus central prisons, attributing them to natural causes.<sup>192</sup>

## 2. Treatment of certain profiles and groups of the population

### 2.1. Individuals affiliated or perceived to be affiliated with the former Government of Syria

Since the change of government, individuals affiliated or perceived to be affiliated with the former Assad regime have continued to face arrests,<sup>193</sup> killings,<sup>194</sup> disappearances,<sup>195</sup> mistreatment,<sup>196</sup> abductions,<sup>197</sup> and social exclusion.<sup>198</sup> These actions have been carried out by state authorities, non-state armed groups, local actors, and unidentified armed factions, including extremist groups, often motivated by alleged collaboration or revenge. Those targeted include former soldiers and security personnel, intelligence officers, civilian collaborators, and those perceived to have ties to the previous government.<sup>199</sup>

As it is often unclear whether individuals are targeted due to their perceived affiliation with the former government or their membership in the Alawite community, there is likely to be some overlap between this section on individuals affiliated – or perceived to be affiliated with the former government of Syria – and the section on Alawites.

<sup>191</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), Annex I para. 31

<sup>192</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras. 52, 53

<sup>193</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 25-26, 44; Global Protection Cluster, Syria Protection Sector - Snapshot Protection Landscape in Syria, 3 April 2025, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>194</sup> SJAC, Revenge Killings Targeting Assad Regime Affiliates (December 2024 - May 2025), 22 May 2025, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Homs, Syria: “Mobile Killings” Claim 30 Civilian Lives in Two Months, 1 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>195</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 44-48

<sup>196</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 26-28; Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, online interview with EUAA, 11 June 2025

<sup>197</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 63-64

<sup>198</sup> Haid, H., Syria’s Patchwork DDR: Holding a Transition Together with Loose Threads, Middle East Council on Global Affairs, 1 February 2026, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), pp. 10-11; UN Human Rights Council, Violations against civilians in Coastal and Western Central Syria in January - March 2025, 11 August 2025, [url](#), para 37

<sup>199</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 63, 70, 97 [Syria Direct, Syrian human rights organisation, SNHR]; EUAA, Syria: Country Focus, July 2025, [url](#), pp. 32-36





### 2.1.1. Former soldiers and security personnel

After taking power, the transitional government ordered security personnel including police, security officers, and soldiers who served under the Assad regime to undergo a formal demobilisation process known as ‘reconciliation’/clearance (*taswiya*).<sup>200</sup> Individuals were required to surrender their weapons, hand over their military identification, and pledge not to take up arms against the new authorities. In return, they were to receive documentation confirming their demobilisation, assurances of safety, and the prospect of an investigative process. Individuals cleared of involvement in war crimes were reportedly to be issued civilian identification documents and have their case files closed.<sup>201</sup>

In the initial weeks following the fall of the Assad government tens of thousands of former SAA soldiers and conscripts, by some accounts around 120 000 in Latakia and Tartous alone,<sup>202</sup> surrendered their weapons and were demobilised.<sup>203</sup> Others refused to disarm, citing the fragile security environment and an ongoing need for self-defence.<sup>204</sup> Many individuals feared that participation in the ‘reconciliation’/clearance process could constitute a trap leading to imprisonment, execution, or attacks while travelling to clearance centres. Identification cards issued to Assad-era security personnel indicated their former jobs, reportedly exposing holders to the risk of detention or other forms of harm during encounters with the new authorities. After surrendering their weapons, dismissed security personnel would receive a *taswiya* document confirming that they were no longer active, which was intended to permit freedom of movement.<sup>205</sup>

While sources assessed that, generally, ordinary SAA soldiers cleared of involvement in war crimes have not been targeted by transitional government forces,<sup>206</sup> reports indicate that *taswiya* (clearance) documentation has, at times, exposed former regime personnel to risks rather than ensuring freedom of movement. Checkpoint guards reportedly interpreted such documents as evidence of involvement in crimes under the former regime, leading to incidents of arrest, harassment, kidnapping, or even killing, prompting thousands of dismissed personnel to avoid the clearance process altogether and remain in their home villages while retaining their weapons.<sup>207</sup> In the months immediately following Assad’s fall, some former soldiers reportedly experienced sectarian harassment, physical assault and detention at checkpoints solely for possessing a *taswiya* card. While most were subsequently released,

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<sup>200</sup> Syria Direct, Assad’s former fighters underground as demobilization stalls, 7 October 2025, [url](#); Waters, G., Koontz, K., Syria’s Unclear Settlement Process Risks Fanning Discontent Among Ex-Regime Soldiers, New Lines Institute, 9 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>201</sup> Syria Direct, Assad’s former fighters underground as demobilization stalls, 7 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>202</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 15

<sup>203</sup> Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies, Rebuilding Security in Syria: Challenges and Strategies for Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration (DDR), and Security Sector Reform, 17 April 2025, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>204</sup> Franjeh, S., Security along the Syrian coast is a work-in-progress, Al Majaala, 28 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>205</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), pp. 10-11

<sup>206</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 75 [international organisation]; Waters, G., Koontz, K., Syria’s Unclear Settlement Process Risks Fanning Discontent Among Ex-Regime Soldiers, 9 March 2026, New Lines Institute, [url](#)

<sup>207</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), pp. 10-11



some reported experiencing physical abuse during detention by security forces.<sup>208</sup> While many Sunni holders of *taswiya* documents reportedly resumed civilian life, activists and local residents indicated that many Alawite former soldiers continued to experience fear and uncertainty,<sup>209</sup> their documents being colloquially referred to as ‘death cards’ due to perceived risks at checkpoints.<sup>210</sup> These fears have confined many individuals to their local communities, limiting their ability to seek employment and contributing to a widespread perception of lacking future prospects.<sup>211</sup> By the end of 2025, authorities began replacing temporary *taswiya* documents with civilian identity cards,<sup>212</sup> although their distribution was reportedly slow and limited.<sup>213</sup>

Authorities have barred former regime figures from joining the new military, although a limited number of lower-ranking personnel with valuable technical or logistical skills have reportedly been admitted to the army or police following vetting.<sup>214</sup> Rehiring of some former Assad-era Alawite police officers has been reported, particularly in Tartous and Latakia governorates.<sup>215</sup> According to Syrian columnist and researcher Haid Haid, under the current arrangements, former Assad forces remain economically inactive, politically marginalised, and socially isolated, conditions that are considered to increase the risk of future unrest.<sup>216</sup>

Arrests targeting former security personnel and individuals perceived to be affiliated with the former government, mainly Alawites, including those who had undergone the reconciliation/clearance process, occurred particularly in the period between December 2024 and February 2025 and during and after the March 2025 violence in the coastal areas.<sup>217</sup> Between 8 December 2024 and 31 January 2026, the UNCOI documented testimonies from former detainees alleging severe beatings, violence and torture in 18 official detention facilities across Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Latakia, Tartous, Idlib, Rural Damascus, and Dar’a, as well as in 12 makeshift facilities and at checkpoints in several governorates. Most documented cases of torture and ill-treatment reportedly involved Alawite men, including former (reconciled) security personnel<sup>218</sup> many of whom were subsequently released.<sup>219</sup> UNCOI

<sup>208</sup> Waters, G., Koontz, K., Syria’s Unclear Settlement Process Risks Fanning Discontent Among Ex-Regime Soldiers, 9 March 2026, New Lines Institute, [url](#)

<sup>209</sup> Waters, G., Koontz, K., Syria’s Unclear Settlement Process Risks Fanning Discontent Among Ex-Regime Soldiers, New Lines Institute, 9 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>210</sup> Waters, G., Koontz, K., Syria’s Unclear Settlement Process Risks Fanning Discontent Among Ex-Regime Soldiers, 9 March 2026, New Lines Institute, [url](#); Haid, H., Syria’s *taswiya* slow roll creates a host of problems, Al Majalla, 28 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>211</sup> Waters, G., Koontz, K., Syria’s Unclear Settlement Process Risks Fanning Discontent Among Ex-Regime Soldiers, 9 March 2026, New Lines Institute, [url](#)

<sup>212</sup> Waters, G., Koontz, K., Syria’s Unclear Settlement Process Risks Fanning Discontent Among Ex-Regime Soldiers, 9 March 2026, New Lines Institute, [url](#)

<sup>213</sup> Haid, H., Syria’s *taswiya* slow roll creates a host of problems, Al Majalla, 28 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>214</sup> Haid, H., Syria’s Patchwork DDR: Holding a Transition Together with Loose Threads, Middle East Council on Global Affairs, 1 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>215</sup> Waters, G., Syria’s Integration of Alawi Police, Syria Revisited, 3 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>216</sup> Haid, H., Syria’s Patchwork DDR: Holding a Transition Together with Loose Threads, Middle East Council on Global Affairs, 1 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>217</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), Annex I paras 7, 9-11, 15-21, 26, 28

<sup>218</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), Annex I paras 31, 33

<sup>219</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), Annex I paras 30-31



documented eight accounts of enforced disappearances carried out by government security forces including of former SAA Alawite officers and former conscripts who underwent reconciliation.<sup>220</sup>

During the reference period, transitional government authorities continued to arrest individuals over alleged links to the Assad regime,<sup>221</sup> including former senior military officials<sup>222</sup> and persons wanted for war crimes committed under the Assad regime,<sup>223</sup> former militia commanders<sup>224</sup> and military judges.<sup>225</sup> Between 8 December 2024 and January 2026, the government reported arresting 6 331 former Syrian Arab Army (SAA) personnel, of whom 1 158 were subsequently released due to insufficient evidence. Most detainees were reportedly held in dilapidated detention facilities from Assad era requiring renovation, amid limited resources and pending judicial reforms and related legal proceedings.<sup>226</sup>

SNHR documented the arrest of 948 persons in 2025 by transitional government security forces, mainly targeting former military personnel and government employees accused of committing human rights violations during the Assad regime, as well as individuals suspected of being linked to remnants of the former regime which carried out attacks against security forces in March 2025.<sup>227</sup> Most reported arrests occurred in Latakia,<sup>228</sup> Tartous, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, Damascus and Idlib governorates.<sup>229</sup> According to SNHR, arrests were carried out within security campaigns, and the source was not able to verify whether they were in accordance with legal arrest warrants issued by relevant judicial authorities.<sup>230</sup> According to SNHR, the reasons for these arrests are often not communicated or unclear, and detention locations and names of those arrested are rarely disclosed. The security forces' lack of transparency makes it difficult to identify patterns or determine the legal basis for these

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<sup>220</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), Annex I para 44, 47

<sup>221</sup> France24, Syria arrests suspects, imposes curfew in Latakia after sectarian violence, 31 December 2025, [url](#); Al Jazeera, The fragile fight for justice in a post-Assad Syria, 7 December 2025, [url](#); New Arab (The), Syria to begin trying Assad-era figures on Sunday, 25 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>222</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Five senior officers from former regime arrested in Latakia, 3 December 2025, [url](#); New Arab (The), Syria arrests officer in charge of notorious Assad-era prison, 22 October 2025, [url](#); New Arab (The), Syria arrests Assad-era general accused of Eastern Ghouta chemical attack involvement, 30 April 2026, [url](#); Shahdawi, Y., How Syrian Forces Captured the Man Behind the Tadamon Massacre, New Lines Magazine, 28 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>223</sup> New Arab (The), 'Dangerous' Assad-era official, 12 who tried to cross border arrested in Syria, 27 December 2025, [url](#); New Arab (The), Syrian authorities arrest alleged war crimes suspect in Latakia, 17 December 2025, [url](#); Etana Syria, BRIEF: Israeli operations continue in south-west Syria, 29 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>224</sup> Waters, G., Tishreen's Military Doctors: Analysis and Interview, Syria Revisited, 6 May 2026, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Five senior officers from former regime arrested in Latakia, 3 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>225</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Five senior officers from former regime arrested in Latakia, 3 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>226</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 25

<sup>227</sup> SNHR At least 1,108 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention Recorded in 2025, of which 52 were Recorded in December, 3 January 2026, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>228</sup> New Arab (The), 'Dangerous' Assad-era official, 12 who tried to cross border arrested in Syria, 27 December 2025, [url](#); SNHR At least 1,108 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention Recorded in 2025, of which 52 were Recorded in December, 3 January 2026, [url](#), p. 10; New Arab (The), Syrian authorities arrest alleged war crimes suspect in Latakia, 17 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>229</sup> SNHR At least 1,108 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention Recorded in 2025, of which 52 were Recorded in December, 3 January 2026, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>230</sup> SNHR At least 1,108 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention Recorded in 2025, of which 52 were Recorded in December, 3 January 2026, [url](#), p. 10; SNHR, At least 141 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention Recorded in November 2025, [url](#), pp. 7-8



detentions.<sup>231</sup> The Syrian non-governmental group The Day After (TDA) stated that there is no consistent pattern in prosecutions, suggesting that decisions may be shaped by personal interests and political considerations rather than clear legal standards.<sup>232</sup>

Since December 2024, the government has issued two waves of amnesties for former government-affiliated detainees. The first, in June 2025, was issued by the Supreme Committee for Preserving Civil Peace and led to the release of around 300 former Assad-era military and security personnel. Authorities justified the releases on the basis that detainees were not proven guilty of serious war crimes and that their release would ease tensions following violence in Latakia and Tartous. However, the process lacked transparency, with unclear arrest procedures and no evident legal framework for assessing innocence. The releases were reportedly brokered by Fadi Saqr, a controversial militia leader and member of the Committee. A second wave of amnesty was issued in March 2026 by presidential decree, granting a general amnesty for crimes committed prior to its enactment, reducing or eliminating prison sentences. The measure aimed to ease pressure on the prison system and promote national reconciliation, while formally excluding those accused of serious crimes such as torture, human trafficking, and embezzlement of public funds. In addition, some former Assad-era detainees were released on an ad hoc basis through varied legal mechanisms.<sup>233</sup>

The transitional government has also pursued reconciliation arrangements with Assad-era figures, exchanging leniency for assets, information, and intelligence cooperation, including temporarily refraining from action against some former security officials to help contain insurgent activity by Assad loyalists on the coast.<sup>234</sup>

## 2.1.2. Other categories of professionals

Sporadic arrests of other categories of professionals by the transitional government forces have been reported. For instance, individuals suspected of having been involved in violations during the Assad regime's rule such as government employees,<sup>235</sup> former ministers,<sup>236</sup> parliamentarians,<sup>237</sup> physicians and military judges<sup>238</sup> were arrested throughout the reference period.

<sup>231</sup> SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026; DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 98 [SNHR]

<sup>232</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 111 [The Day After]

<sup>233</sup> SJAC, Introducing SJAC's Arrests Tracker: Monitoring Detention and Criminal Justice Proceedings to Support Transitional Justice, 9 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>234</sup> Guardian (The), Security or justice? Syria faces post-Assad reckoning after string of arrests, 4 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>235</sup> SNHR At least 1,108 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention Recorded in 2025, of which 52 were Recorded in December, 3 January 2026, [url](#), p. 10; SNHR, At least 141 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention Recorded in November 2025, [url](#), pp. 7-8

<sup>236</sup> Le Monde, En Syrie, sept mois après la chute de Bachar Al-Assad, l'opacité de la justice transitionnelle inquiète la population [In Syria, seven months after the fall of Bashar al-Assad, the opacity of transitional justice worries the population], 12 July 2025, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Syrian Interior Ministry Confirms Arrest of Two Former Ministers over Disappeared Children Case, 8 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>237</sup> Enab Baladi, Syrian General Security arrests Khaled al-Abboud, 21 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>238</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Five senior officers from former regime arrested in Latakia, 3 December 2025, [url](#)



Infrequent arrests of former Ba'ath Party members, were previously reported though reasons for these detentions were not provided.<sup>239</sup> Mere party membership does not typically trigger targeting, as most Syrians were required to join the Ba'ath Party to access state employment in roles such as teaching, medicine, or administration, making membership largely symbolic.<sup>240</sup>

Between December 2024 and October 2025, forced evictions were reportedly carried out by GSS and government-affiliated armed actors in several areas, including Al Somarya in Damascus and Al-Zahryat, where residents of military housing were given short deadlines to vacate their homes. In some cases, evictions reportedly targeted individuals or families based on perceived affiliation with the former government, including collective expulsions of relatives of accused individuals in Idlib.<sup>241</sup> Wives of former officers reportedly also lost their public-sector positions, including in the education and health sectors, apparently after being deemed guilty by association. For many affected individuals, the loss of employment also resulted in the loss of government-provided housing.<sup>242</sup>

### 2.1.3. Factors influencing targeting

The criteria for determining who is considered affiliated with the former government remain unclear, leading to inconsistent targeting.<sup>243</sup> In some cases, individuals were arrested based on military records or corroborated witness testimony, while in other cases arrests followed community accusations, personal disputes, rumours, or unverified social media claims. Some of those targeted were genuinely involved in abuses against civilians, but others were detained solely because of their former political or security roles, or perceived association with the previous regime.<sup>244</sup>

The transitional government's pursuit of former regime members is inconsistent,<sup>245</sup> prioritising the public arrest and long-term detention of high-ranking officials while frequently releasing lower-level informants.<sup>246</sup> Furthermore, disparity in treatment exists where senior figures might receive better treatment in detention, whereas lower-level detainees are more vulnerable to physical abuse.<sup>247</sup> Wealthy businessmen and public figures associated with the former government have largely retained or regained their influence, while lower-ranking officials and civilians accused of loyalty to the former government have faced arrest or harassment.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> SOHR, Including secretary in former Al-Baath Party | Five civilians arrested in Baniyas countryside, 30 May 2025, [url](#); Lister, C., Syria Weekly: May 27-June 3, 2025, 3 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>240</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 64 [Syria Direct]; Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, online interview with EUAA, 11 June 2025

<sup>241</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 64-65

<sup>242</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), pp. 10-11

<sup>243</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 63, 97 [Syria Direct, SNHR]

<sup>244</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 63, 97 [Syria Direct, SNHR]

<sup>245</sup> Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, online interview with EUAA, 11 June 2025; Koontz, K., Waters, G., Without Accountability, Syria's Sectarian Violence Will Only Worsen, TWI, 10 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>246</sup> Koontz, K., Waters, G., Without Accountability, Syria's Sectarian Violence Will Only Worsen, TWI, 10 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>247</sup> Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, online interview with EUAA, 11 June 2025

<sup>248</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 111 [The Day After]



Sectarian identity has been a contributing factor in targeting, particularly in cases involving Alawites targeted by government security forces and affiliated armed groups.<sup>249</sup> However, affiliation with the former government is generally the primary factor driving targeting.<sup>250</sup> In certain areas, such as Deir Ez-Zor, Sunni former SAA personnel are generally not targeted solely for their past military service, as the risk of tribal retaliation may discourage such actions.<sup>251</sup>

## 2.1.4. Targeting by unidentified actors

After the fall of Assad, reporting indicates a pattern of targeted revenge killings of male individuals allegedly linked to the former regime's military or intelligence services, or who acted as collaborators and informants,<sup>252</sup> and were suspected of involvement in past violations.<sup>253</sup> These acts were reportedly carried out by unidentified armed individuals, militant factions such as the Special Accountability Force<sup>254</sup> and Salafi-jihadi factions such as Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah (Supporters of the Sunnah Battalions).<sup>255</sup> Victims have included individuals from Sunni,<sup>256</sup> Alawite, and Shia communities.<sup>257</sup> Killings were often perpetrated by unidentified gunmen on motorcycles.<sup>258</sup> While targeted attacks have occurred across multiple governorates, areas inhabited by ethno-religious minorities such as Homs,<sup>259</sup> Hama,<sup>260</sup> Aleppo<sup>261</sup> and the coastal areas have been particularly affected.<sup>262</sup> Revenge and vigilante killings have particularly targeted Alawite-inhabited areas<sup>263</sup> although in many cases, it is difficult to distinguish whether individuals were targeted for their perceived association with

<sup>249</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Violations against civilians in Coastal and Western Central Syria in January - March 2025, 11 August 2025, [url](#), paras 30, 62; HRW, Syrian Archive, STJ, Are you Alawi? Identity-Based Killings During Syria's Transition, September 2025, [url](#), pp. 21, 42, 44, 46; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 44

<sup>250</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 63, 70, 97 [Syria Direct, Syrian human rights organisation, SNHR]

<sup>251</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 75 [international organisation]

<sup>252</sup> ISW and CT, Iran Update, 15 May 2025, [url](#); SJAC, Revenge Killings Targeting Assad Regime Affiliates (December 2024 - May 2025), 22 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>253</sup> SJAC, Revenge Killings Targeting Assad Regime Affiliates (December 2024 - May 2025), 22 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>254</sup> Koontz, K., Waters, G., Without Accountability, Syria's Sectarian Violence Will Only Worsen, TWI, 10 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>255</sup> ISW and CT, Iran Update, 7 May 2025, [url](#); BBC Monitoring, Explainer: New militant group in Syria targets Alawites, Assad loyalists, 13 February 2025, [url](#); BBC Monitoring, Briefing: New Syria jihadist group claims ongoing attacks on Alawites, 21 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>256</sup> Koontz, K., Waters, G., Without Accountability, Syria's Sectarian Violence Will Only Worsen, TWI, 10 June 2025, [url](#); SJAC, Revenge Killings Targeting Assad Regime Affiliates (December 2024 - May 2025), 22 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>257</sup> SJAC, Revenge Killings Targeting Assad Regime Affiliates (December 2024 - May 2025), 22 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>258</sup> Syria Direct, One year after Syria's coastal massacres, justice remains elusive, 11 March 2026, [url](#); STJ, Drive-by Killings: A Recurrent Pattern of Direct Killings Using Motorcycles Against Civilians in Syria, 26 February 2026, [url](#); Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, The Syrian Government Must Investigate the Targeting of Alawite Civilians in Homs, 13 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>259</sup> Syria Direct, One year after Syria's coastal massacres, justice remains elusive, 11 March 2026, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Homs, Syria: "Mobile Killings" Claim 30 Civilian Lives in Two Months, 1 March 2026, [url](#); Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, The Syrian Government Must Investigate the Targeting of Alawite Civilians in Homs, 13 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>260</sup> Syria Direct, One year after Syria's coastal massacres, justice remains elusive, 11 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>261</sup> DW, Vigilante justice in Syria: Who is being targeted and why?, 5 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>262</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 75 [international organisation]

<sup>263</sup> Syria Direct, One year after Syria's coastal massacres, justice remains elusive, 11 March 2026, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Homs, Syria: "Mobile Killings" Claim 30 Civilian Lives in Two Months, 1 March 2026, [url](#); STJ, Drive-by Killings: A Recurrent Pattern of Direct Killings Using Motorcycles Against Civilians in Syria, 26 February 2026, [url](#)





the former government or for sectarian reasons.<sup>264</sup> According to researcher Gregory Waters, most victims of vigilante violence have belonged to Syria's Sunni majority, as perceived Sunni collaborators with the former regime were often easier to target due to rejection within their own communities. At the same time, attacks against members of minority groups frequently generated accusations of sectarian motives, even in cases where victims were later alleged to have been involved in war crimes.<sup>265</sup>

According to Syria expert Charles Lister writing in February 2026, revenge and vigilante killings constituted a major source of violence across Syria in 2025, with an average of around 23 killings per week between January and October 2025. This rate reportedly declined by 70 % from October (seven deaths per week) onwards and fell further in early 2026 (three deaths in six weeks).<sup>266</sup> However, other sources have assessed in March 2026 that at least 30 civilians have been killed since the start of the year in Homs<sup>267</sup> marking a deterioration of the situation and some of the most severe incidents of killings and instability recorded since the regime's fall.<sup>268</sup> Some sources attributed the increase in vigilantism and revenge killings to perceived inconsistencies in the authorities' detention practices regarding individuals accused of human rights violations under the former regime. While some high-ranking figures or individuals allegedly linked to major massacres were detained, many former informants and lower-level personnel were said to remain free or to have been released after brief periods of detention.<sup>269</sup>

While Charles Lister attributed an assessed reduction in the number of vigilante and revenge killings between October 2025 and January 2026 largely to measures taken by the MoI, including the detention of suspected perpetrators,<sup>270</sup> other sources noted that few arrests have been made in relation to the revenge killings<sup>271</sup> and that in the majority of documented incidents there has been an absence of publicly announced results from judicial or security investigations, including the identification of perpetrators or accountability for those responsible.<sup>272</sup>

## 2.2. Individuals opposing or perceived to be opposing the Transitional Government

### 2.2.1. Political opposition

Upon taking power, the interim president issued a decree dissolving all political parties in Syria, including the Ba'ath Arab Socialist Party, the Arab Socialist Union, and historic leftist and

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<sup>264</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 70 [Syrian human rights organisation]

<sup>265</sup> DW, Vigilante justice in Syria: Who is being targeted and why?, 5 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>266</sup> Lister, C., Syria is stabilizing, but US help remains vital, MEI, 13 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>267</sup> Syria Direct, One year after Syria's coastal massacres, justice remains elusive, 11 March 2026, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Homs, Syria: "Mobile Killings" Claim 30 Civilian Lives in Two Months, 1 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>268</sup> Waters, G., Syria Revisited, Surging Violence in Homs, 6 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>269</sup> DW, Vigilante justice in Syria: Who is being targeted and why?, 5 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>270</sup> Lister, C., Syria is stabilizing, but US help remains vital, MEI, 13 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>271</sup> Syria Direct, One year after Syria's coastal massacres, justice remains elusive, 11 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>272</sup> STJ, Drive-by Killings: A Recurrent Pattern of Direct Killings Using Motorcycles Against Civilians in Syria, 26 February 2026, [url](#)



nationalist parties.<sup>273</sup> The transitional government does not formally criminalise political opposition<sup>274</sup> and has not officially labelled individuals as political opponents.<sup>275</sup> Although many political opponents remained in Syria, no framework exists for political party registration in areas controlled by the transitional government. Consequently, parties were unable to participate in the October 2025 indirect parliamentary elections<sup>276</sup> or to operate as structured political opposition.<sup>277</sup>

There are no active political parties due to the absence of legislation regulating party activity<sup>278</sup>, which cannot be enacted while the legislative council, despite partially elected membership since November 2025, remains inactive.<sup>279</sup> The General Secretariat for Political Affairs (GSPA) was established in March 2025 under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates with the aim of managing political activities and restructuring the political landscape.<sup>280</sup> According to analysts, the GSPA headed by Foreign Minister Assad al-Shaibani has filled the vacuum left by the Ba'ath Party<sup>281</sup> by repurposing its assets and structures, raising concerns that it may act as a de facto successor, controlling the political sphere and key institutions under a new framework.<sup>282</sup> In early May 2026, the GSPA was reportedly dissolved and its staff integrated in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other ministries.<sup>283</sup>

According to Bassam Alahmad, the co-founder and executive director of the NGO Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), there is no organised opposition political movement against the government. Rather, criticism and opposition are primarily expressed by individual activists, civil society organisations, and media outlets. In the source's assessment, the transitional government regards members of minority communities who do not support the authorities, including Druze, Alawites, Kurds, and Christians, as political opponents. As evidence, the source mentioned the involvement of security forces in violations against Alawites in the coastal areas in March 2025, against Druze in Sweida in July 2025, and against Kurds during the government takeover of former SDF-controlled territories in January 2026.<sup>284</sup> The source also referred to the alleged failure of security forces to prevent, and their reported participation in, attacks carried out by members of the Sunni community against Christians in Al-Suqaylabiyah (Hama governorate) in March 2026.<sup>285</sup>

<sup>273</sup> Al-Jurdi, W., Syria's First Parliament After Assad: Empty Seats and Empty Promises?, BTI, 2 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>274</sup> EUAA, email correspondence with SNHR, 26 May 2026

<sup>275</sup> Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026

<sup>276</sup> Al Jazeera, Everything you need to know about Syria's first post-Assad elections, 5 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>277</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 118

<sup>278</sup> Etana Syria, Study: Between Symbolism and Substance: Syria's Transition at 6 Months, 9 July 2025, [url](#); Enab Baladi, "The Political Secretariat," Engineering Syria's Post-Baath Political Order, 18 February 2026, [url](#); Haid Haid online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026

<sup>279</sup> Enab Baladi, "The Political Secretariat," Engineering Syria's Post-Baath Political Order, 18 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>280</sup> SANA, Foreign Affairs establishes new department "General Secretariat for Political Affairs", 28 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>281</sup> Tabler, Andrew J., Cutting Through the Fog of War (and Peace) in Syria, TWI, 10 February 2026, [url](#); Enab Baladi, "The Political Secretariat," Engineering Syria's Post-Baath Political Order, 18 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>282</sup> Enab Baladi, "The Political Secretariat," Engineering Syria's Post-Baath Political Order, 18 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>283</sup> New Arab (The), Exclusive: Syria 'preparing to dissolve' controversial Political Affairs Secretariat, 6 May 2026, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Shibani Moves: Reports Emerge of a Decision to Dissolve the "General Secretariat for Political Affairs", 8 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>284</sup> Bassam Alahmad, online interview with EUAA, 5 & 27 May 2026

<sup>285</sup> Bassam Alahmad, online interview with EUAA, 5 & 27 May 2026; STJ, Al-Suqaylabiyah/Hama: Mass Violence in March 2026, Violations, and a Reconciliation Process that Ignores Rights, 13 May 2026, [url](#)



## 2.2.2. Freedom of expression, civic space and criticism of the authorities

Following the fall of Assad, the civic space has significantly expanded.<sup>286</sup> Civil society groups have been able to register (more than 650 NGOs did so in the first half of 2025) and operate publicly.<sup>287</sup> However, challenges remain, as the transitional government retained Assad-era Law 93, which imposes restrictions on civil society activities and foreign funding.<sup>288</sup> In addition, hosting public events including meetings and cultural events<sup>289</sup> requires obtaining prior approval from the authorities, through procedures described as unclear.<sup>290</sup> Issues concerning transitional justice, accountability, or human rights are reportedly regarded as politically sensitive and may only be discussed subject to approval by the authorities.<sup>291</sup> For instance, humanitarian initiatives are generally allowed to proceed unhindered, but political matters such as constitutional debates, political reform and party organisation face closer scrutiny and might face barriers from the authorities. For example, debates on the Constitutional Declaration and its implications for the relationship with SDF have been being denied and political gatherings at Latakia University were subjected to prior approval.<sup>292</sup> At times, the government through the Political Affairs Directory has refused granting approval to activists and civil society to organise public or private activities which do not align with its views or are considered areas reserved exclusively for the state.<sup>293</sup>

According to Haid Haid, openness to civic activity varied significantly by location: relatively safer areas such as Damascus allowed for more open participation, while regions affected by instability, or sectarian tensions, particularly Homs and the coastal areas, remained more restricted. Local authorities reportedly applied differing approaches to regulating civic activity, ranging from strict controls to more informal or permissive practices, with some tightening restrictions as they consolidated power.<sup>294</sup>

Freedom of expression initially improved in the first months following the fall of the Assad government, with increased public criticism of the new authorities; however, this openness reportedly declined over time<sup>295</sup> particularly from March 2025 onwards and after the July

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<sup>286</sup> Abdulghany, F., Roth, K., Assessing Syria's Progress Since Assad, *Opinio Juris*, 20 February 2026, [url](#); Al, Syria: A year after Assad's fall, the rights of survivors and families must guide transition, 8 December 2025, [url](#); Haid, H., Syria's Expanding but Fragile Civic Space: Opportunities and Risks in the Post-Assad Transition, Arab Reform Initiative, 4 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>287</sup> Abdulghany, F., Roth, K., Assessing Syria's Progress Since Assad, *Opinio Juris*, 20 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>288</sup> Abdulghany, F., Roth, K., Assessing Syria's Progress Since Assad, *Opinio Juris*, 20 February 2026, [url](#); DW, How an Assad-era law is threatening Syrian civil society, 5 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>289</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 110 [TDA]

<sup>290</sup> Al, Syria: A year after Assad's fall, the rights of survivors and families must guide transition, 8 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>291</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 110 [TDA]

<sup>292</sup> Haid, H., Syria's Expanding but Fragile Civic Space: Opportunities and Risks in the Post-Assad Transition, Arab Reform Initiative, 4 December 2025, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>293</sup> Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026

<sup>294</sup> Haid, H., Syria's Expanding but Fragile Civic Space: Opportunities and Risks in the Post-Assad Transition, Arab Reform Initiative, 4 December 2025, [url](#), pp. 19-20

<sup>295</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 74 [international organisation]; Haid, H., Syria's Expanding but Fragile Civic Space: Opportunities and Risks in the Post-Assad Transition, Arab Reform Initiative, 4 December 2025, [url](#)



2025 violence in Sweida, where formal and informal restrictions on civic activities increased.<sup>296</sup>

Public dissent was further discouraged by prevailing religious interpretations associated with the authorities' Salafist-influenced ideology, which frame public criticism of leaders as socially divisive (*'fitna'*), thereby promoting private rather than public expressions of criticism.<sup>297</sup> According to an international organisation interviewed by DIS, Sunni Arabs reportedly have greater latitude to criticise the government publicly, including through social media, often without facing consequences. In contrast, members of minority communities, including Druze, Kurds, Alawites, and Christians, were reported to face higher risks when expressing criticism, as they may be accused of disloyalty, collaboration with external actors, or separatism. For example, sources noted that Druze individuals criticising the authorities risk being labelled as collaborators with Israel.<sup>298</sup> Bassam Alahmad similarly assessed that criticism voiced by individuals perceived as supportive of the government is more likely to be accepted, whereas similar criticism coming from members of minority communities may be viewed differently. In addition, while criticism relating to issues such as electricity prices or ministerial performance may be tolerated, topics such as the events in Sweida or criticism of President Ahmed al-Sharaa are generally regarded as more sensitive.<sup>299</sup>

As far as sources interviewed by the Netherlands MFA indicate, no arrest campaigns targeting critics were reported in areas under the control of the transitional government.<sup>300</sup> Likewise, no cases were reported of civilians being arrested by the authorities solely for expressing criticism,<sup>301</sup> whether from abroad or within Syria,<sup>302</sup> or through online platforms.<sup>303</sup> There were a few reported incidents in which individuals were allegedly detained for criticising the government but the circumstances are unclear, the security actors not consistently providing information on who is being detained, the reasons for detention, or its duration. In some cases, individuals were reportedly detained for social media posts critical of the government or alleged violations committed by the government, while in others, detentions may have been linked to personal disputes, including instances where connections were allegedly used to facilitate arrests as a form of intimidation. Overall, these cases remain difficult to independently verify, and further investigation is required to clarify the underlying patterns.<sup>304</sup>

Individuals expressing criticism online were frequently subjected to online threats and intimidation by pro-government supporters. While these threats largely remained online, many people feared that they could come under attack by pro-government supporters.<sup>305</sup>

<sup>296</sup> Haid, H., Syria's Expanding but Fragile Civic Space: Opportunities and Risks in the Post-Assad Transition, Arab Reform Initiative, 4 December 2025, [url](#), p. 20-21

<sup>297</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 74 [international organisation]

<sup>298</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 74 [international organisation]

<sup>299</sup> Bassam Alahmad, online interview with EUAA, 5 & 27 May 2026

<sup>300</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 118

<sup>301</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 118

<sup>302</sup> Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026

<sup>303</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 74 [international organisation]

<sup>304</sup> Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026

<sup>305</sup> Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026



Regarding former critics of HTS, Haid Haid stated that HTS leadership appears to have sought to reconcile with various actors, including former adversaries. There have generally been no reports of targeted attacks or systematic pursuit of individuals critical of the group. However, there is limited transparency and information regarding the status of detainees held in former HTS-run detention facilities. According to the source, some HTS critics living abroad have reportedly refrained from returning to Syria due to fears of possible repercussions from the authorities.<sup>306</sup>

One frequently cited case concerns the reported arrest of American Islamist journalist Bilal Abdul Kareem in December 2025, allegedly in connection with his criticism of HTS.<sup>307</sup> A prominent figure among the Syrian opposition during the conflict, Kareem was previously arrested by HTS in 2020 for six months for ‘inciting’ against the group. After the fall of Assad, he criticised the transitional government for straying away from Islamic principles, not granting citizenship to foreign opposition fighters, and the decision to join the anti-ISIL coalition.<sup>308</sup> Limited information is available regarding the circumstances, charges, or current status of this case.<sup>309</sup>

### 2.2.3. Relatives of critics

Sources interviewed by Dutch MFA and DIS in September 2025 were not aware of concrete examples of family members of critics or opponents who encountered problems in the transitional government’s control area.<sup>310</sup> In July 2025 SNHR reported on cases where security forces reportedly arrested relatives of critics of the government in Hama governorate to pressure them to surrender.<sup>311</sup> However, SNHR stated that the targeting of relatives of critics of the government was not systematic.<sup>312</sup>

### 2.2.4. Journalists and other media professionals

Under the rule of Bashar al-Assad, civic space<sup>313</sup> and media freedom were severely restricted in practice despite formal constitutional guarantees.<sup>314</sup> Journalists in government-controlled areas were subjected to censorship, arbitrary detention, torture and deaths in custody, while media outlets were required to obtain approval from the MoI. Media ownership was closely linked to regime-affiliated actors. In areas controlled by other groups, local media reportedly faced pressure to align with dominant armed factions.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Haid Haid, online interview, with EUAA 28 April 2026

<sup>307</sup> Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026; MEE, Journalist Bilal Abdul Kareem arrested in Syria, 24 December 2025, [url](#); Reuters, Syria detains prominent American Islamist journalist, sources say, 23 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>308</sup> MEE, Journalist Bilal Abdul Kareem arrested in Syria, 24 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>309</sup> Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026; Reuters, Syria detains prominent American Islamist journalist, sources say, 23 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>310</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 120; DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 96 [SNHR]

<sup>311</sup> SNHR, At least 658 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention Recorded in Syria in the First Half of 2025 including 72 in June, 4 July 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>312</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 96 [SNHR]

<sup>313</sup> AI, The State of the World’s Human Rights; Syria 2025, 21 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>314</sup> RSF, Syria, n.d., [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Syria, 19 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>315</sup> RSF, Syria, n.d., [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Syria, 19 May 2025, [url](#)



The first months following the fall of Assad were described as a period of ‘permissive civic atmosphere’,<sup>316</sup> during which civil society activity re-emerged and newly established independent media registered and opened offices across the country.<sup>317</sup> This was also reflected in a pledge by the Minister of Information in January 2025 to work towards a ‘free press’,<sup>318</sup> as well as in Article 13 of the Constitutional Declaration, which explicitly guarantees freedom of opinion, expression, information and publication.<sup>319</sup> Freedom of the press was reported to have improved significantly, as the government ended pre-publication review requirements, lifted censorship measures, and suspended restrictive media laws inherited from the former government.<sup>320</sup> Exiled Syrian journalists and foreign reporters were also able to return and report from within the country,<sup>321</sup> including on abuses committed under the former regime.<sup>322</sup>

Following the violence in the coastal areas (March 2025) and Sweida (July 2025), authorities began to reassert control over civic space,<sup>323</sup> particularly in relation to activities not aligned with their priorities.<sup>324</sup> In February 2026, the Ministry of Information launched the Professional and Ethical Code of Conduct for the media sector, describing it as a comprehensive framework for regulating journalistic work. The code prompted criticism from journalists, who argued that professional codes of conduct should be developed by independent syndicates rather than by government bodies.<sup>325</sup> Moreover, the gains achieved during the transition were undermined by limited structural and legislative reforms.<sup>326</sup> The media sector continued to operate under repressive legal frameworks developed under the previous regime, which enabled extensive state control<sup>327</sup> and remained in force.<sup>328</sup> Protections guaranteed under the Constitutional Declaration were subject to broad restrictions on grounds such as public order, morality, and national security.<sup>329</sup> At the same time, the collapse of the former regime created a legal vacuum and left civic space largely unregulated,<sup>330</sup> exposing the media landscape to

<sup>316</sup> Arab Reform Initiative, Syria’s expanding but fragile civic space: Opportunities and risks in the Post-Assad’s transition, December 2025, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>317</sup> AI, The State of the World’s Human Rights; Syria 2025, 21 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>318</sup> RSF, RSF calls on Syria’s new authorities to adopt seven priority measures in line with their promises to safeguard press freedom, 7 January 2025, [url](#); Arab Reform Initiative, Syria’s expanding but fragile civic space: Opportunities and risks in the Post-Assad’s transition, December 2025, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>319</sup> Syria, Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic, 13 March 2025, [url](#); HRW, Syria: Constitutional Declaration Risks Endangering Rights, 25 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>320</sup> CPJ, A Year After Assad’s Fall, Syrian Journalists Enjoy Freedom but also New Risks, 5 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>321</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025 – Syria, 19 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>322</sup> RSF, Syria, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>323</sup> Arab Reform Initiative, Syria’s expanding but fragile civic space: Opportunities and risks in the Post-Assad’s transition, December 2025, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>324</sup> Arab Reform Initiative, Syria’s expanding but fragile civic space: Opportunities and risks in the Post-Assad’s transition, December 2025, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>325</sup> Syrian Observer, Syria launches professional code of conduct for media sector, 16 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>326</sup> Arab Reform Initiative, Syria’s expanding but fragile civic space: Opportunities and risks in the Post-Assad’s transition, December 2025, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>327</sup> SNHR, The Role of Journalism in the Transitional Justice Process in Syria after Years of Repression and Intimidation, 30 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>328</sup> AI, The State of the World’s Human Rights; Syria 2025, 21 April 2026, [url](#); Arab Reform Initiative, Syria’s expanding but fragile civic space: Opportunities and risks in the Post-Assad’s transition, December 2025, [url](#), p. 15; Lugarit, Redefining Civic Boundaries, Exploring New Regulations and Challenges for NGO Registration in Post-Assad Syria, Policy Paper, Allaji O. A., Masri H., 8 April 2025, accessible through subscription, [url](#)

<sup>329</sup> Al Majalla, Syria’s civic space opens...but not for everyone, 19 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>330</sup> Arab Reform Initiative, Syria’s expanding but fragile civic space: Opportunities and risks in the Post-Assad’s transition, December 2025, [url](#), p. 20





manipulation, whether through direct political exploitation or more informal pressure from emerging centres of power.<sup>331</sup>

Several confidential sources interviewed by the Netherlands MFA in September 2025 indicated that journalists were required to register with the Ministry of Information and were not always granted permission to report on certain events.<sup>332</sup> Restrictions reportedly included denial of access to the Druze-controlled areas of Sweida.<sup>333</sup> Journalists who had worked in the former HTS-controlled area of Idlib generally enjoyed greater access to information than other journalists.<sup>334</sup> However, despite these constraints, Haid Haid assessed that freedom of expression for journalists has remained relatively noticeable throughout the period, although experiences may differ between Syrians and non-Syrians, since foreign journalists could face administrative restrictions, such as difficulties in obtaining visas.<sup>335</sup>

Over the reference period there were reports of journalists being briefly detained by transitional government for 'inciting sectarian strife',<sup>336</sup> criticising the attacks on the Alawite community, including the abduction of Alawite women and girls,<sup>337</sup> or in the context of the government reasserting control over former SDF-controlled areas.<sup>338</sup> One source also reported incidents in which journalists were arrested at checkpoints, subjected to ill-treatment, and released shortly thereafter without their families being informed of their whereabouts or being provided access to legal assistance. Such incidents were generally characterised by the authorities as isolated cases or misunderstandings. In many instances, the Ministry of Information reportedly intervened when journalists had been arrested by internal security forces.<sup>339</sup> SNHR noted that short detentions of activists or journalists who criticised the government have been documented, consistent with the imposition of actual restrictions on opposition without reaching the threshold of formal criminalisation.<sup>340</sup>

In January 2026, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported on the arrest of three journalists in Aleppo following the reassertion of government control and restrictions on independent reporting. The journalists were eventually released after a couple of hours.<sup>341</sup> Journalists Eva Maria Michelmann and Ahmed Polad, a German and a Kurdish-Turkish journalist working for an Istanbul-based News Agency and TV, were arrested in January 2026, during the takeover of Raqqa. In April, Syrian authorities confirmed that the German journalist was detained

<sup>331</sup> SNHR, The Role of Journalism in the Transitional Justice Process in Syria after Years of Repression and Intimidation, 30 October 2025, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>332</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 123

<sup>333</sup> New York Times (The), After weeks of sectarian clashes in Syria, an uneasy truce takes hold, 6 August 2025, [url](#); IFJ, Syria: One journalist killed, several attacked amid clashes in Sweida, 8 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>334</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 123

<sup>335</sup> Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026

<sup>336</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Damascus Solicitor orders release of Syrian journalist Iyad Sharbaji, 16 December 2025, [url](#); Welat, Syrian Security Detains Journalist in Damascus After His Return from the United States, 15 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>337</sup> AI, The State of the World's Human Rights; Syria 2025, 21 April 2026, [url](#); New Arab (The), Syrian journalist Noor Suleiman released after arrest in Damascus, 30 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>338</sup> CPJ, Journalists detained, barred in Syria as government regains Aleppo areas, 12 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>339</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 123

<sup>340</sup> SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026

<sup>341</sup> CPJ, Journalists detained, barred in Syria as government regains Aleppo areas, 12 January 2026, [url](#)



in Damascus, while, according to information shared by Free Media Union in northeast Syria, Polad is being held in a detention facility in the northern city of Aleppo.<sup>342</sup> Authorities stated that the two journalists were found at an SDF security headquarters, had refused to identify themselves or disclose their professional role, and were not carrying official documentation.<sup>343</sup>

Several sources interviewed by DIS indicated that incidents of detention and harassment of journalists appeared to be isolated rather than systematic.<sup>344</sup> Some detentions were attributed to the low professional standards of local security actors rather than to a coordinated government policy.<sup>345</sup> Journalists who had previously worked for the former government's state media had not been subjected to kidnappings or targeted killings, although some had reportedly experienced verbal confrontations.<sup>346</sup>

According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), 45 journalists and media workers missing or believed to be held hostage under Assad rule remain unaccounted for. Although the new Syrian government has pledged to investigate their fate, as of December 2025, no information regarding their whereabouts has been made public.<sup>347</sup>

### 2.2.5. Monitoring of online activities

According to SNHR and the independent media organisation Enab Baladi, as cited by DIS, authorities lack the capacity for systematic monitoring and instead react to prominent cases or general trends. However, other sources interviewed by DIS reported that monitoring of online activities continued in a manner consistent with practices under the former government, both inside and outside the country, including through informal networks of informants, leading to widespread self-censorship. Several individuals, including journalists and activists, have reportedly been arrested after criticising government actions online, including in relation to military operations in coastal areas in 2025.<sup>348</sup> In February 2026, an Alawite journalist in Latakia was found dead shortly after publishing online criticism of the transitional authorities in February 2026. No official statement regarding the circumstances of the journalist's death had been issued by the Syrian authorities as of February 2026.<sup>349</sup>

### 2.2.6. Reaction of pro-government supporters to criticism of the government

The government's security forces have not been able to consistently provide protection to protesters and demonstrators, particularly from supporters of the government, intervening in

<sup>342</sup> CPJ, CPJ demands transparency as German reporter confirmed detained in Syria, 27 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>343</sup> AP, Syrian government confirms detention of missing German journalist, 30 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>344</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of certain groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>345</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of certain groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>346</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of certain groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>347</sup> RSF, Portraits of 45 Syrian journalists held hostage or missing under Bashar al-Assad — and whose fates remain unknown, 8 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>348</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of certain groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>349</sup> Kurdistan24, Syrian Journalist Found Dead Hours After Posting Criticism of Government, 22 February 2026, [url](#); CPJ, Alaa Mohammed, 21 February 2026, [url](#)



some cases only after attacks had already taken place.<sup>350</sup> On several instances, protesters criticising the government have been attacked by mobilised pro-government supporters, resulting in injuries and, in at least one case, fatalities.<sup>351</sup> Examples include the protests organised in Damascus in relation to violations committed in the coastal areas (March 2025)<sup>352</sup> and Sweida (July 2025),<sup>353</sup> the protests organised in the coastal areas after the bomb attack against an Alawite mosque in Homs (December 2025),<sup>354</sup> and the protests concerning the economic situation in Damascus (April 2026).<sup>355</sup> According to Haid Haid, many government supporters perceive criticism of government policies or approaches as a direct threat to the authorities, regardless of the government's own position. The source further noted a lack of progress in holding accountable those responsible for attacks on demonstrators, contributing to a perception among some pro-government supporters that they can act against critics with impunity.<sup>356</sup>

## 2.3. Individuals perceived to be opposing the SDF/YPG

During the Syrian civil war, the SDF controlled most of north-eastern Syria.<sup>357</sup> In early 2026, the Syrian transitional government took control of large parts of the territory previously held by the SDF in Deir Ez-Zor, Raqqa, Aleppo and Hasaka governorates.<sup>358</sup> By February 2026, SDF presence had reportedly been reduced to areas around the cities of Qamishli and Hasaka, as well as the border town of Kobane,<sup>359</sup> areas where the transitional government also deployed security contingents.<sup>360</sup> The transitional government assumed control of civil administration in formerly SDF-controlled areas<sup>361</sup> and the integration of SDF forces into state military

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<sup>350</sup> Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026; SNHR, Call on the Syrian Government to Prosecute Those who Attacked Civil Activists During a Peaceful Protest in front of the People's Assembly in Damascus, 20 July 2025, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Deadly protests and clashes in Syria – what happened and what's next?, 29 December 2025, [url](#);

<sup>351</sup> Al Jazeera, Deadly protests and clashes in Syria – what happened and what's next?, 29 December 2025, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch Syria, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>352</sup> Al Monitor, Syria security forces disperse rival protests in Damascus, 9 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>353</sup> SNHR, Call on the Syrian Government to Prosecute Those who Attacked Civil Activists During a Peaceful Protest in front of the People's Assembly in Damascus, 20 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>354</sup> Le Monde, Deadly violence erupts during protests in Alawite regions of Syria, 29 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>355</sup> New Arab (The), Syrian govt supporters, opponents clash in Damascus amid protests over economic conditions, 18 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>356</sup> Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026

<sup>357</sup> DW, Kurds vs. Syrian government troops: What you need to know, 20 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>358</sup> Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/61/62, 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 23, 99; Aftandilian, G., The Shrinking Space for Kurdish Autonomy in Syria, Arab Center Washington DC, 26 February 2026, [url](#); Etana Syria, BRIEF: Raqqa, Deir Ezzor fall to interim authorities, 21 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>359</sup> Arab Centre Washington DC, The Shrinking Space for Kurdish Autonomy in Syria, 26 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>360</sup> AFP, Syria Govt Forces Enter Qamishli Under Agreement with Kurds, 3 February 2026, [url](#); Reuters, Syrian state forces deploy in Kurdish-run city under ceasefire deal, 2 February 2026, [url](#); National (The), Syrian forces begin deployment to Hasakah, Kobani and Qamishli cities under deal to integrate SDF-held areas, 2 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>361</sup> Etana Syria, Analysis: Progress & Challenges in SDF integration, 28 March 2026, [url](#); Security Council Report, June 2026 Monthly Forecast, 1 June 2026, [url](#); SANA, Hasakah deputy governor says integration of Asayish personnel to begin soon, 5 June 2026, [url](#)



institutions was ongoing<sup>362</sup> (for more information see sections [1.1.3. Developments in the relationship between the transitional government and SDF](#) and [1.3. Security institutions](#)).

Since the January 2026 loss of territorial control and agreement to integrate into state institutions, SDF and affiliated forces have carried out less arrests. According to SNHR, during the first three months of 2026, the number of detainees released (417) by SDF significantly exceeded the number of arbitrary arrests (42) recorded during the same period.<sup>363</sup> The large number of releases was attributed to the transitional government's takeover of detention centres formerly under SDF control, release agreements between the two parties pursuant to the agreement of 29 January 2026 and popular discontent with forced conscription campaigns.<sup>364</sup>

Prior to January 2026, SDF reportedly carried out arbitrary arrests against individuals accused of criticising its practices, supporting the transitional government,<sup>365</sup> or on issues related to conscription.<sup>366</sup> The SDF-led DAANES administration had also imposed restrictions on public gatherings commemorating the anniversary of the fall of the Assad regime. The enforcing of the ban on gatherings included the dispersal of assemblies with live fire, intensified checkpoint searches, restricted access to public spaces, and arrests linked to participation, filming, or expression of opinions.<sup>367</sup> Cases of incommunicado detention and enforced disappearances at the hands of SDF were also reported in 2025, including against individuals who celebrated the transitional government's assumption of power.<sup>368</sup>

Deaths in SDF custody were reported throughout 2025, with allegations that torture and inadequate medical care contributed to fatalities among men and children. Several cases across Aleppo, Hasaka, Deir Ez-Zor, and Raqqqa governorates, including deaths following arrest-related injuries and the deaths of children in detention, were documented, with investigations ongoing.<sup>369</sup>

In the context of clashes between the transitional government and the SDF in early 2026, some residents claimed that SDF forces and Asayish (Kurdish internal security) restricted civilian movement by blocking access to humanitarian corridors in Aleppo.<sup>370</sup> Additional reports indicated that civilians in Hasaka were shot at or arrested for violating curfews

<sup>362</sup> Enab Baladi, Hamo: Four SDF Brigades Join Defense Ministry, 2 May 2026, [url](#); Arab Centre Washington DC, The Shrinking Space for Kurdish Autonomy in Syria, 26 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>363</sup> SNHR, Quarterly Report on Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention in Syria, 5 April 2026, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>364</sup> SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026

<sup>365</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 94, 155-158; Syria Direct, A year after Assad's fall, arbitrary arrests cast a shadow over northeastern Syria, 5 December 2025, [url](#); STJ, Northeast Syria: Arbitrary Restrictions on Freedom of Expression and Peaceful Assembly in Areas under the Autonomous Administration, 12 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>366</sup> Syria Direct, A year after Assad's fall, arbitrary arrests cast a shadow over northeastern Syria, 5 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>367</sup> STJ, Northeast Syria: Arbitrary Restrictions on Freedom of Expression and Peaceful Assembly in Areas under the Autonomous Administration, 12 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>368</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 155-158

<sup>369</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 154

<sup>370</sup> HRW, Syria: Civilian Protection Lacking in Northeast Escalation, 25 January 2026, [url](#)



imposed by the SDF, including in instances where individuals gathered to welcome the arrival of transitional government forces.<sup>371</sup> On 18 January 2026, Raqqa governorate experienced a major escalation marked by tribal and popular armed clashes with the SDF across several towns, villages, and parts of Raqqa city. Tribal fighters temporarily seized multiple areas, while the SDF destroyed key bridges and allegedly deployed snipers who targeted civilians, causing casualties amid a partial withdrawal of SDF personnel. According to SNHR, SDF fighters killed at least 22 civilians in the events, the majority by sniper fire.<sup>372</sup>

Over the reference period there were also limited reports of journalists being detained by Kurdish-led authorities in northeast Syria allegedly for collaboration with the transitional government.<sup>373</sup>

## 2.4. Individuals with (perceived) affiliation to ISIL

### 2.4.1. Situation of individuals affiliated with or perceived to be affiliated to ISIL in detention in northeast Syria

Since 2019, tens of thousands of detainees, mainly children, but also men and women, affiliated with or perceived as affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), have been held in detention facilities and camps in northeast Syria run by the SDF (15 facilities) and its civilian arm DAANES (10 facilities), with support from the US-led coalition against ISIL. The detainees included Syrians, Iraqis and third-country nationals.<sup>374</sup>

Most detainees held in DAANES-run facilities were Syrians accused of ISIL affiliation and were tried and sentenced before the “People’s Defence Courts” on terrorism and national security charges related to northeast Syria. Due to DAANES’ non-state status, these courts only exercised jurisdiction over Syrian nationals.<sup>375</sup>

By the end of 2025, approximately 27 000 individuals, over 90 % of whom were women and children, were detained in the SDF-controlled Al Hol (Hawl) and Roj (Rawj) camps due to alleged links or family ties with ISIL members.<sup>376</sup> The detainee population consisted primarily of Syrian nationals (around 14 930), alongside approximately 2 320 Iraqi nationals and about 8 480 third-country nationals originating from roughly 59 countries. Additionally, approximately 9 000 men and boys allegedly linked to ISIL remained detained, often

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<sup>371</sup> ISW, Iran Update, 2 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>372</sup> SNHR, Documentation of the Killing of At Least 22 Civilians, Mostly by Snipers, at the Hands of the SDF in Raqqa Governorate on January 18, 23 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>373</sup> RSF, Northeastern Syria’s Kurdish authorities must free journalist held for past month, 7 January 2026, [url](#); IFJ, Syria: IFJ calls for immediate release of journalist Firas Al-Barjas, 30 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>374</sup> CTC, The Collapse of Indefinite Detention in Northeast Syria: Implications Seven Years Later for Syria and Beyond, April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>375</sup> CTC, The Collapse of Indefinite Detention in Northeast Syria: Implications Seven Years Later for Syria and Beyond, April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>376</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 95



incommunicado and in dire conditions, in facilities across north-eastern Syria, including foreign nationals captured as children, some suffering life-threatening injuries.<sup>377</sup>

Most individuals held in Al Hol and Roj camps were detained for years without being charged or having access to individual or regular review of their detention.<sup>378</sup> Camp conditions included the forced separation of boys from their mothers,<sup>379</sup> while testimonies alleged that guards conducted near-nightly raids involving beatings and threats against detainees.<sup>380</sup> The UNCOI assessed that the detention amounted to unlawful deprivation of liberty and the camp conditions constituted cruel or inhuman treatment.<sup>381</sup> U.S. officials assessed that the continued spread of ISIL ideology and radicalisation in Al Hol camp could contribute to the group's resurgence through a new generation of supporters.<sup>382</sup> U.S. military reported ISIL-related attacks in Al Hol<sup>383</sup> while Kurdish forces reported a large-scale escape attempt by some residents in the second half of 2025.<sup>384</sup>

In January 2026, the transitional government assumed control of Al Hol camp amid chaotic conditions, during which approximately 15 000 to 20 000 detainees<sup>385</sup> reportedly fled and dispersed across Aleppo, Deir Ez-Zor and Idlib governorates, with some possibly leaving Syria.<sup>386</sup> U.S. military sources assessed that local ISIL networks facilitated the smuggling of loyalists from Al Hol camp.<sup>387</sup> Those who remained were transferred to Akburhan camp in Aleppo, under transitional government control, where the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) registered 731 families.<sup>388</sup> As of March 2026, UNHCR maintained a presence in the camp carrying out protection monitoring<sup>389</sup> while humanitarian actors, in coordination with local authorities, provided assistance to the camp population.<sup>390</sup> The transitional government began security assessments to determine which families relocated

<sup>377</sup> UN Security Council, Twenty-second report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat [S/2026/57], 2 February 2026, [url](#), paras 15-16

<sup>378</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 96; HRW, Northeast Syria: Camp Closures Leave Thousands Stranded, 23 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>379</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 96; HRW, Northeast Syria: Camp Closures Leave Thousands Stranded, 23 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>380</sup> HRW, Northeast Syria: Camp Closures Leave Thousands Stranded, 23 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>381</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 96

<sup>382</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve Lead Inspector General Quarterly Report to Congress, July 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025, 20 February 2026, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>383</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve Lead Inspector General Quarterly Report to Congress, July 1, 2025 - December 31, 2025, 20 February 2026, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>384</sup> Kurdistan24, Kurdish Security Forces in Western Kurdistan Foil Mass Escape Attempt at al-Hol Camp, 3 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>385</sup> WSJ, U.S. Intelligence Says at Least 15,000 at Large After ISIS Detention Camp Collapses in Syria, 20 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>386</sup> OSES, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Claudio Cordone - Briefing to the Security Council, 18 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>387</sup> USDOD, Lead IG Report to the U.S. Congress January 1, 2026 – March 31, 2026, 27 May 2026, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>388</sup> OSES, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Claudio Cordone - Briefing to the Security Council, 18 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>389</sup> UNHCR, Regional Flash Update #67, 6 March 2026, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>390</sup> UNOCHA, Syria: Humanitarian Response in Aleppo and the North-East | Humanitarian Situation Report No. 4 (As of 4 March 2026), 8 March 2026, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, At Security Council, Deputy Relief Chief underlines Middle East escalation risks to Syrians, 18 March 2026, [url](#)





from Al-Hol camp to Akburhan camp are eligible to leave, with 15 families approved as of March 2026. Those authorised to leave the camp included individuals requiring medical treatment, older persons, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable households.<sup>391</sup>

Al Hol camp was fully evacuated and closed on 23 February 2026. As of March 2026, whereabouts, safety, and protection of the dispersed population remained unclear.<sup>392</sup> According to a report published by the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, the population which fled Al Hol camp was largely made up of women and children and included ‘from victims of the Islamic State to committed adherents to somewhere in between’.<sup>393</sup>

In the context of the U.S. phased withdrawal from bases in Syria<sup>394</sup> and the SDF’s handover of territory and prisons holding ISIL detainees to the transitional government in early 2026, the U.S. announced operations undertaken by the Global Coalition Against Da’esh (ISIL) aimed at transferring ISIL detainees from Syrian prisons to Iraq where they would be temporarily detained,<sup>395</sup> to prevent the escape of more detainees.<sup>396</sup> Transfers of ISIL detainees from prisons in Syria including from Ghwayaran prison (Hasaka governorate), reportedly holding former ISIL fighters,<sup>397</sup> to Iraq were reported.<sup>398</sup> By February 2026, the U.S. announced that 5 704 alleged ISIL detainees, including 3 526 Syrians and 157 children from 61 countries, were transferred to Iraq<sup>399</sup> to stand trial.<sup>400</sup> Organisations including the UNCOI raised serious concerns that the transfers of alleged ISIL detainees to Iraq would contravene to the principle of non-refoulement.<sup>401</sup>

By the end of March 2026, the transitional government had assumed full operational control of all detention facilities in northeastern Syria previously managed by the SDF.<sup>402</sup> As of March 2026, Al Roj camp remained under SDF control,<sup>403</sup> hosting around 2 000 third country

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<sup>391</sup> UNHCR, Regional Flash Update #67, 6 March 2026, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>392</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 98

<sup>393</sup> Margolin, D., The Collapse of Indefinite Detention in Northeast Syria: Implications Seven Years Later for Syria and Beyond, CTC, April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>394</sup> BBC News, US to withdraw troops from Syria as tensions mount with Iran, 19 February 2026, [url](#); WSJ, U.S. Is Withdrawing All Forces From Syria, Officials Say, 18 February 2026, [url](#); Al Jazeera, US transfers ISIL detainees to Iraq as northeast Syria base draws down, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>395</sup> UN, Security Council Press Statement on North-East Syria, 12 February 2026, [url](#); Security Council Report, Syria February 2026 Monthly Forecast, 1 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>396</sup> USDOD, Lead IG Report to the U.S. Congress January 1, 2026 – March 31, 2026, 27 May 2026, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>397</sup> Reuters, What has happened to Islamic State detainees in Syria?, 23 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>398</sup> Al Jazeera, US transfers ISIL detainees to Iraq as northeast Syria base draws down, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>399</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 98

<sup>400</sup> HRW, Northeast Syria: Camp Closures Leave Thousands Stranded, 23 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>401</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 98; HRW, Northeast Syria: Camp Closures Leave Thousands Stranded, 23 February 2026, [url](#); Charbord, A., Ní Aoláin KC F., A Legal Black Hole: Does Iraq Have the Right to Detain Prisoners Transferred from Syria?, Just Security, 11 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>402</sup> USDOD, Lead IG Report to the U.S. Congress January 1, 2026 – March 31, 2026, 27 May 2026, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>403</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 98; OSES, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Claudio Cordone - Briefing to the Security Council, 18 March 2026, [url](#)



nationals alongside Syrians,<sup>404</sup> primarily women and children.<sup>405</sup> The camp is expected to close.<sup>406</sup>

## 2.4.2. Arrests of individuals with perceived affiliation to ISIL in SDF-controlled areas

Following the January 2026 loss of territorial control and agreement to integrate into state institutions, there have been scarce reports of SDF carrying out arrests of ISIL suspects<sup>407</sup> or persons it accused of being affiliated with ISIL. The U.S. special envoy to Syria declared in January 2026 that SDF's role in fighting ISIL has ended.<sup>408</sup>

Throughout 2025 there were reports of SDF and affiliated armed groups arresting individuals under the pretext of affiliation to ISIL.<sup>409</sup> While the SDF states that its security operations and arrests target ISIL affiliates, criminal networks, and other actors threatening local security, some residents have criticised charges of ISIL affiliation used by SDF as 'a ready-made accusation that can be pinned on anyone' which has been applied against critics and opponents of the group.<sup>410</sup> In a 2024 report, Amnesty International stated that accusations of ISIL affiliation have been used by the DAANES and SDF to intimidate and silence perceived opponents and by individuals seeking revenge in personal or clan disputes. It further noted that false allegations of ISIL affiliations have at times been employed by officials at different levels within the DAANES.<sup>411</sup> According to Amnesty International, since the system in SDF-controlled areas lacked fair trial guarantees, including access to defence lawyers and protection from ill treatment, accusations of ISIL affiliation could result in prolonged arbitrary detention for years<sup>412</sup> Source reporting often does not provide clarity or information regarding the charges brought against arrested ISIL suspects, as well as their treatment in detention and the judicial proceedings against them.

<sup>404</sup> OSES, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Claudio Cordone - Briefing to the Security Council, 18 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>405</sup> Margolin, D., The Collapse of Indefinite Detention in Northeast Syria: Implications Seven Years Later for Syria and Beyond, CTC, April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>406</sup> HRW, Northeast Syria: Camp Closures Leave Thousands Stranded, 23 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>407</sup> SOHR, Security campaign | Asayish Forces dismantle active cell and arrest two of its members in Al-Hasakah, 27 February 2026, [url](#); Rudaw, SDF arrests four suspected ISIS members in Raqqa, 1 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>408</sup> New York Times (The), U.S. Shifts Away From Kurdish-Led Forces in Fight Against ISIS, 4 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>409</sup> SNHR, At least 658 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention Recorded in Syria in the First Half of 2025 including 72 Cases in June, 4 July 2025, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, At least 109 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention Recorded in July 2025, 2 August 2025, [url](#), p. 10; Arab Weekly (The), Fear of Arab tribal revolt drives SDF crackdown in Syria's Hasakah, 2 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>410</sup> Syria Direct, A year after Assad's fall, arbitrary arrests cast a shadow over northeastern Syria, 5 December 2025, [url](#); Syria Direct, A city apart: Raqqa residents fear 'separatism' and the 'IS card', 26 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>411</sup> AI, Syria: Aftermath: Injustice, torture and death in detention in north-east Syria, 17 April 2024, [url](#), p. 174

<sup>412</sup> AI, Syria: Aftermath: Injustice, torture and death in detention in north-east Syria, 17 April 2024, [url](#), p. 174



## 2.5. Individuals fearing forced or child recruitment by Kurdish-led forces

### 2.5.1. Developments regarding military service in DAANES

The conscription under the Law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty has ceased in practice since late January 2026.<sup>413</sup> According to Wladimir van Wilgenburg, a journalist and analyst specialised in Kurdish affairs, conscription under the Law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty had, in practice, ceased following the clashes of January 2026, although no official announcement abolishing conscription has been made.<sup>414</sup> In the Arab-majority areas that came under transitional government control after the SDF's territorial losses in January 2026, conscription reportedly ceased altogether. In other areas where the SDF remained present but no longer exercised full control, such as Hasaka and Kobane, there were likewise no reports of ongoing conscription under the Law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty.<sup>415</sup> SNHR noted that the integration agreement signed on 30 January 2026 did not alter the legal status of the Mandatory Self-Defense Duty. However, in practice, the 'self-defence duty' became unenforceable in Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zor governorates following their transfer to transitional government control.<sup>416</sup>

After January 2026 no recruitment campaigns for the 'self-defence duty' have been reported. UNHCR assessed that following loss of territory and operating under state control, 'the SDF should no longer be in a position to continue the forced recruitment practices previously reported in those areas.'<sup>417</sup>

Likewise, after January 2026, conscripts serving under the Law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty were demobilised<sup>418</sup> or required to undergo reconciliation with the transitional government.<sup>419</sup> The process required individuals who served in the civil and military structures of DAANES, including the SDF and Asayish members,<sup>420</sup> and those serving the Mandatory Self-Defense Duty (HXP)<sup>421</sup> to hand over identification documents and equipment issued by the former authorities including weapons and to receive a document allowing them to move freely without being stopped at checkpoints.<sup>422</sup> According to SNHR, former member of SDF and those serving the Mandatory Self-Defense Duty (HXP) were reaching individual arrangements with the government forces or local commanders. These arrangements are

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<sup>413</sup> Van Wilgenburg W., telephone interview with EUAA, 16 April 2026; Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026; Bassam Alahmad, online interview with EUAA, 5 & 27 May 2026

<sup>414</sup> Van Wilgenburg W., telephone interview with EUAA, 16 April 2026

<sup>415</sup> Van Wilgenburg W., telephone interview with EUAA, 16 April 2026; Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026

<sup>416</sup> SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026

<sup>417</sup> UNHCR, International Protection Considerations with Regard to Asylum-Seekers from the Syrian Arab Republic, [url](#), p. 70

<sup>418</sup> Van Wilgenburg W., telephone interview with EUAA, 16 April 2026

<sup>419</sup> SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026

<sup>420</sup> Syria Direct, After the SDF: How can Raqqa mend its social fabric?, 3 February 2026, [url](#); Van Wilgenburg W., telephone interview with EUAA, 16 April 2026

<sup>421</sup> SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026

<sup>422</sup> Syria Direct, After the SDF: How can Raqqa mend its social fabric?, 3 February 2026, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Limited turnout at Deir Ezzor settlement center for former SDF members, 27 January 2026, [url](#)



regarded by SNHR as informal and inconsistent, and they do not constitute a systematic framework of general amnesty nor a formal demobilisation mechanism. Those who surrendered to the transitional government or defected before or during January 2026 were, in some cases, permitted to return to civilian life, while others faced detention for purposes of security vetting.<sup>423</sup>

According to Wladimir van Wilgenburg, many individuals who had previously served in DAANES civil and military institutions were now unemployed.<sup>424</sup> According to Haid Haid, some former conscripts serving the Mandatory Self-Defense Duty (HXP) were now attempting to join armed groups on a voluntary basis.<sup>425</sup>

Prior to January 2026, DAANES was requiring men to serve the mandatory 'self-defence duty' for 12 months upon reaching the age of 18.<sup>426</sup> Compulsory recruitment campaigns in northeastern Syria, particularly in Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor and Hasaka governorates, were reported mainly in September and October 2025<sup>427</sup> and led to the detention of more than 500 individuals only in Raqqa.<sup>428</sup> These operations reportedly targeted young men born between 1999 and 2007<sup>429</sup> and were conducted through raids and checkpoints.<sup>430</sup> According to SNHR, evaders from the 'self-defence duty' were generally transferred directly to service once apprehended while defectors faced detention, military judicial proceedings, and forcible return to service.<sup>431</sup>

### 2.5.2. Recruitment of minors by armed groups associated with SDF

UNHCR assessed that, after government forces regained control of former SDF-held areas in Aleppo, Deir Ez-Zor, Raqqa, and Hasaka in January 2026, child recruitment in those areas is expected to have stopped.<sup>432</sup> Additionally, the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM), one of the main actors identified as carrying out child recruitment, was expected to leave Syrian territory as part of the January 2026 agreement between the transitional government and SDF.<sup>433</sup> However, their presence in Hasaka was still reported as of early May 2026.<sup>434</sup>

Despite the Action Plan signed between the SDF and the United Nations in 2019 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children under the age of 18,<sup>435</sup> recruitment of children by

<sup>423</sup> SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026

<sup>424</sup> Van Wilgenburg W., telephone interview with EUAA, 16 April 2026

<sup>425</sup> Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026

<sup>426</sup> Enab Baladi, AANES Adopts Amendments to Conscription Laws, 22 February 2024, [url](#);

<sup>427</sup> Enab Baladi, Arrests, stalled talks, and military buildups War drums beat in eastern Syria, 8 October 2025, [url](#); Arab Weekly (The), Return of forced conscription in Raqqa undermines fragile SDF-Damascus accords, 1 October 2025, [url](#); New Arab (The), SDF forcibly drafts young men amid fear of conflict with Syrian government, 1 October 2025, [url](#); SNHR, Condemning the Widespread Detention for Forced Conscription by the Syrian Democratic Forces in Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zor since 29 September 2025, 8 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>428</sup> Enab Baladi, Arrests, stalled talks, and military buildups War drums beat in eastern Syria, 8 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>429</sup> New Arab (The), SDF forcibly drafts young men amid fear of conflict with Syrian government, 1 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>430</sup> Enab Baladi, Arrests, stalled talks, and military buildups War drums beat in eastern Syria, 8 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>431</sup> SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026

<sup>432</sup> UNHCR, International Protection Considerations with Regard to Asylum-Seekers from the Syrian Arab Republic, [url](#), p. 79

<sup>433</sup> Hamidi, I, Back to Qandil: PKK fighters finally leaving Syria, 12 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>434</sup> Asharq A-Awsat, Syria Says Arabic Remains Sole Official Language after Hasakah Unrest, 9 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>435</sup> UN SRSG, Syrian Democratic Forces Sign Action Plan to End and Prevent the Recruitment and Use of Children, 1 July 2019, [url](#)



the SDF and affiliated entities continued to be documented as of December 2025.<sup>436</sup> The Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict noted that some progress in implementing the Action Plan with SDF was reportedly achieved, while reiterating that SDF needs to end and prevent their recruitment and use of children, in line with the January 2026 agreement to integrate SDF into the Syrian government forces.<sup>437</sup>

The SDF, Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), YPJ, Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and the RYM continued to recruit children after the fall of the former government.<sup>438</sup> Among these groups, the PKK-affiliated RYM was identified as the principal actor responsible for the recruitment of child soldiers for the SDF.<sup>439</sup> Recruitment often targeted vulnerable children, including those from poor or displaced families or those experiencing domestic violence,<sup>440</sup> and families were frequently not told where their children had been taken.<sup>441</sup>

According to SNHR, between 29 September and 5 October 2025, at least 113 individuals, including 12 children and several students, were reportedly detained in Raqqa city and in areas under SDF control in Deir Ez-Zor governorate.<sup>442</sup> According to local sources cited by SNHR, many detainees were transferred to recruitment camps,<sup>443</sup> while activists described the arrests as arbitrary and based largely on physical appearance rather than identity verification.<sup>444</sup> Some detainees were reportedly outside the official recruitment age, including minors and men older than 30 years old.<sup>445</sup> The SDF denied allegations of forced recruitment, describing the operations as routine security procedures aimed at maintaining stability.<sup>446</sup>

In October 2025, a 14-year-old boy was reportedly abducted by the RYM in Aleppo governorate.<sup>447</sup> In testimonies published in January 2026, two Syrian minors stated having been forcibly recruited by YPG/SDF forces after being detained in December 2025 while attempting to cross into Türkiye in search of work. According to their accounts, they were

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<sup>436</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/61/62, 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 99; SNHR, The fifteenth annual report on human rights situation in Syria 2025, 26 March 2026, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>437</sup> UN SRSG, SRSG CAAC Frazier's Remarks to the UN Security Council 10143rd meeting on Syria, 22 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>438</sup> Levant24, German Report Reignites Scrutiny of Kurdish Child Recruitment, 13 January 2026, [url](#); SNHR, On worlds' children day: Strengthening the child protection system in Syria; Addressing the legacy of fifteen years of systematic violations and ensuring a safe future for generations, 21 November 2025, [url](#), p. 13; SNHR, Syrian Democratic Forces Kidnapped Child Omar Abdul Rahim Qader for Forced Conscription in Aleppo Governorate on October 16, 2025, 19 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>439</sup> Verify-Sy, "Şirāt Qandīl": Al-Jisr al-Jasadī alladhī Yarbuṭ al-Aṭfāl al-Kurd al-Sūriyyīn bi Jahannam "Al-'Ummāl al-Kurdistānī", 13 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>440</sup> FundsforNGOs, Kurdish Youth Group Allegedly Recruiting Children for Armed Groups in Northeast Syria, 21 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>441</sup> SNHR, Child Recruitment in SDF-Controlled Areas: Legal Framework and Documented Practices, 14 January 2026, [url](#); Levant24, Reports Reveal Systematic Child Recruitment by the SDF, 21 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>442</sup> SNHR, Condemning the Widespread Detention for Forced Conscription by the Syrian Democratic Forces in Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zor since 29 September 2025, 8 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>443</sup> SNHR, Condemning the Widespread Detention for Forced Conscription by the Syrian Democratic Forces in Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zor since 29 September 2025, 8 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>444</sup> Enab Baladi, Arrests, stalled talks, and military buildups War drums beat in eastern Syria, 8 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>445</sup> Enab Baladi, Arrests, stalled talks, and military buildups War drums beat in eastern Syria, 8 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>446</sup> Enab Baladi, Arrests, stalled talks, and military buildups War drums beat in eastern Syria, 8 October 2025, [url](#); Rudaw, SDF denies allegations of child recruitment in Raqqa, 2 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>447</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/61/62, 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 164



transferred to military camps, underwent military training and participated in armed activities in northern Syria. Human rights reporting further indicated that families of recruited children were in some cases subjected to intimidation or threats aimed at discouraging them from reporting cases to international organisations. Some families reportedly organised demonstrations and sit-ins demanding the return of their children.<sup>448</sup> In January 2026, an alleged girl fighter was killed in Aleppo while investigations into the incident were ongoing.<sup>449</sup>

## 2.6. Individuals perceived to have transgressed religious/moral laws, norms or codes

The Constitutional Declaration stipulates that Islam is the religion of the president and Islamic jurisprudence is the ‘primary source’ of legislation.<sup>450</sup> This marks a notable shift from the previous constitution, which considered Islamic law as ‘a main source’ of legislation.<sup>451</sup> The president established a new *Fatwa* Council comprised entirely of Sunni members which is tasked with assessing whether legislation conforms to Islamic law.<sup>452</sup> While no new laws were introduced to formally restrict social life<sup>453</sup> and no systematic nationwide policy to impose Islamic norms was enacted,<sup>454</sup> there were reports of increasing religious conservatism<sup>455</sup> and attempts by individuals to enforce Islamic norms in practice,<sup>456</sup> including by local authorities.<sup>457</sup> Many attempts to enforce Islamic norms and regulations have primarily occurred at the local level,<sup>458</sup> by local councils or provincial administrations issuing decisions and directives.<sup>459</sup> These measures are often presented as the implementation of existing laws<sup>460</sup> or are justified on the grounds of public interest and compliance with Islamic principles.<sup>461</sup>

<sup>448</sup> AA, Syrian children recount forced recruitment by terror group YPG/SDF, 22 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>449</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/61/62, 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 164

<sup>450</sup> Security Council Report, April 2025 Monthly Forecast, 31 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>451</sup> BBC News, Syria leader signs temporary constitution for five-year transition, 14 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>452</sup> International Crisis Group, What Lies in Store for Syria as a New Government Takes Power?, 25 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>453</sup> BBC News, Syrians have more freedom after Assad, but could they soon lose it?, 18 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>454</sup> Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026

<sup>455</sup> New York Times (The), Clashing Visions of Syria’s Future Play Out in Ancient Alleys of Damascus, 11 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>456</sup> BBC News, Syrians have more freedom after Assad, but could they soon lose it?, 18 April 2025, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), “Muslims Are More Disturbed Than Christians”: Rising Fears Among Syrians Over Islamic Evangelism, 24 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>457</sup> Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026; New Arab (The), Syrian authorities walk back Damascus alcohol curbs after protests, 23 March 2026, [url](#); New York Times (The), A Ban on Makeup in Syria Has Some Red in the Face, 20 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>458</sup> Al-Tamini, A., A Damascus Suburb Local Council’s Regulations Against Blasphemy, Aymenn’s Monstrous Publications, 26 May 2026, [url](#); Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026

<sup>459</sup> Al-Tamini, A., A Damascus Suburb Local Council’s Regulations Against Blasphemy, Aymenn’s Monstrous Publications, 26 May 2026, [url](#); New York Times (The), A Ban on Makeup in Syria Has Some Red in the Face, 20 February 2026, [url](#); Haid, H., The Latakia makeup ban is a bad omen for Syria, 8 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>460</sup> New Arab (The), Syrian authorities walk back Damascus alcohol curbs after protests, 23 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>461</sup> Al-Tamini, A., A Damascus Suburb Local Council’s Regulations Against Blasphemy, Aymenn’s Monstrous Publications, 26 May 2026, [url](#); Haid, H., The Latakia makeup ban is a bad omen for Syria, 8 February 2026, [url](#)





## 2.6.1. Behaviour that may be perceived as transgressing moral codes

### Alcohol consumption

The transitional government did not impose a nation-wide legal alcohol ban.<sup>462</sup> As of early 2026, alcohol was reportedly available in Damascus' Bab Touma and Jaramana neighbourhoods.<sup>463</sup> However, many establishments selling alcohol reportedly face challenges due to expired licenses and the suspension of their renewal by the authorities.<sup>464</sup> Unlicensed restaurants and alcohol shops in Damascus and Latakia faced closures and threats on the grounds of lacking a licence to serve spirits, and, in some cases, armed attacks.<sup>465</sup>

Although most alcohol shops remain open, licensing has become a major challenge for Syria's wine industry since the fall of the former regime.<sup>466</sup> According to one of the few wine producers in Syria, the absence of a clear law regulating alcohol sales in Syria has made it impossible to sell alcohol after the fall of Assad. While there are no official restrictions on alcohol imports, Syrian border guards routinely inspect personal luggage and confiscate any alcohol found.<sup>467</sup>

According to an international organisation interviewed by DIS in September 2025, the government restricted alcohol sales in Muslim-majority areas, while Christians can sell it in licensed shops,<sup>468</sup> though no new licenses have been issued by the current authorities despite numerous applications from previously closed businesses.<sup>469</sup>

In August 2025, security forces arrested a Christian man at a checkpoint in Damascus after discovering that he was carrying two bottles of alcohol. He was allegedly physically assaulted and taken to the Khatib detention centre and pressed to convert to Islam. He was released after his family paid a ransom of USD 10 000.<sup>470</sup>

In March 2026, authorities in Damascus announced a city-wide ban on the sale of alcohol in restaurants and nightclubs, citing numerous complaints from residents and the aim of eliminating practices considered contrary to public morals. Limited exceptions were introduced for certain Christian neighbourhoods, including Bab Touma, Qassaa, and Bab Sharqi, where alcohol sales remain permitted only through specifically licensed

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<sup>462</sup> New York Times (The), Clashing visions of Syria's future play out in ancient alleys of Damascus, 11 August 2025, [url](#); Waters, G., Dispatch from Syria's Christian strongholds: A new government, a full political spectrum, Atlantic Council, 25 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>463</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 115

<sup>464</sup> New Arab (The), Alcohol, authority and freedom: How restrictions in Damascus are testing personal liberties, 1 April 2026, [url](#); Syria Untold, Syrian wine industry: hidden resistance in jars, 30 December 2025, [url](#); DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 78 [international organisation]

<sup>465</sup> Syria Untold, Syrian wine industry: hidden resistance in jars, 30 December 2025, [url](#); Guardian (The), From tourism to wine, Syrian businesses flounder in post-Assad cultural flux, 5 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>466</sup> Syria Untold, Syrian wine industry: hidden resistance in jars, 30 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>467</sup> Guardian (The), From tourism to wine, Syrian businesses flounder in post-Assad cultural flux, 5 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>468</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 78 [international organisation]

<sup>469</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 78 [international organisation]; Syria Untold, Syrian wine industry: hidden resistance in jars, 30 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>470</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Christian man tortured and forced to recite Quran in Syrian detention center, 13 August 2025, [url](#)



establishments and exclusively as sealed takeaway purchases. Businesses authorised to sell alcohol must also comply with distance requirements from religious sites, schools, cemeteries, police stations, and administrative buildings. Establishments were given three months to comply with the new regulations.<sup>471</sup> Protest demonstrations against the decision to ban alcohol and restrict personal freedoms took place in Damascus without incidents.<sup>472</sup> Following the protests, authorities partially reversed the ban on alcohol sales in Damascus, indicating exceptions on alcohol sales for tourism purposes in certain establishments, as well as a policy review.<sup>473</sup>

### Dress code

The new Syrian government has not broadly enforced a dress code, aside from a June 2025 requirement for full-body swimwear on public beaches. However, unofficial signs in some cities have encouraged modest and conservative dress,<sup>474</sup> such as flyers being distributed on buses and in Umayyad Mosque in Damascus calling on women to wear full-face veils.<sup>475</sup> Women have faced informal pressure from local authorities, religious figures, and security actors to wear the Islamic veil, leading some to adopt it out of fear of harassment. In coastal areas, Sweida, and parts of Homs and Damascus, stricter dress codes, including the hijab, have been imposed by local actors, some reportedly linked to authorities.<sup>476</sup>

On 26 January 2026, the governor of Latakia issued a decision to ban female public sector employees from wearing makeup<sup>477</sup> in state and local administrations, public institutions, and schools.<sup>478</sup> The decision has triggered significant public anger and widespread concern over a crackdown on personal freedoms. Authorities claim the measure is intended to 'regulate professional appearance' and curb 'excess' rather than restrict personal freedom.<sup>479</sup> Another decision by local authorities in al-Tal, Rural Damascus was issued to forbid men from working in women's clothing stores,<sup>480</sup> while the municipality of Wadi Barada issued a circular prohibiting restaurants from hosting mixed groups for dancing or socialising, citing religious ethics.<sup>481</sup>

According to Haid Haid, although such practices lack a clear legal basis or formal policy mandate, the absence of accountability or official condemnation has allowed them to

<sup>471</sup> MEE, Damascus authorities ban alcohol sales in non-Christian areas, 17 March 2026, [url](#); Arab News, Syria's Damascus city restricts sale of alcohol, 17 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>472</sup> AP News, Syrian authorities' new limits on alcohol sales in Damascus spark backlash, 22 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>473</sup> New Arab (The), Syrian authorities walk back Damascus alcohol curbs after protests, 23 March 2026, [url](#); MEE, Syria walks back Damascus alcohol ban after outcry from residents, 22 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>474</sup> Syria Direct, In northeastern Syria, artists fight to preserve a cultural renaissance, 2 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>475</sup> BBC News, Syrians have more freedom after Assad, but could they soon lose it?, 18 April 2025, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), "Muslims Are More Disturbed Than Christians": Rising Fears Among Syrians Over Islamic Evangelism, 24 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>476</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 59-61 [Syrian human rights organisation (1), Syrian human rights organisation (2)]

<sup>477</sup> New York Times (The), A Ban on Makeup in Syria Has Some Red in the Face, 20 February 2026, [url](#); Haid, H., The Latakia makeup ban is a bad omen for Syria, 8 February 2026, [url](#); L'Orient Today, Public sector makeup ban stirs criticism in Syria's Latakia, 28 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>478</sup> New York Times (The), A Ban on Makeup in Syria Has Some Red in the Face, 20 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>479</sup> Haid, H., The Latakia makeup ban is a bad omen for Syria, 8 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>480</sup> L'Orient Today, Public sector makeup ban stirs criticism in Syria's Latakia, 28 January 2026, [url](#); New York Times (The), A Ban on Makeup in Syria Has Some Red in the Face, 20 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>481</sup> Haid, H., The Latakia makeup ban is a bad omen for Syria, 8 February 2026, [url](#)



continue, contributing to an environment where personal freedoms are influenced by discretionary authority rather than established law.<sup>482</sup>

### Non-Islamic behaviour

In Syria, many Muslims reportedly practice their faith only to a limited extent, for example by attending Friday prayers without regularly observing other religious practices. According to one source, non-practicing Muslims are more common in Damascus than in more conservative areas<sup>483</sup> such as Idlib.<sup>484</sup>

Over 2025 there were reports of personnel informally enforcing gender segregation on public buses and in public spaces in certain areas,<sup>485</sup> although these practices were ad-hoc rather than formalised.<sup>486</sup> According to a Christian church leader interviewed by DIS, there have been repeated incidents at certain checkpoints in Damascus, including in Zabadani and on Baghdad Street, where individuals have been stopped for behaviour perceived as violating social or religious norms, such as gender mixing (woman being alone with a man with whom she has no formal relationship). She was reportedly returned to her family, while the man was beaten by checkpoint personnel. Enforcement and punishment vary depending on who controls the checkpoint, with different groups applying differing standards of acceptable conduct.<sup>487</sup> In 2026, there have been sporadic reports of individuals who were being briefly detained or dismissed from their employment for publicly breaking the Ramadan fast.<sup>488</sup>

According to several sources interviewed by the Netherlands MFA in September 2025, not practicing Islam usually did not lead to problems with the transitional authorities<sup>489</sup>

## 2.6.2. Atheists and apostasy

Atheists and individuals who have apostatised from Islam in Syria generally refrain from openly expressing their non-religious identity beyond trusted circles, as such matters remain highly taboo.<sup>490</sup> Most individuals never openly declare atheism or apostasy due to societal rejection and risk of ostracism.<sup>491</sup> However, several confidential sources interviewed by the

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<sup>482</sup> Haid, H., The Latakia makeup ban is a bad omen for Syria, 8 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>483</sup> SE, Swedish Migration Agency, Syrien Säkerhet och skydd i områden under de facto-myndigheternas kontroll [Syria Security and protection in areas under the control of the de facto authorities], 11 November 2025, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>484</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 104

<sup>485</sup> Haid, H., The Latakia makeup ban is a bad omen for Syria, 8 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>486</sup> France24, Between freedom and restrictions, Syrians navigate new reality, 4 June 2025, [url](#); DK, DIS, Syria - Security situation, June 2025, [url](#), p. 52 [Syrian Embassy in Beirut]

<sup>487</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 127-128 [high-profile Christian church leader]

<sup>488</sup> Reuters, Syrian authorities ban alcohol in Damascus, 17 March 2026, [url](#); Rozana, Ramadan Non-Fasters in Syria: "Public Morality" Overshadows the Rule of Law, 9 March 2026, [url](#); USCIRF, Country Update: Syria, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>489</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 105

<sup>490</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 107; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [General Country Report Syria], May 2025, [url](#), p. 101

<sup>491</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [General Country Report Syria], May 2025, [url](#), p. 101



Netherlands MFA in 2025 were not aware of specific cases in which atheists or apostates faced problems since the takeover by the transitional government.<sup>492</sup>

According to a high-profile Christian church leader in Damascus interviewed in September 2025 by DIS, in Syria, religious affiliation is recorded on national identity documents regardless of an individual's personal beliefs. Non-religious individuals generally avoid publicly expressing atheism due to social and security risks. Isolated cases of mistreatment have reportedly occurred, including incidents linked to personal appearance or clothing indicating they were not religious.<sup>493</sup> Other sources assessed that in more conservative areas such as Idlib and northern Aleppo, open apostasy could lead to murder, while in Damascus it might be tolerated within closed circles.<sup>494</sup>

### 2.6.3. Converts

Conversion from Islam to other faiths is not explicitly prohibited by law.<sup>495</sup> However, Muslims who convert to Christianity are not permitted to change their religious affiliation on government-issued documents and remain registered as Muslims.<sup>496</sup> A high-profile Christian church leader stated that while converts may be formally protected by law, they could face retaliation from family or society, and perpetrators of such acts may face only limited legal consequences such as imprisonment for around three months.<sup>497</sup>

According to an international organisation interviewed by the DIS in September 2025, there are no known cases of Muslims converting to Christianity in government-controlled areas, likely because individuals would avoid revealing such conversions due to their sensitive nature and possible repercussions.<sup>498</sup> A Church organisation interviewed by DIS stated that conversion to Christianity remains a sensitive issue in government-controlled areas of Syria and would likely provoke hostility.<sup>499</sup> Christian proselytising is considered unlikely despite the absence of a formal ban<sup>500</sup>, as authorities are reportedly unable to fully control radical elements within their ranks and in society, exposing anyone attempting to convert others to potential attacks.<sup>501</sup>

In contrast, several conversions to Christianity have reportedly occurred in Kurdish-controlled areas in northeastern Syria without resulting in consequences for the converts.<sup>502</sup> American evangelical churches reportedly operate openly in Kurdish-controlled areas and authorities do

<sup>492</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 107; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [General Country Report Syria], May 2025, [url](#), p. 101

<sup>493</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 127 [high-profile Christian church leader]

<sup>494</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [General Country Report Syria], May 2025, [url](#), p. 101

<sup>495</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 65

<sup>496</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 128 [high-profile Christian church leader]

<sup>497</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 128 [high-profile Christian church leader]

<sup>498</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 78 [international organisation]

<sup>499</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 85 [church organisation]

<sup>500</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 85 [church organisation]

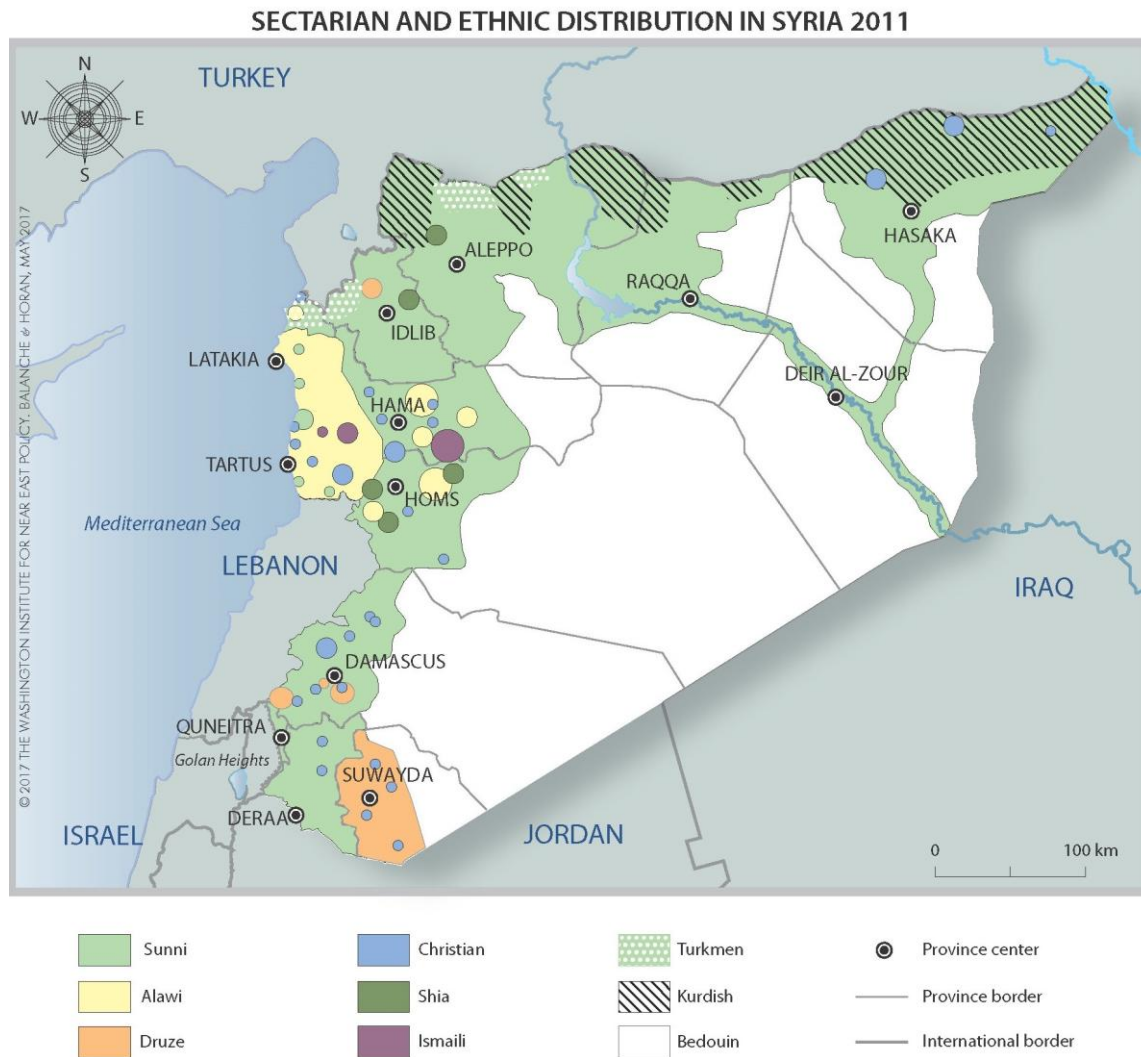
<sup>501</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 78 [international organisation]

<sup>502</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 78 [international organisation]



not sanction converts, although individuals may still face pressure or repercussions from conservative family members.<sup>503</sup>

## 2.7. Ethno-religious minorities



**Map 3: © A map of Sectarian and ethnic distribution in Syria 2011, Fabrice Balanche & Mary Kalbach Horan, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy<sup>504</sup>**

### 2.7.1. Kurds

Kurds constitute the largest ethnic minority in Syria, with an estimated population of 2 to 2.5 million,<sup>505</sup> or up to 10 % of the country's pre-war population of 23 million.<sup>506</sup> Kurdish population is concentrated in the regions of Afrin, Kobane, and Jazira (Hasaka), neighbourhoods of

<sup>503</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 85 [church organisation]

<sup>504</sup> Balanche, F., Sectarianism in Syria's civil war, 2018, [url](#), Introduction XIII

<sup>505</sup> MRG, Syria, January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>506</sup> Arab News, Kurdish fighters leave northern city in Syria as part of deal with central government, 4 April 2025, [url](#)



Aleppo and Damascus cities, and, to a lesser extent, in several districts in Raqqa city.<sup>507</sup> Kurds constitute approximately one third of the population in Damascus and are generally considered an integrated component of Syrian society. In long-established Kurdish-majority neighbourhoods of Damascus, such as Rukn al-Din and Wadi al-Mashari, Kurds reportedly do not visibly differ from other residents and are therefore not easily identifiable on the basis of ethnicity. Kurds also hold high-ranking positions within the government.<sup>508</sup>

On 16 January 2026, Presidential Decree No. 13 recognised Kurdish as a national language, permitting its instruction in both public and private schools in areas with significant Kurdish populations. It also designates 21 March (the Kurdish New Year - Nowruz) as a nationwide public holiday in Syria.<sup>509</sup> The January 2026 integration agreement between the SDF and the transitional government includes provisions to facilitate the return of predominantly Kurdish displaced persons to Afrin, Sheikh Maqsoud (Aleppo governorate) and Sere Kaniye (Hasaka governorate) and envisages the appointment of local officials in these areas.<sup>510</sup> However, neither the agreement nor the decree provides for the constitutional recognition of Kurdish rights, a key demand of Kurdish political leaders.<sup>511</sup>

Kurds residing in transitional government-controlled areas generally continue their daily lives without significant restrictions, harassment, mistreatment, discriminatory treatment, or ethnically motivated attacks,<sup>512</sup> provided they do not engage in political activity.<sup>513</sup> According to a Syrian lawyer consulted by DIS, individuals perceived as politically active or critical of the authorities may face reprisals similar to those experienced by government critics irrespective of their ethnic background.<sup>514</sup> In general there have been no attacks against Kurds living in government-held areas apart from isolated incidents reported of Kurds travelling from northeast Syria to Damascus who have been screened for alleged links to DAANES and in some cases detained.<sup>515</sup> According to a Kurdish activist interviewed by DIS there have been arrests of Kurds travelling from SDF-controlled areas to Damascus for alleged links to the Democratic Union Party (PYD) with some of them reportedly being tortured. No other cases of mistreatment of Kurds have been reported.<sup>516</sup>

### **Situation of Kurds in Aleppo governorate**

In Aleppo governorate, some arrests and detentions carried out by government forces during the first half of 2025 reportedly targeted individuals of Kurdish background perceived to be

<sup>507</sup> GEG, Iraq and Syria: Kurdish Autonomous Regions Under Threat, 4 March 2023, [url](#)

<sup>508</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 71, 77, 117 [international organisation]

<sup>509</sup> Al Monitor, Syria's Sharaa declares Kurdish a national language, recognizes Nowruz, 16 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>510</sup> Bodette, M., The SDF-Damascus Deal and the Kurdish Question: Prospects for Peace, Kurdish Peace Institute, 9 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>511</sup> Security Council Report, Syria March 2026 Monthly, 2 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>512</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, [url](#), p. 77, 81, 98, 117 [international organisation, international organisation in Damascus, SNHR, Enab Baladi]

<sup>513</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, December 2025, [url](#), p. 77 [international organisation]

<sup>514</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, December 2025, [url](#), p. 59 [Syrian human rights organisation]

<sup>515</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, [url](#), December 2025, p. 71 [Syria Direct, Syrian Human Rights organisation]; NPA, Fate of 4 Kurds from NE Syria remains unknown after arrest in Damascus, 7 July 2025, [url](#); SOHR, Without official explanation | Syrian authorities arrest nine Kurdish people in Damascus and National Army arrests civilian in Afrin, 1 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>516</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, [url](#), p. 130 [Kurdish activist]





affiliated with the SDF,<sup>517</sup> including cases where images related to the SDF were found on their mobile phones.<sup>518</sup> The sources did not provide further information on the cases.

After the transitional government took control over the Kurdish-neighbourhoods of Ashrafiyeh and Sheikh Maqsoud in Aleppo city in January 2026, reports indicated that government forces arrested over 300 Kurds that the authorities claimed were fighters, while some sources reported that those detained were civilians.<sup>519</sup> A STJ report based on testimonies from witnesses and victims indicated that civilians attempting to leave Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh between 6-12 January 2026 were frequently arrested and detained, without being informed of the reasons for their arrest, particularly at checkpoints such as al-Awarid.<sup>520</sup> Witnesses reported identity checks conducted by a mix of armed personnel, including individuals in plain clothes, Internal Security Forces uniforms, and members of Arab tribes. Documentation suggests that several tribes, notably the Mawali tribe, operated alongside Internal Security Forces in these areas. Some civilians reported degrading treatment during arrest and initial detention, including beatings, verbal abuse, threats, and confiscation of personal belongings.<sup>521</sup>

In Afrin, following the entry of the transitional government in 2025, abuses by Turkish-aligned armed factions reportedly decreased only marginally. While some detainees were released and certain properties returned to their original owners, these measures are widely perceived as symbolic steps aimed at improving the government's image rather than reflecting substantive human rights reforms. Armed factions, including the Hamzat and Amshat groups, reportedly remain influential and active in the area.<sup>522</sup>

In September 2025, Turkish Mol forces stationed in Afrin withdrew from the city. Following the January 2026 agreement between the transitional government and the SDF, convoys carrying hundreds of IDPs returned to Afrin,<sup>523</sup> with approximately 1 400 families having returned as of mid-April 2026<sup>524</sup> and further returns reported in May 2026.<sup>525</sup> Other reports indicate that Kurdish IDPs have been returning to Afrin<sup>526</sup> even before January 2026, with some estimates

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<sup>517</sup> SNHR, SNHR's Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria. At least 89 Arbitrary Arrests Recorded in Syria in April 2025, 3 May 2025, [url](#), p. 7; SNHR, At least 658 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention Recorded in Syria in the First Half of 2025 including 72 in June, 5 July 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>518</sup> SOHR, Having pictures with Kurdish symbols. Three civilians arrested at makeshift checkpoint near Deir Hafer crossing, 14 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>519</sup> Arab Weekly (The), Syria government forces take control of Aleppo's Kurdish neighbourhoods, 12 January 2026, [url](#); New Arab (The), Syria govt forces detain 300 Kurds, evacuate 400 fighters from Aleppo, 11 January 2026, [url](#); HRW, Syria: Civilian Protection Lacking in Northeast Escalation, 25 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>520</sup> STJ, Syria: Arrests and Abuse of Kurds During Aleppo Escalation (January 2026), 9 April 2026, [url](#); STJ, Joint Press Statement: Concerns Over the Fate of Hundreds of Detainees After Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh Clashes in Aleppo, 15 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>521</sup> STJ, Syria: Arrests and Abuse of Kurds During Aleppo Escalation (January 2026), 9 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>522</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, December 2025, [url](#), p. 91 [Lawyer]

<sup>523</sup> Rudaw, First convoy of displaced Afrin families set to return under Damascus-SDF agreement, 9 March 2026, [url](#); Levant24, Convoy Departs Aleppo to Return Displaced Afrin Residents, 9 March 2026, [url](#); ANHA, Returnees to Afrin: dream come true and beginning of a new life, 10 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>524</sup> Enab Baladi, Third group of displaced Afrin families in Qamishli returns to home areas, 14 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>525</sup> OSES, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Claudio Cordone - Briefing to the Security Council, 15 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>526</sup> Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, A Field Report from Afrin: Assessing the Prospects for Return of Displaced Kurds, Middle East Forum, 30 January 2026, [url](#); Al Monitor, Kurds from Syria's Afrin languish in camps as Sharaa, SDF remain unreconciled, 10 December 2025, [url](#)



on the number of returnees ranging up to 60 %<sup>527</sup> and some analysts assessing that the demographic balance has partially shifted back in favour of the Kurdish population.<sup>528</sup> In rural areas of Afrin, however, former SNA factions, including the Sultan Suleiman Shah and Sultan Murad brigades, reportedly continue to engage in largely unchecked criminal practices. Allegations include the looting of olive harvests, occupation of farmland and private property, and demands for substantial payments from returnees seeking to reclaim their homes or land from Arab settlers and SNA-affiliated actors. Cases have also been reported in which Kurdish returnees were denied property restitution on the basis of alleged sympathy with SDF-aligned armed groups.<sup>529</sup> According to researcher Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, the number of checkpoints and visible SNA symbols in Afrin has significantly decreased, and factions previously accused of human rights violations against Kurds have been incorporated into newly formed army divisions and redeployed to other governorates. However, individual figures and commanders from former factions may still retain control over confiscated real estate in Afrin and continue to refuse its return to original owners, owing to lack of alternative accommodation, personal financial gain, and the persistence of patronage networks.<sup>530</sup> The 80th Division of the army, which is led by a former Nour al-Din al-Zinki leader and includes fighters from former SNA groups, was reported to be present in Afrin.<sup>531</sup>

Authorities in Afrin require displaced persons to validate ownership documents through an approved lawyer, often with certification from a local *mukhtar* and witnesses. The documents are then reviewed by local and central 'economic committees', which, according to official procedures, should ensure the return of property once ownership is confirmed. The head of the Afrin administration stated that, in cases where confiscated property is occupied by displaced families unable to return to destroyed homes, authorities seek negotiated arrangements with original owners, such as rental agreements, or alternatively provide accommodation in displacement camps. Critics, particularly those aligned with the SDF, argue that these 'economic committee' mechanisms effectively legitimise property confiscations by armed groups and that procedures governing property restitution remain arbitrary and inconsistent.<sup>532</sup>

During the Kurdish celebrations of Nowruz, violence erupted in several areas after images circulated of a man removing the Syrian flag in Kobane/Ayn al-Arab, triggering unrest amid recent tensions. Incidents included mob attacks and vandalism in Kurdish areas in Afrin, prompting a curfew, and assaults on a Damascus-affiliated security post in SDF-controlled Qamishli, with no casualties immediately reported.<sup>533</sup>

<sup>527</sup> Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, A Field Report from Afrin: Assessing the Prospects for Return of Displaced Kurds, Middle East Forum, 30 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>528</sup> Al Monitor, Kurds from Syria's Afrin languish in camps as Sharaa, SDF remain unreconciled, 10 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>529</sup> Al Monitor, Kurds from Syria's Afrin languish in camps as Sharaa, SDF remain unreconciled, 10 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>530</sup> Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, A Field Report from Afrin: Assessing the Prospects for Return of Displaced Kurds, Middle East Forum, 30 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>531</sup> Syria in Transition, What's left of the SNA, December 2025, [url](#); Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, A Field Report from Afrin: Assessing the Prospects for Return of Displaced Kurds, Middle East Forum, 30 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>532</sup> Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, A Field Report from Afrin: Assessing the Prospects for Return of Displaced Kurds, Middle East Forum, 30 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>533</sup> AP News, Syrian Kurds return home to celebrate Nowruz for the first time since exile, 21 March 2026, [url](#)



## Stateless Kurds

A 1962 census in Hasaka governorate required residents to prove residence in Syria prior to 1945,<sup>534</sup> resulting in the deprivation of Syrian citizenship for an estimated 120 000 Kurds<sup>535</sup> and the creation of two stateless groups.<sup>536</sup> The *ajanib* ('foreigners') were individuals who were able to provide proof of residency but failed to meet all requirements, while the *maktoumeen* ('unregistered') either lacked documentation or did not participate in the census, resulting in their presence in Syria to be considered illegal. The stateless status of the *ajanib* and *maktoumeen*, passed down from fathers to their children, led to severe marginalisation of the community, whose rights, including access to health, education, property ownership, and political participation, became severely limited.<sup>537</sup> In April 2011, the Syrian government issued Decree 49 granting Syrian citizenship to the *ajanib* group of stateless Syrian Kurds.<sup>538</sup> *Maktoumeen* Kurds were left outside of the scope of the 2011 decree.<sup>539</sup>

On 16 January 2026, President Ahmad al-Sharaa issued Decree No. 13 which granted Syrian nationality to all Syrians of Kurdish origin<sup>540</sup> residing in Syria, including those previously listed as stateless or unregistered, while guaranteeing full equality in rights.<sup>541</sup> The decree specifically abolished all laws and exceptional measures resulting from the 1962 Hasaka census, which had stripped thousands of Kurds of their citizenship and basic civil rights.<sup>542</sup> Kurdish political leaders reportedly welcomed the measure, while calling for these rights to be constitutionally guaranteed.<sup>543</sup>

In February 2026, the MoI issued Decision No. 144/M to implement Presidential Decree No. 13 of 2026, establishing procedures for granting Syrian citizenship to eligible Kurds. Applicants must submit a formal request at designated centres, either individually or as a family application filed by the head of household. Required documentation includes an identification certificate issued by a local *mukhtar*, proof of residence and presence in Syria, and supporting evidence such as utility bills, certified school enrolment documents, or other legally accepted records. Application centres were established in Damascus, Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor, and Hasaka. A review committee will be established at each application centre to assess citizenship requests. Each committee will be chaired by a judge of counsellor rank appointed by the Minister of Justice and will include a civil affairs representative serving as rapporteur, as

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<sup>534</sup> STJ, Syria: 10 facts about the 1962 special Census of al-Hasakah, 4 October 2019, [url](#); StatelessHub, Syria, January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>535</sup> Benslama-Dabdoub, M., Colonial legacies in Syrian nationality law and the risk of statelessness, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 26-27

<sup>536</sup> McGee, T., Implications of legal identity documentation issued by the Kurdish-led Self Administration in Northern Syria: competition and compromise with the central state, Citizenship Studies 27 (7), 11 March 2024, [url](#)

<sup>537</sup> StatelessHub, Syria, January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>538</sup> StatelessHub, Syria, January 2024, [url](#); DK, DIS, Syria, Ajanib and Maktoumeen, Citizenship and Military Service, April 2024, [url](#), pp. 1, 6

<sup>539</sup> STJ, Statelessness in Syria: An Enduring Dilemma, 11 October 2022, [url](#), p. 3; StatelessHub, Syria, January 2024, [url](#)

<sup>540</sup> Security Council Report, Syria February 2026 Monthly, 1 February 2026, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Syria grants immediate citizenship to Kurds in wake of gains against SDF, 29 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>541</sup> SANA, From marginalization to citizenship: Syria's historic decree for Kurds, 17 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>542</sup> SANA, From marginalization to citizenship: Syria's historic decree for Kurds, 17 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>543</sup> Security Council Report, Syria February 2026 Monthly, 1 February 2026, [url](#); Van Wilgenburg, Syrian Kurds seek constitutional recognition after rights decree, MEE, 17 January 2026, [url](#)



well as a Syrian Kurdish community representative appointed by the governor.<sup>544</sup> In May, the authorities extended the deadline for receiving citizenship applications after a high number of submissions.<sup>545</sup>

According to Bassam Alahmad, thousands of stateless Kurds have applied to be granted citizenship following the issuance of Decree No. 13. The process is ongoing as the evaluation of applications and subsequent issuance of documents takes a few months.<sup>546</sup>

## 2.7.2. Alawites

Alawites constitute between 9 %<sup>547</sup> and 10 % of Syria's population<sup>548</sup>. They are primarily concentrated along Syria's coastal and mountainous hinterlands (Tartous and Latakia governorates), with smaller communities present in Homs, Hama, and Damascus.<sup>549</sup> During the rule of Hafez al-Assad and Bashar al-Assad, themselves members of the Alawite minority, Alawites held disproportionate influence in Syria's military, intelligence and political institutions, though much of the rural population remained economically marginalised.<sup>550</sup> Their overrepresentation in key positions within the Syrian state and longstanding association with the Assad government contributed to widespread perceptions of Alawite complicity in the regime's actions,<sup>551</sup> as well as to mistrust and resentment toward the community, particularly among the new authorities and segments of the Sunni population.<sup>552</sup>

### Targeting by transitional government security forces and affiliated armed actors

The UNCOI documented cases of arbitrary detention, as well as torture and ill-treatment of Alawite individuals in detention by transitional government forces between January and October 2025. Cases involved Alawites who were former SAA members including some who underwent reconciliation, civilians affiliated with the former government, as well as civilians accused to be remnants of the former regime.<sup>553</sup> Deaths of Alawite detainees arrested in early 2025 while in transitional government detention facilities were also documented by the UNCOI.<sup>554</sup>

In March 2025, a large-scale violence erupted against Alawite community in Latakia, Tartous, Homs and Hama governorates amidst clashes between pro-Assad remnants, transitional

<sup>544</sup> ANHA, Ministry of Interior issues decision to implement citizenship decree for Kurds, 20 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>545</sup> New Region (The), Syria extends citizenship application period for Kurds, 7 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>546</sup> Bassam Alahmad, online interview with EUAA, 5 & 27 May 2026

<sup>547</sup> France24, In Syria's Alawite area, joy at Assad fall but fear of Islamism, 16 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>548</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Violations against civilians in Coastal and Western Central Syria in January - March 2025, 11 August 2025, [url](#), para 31

<sup>549</sup> Shahin, K., The Existential Challenge for Syria's Alawites, NLM, 12 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>550</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Violations against civilians in Coastal and Western Central Syria in January - March 2025, 11 August 2025, [url](#), paras 31, 33

<sup>551</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Violations against civilians in Coastal and Western Central Syria in January - March 2025, 11 August 2025, [url](#), paras 33

<sup>552</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), pp 8-11; DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 75 [international organisation]; SJAC, The Syrian Government Must Investigate the Targeting of Alawite Civilians in Homs, 13 May 2025, [url](#);

<sup>553</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), Annex I paras 15-18, 24-27, 31-32

<sup>554</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), Annex I paras 55-60



government security forces and private individuals operating alongside them. The violence led to over 1 400 people, including around 100 women, predominantly civilian Alawites being killed.<sup>555</sup> UNCOI investigations found reasonable grounds to believe that members of the parties involved in the incidents, including transitional government security forces, committed violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, some of which may constitute war crimes.<sup>556</sup>

Since July 2025, the transitional government has introduced corrective measures, such as reducing checkpoints, rotating personnel and arresting individuals linked to earlier abuses, which have limited overt misconduct by state-affiliated forces. However, these steps have not significantly improved the security in the areas affected, leaving minorities exposed to violations by non-state actors and ongoing intercommunal tensions.<sup>557</sup> Many Alawites who fled the March 2025 violence to Lebanon reportedly remain abroad,<sup>558</sup> while thousands of Alawites reportedly relocated to SDF-controlled areas in northeast Syria. Around 2 000 are estimated to have joined the SDF incentivised by the monthly USD 200 stipend paid to fighters.<sup>559</sup> The Alawite community's trust in the transitional government has been undermined by its perceived failure to protect civilians, allegations of involvement of some of its personnel in the March atrocities, and the absence of credible efforts to ensure accountability or prevent the recurrence of such abuses.<sup>560</sup>

### **Targeting by non-state armed actors and unidentified actors**

Incidents of harassment, abduction, killings<sup>561</sup>, torture, ill-treatment, and forced displacement of Alawite civilians in Damascus<sup>562</sup>, the coastal areas and in Homs and Hama governorates continued after the March 2025 violence.<sup>563</sup> The perpetrators are often reported to be non-state armed actors.

In November 2025, the killing of a couple from the Bani Khalid Bedouin tribe in Zaydal, southern Homs accompanied by sectarian slogans found at the crime scene and fuelled by portrayal of the crime as a sectarian attack committed by Alawites,<sup>564</sup> sparked retaliatory attacks against Alawite-majority neighbourhoods, including al-Bassel and al-Muhajirin. Armed

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<sup>555</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 37

<sup>556</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Violations against civilians in Coastal and Western Central Syria in January - March 2025, 11 August 2025, [url](#), para 91

<sup>557</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>558</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>559</sup> Al Monitor, After SDF-Damascus truce, is Kurdish haven still safe for Syria's Alawites?, 18 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>560</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>561</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>562</sup> OHCHR, "The future of Syria is in the balance:" UN Commission sounds alarm on renewed violence amid hopes for justice and peace, 30 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>563</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 37; International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>564</sup> STJ, Zaidal/Homs Crime: Disinformation and Sectarian Incitement Behind Violence Against Civilians, 3 February 2026, [url](#), p. 3



tribal members vandalised and burned property, fired on homes and shops, and the violence spread to additional areas of the province as dozens of armed individuals called for revenge. In response, the Mol imposed a curfew and deployed security forces, establishing checkpoints and conducting patrols to contain the unrest. Health authorities in Homs reported that at least 18 people were injured in the violence, while the Alawite organisations stated that attacks carried out by members of Bedouin tribes resulted in two fatalities.<sup>565</sup> Large protests were held as a result in Alawite-majority areas in Latakia, Tartous, Homs and Hama.<sup>566</sup>

On 26 December 2025, a bombing at an Alawite mosque in Homs city killed at least eight civilians and injured 20 others, with Saraya Ansar al-Sunna claiming responsibility.<sup>567</sup> Two days later, protests erupted in coastal areas, including Latakia and Tartous, where Alawite demonstrators called for security and political guarantees.<sup>568</sup> Clashes between protesters, transitional government supporters and security forces reportedly left at least three civilians and one security officer dead and more than 100 injured.<sup>569</sup> Syrian authorities attributed the violence to pro-Assad loyalists who attacked security forces, while monitoring groups reported that security forces were responsible for some deaths during clashes and the dispersal of demonstrations in Latakia, where confrontations between protesters and counter-protesters also involved beatings, stone-throwing and gunfire being shot in the air.<sup>570</sup> In the aftermath of the protests, unidentified individuals attacked Alawite-majority neighbourhoods in Latakia, damaging cars and vandalising shops. Authorities imposed a curfew and arrested 21 individuals it labelled as former regime remnants who were reportedly inciting sectarianism and targeting security forces.<sup>571</sup>

Since early 2025, a pattern of assassinations of Alawites by unidentified armed individuals has been reported in Alawite-inhabited areas, particularly in Homs city and its countryside.<sup>572</sup> At least 40 Alawites were killed in Homs in separate attacks between 5 June and 31 October 2025. Incidents of kidnapping and murder in Homs governorate also increased, particularly affecting Alawite-majority areas. SNHR assessed that most of these attacks were acts of revenge against former members of the regime and perceived collaborators.<sup>573</sup> During the first two months of 2026, local activists documented the killing of 30 civilians in Homs city, the majority Alawites, carried out by unidentified gunmen on motorcycles.<sup>574</sup> According to sources, the victims reportedly included civilians with no known prior involvement in the conflict or in

<sup>565</sup> Al Monitor, Curfew extended in Syria's Homs following Bedouin-Alawite clashes: What to know, 24 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>566</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch Syria, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>567</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 100; Security Council Report, Syria January 2026 Monthly Forecast, 30 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>568</sup> Security Council Report, Syria January 2026 Monthly Forecast, 30 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>569</sup> Al Jazeera, Deadly protests and clashes in Syria – what happened and what's next?, 29 December 2025, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch Syria, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>570</sup> Le Monde, Deadly violence erupts during protests in Alawite regions of Syria, 29 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>571</sup> Al Jazeera, Syrian authorities impose curfew in Latakia as violence surges, 30 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>572</sup> SJAC, The Syrian Government Must Investigate the Targeting of Alawite Civilians in Homs, 13 May 2025, [url](#); SNHR, No Fewer than 20 Civilians Extrajudicial Killed in Homs City Between April 23-28, 2025, 30 April 2025, [url](#); MEE, One month on, killings persist in Syria's Alawi heartlands, 11 April 2025, [url](#); Syria Direct, Extrajudicial killings of Alawites plague Homs city, 9 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>573</sup> BBC News, 'Killed because they are Alawites': Fear among Syria's minorities after the fall of Assad, 10 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>574</sup> Enab Baladi, Homs, Syria: "Mobile Killings" Claim 30 Civilian Lives in Two Months, 1 March 2026, [url](#)





human rights violations, reinforcing a growing perception within the community that sectarian affiliation has itself become a risk factor.<sup>575</sup>

### **Situation of Alawite women**

In the aftermath of the March 2025 violence, the number of Alawite female-headed households increased since most of the fatalities were men. The absence of male family members in a patriarchal context has left affected women vulnerable to exploitation, property disputes, and increased risks of gender-based violence and harassment. Women reported facing stigma and abuse when seeking death certificates at civil registries, their deceased being labelled traitors or insurgents. The loss of primary breadwinners has undermined economic stability and, in some cases, discouraged widows from returning to work after the massacres.<sup>576</sup>

Throughout 2025, there were reports of women and girls, primarily from Alawite communities, who were abducted<sup>577</sup> across several governorates, including Damascus, Latakia, Tartous, Hama, Rural Damascus and Homs.<sup>578</sup> The UNCOI documented 21 cases affecting women and four girls, in which perpetrators typically were unidentified armed actors, organised criminal groups or individual criminals, while one case implicated foreign fighters nominally integrated into government forces. During captivity, many victims were subjected to beatings, sectarian slurs and, in some cases, ransom demands, suggesting both sectarian and financial motives. At least eight abductees experienced sexual violence, including gang rape and forced marriage, and three survivors returned pregnant.<sup>579</sup>

The Stop the Abduction of Syrian Women campaign documented 130 abduction cases from February to December 2025, mostly affecting Alawite women, with 36 still missing.<sup>580</sup> The Syrian Feminist Lobby, an advocacy group for women in Syria, documented more than 80 disappearances between February and December 2025, at least 26 of which were confirmed kidnappings, and nearly all reported victims identified as Alawite women.<sup>581</sup>

A New York Times investigation, based on dozens of interviews with Alawite victims, their relatives and individuals involved in the cases, found that kidnappings were widespread and often carried out with brutality. In some cases, ransom was requested by kidnappers. The investigation verified the abduction of 13 Alawite women and girls, as well as one man and

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<sup>575</sup> Enab Baladi, Homs, Syria: "Mobile Killings" Claim 30 Civilian Lives in Two Months, 1 March 2026, [url](#); STJ, Drive-by Killings: A Recurrent Pattern of Direct Killings Using Motorcycles Against Civilians in Syria, 26 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>576</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>577</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 69-73; AI, Syria: Authorities must investigate abductions of Alawite women and girls, 28 July 2025, [url](#); OHCHR, Syria: UN experts alarmed by targeted abductions and disappearances of Alawite women and girls, 23 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>578</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 69-73; STJ, Abduction in Syria: Alawite Women Most Targeted Amidst Transitional Government Inaction, 23 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>579</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 69-73

<sup>580</sup> STJ, Abduction in Syria: Alawite Women Most Targeted Amidst Transitional Government Inaction, 23 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>581</sup> AI Monitor, After SDF-Damascus truce, is Kurdish haven still safe for Syria's Alawites?, 18 February 2026, [url](#)



one boy; five victims reported rape, and two returned pregnant. Victims reported being abducted either by fellow Syrians motivated by money or sectarian revenge or by foreign jihadists. Many victims claimed their captors insulted Alawites and justified robbery and sexual violence against them, reflecting narratives promoted by extremist Islamist groups.<sup>582</sup>

State responses to abduction reports were inconsistent, with some investigations left incomplete, families sometimes discouraged or threatened from pursuing cases, and in two instances victims themselves arrested on morality-related charges after being rescued.<sup>583</sup> In November 2025, the Mol stated that, of 42 alleged cases it investigated, only one was confirmed to be an abduction.<sup>584</sup> The Syrian authorities dismissed the findings of the New York Times investigation as unsubstantiated, stating that no evidence was found of systematic abductions of Alawite women.<sup>585</sup>

### **Situation of Alawites working in the public sector**

Widespread public-sector layoffs enacted by the transitional government after taking power, including the dismissal of the entire former regime's security apparatus,<sup>586</sup> has disproportionately affected the Alawite community,<sup>587</sup> reflecting both targeted sectarian measures and their overrepresentation in government employment under Assad.<sup>588</sup> This measure resulted in a large number of unemployed Alawite men with military training and limited prospects.<sup>589</sup> Wives of former officers reportedly also lost their public-sector positions, including in the education and health sectors, apparently after being deemed guilty by association.<sup>590</sup>

For many affected individuals, the loss of employment also resulted in the loss of government-provided housing.<sup>591</sup> Social and military housing originally provided to public-sector employees, military personnel, and low-income households, along with informal settlements inhabited by Alawites on expropriated land, have been subjected to property destruction and forced evictions, frequently carried out by armed men affiliated with government forces.<sup>592</sup> Alawite residents of military and social housing in the Al-Somarya and Al-Zahryat areas of

<sup>582</sup> New York Times (The), In Syria, Kidnappings of Women and Girls Fuel a Minority Group's Fears, 3 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>583</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 74

<sup>584</sup> New Arab (The), Investigative flaws undermine accountability for Syria's coast sectarian massacres, 9 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>585</sup> SANA, Syria's Information Ministry rejects New York Times report on alleged abductions, 4 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>586</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), pp. 10-11

<sup>587</sup> International Crisis Group, Finding a Path through a Perilous Moment for Post-Assad Syria, 10 March 2025, [url](#); STJ, Mass Dismissals in Syria After the Regime's Fall, 13 May 2025, [url](#), pp. 4, 9; Anjarini, S., Investigating the Alawite Massacres, New Lines Magazine, 12 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>588</sup> Anjarini, S., Investigating the Alawite Massacres, New Lines Magazine, 12 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>589</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), pp. 10-11; UN Human Rights Council, Violations against civilians in Coastal and Western Central Syria in January - March 2025, 11 August 2025, [url](#), para 37

<sup>590</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), pp. 10-11

<sup>591</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), pp. 10-11

<sup>592</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 96



Damascus were reportedly evicted after receiving only hours or days' notice, with properties looted and male residents allegedly arrested. The transitional government, however, stated that the evacuations followed a one-month notice period and that no incidents occurred during the process.<sup>593</sup>

While there were reports of authorities reinstating most non-security public-sector employees, implementation remained inconsistent. Former security-sector personnel continued to be excluded.<sup>594</sup>

### **Housing, Land, and Property issues**

Following the fall of the Assad government, residents of dozens of Alawi villages in northern Hama fled, after which individuals from nearby communities looted property and seized agricultural land. Attempts by displaced villagers to return were reportedly hindered by authorities' inability to ensure security, while their land continued to be used in their absence without the authorities intervening. Those Alawites who did not flee were subjected to insults, death threats and ill-treatment including from alleged government security forces.<sup>595</sup> Looting, seizure, and destruction of property belonging to Alawite residents were reported in Homs city and surrounding rural areas in the context of security operations conducted between December 2024 and March 2025. The perpetrators reportedly included government forces as well as armed Sunni and Bedouin groups.<sup>596</sup>

A STJ report documented displacement of Alawites from villages in northern Hama as well as ongoing abuses, including direct security threats and a lack of protective measures preventing their return. Meanwhile, their property was extensively looted, and organised entities, most notably Idlib-based Iktifaa Company, took control of agricultural lands under the pretext of investment, depriving owners of their primary livelihoods.<sup>597</sup>

### **2.7.3. Druze**

The Druze constituted 3 % of Syria's pre-war population,<sup>598</sup> accounting for approximately 700 000.<sup>599</sup> Historically, they have been concentrated in the southern governorate of Sweida,<sup>600</sup> with smaller communities near Damascus,<sup>601</sup> notably in Jaramana and Ashrafiyat

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<sup>593</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 100-105

<sup>594</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), pp. 10-11

<sup>595</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 81-82

<sup>596</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 84-88

<sup>597</sup> STJ, Syria/Rural Hama: Forced Displacement and Unlawful Seizure of Property against Alawites following the Fall of al-Assad, 6 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>598</sup> MRG, Syria, January 2025, [url](#); France24, Syria's Druze: minority caught between Islamist government and Israel, 30 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>599</sup> France24, Syria's Druze: minority caught between Islamist government and Israel, 30 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>600</sup> MRG, Syria, January 2025, [url](#); France24, Syria's Druze: minority caught between Islamist government and Israel, 30 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>601</sup> France24, Syria's Druze: minority caught between Islamist government and Israel, 30 April 2025, [url](#)



Sahnaya.<sup>602</sup> Traditionally, the Druze in Syria have maintained a level of autonomy, including the formation of local militias,<sup>603</sup> consisting of ‘tens of thousands of fighters.’<sup>604</sup> After the fall of the Assad regime, the resistance of Druze community leaders and local armed groups to government control and integration into state forces,<sup>605</sup> resulted at times in clashes and casualties. In late April and early May 2025, fighting between local Druze armed groups and pro-government forces in Rural Damascus<sup>606</sup> and Sweida caused more than 100 fatalities<sup>607</sup> including dozens of civilians.<sup>608</sup>

The July 2025 violence in Sweida killed over 1 700 people and displaced nearly 200 000.<sup>609</sup> During the first and deadliest wave of violence from 14–16 July, government forces, aided by tribal fighters, committed widespread violations of international humanitarian and human rights law against Druze civilians in western Sweida and Sweida city. This included murder, torture, arbitrary detention, and pillage, with men separated from women and children for execution, and others shot in the streets or killed in their homes alongside family members. The second wave began on 17 July after government forces withdrew following Israeli airstrikes on Sweida and Damascus. Druze armed groups then targeted Bedouin civilians, committing serious violations, including murder, torture, arbitrary detention, forced displacement, and pillage, ultimately displacing nearly the entire Bedouin community from areas under their control. The third and most destructive wave, from 17–19 July, was carried out by tribal fighters in retaliation against Druze civilians. Nearly all homes, businesses, and religious sites in up to 35 Druze-majority or mixed villages were burned and looted, and civilians killed or abducted. Some government forces personnel removed their uniforms to join the attacks.<sup>610</sup>

Based on 409 firsthand testimonies and field visits conducted with government access, the UNCOI documented widespread destruction, particularly in Druze villages, where tens of thousands of homes, businesses, and places of worship were burned. The Druze community suffered 1 190 men, 99 women, 22 boys, and 31 girls killed in July 2025, while the smaller local Bedouin community lost 53 men, 9 women, 5 boys, and 3 girls. Most victims were civilians or no longer participating in hostilities, though some Druze and Bedouin men were combatants. At least 225 government personnel also died, many in Israeli airstrikes on 14-16 July in Sweida and Damascus, with additional tribal fatalities reported, bringing the total reported deaths to over 1 707.<sup>611</sup>

<sup>602</sup> AP News, Syria: Who the Druze are and why they're clashing with government forces, 16 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>603</sup> NPR, Druze militias are suspicious of Syria's new leaders – and are ready to go to battle, 12 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>604</sup> New York Times (The), What to Know About Syria's Minorities and Sectarian Violence, 1 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>605</sup> Etana Syria, Syria Update #25, 26 May 2025, [url](#); USDOD, Lead IG Report to the U.S. Congress January 1, 2025 – March 31, 2025, 29 April 2025, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>606</sup> Syria Report (The), Attacks on Druze Residents in Damascus Suburbs and Suweida Include HLP Violations, 20 May 2025, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Update #24, 8 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>607</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), pp 16-17; International Crisis Group, A Helping Hand for Post-Assad Syria, 22 May 2025, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Update #24, 8 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>608</sup> Security Council Report, Syria: June 2025 Monthly Forecast, 1 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>609</sup> OHCHR, UN Syria Commission releases report on July massacres and other grave violations committed in Suwayda and calls for expanded accountability measures, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>610</sup> OHCHR, UN Syria Commission releases report on July massacres and other grave violations committed in Suwayda and calls for expanded accountability measures, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>611</sup> OHCHR, UN Syria Commission releases report on July massacres and other grave violations committed in Suwayda and calls for expanded accountability measures, 27 March 2026, [url](#)



Of the nearly 200 000 people displaced in July, around 155 000, mainly from burned Druze villages, remain unable to return. Almost the entire Bedouin population remains forcibly displaced, many living in inadequate shelters, while other communities, including Christians and non-Bedouin Sunnis, continue to report insecurity and fear of renewed violence.<sup>612</sup>

Many individuals were also abducted, kidnapped, or unlawfully detained. While most have been found and released, about 100 Druze, 20 Bedouin, and 30 government personnel remain missing, along with a Syrian Civil Defense volunteer who disappeared during evacuation efforts. Initial reports of large numbers of missing women were largely unsubstantiated, though three Bedouin women and one girl, and three Druze women, remain unaccounted for. The violence had a pronounced gendered impact, as men and boys were particularly targeted. Druze and Bedouin communities also reported sexual violence against women and girls, including rape, though only a limited number of cases have been confirmed and the full extent is still under investigation.<sup>613</sup>

Israel's military intervention, alongside earlier attempts to disrupt government operations and sow division, caused deaths and injuries while exacerbating instability. This fuelled accusations of treason against Druze leaders, online incitement, retaliatory attacks, and community divisions. According to the UNCOI, each wave of violence included sectarian insults against Druze and Bedouin civilians, with clear patterns of targeting based on religion, ethnicity, age, and gender.<sup>614</sup> The scale of the violence overwhelmed existing systems for receiving and identifying bodies, issuing death certificates, and conducting dignified burials.<sup>615</sup>

On 17 March 2026, the Syrian National Investigation Committee released its report on the July 2025 violence in Sweida between Bedouin and government forces and Druze militias. It recorded 1 760 deaths, 2 188 injuries, and the destruction or burning of about 36 villages, resulting in mass displacement.<sup>616</sup> The committee classified the violations as individual rather than systematic, with 23 security and military personnel reportedly detained for trial. Human rights observers criticised the findings, arguing that this characterisation shields senior leadership from accountability and that the committee's government-appointed status undermines its independence and credibility as a transitional justice mechanism.<sup>617</sup>

Cross-community relations remain tense following the violence, with sporadic clashes, road closures, and targeted attacks continuing to disrupt daily life. Civic space in Sweida has

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<sup>612</sup> OHCHR, UN Syria Commission releases report on July massacres and other grave violations committed in Suwayda and calls for expanded accountability measures, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>613</sup> OHCHR, UN Syria Commission releases report on July massacres and other grave violations committed in Suwayda and calls for expanded accountability measures, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>614</sup> OHCHR, UN Syria Commission releases report on July massacres and other grave violations committed in Suwayda and calls for expanded accountability measures, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>615</sup>

UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law violations committed during the July 2025 violence in Suwayda, Syria, 27 March 2026, [url](#), paras 114-116

<sup>616</sup> Enab Baladi, Syrian national committee submits final report on Suwayda events, outlines key findings, 18 March 2026, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law violations committed during the July 2025 violence in Suwayda, Syria, 27 March 2026, [url](#), paras 138-139

<sup>617</sup> Security Council Report, Syria April 2026 Monthly Forecast, 1 April 2026, [url](#)

significantly narrowed,<sup>618</sup> and critics of local military and civilian authorities are increasingly targeted. There are allegations of torture and executions by the Sweida National Guard, including the reported deaths of two Druze sheikhs and a prominent poet<sup>619</sup> in late November and early December 2025 following alleged torture in custody, as well as ongoing looting of Bedouin homes.<sup>620</sup>

Sporadic clashes between Druze local armed groups and transitional government forces in Sweida were reported during the reference period, at times leading to casualties among combatants.<sup>621</sup> The parties exchanged prisoners on a couple of occasions, with the government releasing dozens of Druze detainees.<sup>622</sup> Some sources assessed that many of those released were civilians previously abducted by tribal groups and later transferred to government authorities, who subsequently held them in custody.<sup>623</sup> The National Investigation Committee on Sweida documented prisoner exchanges, including the release of 119 Druze and 25 individuals from Bedouin, tribal, and government forces, while noting that several people remain missing.<sup>624</sup> The UNCOI stated that at least 100 Druze arbitrarily detained or abducted during the July 2025 violence remain missing.<sup>625</sup>

The violence in Sweida deepened communal divisions and reinforced a sense of existential threat among the Druze community,<sup>626</sup> created mistrust between the Druze community and the Syrian government and, to some extent, conservative Sunni groups.<sup>627</sup> The Druze have increasingly been portrayed as aligned with Israel,<sup>628</sup> while many within the community report heightened security fears and feelings of political marginalisation.<sup>629</sup>

<sup>618</sup> Syria Direct, Red lines and death threats: Freedom of expression wanes in Suwayda, 1 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>619</sup> New Arab (The), Druze poet killed in Syria's Suweida after criticising local militias, 16 December 2025, [url](#); New Arab (The), Second Druze cleric dies after detention in Suweida, local reports say, 3 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>620</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law violations committed during the July 2025 violence in Suwayda, Syria, 27 March 2026, [url](#), paras 57-59

<sup>621</sup> International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch Syria, n.d, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), p. 28; Etana Syria, Brief: Clashes in western Suwayda, 26 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>622</sup> Etana Syria, Brief: Suwayda-Damascus prisoner exchange, 5 March 2026, [url](#); Haid, H., The risks behind the Damascus–Sweida prisoner swap, 28 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>623</sup> Haid, H., The risks behind the Damascus–Sweida prisoner swap, 28 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>624</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law violations committed during the July 2025 violence in Suwayda, Syria, 27 March 2026, [url](#), para 139

<sup>625</sup> OHCHR, UN Syria Commission releases report on July massacres and other grave violations committed in Suwayda and calls for expanded accountability measures, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>626</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), p. 30

<sup>627</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 75 [international organisation]

<sup>628</sup> OHCHR, Syria: UN experts alarmed by attacks on Druze communities, including sexual violence against women and girls, 21 August 2025, [url](#); DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 75 [international organisation]

<sup>629</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 30



## 2.7.4. Christians

Christians in Syria are mainly concentrated in major urban centres such as Damascus,<sup>630</sup> Aleppo, and the governorate of Hama,<sup>631</sup> with an estimated community also present in Sweida (around 30 000).<sup>632</sup> Although hosting around 3 000 Christian families, Aleppo is not considered as a major Christian centre, compared with approximately 20 000 families in Wadi al Nasara in Homs Governorate.<sup>633</sup> Before 2011, Christians made up approximately 10 % of the population,<sup>634</sup> but the civil war led to significant displacement and emigration, particularly to Lebanon and Western countries,<sup>635</sup> including Europe.<sup>636</sup> While there is no official current figure,<sup>637</sup> estimates suggest the Christian population has declined to around 2 %<sup>638</sup> (or approximately 300 000<sup>639</sup>), as over 75 % have left the country since the onset of the civil conflict.<sup>640</sup>

Syrian Christians comprise several denominations, including Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Armenian Apostolic, Armenian Catholic, Maronite, Protestant, Nestorian, Latin, and Chaldean churches.<sup>641</sup> Prior to the war, these communities were geographically dispersed: Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics mainly in and around Damascus, Latakia, and the coastal region; Syriac Orthodox communities in the Jazira region, Homs, Aleppo, and Damascus; Syriac Catholics in smaller communities in Aleppo, Hasaka, and Damascus; and Armenian Christians largely concentrated in Aleppo, with additional communities in Damascus and the Jazira region.<sup>642</sup>

Historically, Christians in Syria were subject to an implicit social contract with the state, whereby political neutrality was exchanged for the freedom to practise their faith. Under the Assad regime, this arrangement allowed Christians to live openly and access public services while remaining largely politically inactive. Transitional authorities have also largely refrained from targeting Christians for political reasons. Unlike some other minority groups, Christian leaders had not publicly demanded a role in shaping the country's future governance.<sup>643</sup> Despite some Christian leaders actively engaging with the transitional authorities,<sup>644</sup> Christian

<sup>630</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 37; DW, Syrian Christians: Debating the past, worry for the future, 28 March 2025, [url](#); Encyclopaedia Britannica, Syria, 27 March 2026, [url](#); MRG, Syria, January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>631</sup> DW, Syrian Christians: Debating the past, worry for the future, 28 March 2025, [url](#); Encyclopaedia Britannica, Syria, 27 March 2026, [url](#); MRG, Syria, January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>632</sup> Al Hurra, The loud silence of Syria's Christians, 10 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>633</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>634</sup> DW, Syrian Christians: Debating the past, worry for the future, 28 March 2025, [url](#); Encyclopaedia Britannica, Syria, 27 March 2026, [url](#); MRG, Syria, January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>635</sup> New York Times (The), Ancient Syrian Town Seeks Interfaith Peace After Long War, 14 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>636</sup> Syrian Observer (The), "Muslims Are More Disturbed Than Christians": Rising Fears Among Syrians Over Islamic Evangelism, 24 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>637</sup> DW, Syrian Christians: Debating the past, worry for the future, 28 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>638</sup> Vatican News, Syria: 'The few certainties that existed are now gone', 19 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>639</sup> Church Times, Christians in Syria remain cautious after overthrow of Assad regime, 10 December 2024, [url](#); France24, Muted Palm Sunday in Syria after violence in Christian town, 29 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>640</sup> Al Hurra, The loud silence of Syria's Christians, 10 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>641</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, Syria, 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>642</sup> MRG, Syria, January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>643</sup> Al Hurra, The loud silence of Syria's Christians, 10 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>644</sup> Zelin, A., Christians in the New Syria: Accepted, But At-Risk in TWI, 9 December 2025, [url](#)



communities largely remain politically marginal as their leaders exercise influence primarily through religious institutions rather than direct representation.<sup>645</sup>

Sources interviewed by DIS reported that when HTS took control of Damascus in December 2024, many Christians initially believed the group to be ISIL. This perception contributed to a persistent atmosphere of fear, unease, and distrust towards the authorities, accompanied by concerns regarding the future.<sup>646</sup>

Despite such fears, following the fall of the Assad government, the Directorate of Minority Affairs stated that Christians would remain protected under the transitional authorities. Early engagement with the new government included meetings between Christian leaders from various denominations and the interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa. In October 2025, the President visited the Mariamite Church in Old Damascus and met with Patriarch John X Yazigi, during which both sides reaffirmed their commitment to safeguarding Syrian Christianity and supporting the state,<sup>647</sup> describing it as a 'shared commitment to strengthening national values and promoting unity among all citizens'.<sup>648</sup> Despite the attempts to reassure religious minorities by the transitional authorities, the draft constitution defines Islam as the 'primary source' of legislation although explicitly recognising freedom of belief only for 'divine religions'—Christianity and Judaism—excluding groups such as the Yazidi faith.<sup>649</sup>

Sectarian violence, including the killing of hundreds of mostly Alawite civilians in March 2025 and the clashes that erupted in the Druze-majority governorate of Sweida in July, fuelled fears among minority communities, particularly Christians.<sup>650</sup> Moreover, localised disputes escalated into broader clashes between Muslim and Christian communities,<sup>651</sup> fuelling insecurity and leading to the cancellation of certain religious celebrations.<sup>652</sup> For instance, disputes between Christian residents of Suqaylabiyah (Hama governorate) and neighbouring Sunni communities had been ongoing<sup>653</sup> but were exacerbated by the town's frontline position during the war. Local militias from Suqaylabiyah were accused of abuses against nearby Sunni villages during the conflict,<sup>654</sup> while Christians from the town reportedly faced harassment from residents of neighbouring communities.<sup>655</sup> Following the fall of the Assad regime, tensions reportedly intensified as some members of neighbouring Sunni communities expressed hostility towards those perceived as having been aligned with the former government.<sup>656</sup> Earlier sectarian

<sup>645</sup> Al Hurra, The loud silence of Syria's Christians, 10 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>646</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of certain groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 34

<sup>647</sup> Zelin, A., Christians in the New Syria: Accepted, But At-Risk in TWI, 9 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>648</sup> Sana, President Al-Sharaa Meets Patriarch John X Yazigi, Emphasizes National Unity, 26 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>649</sup> ACCORD, Query response on Syria: Situation of Yazidis since the fall of the Assad administration (attacks / discrimination by the transitional government, the Kurdish government or other actors; state protection), 23 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>650</sup> France24, Muted Palm Sunday in Syria after violence in Christian town, 29 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>651</sup> AP News, Sectarian attacks rock a Christian town in Syria after a dispute, 28 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>652</sup> OSES, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Claudio Cordone - Briefing to the Security Council, 22 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>653</sup> New Arab (The), How attacks on a Christian town test Syria's postwar cohesion, 2 April 2026, [url](#); Etana Syria, BRIEF: Sectarian unrest in Al- Suqaylabiyeh, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>654</sup> New Arab (The), How attacks on a Christian town test Syria's postwar cohesion, 2 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>655</sup> Etana Syria, BRIEF: Sectarian unrest in Al- Suqaylabiyeh, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>656</sup> New Arab (The), How attacks on a Christian town test Syria's postwar cohesion, 2 April 2026, [url](#)



tensions were also reported in December 2024, when a public Christmas tree in Suqaylabiyah was set on fire.<sup>657</sup>

Local measures restricting alcohol in Damascus also generated unease, with aspects of their implementation perceived by some as stigmatising communities and affecting personal freedoms.<sup>658</sup> At the same time, authorities sought to reassure Christian communities, including through public outreach by the Syrian interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa and security measures implemented by the MoI during Easter celebrations.<sup>659</sup>

Christians are generally able to live openly and practise their religion,<sup>660</sup> with access to public services and employment in the public sector.<sup>661</sup> In major cities such as Damascus and Aleppo, Christians are able to express their faith and benefit from comparatively better employment opportunities. By contrast, in rural areas, living openly as Christians was more challenging, and livelihood opportunities were more limited.<sup>662</sup>

In October 2025, church schools in areas formerly controlled by the SDF were temporarily closed due to administrative disputes with local authorities over the use of the official Syrian government curriculum.<sup>663</sup> By November 2025, the schools had reopened and were permitted to continue teaching the Syrian Ministry of Education's curriculum for the 2025–2026 academic year.<sup>664</sup>

### Security incidents involving Christians

Although Christians in Syria continued to live openly, they reportedly experience sporadic targeted incidents,<sup>665</sup> often in the context of broader local insecurity affecting multiple communities.<sup>666</sup> In June 2025, a suicide bombing targeted the Greek Orthodox Mar St. Elias Church in Damascus,<sup>667</sup> killing at least 27 people and injuring more than 60. Authorities initially attributed the attack to ISIL, while the group Saraya Ansar al-Sunna (SAS), which is ideologically aligned with ISIL, later claimed responsibility.<sup>668</sup> The group stated that the attack was carried out in response to government restrictions on unapproved proselytisation in the area.<sup>669</sup> Following the incident, Christian leaders and community members called for stronger

<sup>657</sup> Etana Syria, BRIEF: Sectarian unrest in Al- Suqaylabiyeh, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>658</sup> OSES, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Claudio Cordone - Briefing to the Security Council, 22 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>659</sup> OSES, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Claudio Cordone - Briefing to the Security Council, 22 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>660</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of certain groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 2; Zelin, A., Christians in the New Syria: Accepted, But At-Risk in TWI, 9 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>661</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of certain groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>662</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of certain groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>663</sup> Zelin, A., Christians in the New Syria: Accepted, But At-Risk in TWI, 9 December 2025, [url](#); Welat Tv, Church Schools in SDF-Held Areas Reopen Under Government Curriculum, 03 November 2025, [url](#); Sana, Syriac Orthodox Church Rejects SDF Curriculum, Condemns Closure of Christian Schools, 7 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>664</sup> Welat Tv, Church Schools in SDF-Held Areas Reopen Under Government Curriculum, 03 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>665</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of certain groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>666</sup> Syriac Press, Tension in Saidnaya and assassination attempt in Al-Qusayr renew fears over the situation of Christians in Syria, 22 February 2026, [url](#); Y. Zelin A, Christians in the New Syria: Accepted, But At-Risk in TWI, 9 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>667</sup> Zelin, A., The Damascus Church Attack: Who Is Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah?, TWI, 25 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>668</sup> International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch June 2025, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>669</sup> Zelin, A., The Damascus Church Attack: Who Is Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah?, TWI, 25 June 2025, [url](#)



protection and accountability, stating that earlier threats and incidents had not been adequately addressed by the authorities.<sup>670</sup> During the July 2025 violence in Sweida, at least four Christian churches in villages with large Druze populations were reportedly looted and vandalised, with three of them also burned.<sup>671</sup>

Kidnappings in predominantly Christian areas, such as in Wadi al-Nasara in rural Homs,<sup>672</sup> have been reported, although some cases have later been identified as misinformation.<sup>673</sup> An investigation by the Mol found that only one out of 42 reported cases involved a confirmed kidnapping. However, eyewitness accounts and statements from local security actors indicated that kidnappings did occur across multiple communities and that they were not limited to Christians. These incidents were typically driven by motives such as financial extortion, personal revenge, or general criminal activity, and affect Sunni, Alawites, and Christian populations alike.<sup>674</sup>

A high-profile Christian church leader interviewed by DIS noted that Christians were not specifically targeted because of their faith, but rather because they were often perceived as relatively wealthy and that kidnappings were not exclusive to Christian communities. He however noted that efforts by the local church to secure government protection in Wadi al Nasara have been unsuccessful. Although the government approved the recruitment of 200 local volunteers into its security forces, the agreement was reportedly never implemented, leaving the area without effective government protection.<sup>675</sup> According to researcher Aaron Y. Zelin, despite recorded incidents, the majority of Christians in Syria had not been directly targeted. Churches in government-controlled areas are generally provided with security by the authorities. Therefore, based on the same source, security risks for Christians should be understood within the broader context of overall instability and insecurity affecting all communities in Syria.<sup>676</sup>

One confidential source interviewed by Landinfo and the Swedish Migration Agency alleged that Christians in and around Homs had been subjected to killings, kidnappings, threats and other abuses. The source further claimed that some perpetrators wore General Security Service uniforms, while acknowledging uncertainty regarding their identity and any possible connection to the authorities.<sup>677</sup> However, no other sources could not be found to corroborate this information.

<sup>670</sup> Makki, D., Al-Sahwi, A., Syria's Christians Are Facing New Fears, New Lines Magazine, 26 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>671</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), Annex I, para 92

<sup>672</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of certain groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 36

<sup>673</sup> Qalaat Al Mudiq, published on X, 5 November 2025, [url](#); Waters G., Syria's Kidnapping Controversy, Syria Revisited, 6 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>674</sup> Waters G., Syria's Kidnapping Controversy, Syria Revisited, 6 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>675</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of certain groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 36

<sup>676</sup> Zelin, A., Christians in the New Syria: Accepted, But At-Risk in TWI, 9 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>677</sup> NO, Landinfo, Syria Situasjonen for religiøse minoriteter [Syria The situation of religious minorities], 10 April 2026, [url](#), p. 10; SE, Swedish Migration Agency, Syrien Säkerhet och skydd i områden under de facto-myndigheternas kontroll [Syria Security and protection in areas under the control of the de facto authorities], 11 November 2025, [url](#), p. 38



In October 2025, in Anaz village, rural Homs governorate, four masked gunmen, allegedly in General Security Service uniforms,<sup>678</sup> opened fire on young Christian men, killing two and critically injuring a third one.<sup>679</sup>

In February 2026, the Assyrian Monitor for Human Rights (AMHR) reported intimidation incidents in Qatana, a suburb of Damascus, including vehicles driving through predominantly Christian neighbourhoods while broadcasting Quranic verses.<sup>680</sup> In February 2026, in the predominantly Christian town of Saidnaya, north of Damascus, a number of young men removed the Syrian flag from the main square and raised the 'Islamic Tawhid' banner in its place, amid chants of 'Allahu Akbar'. The move was described by several residents as a direct provocation to the feelings of the town's inhabitants.<sup>681</sup> In the same month, a resident of Al-Qusayr in Homs governorate narrowly survived an assassination attempt when two gunmen on a motorcycle fired at his car in front of his home.<sup>682</sup>

In March 2026, an argument between two men in the predominantly Christian town of Suqaylabiyah in Hama governorate led to sectarian attacks that caused widespread damage to homes, shops and cars.<sup>683</sup> Several sources reported that a large number of masked gunmen, coming from Qalaat al-Madiq and neighbouring villages, attacked civilians and vandalised property.<sup>684</sup> The official SANA news agency, however, stated that security forces intervened to break up a 'mass brawl' and that calm was restored following a number of arrests.<sup>685</sup> Following the attack, as a consequence, the Easter celebrations were limited to prayers only inside the churches, as stated by the Greek Catholic Patriarchate in Antioch and the East.<sup>686</sup> During the Syrian conflict, the predominantly Christian town of Suqaylabiyah remained under the control of government-aligned forces, while nearby Sunni-majority Qalaat al-Madiq was held by opposition groups,<sup>687</sup> contributing to heightened tensions between the two communities.<sup>688</sup> Earlier sectarian tensions were also reported in December 2024, when a public Christmas tree in Suqaylabiyah was set on fire.<sup>689</sup>

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<sup>678</sup> Syriac Press, SYRIA: Two Christians killed, one critically injured, in Wadi al-Nasara sparks outrage and general strike, 2 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>679</sup> BBC, 'Killed because they are Alawites': Fear among Syria's minorities after the fall of Assad, 10 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>680</sup> SyriacPress, Assyrian Monitor for Human Rights warns of rising intimidation targeting Christians in Daramsuq (Damascus), 16 February 2026, [url](#); SyriacPress, Syriac Catholics in Qatana harassed outside church as regional pressures mount, 14 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>681</sup> SyriacPress, Tension in Saidnaya and assassination attempt in Al-Qusayr renew fears over the situation of Christians in Syria, 22 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>682</sup> SyriacPress, Tension in Saidnaya and assassination attempt in Al-Qusayr renew fears over the situation of Christians in Syria, 22 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>683</sup> AP News, Sectarian attacks rock a Christian town in Syria after a dispute, 28 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>684</sup> New Arab (The), How attacks on a Christian town test Syria's postwar cohesion, 2 April 2026, [url](#); Etana Syria, BRIEF: Sectarian unrest in Al- Suqaylabiyeh, n.d., [url](#); France24, Muted Palm Sunday in Syria after violence in Christian town, 29 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>685</sup> France24, Muted Palm Sunday in Syria after violence in Christian town, 29 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>686</sup> France24, Muted Palm Sunday in Syria after violence in Christian town, 29 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>687</sup> AP News, Sectarian attacks rock a Christian town in Syria after a dispute, 28 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>688</sup> New Arab (The), How attacks on a Christian town test Syria's postwar cohesion, 2 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>689</sup> Etana Syria, BRIEF: Sectarian unrest in Al- Suqaylabiyeh, n.d., [url](#)



## 2.7.5. Palestinians

Palestinians arrived in Syria in successive waves following regional conflicts, notably in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1982.<sup>690</sup> Prior to 2011, estimates of the Palestinian population in Syria ranged between approximately 560 000<sup>691</sup> and 585 610.<sup>692</sup> They mainly resided in twelve camps and surrounding areas,<sup>693</sup> as well as in informal gatherings and urban neighbourhoods.<sup>694</sup> Nine camps were officially recognised by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), while Yarmouk in Damascus, Latakia, and Ayn al-Tal in Aleppo were considered unofficial camps.<sup>695</sup> During the war, Palestinian camps became battlefields, subjected to sieges and bombardment, and in many cases left largely depopulated.<sup>696</sup>

As of April 2026, an estimated 438 000 Palestinian refugees remained in the country,<sup>697</sup> while many others had fled to Lebanon, Jordan, Türkiye or Europe.<sup>698</sup> A large proportion of the Palestinian refugee population in Syria has experienced displacement. According to the latest UNRWA estimates, most Palestinian refugees in Syria have been displaced at least once during the conflict,<sup>699</sup> and around 30 % (over 125 000 individuals) live in situations of protracted displacement.<sup>700</sup>

Following the escalation of the conflict in the region in March 2026, cross-border movements between Lebanon and Syria intensified,<sup>701</sup> with over 189 000 people crossing from Lebanon into Syria by 26 March 2026,<sup>702</sup> including more than 1 200 Palestine refugees from Syria.<sup>703</sup>

The legal status of Palestinian refugees in Syria is primarily governed by Law No. 260 of 1956.<sup>704</sup> This law grants Palestinians many civil and economic rights comparable to Syrian citizens, including access to employment, education, and public services.<sup>705</sup> However,

<sup>690</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Thematisch ambtsbericht over documenten in Syrië [Thematic official report on documents in Syria], 9 March 2026, [url](#), pp. 15-16

<sup>691</sup> COAR, Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point, 21 December 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>692</sup> UNRWA, Where we work, Syria, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>693</sup> COAR, Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point, 21 December 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>694</sup> DK, DIS, Syria – Situation of certain groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 120 [humanitarian organisation]

<sup>695</sup> UNRWA, UNRWA IN SYRIA: FACTSHEET, March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>696</sup> COAR, Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point, 21 December 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>697</sup> UNRWA, UNRWA 2025 Syria Annual Protection Case Trends Update, 12 May 2026, [url](#). It should be noted that UNRWA data on registered refugees across its five operational fields, as well as the latest available figures on the number of refugees who have received assistance by the Agency, may vary slightly across publications, even when based on the same underlying data.

<sup>698</sup> COAR, Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point, 21 December 2025, [url](#), p. 10; UNRWA, Where we work, Syria, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>699</sup> COAR, Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point, 21 December 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>700</sup> UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan humanitarian appeal 2026, 23 December 2025, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>701</sup> IOM, Syrian Arab Republic – Emergency Mobility Tracking and Cross Border Monitoring Situation Update – Round 2 (16 March 2026), 16 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>702</sup> UNOCHA, Lebanon: Flash Update #12 - Escalation of hostilities in Lebanon, (as of 26 March 2026), 28 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>703</sup> UNRWA, UNRWA Situation Report #5 on the Lebanon Emergency Response 2026, 2 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>704</sup> Sabaaneh W., Palestinians in Syria: Future Uncertainties and Emerging Challenges, published on LinkedIn, 20 February 2025, [url](#); COAR, Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point, 21 December 2025, [url](#), p. 10; Ceasefire Center for Civilian Conflict, Securing rights and protections for Palestinians in a changing Syria, 18 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>705</sup> COAR, Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point, 21 December 2025, [url](#), p. 10; Ceasefire Center for Civilian Rights, Securing rights and protections for Palestinians in a changing Syria, 18 July 2025, [url](#); Sabaaneh W., Palestinians in Syria: Future Uncertainties and Emerging Challenges, published on LinkedIn, 20 February 2025, [url](#)





Palestinians are excluded from Syrian citizenship<sup>706</sup> and political participation,<sup>707</sup> including voting and standing for election.<sup>708</sup> Restrictions on property ownership also apply,<sup>709</sup> as Palestinians can only own a residential place but not agricultural, industrial or commercial real estate.<sup>710</sup>

The General Authority for Palestinian Arab Refugees (GAPAR), operating under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, remains the principal authority responsible for official issues related to the status of Palestinian refugees in Syria.<sup>711</sup> Palestinians who arrived between 1948 and 1956 were eligible for registration with GAPAR, which maintains a registry linked to the Civil Affairs Directorate of the MoI.<sup>712</sup> Registration enabled access to identity documents, family records, work permits, and travel documents.<sup>713</sup> However, not all Palestinians were registered with GAPAR, particularly those arriving after 1956<sup>714</sup> and they were instead treated as foreigners by the Syrian authorities.<sup>715</sup>

Following the fall of the Syrian government, administrative procedures reportedly changed. Palestinians registered with GAPAR increasingly accessed civil registry offices used by Syrian citizens to register life events and obtain documentation.<sup>716</sup>

In July 2025, reports that some Palestinians had been recorded as ‘foreign residents’ in civil registries raised concerns,<sup>717</sup> although authorities stated this resulted from a technical error that was later corrected.<sup>718</sup> In September 2025, the authorities called on undocumented Palestinians to regularise their status through GAPAR.<sup>719</sup> However, observers noted that

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<sup>706</sup> Ceasefire Center for Civilian Rights, Securing rights and protections for Palestinians in a changing Syria, 18 July 2025, [url](#); Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 117; BTI, Bertelsmann Stiftung: BTI 2026 Country Report - Syria, 2026, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>707</sup> Rahhal, N., Syria has the power to change, from one of the biggest statelessness exporters to a role model for the Global North, ENS, 22 May 2025, [url](#); BTI, Bertelsmann Stiftung: BTI 2026 Country Report - Syria, 2026, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>708</sup> Syria Nationality, Nationality, Documentation, and Statelessness in Syria, [url](#), p. 5; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [General Country Report Syria], May 2025, [url](#), p. 103; BTI, Bertelsmann Stiftung: BTI 2026 Country Report - Syria, 2026, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>709</sup> Syria Nationality, Nationality, Documentation, and Statelessness in Syria, n.d., [url](#), p. 5

<sup>710</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of certain groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 49 [international security organisation]

<sup>711</sup> Finland, Finnish Immigration Service: Syiria / Syirialainen palestiinalaisille myöntämät asiakirjat: Syria / Documents issued by Syria to Palestinians [KT1232], 12 February 2026, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>712</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Thematisch ambtsbericht over documenten in Syrië [Thematic official report on documents in Syria], 9 March 2026, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>713</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Thematisch ambtsbericht over documenten in Syrië [Thematic official report on documents in Syria], 9 March 2026, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>714</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Thematisch ambtsbericht over documenten in Syrië [Thematic official report on documents in Syria], 9 March 2026, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>715</sup> New Arab (The), Syria invites undocumented Palestinian refugees to legalise for first time in decades, 29 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>716</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Thematisch ambtsbericht over documenten in Syrië [Thematic official report on documents in Syria], 9 March 2026, [url](#), pp. 15-16

<sup>717</sup> New Arab (The), Among the rubble, Yarmouk's Palestinians search for a future in the new Syria, 9 September 2025, [url](#); Watan, Syria Quietly Strips ‘Syrian Palestinian’ Identity from Refugee Documents, 11 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>718</sup> New Arab (The), Syria corrects ‘erroneous’ classification of Palestinians as foreigners amid shock, 15 July 2025, [url](#); The Netherlands, Thematisch ambtsbericht over documenten in Syrië [Thematic official report on documents in Syria], 9 March 2026, [url](#), pp. 15-16; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 109

<sup>719</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 117



documentation and residency requirements could make the process difficult for many Palestinians lacking valid residency card.<sup>720</sup>

Documentation gaps reportedly remained widespread due to lost records, destroyed registries, and administrative obstacles. Without documentation, Palestinians in Syria are unable to access services, claim housing, land and property rights, or obtain required security clearances for movement and return.<sup>721</sup> The number of unregistered Palestinians living in Syria remains unknown.<sup>722</sup>

In January 2026, the Palestinian Embassy announced that holders of ordinary Palestinian passports and travel documents require prior approval to enter Syria, while holders of Syrian-issued travel documents remain exempt from this requirement.<sup>723</sup>

### **Socio-economic situation and living conditions**

The socio-economic conditions of Palestinian refugees in Syria deteriorated significantly during the conflict.<sup>724</sup> According to UNRWA, approximately 90 % of Palestinian refugees in Syria live below the poverty line.<sup>725</sup> Food insecurity has increased significantly, rising from 46 % in 2022 to more than 60 % in 2024 and reaching 92 % in 2025.<sup>726</sup> Unemployment is reported to be widespread, with high levels of household debt. Palestinian refugees' households have historically relied on small-scale commerce, skilled labour, and public-sector employment; however, these sectors have largely collapsed during the conflict.<sup>727</sup>

The camps of Yarmouk, Ein el Tal, and Dera'a together hosted approximately one third of the Palestinian refugee population in the country.<sup>728</sup> Despite ongoing efforts to rehabilitate them,<sup>729</sup> they have remained largely destroyed or damaged.<sup>730</sup> As of December 2025, living conditions in these camps were severe, with many families residing in structurally compromised shelters and with limited access to adequate sanitation.<sup>731</sup> Reconstruction efforts have been slow and uneven, as the removal and looting of building materials has further hindered progress.<sup>732</sup> As of December 2025, more than half of Syria's sub-districts remained

<sup>720</sup> New Arab (The), Syria invites undocumented Palestinian refugees to legalise for first time in decades, 29 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>721</sup> COAR, Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point, 21 December 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>722</sup> New Arab (The), Syria invites undocumented Palestinian refugees to legalise for first time in decades, 29 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>723</sup> Sada News, Syria Requires Prior Approval for Entry of Holders of Palestinian Passports into Its Territory, 20 January 2026, [url](#)

<sup>724</sup> COAR, Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point, 21 December 2025, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>725</sup> COAR, Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point, 21 December 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>726</sup> UNRWA: Syria, Lebanon and Jordan Emergency Appeal 2025 Progress Report (1 January – 30 June 2025), 19 November 2025, [url](#); UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan humanitarian appeal 2026, 23 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>727</sup> COAR, Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point, 21 December 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>728</sup> UNRWA, IDP Return Perceptions and Intentions Survey (October 2025), 1 February 2026, [url](#), p. 1; UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan humanitarian appeal 2026, 23 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>729</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Priorities, Syrian Arab Republic, January – June 2025, March 2025, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>730</sup> UN/Syrian Arab Republic, Syria – Common Country Analysis, 2024 Update, 27 March 2025, [url](#), p. 34; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Priorities, Syrian Arab Republic, January – June 2025, March 2025, [url](#), p. 14; COAR, Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point, 21 December 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>731</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of certain groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 121 [humanitarian organisation]

<sup>732</sup> New Arab (The), Among the rubble, Yarmouk's Palestinians search for a future in the new Syria, 9 September 2025, [url](#)



contaminated by explosive remnants of war, including in densely populated areas where many Palestine refugees reside.<sup>733</sup>

Despite extensive destruction of Palestine refugee camps –with partially destroyed housing and limited access to basic infrastructure such as electricity, water, healthcare—<sup>734</sup> return movements to and within Syria have increased significantly following the fall of the Bashar al-Assad government in 2025.<sup>735</sup> Returns were primarily driven by deteriorating living conditions in displacement, including inability to afford rent, as well as precarious legal status abroad, alongside pull factors such as family reunification.<sup>736</sup> According to UNRWA data, more than 42 000 Palestine refugees had returned to heavily affected camps by November 2025, compared to 12 638 in December 2024.<sup>737</sup> Over 29 000 returns were recorded in the first half of 2025 alone, more than twice the total recorded over the previous five years combined.<sup>738</sup>

Over the years, some Palestinians have moved out of the camps to large informal settlements in rural areas.<sup>739</sup> While UNRWA provides services in the camps, only a limited range of services are offered in such informal settlements. As a result, Palestinians living outside the camps or in informal settlements must either travel to the camps to access these services or rely on public services provided by the authorities.<sup>740</sup>

### **Access to UNRWA and provision of essential services**

Palestinian refugees in Syria access services through both Syrian state institutions and UNRWA programmes.<sup>741</sup> Palestinians registered with GAPAR were entitled to the same access to public services and employment as Syrian nationals. However, the Syrian conflict has significantly reduced the capacity and quality of public service provision across the country.<sup>742</sup> UNRWA provides essential services to Palestine Refugees in Syria,<sup>743</sup> constituting the backbone of service provision.<sup>744</sup> Although under severe fiscal strain, parallel services have not emerged at sufficient scale to fill the gap.<sup>745</sup> For more information on UNRWA's operations in Syria and on UNRWA's current funding overview, see April 2026 EUAA Query on [UNRWA's ability to fulfil its mandate across its areas of operation](#).

Palestinian refugees internally displaced in Syria continued to face high levels of vulnerability, according to a survey conducted by UNRWA in October 2025. The survey indicates that 81 %

<sup>733</sup> UNRWA, UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan humanitarian appeal 2026, 23 December 2025, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>734</sup> COAR, Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point, 21 December 2025, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>735</sup> UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan humanitarian appeal 2026, 23 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>736</sup> UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan humanitarian appeal 2026, 23 December 2025, [url](#); UNRWA: Syria, Lebanon and Jordan Emergency Appeal 2025 Progress Report (1 January – 30 June 2025), 19 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>737</sup> UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan humanitarian appeal 2026, 23 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>738</sup> UNRWA: Syria, Lebanon and Jordan Emergency Appeal 2025 Progress Report (1 January – 30 June 2025), 19 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>739</sup> DK, DIS, Syria Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 120 [humanitarian organisation]

<sup>740</sup> DK, DIS, Syria Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 120 [humanitarian organisation]

<sup>741</sup> UNRWA, Information on UNRWA services available to Palestine Refugees from Syria returning from displacement due to the Syria crisis, July 2025, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>742</sup> UNRWA, Information on UNRWA services available to Palestine Refugees from Syria returning from displacement due to the Syria crisis, July 2025, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>743</sup> UNRWA, UNRWA in Syria: Factsheet, March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>744</sup> COAR, Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point, 21 December 2025, [url](#), pp. 1, 10

<sup>745</sup> COAR, Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point, 21 December 2025, [url](#), p. 3



of such households rely on humanitarian assistance to meet basic needs, while 55 % report difficulties in covering essential living costs. Many households reside in overcrowded or substandard housing, with irregular access to electricity, and access to healthcare remaining uneven, particularly for vulnerable groups. Female-headed households were found to have higher dependency ratios and more limited income-generating opportunities. The findings further indicated that most internally displaced households continue to rely heavily on UNRWA services.<sup>746</sup>

UNRWA has nevertheless experienced chronic underfunding for over a decade and currently describes its financial situation as an ‘existential crisis’.<sup>747</sup> With basic services remaining scarce and the security situation fragile, UNRWA’s financial difficulties are increasingly limiting its capacity to sustain assistance, thereby weakening a last-resort safety net for Palestinians in Syria.<sup>748</sup> A humanitarian organisation interviewed by DIS in 2025 stated that funding shortfall has had a significant impact on the provision of healthcare and education. According to the same source, UNRWA faced widespread criticism from Palestine refugees from Syria during community meetings and on social media for failing to meet its mandate, including in the provision of cash assistance and food support.<sup>749</sup> In addition, UNRWA’s free legal assistance programme — which covers issues such as civil documentation and gender-based violence cases— was suspended for several months over 2024-2025, as the Agency did not have sufficient funding to cover volunteer lawyers’ transportation costs, court fees, and other related expenses. Beyond its impact on service delivery, the funding shortfall has also affected approximately 2 500 locally recruited UNRWA staff, who reportedly continued frontline work and community engagement despite uncertainty over salaries and contract renewals.<sup>750</sup>

Despite these financial constraints, according to both UNOCHA<sup>751</sup> and UNRWA, for the year 2026, the Agency would continue to prioritise the delivery of essential humanitarian assistance, especially for the most vulnerable Palestine refugees. Such support includes cash assistance for basic needs, food security and livelihoods assistance, sanitation services, hygiene items, and dignity kits, as well as assistance for shelter repairs and other essential non-food items in heavily conflict-affected camps, particularly Dera’a, Ein el Tal, and Yarmouk.<sup>752</sup>

Palestine refugees returning to conflict-affected areas from abroad or from internal displacement may access UNRWA services upon reactivating or transferring their registration. Returnees remain eligible for healthcare, education, protection and reintegration assistance, subject to funding availability.<sup>753</sup> UNRWA also provides reintegration cash assistance. At the same time, those who remain displaced continue to rely heavily on the Agency for essential support, including multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) and protection services, such as

<sup>746</sup> UNRWA, IDP Return Perceptions and Intentions Survey, 1 February 2026, [url](#), pp. 4-5

<sup>747</sup> UNRWA, UNRWA Strategic Plan 2026-2029, 2026, [url](#), pp. 6, 26

<sup>748</sup> COAR, Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point, 21 December 2025, [url](#), pp. 1, 10

<sup>749</sup> DK, DIS, Syria Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 52

<sup>750</sup> DK, DIS, Syria Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 52

<sup>751</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Needs And Response Plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>752</sup> UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan Humanitarian Appeal 2026, 23 December 2025, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>753</sup> UNRWA, Information on UNRWA services available to Palestine Refugees from Syria returning from displacement due to the Syria crisis, July 2025, [url](#), pp. 1-3



legal aid to address barriers to obtaining or regularising civil documentation and legal status.<sup>754</sup>

### **Security and governance in camps**

The Syrian authorities are in charge of security inside the camps. Police stations are present in the camps, although their operational capacity is reportedly limited, reflecting broader weaknesses in policing and governance throughout Syria.<sup>755</sup>

The collapse of former security and governance structures created uncertainty regarding governance arrangements in Palestinian camps. In response, local committees, municipal bodies and community networks had increasingly assumed responsibilities relating to dispute resolution, community coordination and assistance to returnees. Governance structures currently involve a combination of state institutions, local actors and humanitarian organisations, sometimes with overlapping responsibilities and unclear coordination mechanisms.<sup>756</sup> Uncertainty regarding the future of Palestinian camps, combined with ongoing insecurity and destruction, has contributed to a broader sense of instability among Palestinian refugees in Syria.<sup>757</sup>

### **Treatment of Palestinians by the transitional government**

Palestine refugees from Syria remain marginalised and heavily dependent on humanitarian assistance due to limited access to employment, documentation, essential services,<sup>758</sup> including health care.<sup>759</sup> However, Palestinians are generally able to move freely and reside throughout Syria, without reported restrictions linked to their status or background. There are no reports indicating that Palestinians are treated differently from Syrians at checkpoints. Access to UNRWA camps does not require documentation, although some camps maintain government checkpoints. Certain areas, particularly near military installations and airports, remain sensitive for all residents.<sup>760</sup> The socio-economic hardship affecting Palestinians largely reflects the broader deterioration of living conditions across Syria. However, Palestinians remain subject to restrictions on property ownership, as they are not permitted to own agricultural, industrial or commercial real estate.<sup>761</sup>

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<sup>754</sup> UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan Emergency Appeal 2025 Progress Report (1 January – 30 June 2025), 19 November 2025, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>755</sup> DK, DIS, Syria Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>756</sup> COAR, Palestinian Syrians at a Turning Point, 21 December 2025, [url](#), pp. 5-7

<sup>757</sup> Syria in Transition, Issue 33, Handarat after the fall, March 2026, [url](#); Sabaaneh W., Palestinians in Syria: Future Uncertainties and Emerging Challenges, published on LinkedIn, 20 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>758</sup> UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan humanitarian appeal 2026, 23 December 2025, [url](#), p. 2; DK, DIS, Syria Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 120-121

<sup>759</sup> DK, DIS, Syria Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 120-121

<sup>760</sup> DK, DIS, Syria Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 49

<sup>761</sup> DK, DIS, Syria Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 120-121



## 2.8. LGBTIQ persons

### 2.8.1. Legislative framework and developments

Consensual same-sex sexual acts continue to be punishable by law in Syria.<sup>762</sup> According to the article 520 of the 1949 Syrian Penal Code, ‘Unnatural Sexual Intercourse’ is a crime punishable for up to three years imprisonment,<sup>763</sup> and it is applicable to men as well as women.<sup>764</sup>

According to a confidential source cited by the Netherlands MFA, since the fall of the Assad regime and as of late April 2025, criminal courts continued to apply the Penal Code,<sup>765</sup> however, other confidential sources consulted were not aware of any LGBTIQ individuals who had been convicted under this section of the law.<sup>766</sup> Instead, LGBTIQ individuals have been arrested and prosecuted under vague interpretations of other legal provisions, including offences related to public decency and morality,<sup>767</sup> prostitution,<sup>768</sup> or trafficking of illegal substances.<sup>769</sup>

### 2.8.2. Treatment by state, non-state and societal actors

Sources have documented abuses against LGBTIQ individuals during the Syrian conflict by state<sup>770</sup> and non-state actors,<sup>771</sup> including HTS.<sup>772</sup>

The Guardians of Equality Movement (GEM), the first Syrian LGBTIQ organisation,<sup>773</sup> documented ‘waves of violence’ against several Syrian transgender women in the first two months of 2025,<sup>774</sup> implicating both non-state armed groups and security forces in multiple cities.<sup>775</sup> In February 2025, online videos reportedly showed Syrian authorities arresting

<sup>762</sup> Human Dignity Trust, Syria, last updated 6 January 2026, [url](#); ILGA World, ILGA World Database – Syria, [2026], [url](#)

<sup>763</sup> HRW, World Report 2026, Syria: Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#); ILGA World, ILGA World Database – Syria, [2026], [url](#)

<sup>764</sup> Human Dignity Trust, Syria, last updated 6 January 2026, [url](#); GEM, We Are Here, We Are Syrian, We Are Queer, Get Used to It, 2024, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>765</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, May 2025, [url](#), p. 97

<sup>766</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 108

<sup>767</sup> GEM, Syria: The Legal Position on LGBTQIA+ Individuals’ “Fear of Entering the Police Station and Not Exiting”, 5 May 2026, [url](#), pp. 2, 3; DK, DIS, Syria: Situation of LGBT+ persons, January 2026, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>768</sup> DK, DIS, Syria: Situation of LGBT+ persons, January 2026, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>769</sup> Worldcrunch, As Syria Faces New Divides, LGBTQ+ Hate Remains The Most Reliable Consensus, 22 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>770</sup> BBC News, ‘I was raped by Assad’s thugs - but I’m no longer afraid to show my face’, 23 December 2024, [url](#); GEM, We Are Here, We Are Syrian, We Are Queer, Get Used to It, 2024, [url](#), pp. 17 – 20

<sup>771</sup> GEM, We Are Here, We Are Syrian, We Are Queer, Get Used to It, 2024, [url](#), pp. 17 – 20

<sup>772</sup> GEM, We Are Here, We Are Syrian, We Are Queer, Get Used to It, 2024, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>773</sup> GEM, Who We Are?, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>774</sup> GEM, LGBTQIA+ Individuals In Syria After The Fall Of The Assad Regime, 19 April 2025, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>775</sup> GEM, LGBTQIA+ Individuals In Syria After The Fall Of The Assad Regime, 19 April 2025, [url](#), pp. 2, 7, 8; Worldcrunch, As Syria Faces New Divides, LGBTQ+ Hate Remains The Most Reliable Consensus, 22 February 2025, [url](#)





transgender individuals.<sup>776</sup> According to the GEM, since December 2024, armed groups linked to the new authorities as well as non-state actors were implicated in serious violations against LGBTIQ individuals including ‘entrapment through dating apps, home raids, abductions, arbitrary arrests, torture, humiliation, threats of physical violence and disfigurement, as well as other dangerous practices such as forced filming and public shaming’.<sup>777</sup>

Sources indicate that homophobia is prevalent in Syrian society.<sup>778</sup> According to confidential sources interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as of September 2025 the situation of LGBTIQ individuals ‘did not change’, with LGBTIQ related issues remaining ‘a major taboo’ in Syrian society.<sup>779</sup> LGBTIQ individuals in Syria were in general not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity, due to the risk of family and social rejection, stigmatisation, discrimination and violence.<sup>780</sup> The Beirut-based media outlet Daraj noted that there was no legislation in Syria protecting LGBTIQ individuals from violence and discrimination.<sup>781</sup> According to a May 2026 report by the GEM, LGBTIQ individuals often refrain from reporting crimes for fear that disclosing their identity will result in them being framed as perpetrators, leaving them unprotected against homophobic or transphobic violence.<sup>782</sup>

## 2.9. Women and girls

### 2.9.1. General overview of violations against women

The protracted conflict in Syria has exacerbated gender inequalities, exposing women and girls to increased violence, displacement and discriminatory legislation.<sup>783</sup> Women continued to be excluded from decision-making in the new transitional government and to have a limited role in political processes.<sup>784</sup> Although several women were appointed to transitional justice bodies, only one woman was appointed to a ministerial position,<sup>785</sup> specifically as the minister

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<sup>776</sup> Worldcrunch, As Syria Faces New Divides, LGBTQ+ Hate Remains The Most Reliable Consensus, 22 February 2025, [url](#); Jerusalem Post (The), Syrian security forces beat, insult transgender woman after series of anti-LGBT arrests, 7 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>777</sup> GEM, Urgent Statement on The Campaign of Violations of Torture and Arrest, Against Sexual and Gender Minorities in Syria, 11 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>778</sup> GEM, We Are Here, We Are Syrian, We Are Queer, Get Used to It, 2024, [url](#), p. 21; Metro, ‘I was tortured in Syria for being gay — now I’m terrified what the future will bring’, updated 10 January 2025, [url](#); Worldcrunch, As Syria Faces New Divides, LGBTQ+ Hate Remains The Most Reliable Consensus, 22 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>779</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 108

<sup>780</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 108

<sup>781</sup> Daraj, Queer Syrians in Germany: We Dream of a Country that Protects Us, 8 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>782</sup> GEM, Syria: The Legal Position on LGBTQIA+ Individuals’ “Fear of Entering the Police Station and Not Exiting”, 5 May 2026, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>783</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), para. 33; HRW, World Report 2026, Syria: Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>784</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), para. 33; Conversation (The), Women played key roles in Syria’s revolution. Now they’ve been pushed to the margins, 14 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>785</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), para. 33



for social affairs and labour.<sup>786</sup> Following indirect parliamentary elections in October 2025, only six women were elected,<sup>787</sup> representing approximately 4 % of seats in total<sup>788</sup> and marking a decrease in women's representation.<sup>789</sup>

According to SNHR, at least 29 358 women and girls have been killed in Syria between March 2011 and November 2025, over 75 % of them attributed to the security forces of the Assad regime.<sup>790</sup> Following the fall of the Assad regime, reports of women being killed by armed actors<sup>791</sup> or as a result of armed clashes<sup>792</sup> continued.<sup>793</sup> However, the majority of the 312 women fatalities documented by SNHR in 2025<sup>794</sup>, and the 27 recorded during the first quarter of 2026<sup>795</sup>, were attributed unidentified perpetrators and landmines.<sup>796</sup>

According to several Syrian human rights and non-governmental organisations, the situation of women in Syria reportedly varies significantly depending on their sectarian, regional and socioeconomic background.<sup>797</sup> Specifically, non-Sunni women 'appear more vulnerable, especially when their identity is visible through appearance or behaviour', and most cases of discrimination, harassment and abuse against women were reported from minority areas.<sup>798</sup> Similarly, women in smaller towns and rural communities often live under stricter cultural norms and rely on family networks for protection.<sup>799</sup>

<sup>786</sup> BBC News, Syria's only female minister pushes for change: 'I'm not here for window dressing', 2 February 2026, [url](#); Conversation (The), Women played key roles in Syria's revolution. Now they've been pushed to the margins, 14 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>787</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), para. 33; Reuters, First results for Syria's new parliament show low share for minorities, women, 6 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>788</sup> BBC News, Syria's only female minister pushes for change: 'I'm not here for window dressing', 2 February 2026, [url](#); IPU, Syrian Arab Republic, [2025], [url](#)

<sup>789</sup> HRW, Syria: One Year Since Assad's Fall, 8 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>790</sup> SNHR, On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women: Strengthening Participation of Women in the Transitional Phase in Syria to Guarantee Their Rights and Justice, 25 November 2025, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>791</sup> SNHR, Monthly report for victims of extrajudicial killing in Syria, 1 January 2026, [url](#), pp. 2-3; SOHR, Assassinations and retaliation-driven murder crimes: 22 children and 40 women among 1,301 people killed since fall of Al-Assad regime, 8 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>792</sup> ANHA, 80 children, 51 women killed in Syria since beginning of 2026, 16 March 2026, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 1 - Escalation of violence in Aleppo (as of 07 January 2026), 7 January 2026, [url](#), p. 1; SHRC, December Report on Human Rights Victims in Syria, 1 January 2026, [url](#); SOHR, Death toll update: Four children and women among 15 people killed in clashes and bombardment by Israeli forces in Beit Jinn, 28 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>793</sup> SNHR, Monthly report for victims of extrajudicial killing in Syria, 1 January 2026, [url](#), pp. 2-3; SOHR, Assassinations and retaliation-driven murder crimes: 22 children and 40 women among 1,301 people killed since fall of Al-Assad regime, 8 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>794</sup> SNHR, Monthly report for victims of extrajudicial killing in Syria, 1 January 2026, [url](#), pp. 2-3

<sup>795</sup> SNHR, Quarterly Report on Victims of Unlawful Killings in Syria, 1 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 3-4

<sup>796</sup> SNHR, Monthly report for victims of extrajudicial killing in Syria, 1 January 2026, [url](#), pp. 2-3; SNHR, Quarterly Report on Victims of Unlawful Killings in Syria, 1 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 3-4

<sup>797</sup> DK, DIS, Syria: Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 43-44

<sup>798</sup> DK, DIS, Syria: Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>799</sup> DK, DIS, Syria: Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 44



Throughout 2025, disappearances<sup>800</sup> and abductions of Alawite women and girls, have been reported.<sup>801</sup> According to the Syrian Feminist Lobby (SFL), an advocacy group for women's rights, the disappearance of more than 80 women, mainly Alawite, has been recorded between February 2025 and December 2025.<sup>802</sup> In July 2025, at least 36 women and girls, aged 3 to 40, were reportedly abducted, with several incidents occurring in broad daylight, by unidentified individuals across multiple governorates including Latakia, Tartous, Hama, Homs,<sup>803</sup> Damascus, and Aleppo.<sup>804</sup> In several cases of abductions members of the security forces or individuals affiliated with the government were reportedly involved.<sup>805</sup> Some women were released following the payment of ransom demands.<sup>806</sup> Those held in abduction reportedly faced physical assault, sexual violence, and forced marriage.<sup>807</sup> According to sources, police and security forces failed to conduct effective investigations on these cases,<sup>808</sup> occasionally refusing to register complaints or dismissing families' concerns.<sup>809</sup> In November 2025, the Mol's spokesperson stated that following an investigation, only one out of a total of 42 reported cases was confirmed as an abduction,<sup>810</sup> attributing the other cases to reasons, including fleeing from domestic abuse, elopement, or 'false claims on social media'.<sup>811</sup>

In the context of the July 2025 violence in Sweida governorate, violations against Druze women were reported, including killings, detentions,<sup>812</sup> sexual violence and abductions.<sup>813</sup> As noted by the UNCOI, between July and November 2025 eleven Druze women and four girls

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<sup>800</sup> BBC News, I would scream in my sleep: Women from Syria's Alawite minority tell of kidnap and rape, 18 February 2026, [url](#); OHCHR, Syria: UN experts alarmed by targeted abductions and disappearances of Alawite women and girls, 23 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>801</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), para. 69; AI, The State of the World's Human Rights; Syria 2025, 21 April 2026, [url](#); Reuters, 'She's not coming back': Alawite women snatched from streets of Syria, 27 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>802</sup> BBC News, I would scream in my sleep: Women from Syria's Alawite minority tell of kidnap and rape, 18 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>803</sup> AI, Syria: Authorities must investigate abductions of Alawite women and girls, 28 July 2025, [url](#); OHCHR, Syria: UN experts alarmed by targeted abductions and disappearances of Alawite women and girls, 23 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>804</sup> OHCHR, Syria: UN experts alarmed by targeted abductions and disappearances of Alawite women and girls, 23 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>805</sup> BBC News, I would scream in my sleep: Women from Syria's Alawite minority tell of kidnap and rape, 18 February 2026, [url](#); OHCHR, Syria: UN experts alarmed by targeted abductions and disappearances of Alawite women and girls, 23 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>806</sup> AI, Syria: Authorities must investigate abductions of Alawite women and girls, 28 July 2025, [url](#); Reuters, 'She's not coming back': Alawite women snatched from streets of Syria, 27 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>807</sup> AI, Syria: Authorities must investigate abductions of Alawite women and girls, 28 July 2025, [url](#); OHCHR, Syria: UN experts alarmed by targeted abductions and disappearances of Alawite women and girls, 23 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>808</sup> AI, The State of the World's Human Rights; Syria 2025, 21 April 2026, [url](#); BBC News, I would scream in my sleep: Women from Syria's Alawite minority tell of kidnap and rape, 18 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>809</sup> OHCHR, Syria: UN experts alarmed by targeted abductions and disappearances of Alawite women and girls, 23 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>810</sup> AI, The State of the World's Human Rights; Syria 2025, 21 April 2026, [url](#); BBC News, I would scream in my sleep: Women from Syria's Alawite minority tell of kidnap and rape, 18 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>811</sup> BBC News, I would scream in my sleep: Women from Syria's Alawite minority tell of kidnap and rape, 18 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>812</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras. 78, 79

<sup>813</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras. 78, 79; Denmark, DIS, Syria: Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 43



were abducted and subsequently released, with perpetrators allegedly including tribal fighters and Internal Security Forces (ISF) personnel.<sup>814</sup>

## 2.9.2. Situation of IDP women

UNOCHA indicated that due to the escalation of hostilities in north-east Syria in January 2026, 116 900 individuals remain internally displaced across Aleppo and Hasaka governorates as of 4 March 2026, with women and children accounting for approximately 89 % of the total displaced population. Displaced women and girls in north-east Syria face increased risks of gender-based violence (GBV) due to overcrowded and poor shelter conditions and economic hardship, while access to specialised GBV services was limited or unavailable.<sup>815</sup>

Displaced women, especially those without family support are increasingly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.<sup>816</sup> Poor living conditions, overcrowding and difficulties to access to basic services in camps and temporary shelters increased exposure to GBV risks.<sup>817</sup> According to UNOCHA, women and girls are less likely to safely access humanitarian assistance and essential services compared to men and boys.<sup>818</sup>

Women and girls continue to face restrictions on movement,<sup>819</sup> due to insecurity, including explosive ordnance contamination,<sup>820</sup> and strict cultural and social norms.<sup>821</sup> These restrictions disproportionately affect internally displaced women<sup>822</sup> and female-headed households.<sup>823</sup>

## 2.9.3. Honour-based violence

Since the fall of the Assad regime, 'honour'-based violence against women has reportedly continued to occur.<sup>824</sup> According to confidential sources interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in September 2025, 'honour'-based violence 'was a major taboo' in Syria, and no definite figures were available on its scale or geographical distribution.<sup>825</sup> In 2025, several incidents of 'honour' killings were reported across various regions including

<sup>814</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), para. 79

<sup>815</sup> UNOCHA, Syria: Humanitarian Response in Aleppo and the North-East, Humanitarian Situation Report No. 4 (As of 4 March 2026), 8 March 2026, [url](#), pp. 1, 2, 8

<sup>816</sup> GCHR, Syria, End of an Era: From the Fall of Brutality to the Rise of Uncertainty, 21 May 2025, [url](#)

<sup>817</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 11, 19; UNFPA and GBV AoR, Voices From Syria 2025, 14 October 2025, [url](#), pp. 20, 34, 47, 97, 108

<sup>818</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 30

<sup>819</sup> UNHCR, Coming Home: One Year Into Syria's Transition, 11 December 2025, [url](#), p. 15; UNFPA and GBV AoR, Voices From Syria 2025, 14 October 2025, [url](#), pp. 10, 24

<sup>820</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 38; UNFPA and GBV AoR, Voices From Syria 2025, 14 October 2025, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>821</sup> DK, DIS, Syria: Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 43; UNFPA and GBV AoR, Voices From Syria 2025, 14 October 2025, [url](#), pp. 21, 24

<sup>822</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 38

<sup>823</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 38; GPC, Protection Monitoring: Summary of Key Findings (September to November 2025), 14 January 2026, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>824</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 114; STJ, Syria's Transitional Phase: "Honor" Killings Persist Amid Failing Protection and Legal Response, 19 June 2025, [url](#); Worldcrunch, Regimes May Change In Syria — The Scourge Of Honor Killings Persists, 17 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>825</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 115



Aleppo and Sweida governorates,<sup>826</sup> with some gaining visibility or being broadcasted on social media.<sup>827</sup> ‘Honour’-related crimes remain underreported, with victims often refraining from reporting incidents due to fear of retaliation and social stigma.<sup>828</sup>

In practice, ‘honour’-based violence is often not prosecuted.<sup>829</sup> In June 2025, the Syrian Higher Fatwa Council issued a formal religious ruling (*fatwa*) prohibiting extrajudicial retaliation and revenge killings, including ‘honour’-based violence.<sup>830</sup> However, by then, the transitional government had not enacted legislative measures or issued official statements condemning ‘honour’ related crimes.<sup>831</sup>

## 2.9.4. Sexual and gender-based violence

A SNHR report released in November 2025 recorded 11 583 cases of sexual violence against women since March 2011, with forces affiliated to the former Syrian regime accounting for 69 % of all recorded incidents.<sup>832</sup>

Gender-based Violence (GBV) remain widespread in Syria.<sup>833</sup> As noted in a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and GBV AoR report, women face multiple and increasing forms of gender-based violence (GBV) following the fall of the Assad regime.<sup>834</sup> According to a UNOCHA analysis conducted at the end of 2025, out of some 8.6 million people requiring GBV assistance in Syria, 85 % are women and girls. Intimate partner violence, psychological violence, economic violence, early and forced marriage, and sexual exploitation remained ‘persistent concerns’.<sup>835</sup> Sources interviewed by the Swedish Migration Agency in September 2025 assessed that physical violence against women within the household increased and became more normalised, particularly as growing numbers of returnee women were required to share accommodation with extended family members or relatives. Sources also noted a reinforcement of traditional male gender roles, which has been associated with increased levels of physical and sexual violence, including forms of intimate partner violence such as

<sup>826</sup> STJ, Syria’s Transitional Phase: “Honor” Killings Persist Amid Failing Protection and Legal Response, 19 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>827</sup> STJ, Syria’s Transitional Phase: “Honor” Killings Persist Amid Failing Protection and Legal Response, 19 June 2025, [url](#); Worldcrunch, Regimes May Change In Syria — The Scourge Of Honor Killings Persists, 17 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>828</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), Annex I para. 79; UNFPA and GBV AoR, Voices From Syria 2025, 14 October 2025, [url](#), p. 31; STJ, Syria’s Transitional Phase: “Honor” Killings Persist Amid Failing Protection and Legal Response, 19 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>829</sup> STJ, Syria’s Transitional Phase: “Honor” Killings Persist Amid Failing Protection and Legal Response, 19 June 2025, [url](#); Worldcrunch, Regimes May Change In Syria — The Scourge Of Honor Killings Persists, 17 April 2025, [url](#)

<sup>830</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Syria’s highest fatwa council bans vigilante justice: A step toward rule of law, 9 June 2025, [url](#); New Arab (The), Syria religious authorities issue fatwa against extrajudicial killings, revenge attacks, 7 June 2025, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Syrian Fatwa Council prohibits revenge killings outside judicial framework, 6 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>831</sup> STJ, Syria’s Transitional Phase: “Honor” Killings Persist Amid Failing Protection and Legal Response, 19 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>832</sup> SNHR, On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women: Strengthening Participation of Women in the Transitional Phase in Syria to Guarantee Their Rights and Justice, 25 November 2025, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>833</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 11, 38; GPC, Protection Monitoring: Summary of Key Findings (September to November 2025), 14 January 2026, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>834</sup> UNFPA and GBV AoR, Voices From Syria 2025, 14 October 2025, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>835</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 38



marital rape.<sup>836</sup> According to UNHCR, returnee women from abroad were reported to face heightened exposure to GBV, such as violence and harassment, in certain areas ‘linked to negative perceptions and social stigma, including views of them as more “liberal”’.<sup>837</sup>

Barriers to effective GBV reporting persisted in the form of constrained mobility, limited access to protective services,<sup>838</sup> social stigma, legal and procedural obstacles, fear of reprisals, and lack of trust in legal mechanisms.<sup>839</sup> According to GBV experts, ‘some signs of improved access’ to justice and protection were observed, however institutional support remained highly localised and inconsistent, depending on the individual context and personal networks.<sup>840</sup>

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) was ‘widespread’<sup>841</sup> and increasing across Syria.<sup>842</sup> Forms of TFGBV reported included online harassment, threats, disclosure of personal information and extortion, with women with a higher online visibility, including journalists, facing higher risk to be targeted.<sup>843</sup> A report by UNFPA and Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR) noted that there is an absence of legal and enforcement frameworks, while access to tailored TFGBV services, including legal and psychosocial support and digital safety trainings, is limited.<sup>844</sup> Fear of stigma and societal blame further leads many women to self-censor, resulting in restriction or withdrawal from digital engagement and avoidance of visible career opportunities.<sup>845</sup>

## 2.9.5. Female headed households

The conflict in Syria has led to a demographic change leading to a bigger number of female heads of households.<sup>846</sup> The situation of women living alone has not improved since the fall of the Assad regime.<sup>847</sup> Female-headed households face significant challenges in accessing basic services, including economic constraints<sup>848</sup> and social stigma.<sup>849</sup> UNOCHA noted that female-headed households continue to face disproportionately low levels of food security.<sup>850</sup>

<sup>836</sup> SE, Swedish Migration Agency, *Syrien Säkerhet och skydd i områden under de facto-myndigheternas kontroll* [Syria Security and protection in areas under the control of the de facto authorities], 11 November 2025, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>837</sup> UNHCR, *Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights: Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria* (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 18-19

<sup>838</sup> GPC, *Protection Landscape in Syria – A Snapshot: March 2025*, 3 April 2025, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>839</sup> UNFPA and GBV AoR, *Voices From Syria 2025*, 14 October 2025, [url](#), p. 41

<sup>840</sup> UNFPA and GBV AoR, *Voices From Syria 2025*, 14 October 2025, [url](#), p. 41

<sup>841</sup> DW Akademie, *Syria: What gender-based violence online means for women*, 2 April 2026, [url](#); ACAPS, *Technology-facilitated gender-based violence in Northwest Syria*, 3 June 2025, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>842</sup> UNFPA and GBV AoR, *Voices From Syria 2025*, 14 October 2025, [url](#), pp. 21, 28, 30

<sup>843</sup> DW Akademie, *Syria: What gender-based violence online means for women*, 2 April 2026, [url](#); UNFPA and GBV AoR, *Voices From Syria 2025*, 14 October 2025, [url](#), pp. 28 – 30, 35

<sup>844</sup> UNFPA and GBV AoR, *Voices From Syria 2025*, 14 October 2025, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>845</sup> DW Akademie, *Syria: What gender-based violence online means for women*, 2 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>846</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, January 2026, [url](#), p. 114; Atlantic Council, *What will minority and women’s rights look like in the new Syria?*, 20 December 2024, [url](#)

<sup>847</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, January 2026, [url](#), p. 114; DK, DIS, *Syria: Situation of Certain Groups*, December 2025, [url](#), p. 46

<sup>848</sup> UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan*, 2 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 37, 49; UNHCR, *Coming Home: One Year Into Syria’s Transition*, 11 December 2025, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>849</sup> GPC, *Protection Landscape in Syria – A Snapshot: March 2025*, 3 April 2025, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>850</sup> UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan*, 2 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 5, 30





Female-headed households, including single and widowed women, face difficulties in securing housing due to restrictive societal norms,<sup>851</sup> discriminatory inheritance laws,<sup>852</sup> and a lack of property documentation,<sup>853</sup> compounded by accommodation-related costs and limited employment opportunities.<sup>854</sup> This was indicated as a significant obstacle to the return of female-headed households,<sup>855</sup> as they often have to rely on family network to sustain themselves.<sup>856</sup> UNOCHA highlighted that women heads of household face heightened risk of GBV and exposure to exploitation.<sup>857</sup>

Women whose husbands are missing faced severe administrative issues.<sup>858</sup> Barriers to access documents proving the death or disappearance of their husbands led to economic and legal ambiguity and hindered their access to inheritance,<sup>859</sup> as well as custody and documentation for their children.<sup>860</sup> Many women heads of households faced difficulties registering their children's births,<sup>861</sup> particularly those who were married to foreign nationals and often lack legal proof of marriage.<sup>862</sup>

### 2.9.6. Access to services

As noted by the Syrian Women's Political Movement, public and administrative services and official conduct have improved in certain urban and government-controlled areas. However, services have reportedly deteriorated in other regions, including in regions under the control of armed groups or conservative factions, where women continued to face insecurity and discrimination.<sup>863</sup>

UNOCHA emphasised that access to GBV services was restricted by social stigma, fear of identification, concerns around confidentiality, distance to service points and limited availability of trained female staff.<sup>864</sup> Funding constraints have led to the closure of hospitals, community centres, and safe spaces for women and girls,<sup>865</sup> while GBV organisations have also been severely affected.<sup>866</sup> According to UNPFA and GBV AoR, as of May 2025 a total of

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<sup>851</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), para. 61; DK, DIS, Syria: Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 46, 47

<sup>852</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), para. 61

<sup>853</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 114

<sup>854</sup> DK, DIS, Syria: Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 47

<sup>855</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), para. 61

<sup>856</sup> DK, DIS, Syria: Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 46, 47

<sup>857</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 11, 38

<sup>858</sup> DW, Syria: Wives of missing men push for legal reform, 27 March 2026, [url](#); DK, DIS, Syria: Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 46

<sup>859</sup> DW, Syria: Wives of missing men push for legal reform 27 March 2026, [url](#); Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (The), Wives of the Disappeared in Syria: Voices in Legal Limbo, 10 December 2025, [url](#)

<sup>860</sup> DW, Syria: Wives of missing men push for legal reform 27 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>861</sup> HRW, World Report 2025 - Syria, 16 January 2025, [url](#)

<sup>862</sup> DK, DIS, Syria: Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 46

<sup>863</sup> DK, DIS, Syria: Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>864</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 11, 38

<sup>865</sup> UNOCHA, UN Relief Chief urges Security Council to back Syrian-led recovery with urgent investment, 18 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>866</sup> UNPFA and GBV AoR, Voices From Syria 2025, 14 October 2025, [url](#), p. 43

453 GBV service points were functional across Syria, whereas at least 45 service points for survivors of gender-based violence have closed.<sup>867</sup>

## 2.10. Children

### 2.10.1. Impact of violence on children

According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), as of the end of March 2026, 6.9 million children were in need of humanitarian assistance across Syria.<sup>868</sup> Nutritional risks, particularly for children under five, remained high,<sup>869</sup> with 600 000 children estimated to be 'suffering from wasting' as of early 2026.<sup>870</sup> The main concerns relating to children include neglect, child labour, child marriage, and domestic violence,<sup>871</sup> exacerbated by economic hardships,<sup>872</sup> deteriorating living conditions,<sup>873</sup> displacement, and exposure to explosive ordnance.<sup>874</sup> UNICEF highlighted that displacement and overcrowded living conditions increased the risk of violence, including sexual violence, for children, girls, and women.<sup>875</sup> Different community surveys indicated that families often adopted negative coping strategies, including child labour, child marriage,<sup>876</sup> and withdrawing children from school,<sup>877</sup> due to economic challenges driven by high living costs and limited access to services.<sup>878</sup> These challenges especially affected displaced population<sup>879</sup> and communities in northeast Syria.<sup>880</sup>

<sup>867</sup> UNFPA and GBV AoR, Voices From Syria 2025, 14 October 2025, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>868</sup> UNICEF, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1 (Reporting Period: 1 January to 31 March 2026, 8 May 2026, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>869</sup> UNICEF, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1 (Reporting Period: 1 January to 31 March 2026, 8 May 2026, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>870</sup> UNICEF, Syrian crisis: After 14 years of conflict and crisis, children continue to pay the heaviest price, 2026, [url](#)

<sup>871</sup> UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights: Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), p. 19; GPC, Protection Monitoring: Summary of Key Findings (September to November 2025), 14 January 2026, [url](#), pp. 2, 4

<sup>872</sup> GPC, Protection Monitoring: Summary of Key Findings (September to November 2025), 14 January 2026, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>873</sup> UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights: Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>874</sup> UNICEF, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1 (Reporting Period: 1 January to 31 March 2026, 8 May 2026, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>875</sup> UNICEF, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1 (Reporting Period: 1 January to 31 March 2026, 8 May 2026, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>876</sup> UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights: Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), p. 19; DRC and MMC, Safe to Stay, Safe to Return? – Regional Syria Crisis Protection Monitoring Quarterly Snapshot (Q4: October - December 2025), 9 April 2026, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>877</sup> UNICEF, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 16, (1-31 October 2025), 23 November 2025, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>878</sup> UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights: Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), p. 19; DRC and MMC, Safe to Stay, Safe to Return? – Regional Syria Crisis Protection Monitoring Quarterly Snapshot (Q4: October - December 2025), 9 April 2026, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>879</sup> DRC and MMC, Safe to Stay, Safe to Return? – Regional Syria Crisis Protection Monitoring Quarterly Snapshot (Q4: October - December 2025), 9 April 2026, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>880</sup> UNICEF, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Situation Report No. 16, (1-31 October 2025), 23 November 2025, [url](#), p. 2

Following the fall of the Assad regime, reports on killing of children by armed actors persisted, including by Syrian transitional government forces,<sup>881</sup> Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF),<sup>882</sup> Israel Defence Forces (IDF),<sup>883</sup> Turkish-backed forces,<sup>884</sup> and armed groups affiliated with the Assad regime.<sup>885</sup> However, the majority of the 328 child fatalities documented by SNHR in 2025<sup>886</sup>, and the 43 recorded during the first quarter of 2026<sup>887</sup>, were attributed to unidentified perpetrators and landmines.<sup>888</sup>

Contamination by explosive ordnance remains ‘widespread’ across the country<sup>889</sup> and continues posing a significant threat against civilians,<sup>890</sup> with children being disproportionately affected<sup>891</sup> in both residential and agricultural areas.<sup>892</sup> According to UNICEF, at least 5 million children live in areas contaminated with landmines and explosive remnants of war, with more than 300 000 deadly devices scattered across the country.<sup>893</sup> UNICEF further estimated that between December 2024 and February 2026 698 people were killed and 1 193 injured by explosive war remnants, with children accounting for 30 % of those killed and 40 % of those injured, although noting that the figures were ‘likely underreported’.<sup>894</sup> Between December 2024 and April 2026, SNHR documented the death of at least 74 children due to landmines and cluster munitions.<sup>895</sup>

During the reporting period, child recruitment by the SDF and affiliated entities continued to be reported.<sup>896</sup> For detailed information on child recruitment in Syria, see section [Individuals fearing forced or child recruitment by Kurdish-led forces](#).

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<sup>881</sup> OHCHR, Statement by Paulo Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, to the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly’s Third Committee in New York, 30 October 2025, [url](#); OHCHR, Syria: UN experts alarmed by attacks on Druze communities, including sexual violence against women and girls, 21 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>882</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), para. 151

<sup>883</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras. 123, 125 – 127, 129

<sup>884</sup> HRW, World Report 2026, Syria: Events of 2025, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>885</sup> SNHR, Monthly report for victims of extrajudicial killing in Syria, 1 January 2026, [url](#), pp. 2, 3

<sup>886</sup> SNHR, Monthly report for victims of extrajudicial killing in Syria, 1 January 2026, [url](#), pp. 2, 3

<sup>887</sup> SNHR, Quarterly Report on Victims of Unlawful Killings in Syria, 1 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 3-4

<sup>888</sup> SNHR, Monthly report for victims of extrajudicial killing in Syria, 1 January 2026, [url](#), pp. 2, 3; SNHR, Quarterly Report on Victims of Unlawful Killings in Syria, 1 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 3-4

<sup>889</sup> MA AoR, Syria Mine Action AoR: Situation Update No.7 (December 2025 - March 2026), 16 March 2026, available at: [url](#), p. 4; UNHCR, Coming Home: One Year Into Syria’s Transition, 11 December 2025, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>890</sup> SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness: Documenting the deaths of at least 3,799 civilians from landmines and cluster munitions in Syria, March 2011 – April 2026, 4 April 2026, [url](#), p. 1; Etana Syria, BRIEF: Recent developments in south-west Syria, 2 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>891</sup> SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness: Documenting the deaths of at least 3,799 civilians from landmines and cluster munitions in Syria, March 2011 – April 2026, 4 April 2026, [url](#), p. 1; GPC, Protection Monitoring: Summary of Key Findings (September to November 2025), 14 January 2026, [url](#), pp. 5 – 6; UNICEF, Children in Syria remain at deadly risk from explosive remnants of war, 4 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>892</sup> MA AoR, Syria Mine Action AoR: Situation Update No.7 (December 2025 - March 2026), 16 March 2026, available at: [url](#), pp. 3, 5

<sup>893</sup> UNICEF, Children in Syria remain at deadly risk from explosive remnants of war, 4 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>894</sup> UNICEF, Children in Syria remain at deadly risk from explosive remnants of war, 4 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>895</sup> SNHR, On the International Day for Mine Awareness: Documenting the deaths of at least 3,799 civilians from landmines and cluster munitions in Syria, March 2011 – April 2026, 4 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 8, 9

<sup>896</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras. 99, 131, 164; SNHR, Child Recruitment in SDF-Controlled Areas: Legal Framework and Documented Practices, 14 January 2026, [url](#)



As noted in a UNFPA and GBV AoR report, unaccompanied minors, including orphaned children, were more vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation than other children.<sup>897</sup> There are several orphanages and childcare institutions under the supervision of the transitional government. These facilities are mostly operated by charities, religious groups, or humanitarian organisations, largely dependent on private donations and foreign funding. Conditions in these institutions were described as ‘generally very poor’.<sup>898</sup>

## 2.10.2. Access to education

The conflict has severely disrupted access to education in Syria,<sup>899</sup> with displaced children being especially affected.<sup>900</sup> During 2025, insecurity, natural hazards, infrastructure and staffing challenges, use of schools as shelters, and limited access to essential services led to school disruptions and reduction in instructional time across multiple governorates.<sup>901</sup> Presence of unexploded ordnance including ‘near educational facilities and along transit routes’ was reported as a concern affecting access to schools.<sup>902</sup> Economic hardship and the inability to cover education-related expenses were also reported as barriers to school enrolment,<sup>903</sup> resulting in many children dropping out of school to support their families.<sup>904</sup>

Following the January 2026 clashes in northeast Syria, education services in Aleppo, Raqqqa, Deir Ez-Zor, and Hasaka governorates were ‘severely impacted’.<sup>905</sup> Particularly, in Aleppo several school facilities had reportedly sustained damages.<sup>906</sup> Following the downfall of the Assad regime, several initiatives have been launched to rehabilitate schools that were previously damaged or deemed unsuitable for educational use.<sup>907</sup> As of May 2026, education remained severely disrupted, especially in northeast Syria, as well as in regions with high numbers of returnees and in flood-affected areas.<sup>908</sup>

<sup>897</sup> UNFPA and GBV AoR, Voices From Syria 2025, 14 October 2025, [url](#), p. 36

<sup>898</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 116

<sup>899</sup> DRC, NRC et al., Education at the Heart of Syria’s Recovery: The Role of Schools in Return, Resilience, and Social Cohesion in a Changing Syria, 22 January 2026, [url](#), p. 3; UNHCR, Coming Home: One Year Into Syria’s Transition, 11 December 2025, [url](#), p. 6; IPS, They Have Known Nothing but War—The Plight of Syria’s Out-of-School Children, 16 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>900</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 38; IPS, They Have Known Nothing but War—The Plight of Syria’s Out-of-School Children, 16 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>901</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>902</sup> AFH, Civilian Perspectives on Humanitarian Needs and Recovery Priorities in Syria, 13 March 2026, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>903</sup> DRC, NRC et al., Education at the Heart of Syria’s Recovery: The Role of Schools in Return, Resilience, and Social Cohesion in a Changing Syria, 22 January 2026, [url](#), p. 5; IPS, They Have Known Nothing but War—The Plight of Syria’s Out-of-School Children, 16 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>904</sup> AFH, Civilian Perspectives on Humanitarian Needs and Recovery Priorities in Syria, 13 March 2026, [url](#), pp. 16, 22; IPS, They Have Known Nothing but War—The Plight of Syria’s Out-of-School Children, 16 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>905</sup> UNICEF, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Flash Update No. 3 (Escalation of Violence in Aleppo), 23 January 2026, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>906</sup> UNICEF, Syrian Arab Republic Humanitarian Flash Update No. 3 (Escalation of Violence in Aleppo), 23 January 2026, [url](#), pp. 3, 5

<sup>907</sup> IPS, They Have Known Nothing but War—The Plight of Syria’s Out-of-School Children, 16 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>908</sup> UNICEF, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Situation Report No. 1 (Reporting Period: 1 January to 31 March 2026, 8 May 2026, [url](#), p. 3



Returnee students, including IDP children and those who returned from abroad, faced additional challenges to re-entering formal education.<sup>909</sup> In many areas, increased demand due to returns has led to capacity constraints, including overcrowding and limited services.<sup>910</sup> Reintegration of students is hindered by damaged educational facilities,<sup>911</sup> lack of basic supplies,<sup>912</sup> long travel distances, and limited transport, with girls being disproportionately affected.<sup>913</sup> Children returning from abroad face difficulties reintegrating into Syria due to language barriers, differences in curricula and culture,<sup>914</sup> separation from communities formed during displacement, and limited connections to their families' places of origin.<sup>915</sup>

School non-attendance among IDP returnee and refugee returnee children is mainly driven by economic hardship and lack of documentation, particularly the inability to afford school-related costs and transportation. Child labour was indicated as a reason for children's non-school attendance by 27 % of IDP returnees and 14 % of refugee returnees surveyed by UNHCR during the first quarter of 2026.<sup>916</sup>

A shortage of educational staff was reported.<sup>917</sup> Teachers worked under precarious conditions, often being inadequately paid.<sup>918</sup> This resulted in high turnover rates<sup>919</sup> or absenteeism that compromised the quality of education, which was further undermined by insecurity.<sup>920</sup>

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<sup>909</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 45; Enab Baladi, From foreign schools to Darayya classrooms, returning families' children face an education gap, 17 March 2026, [url](#); DRC, NRC et al., Education at the Heart of Syria's Recovery: The Role of Schools in Return, Resilience, and Social Cohesion in a Changing Syria, 22 January 2026, [url](#), p. 3, 4

<sup>910</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 45; DRC, NRC et al., Education at the Heart of Syria's Recovery: The Role of Schools in Return, Resilience, and Social Cohesion in a Changing Syria, 22 January 2026, [url](#), pp. 4, 11

<sup>911</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 45; DRC, NRC et al., Education at the Heart of Syria's Recovery: The Role of Schools in Return, Resilience, and Social Cohesion in a Changing Syria, 22 January 2026, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>912</sup> DRC, NRC et al., Education at the Heart of Syria's Recovery: The Role of Schools in Return, Resilience, and Social Cohesion in a Changing Syria, 22 January 2026, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>913</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>914</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, December 2025, [url](#), p. 95 [international NGO]; UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights. Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>915</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, December 2025, [url](#), p. 95 [international NGO]

<sup>916</sup> UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights. Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>917</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 45; Enab Baladi, From foreign schools to Darayya classrooms, returning families' children face an education gap, 17 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>918</sup> NRC, Beyond return: Ensuring sustainable recovery & (re)-integration in Syria, May 2025, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>919</sup> NRC, Beyond return: Ensuring sustainable recovery & (re)-integration in Syria, May 2025, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>920</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 45



### 3. Returns from abroad

#### 3.1. Administrative requirements for returnees

Generally, Syrians returning to the country must present valid identification, such as a national passport or ID card, to enter. Passports and ID cards issued by the former government are deemed valid. Those without documents but registered in Syria's civil registries may still be allowed entry after their identity is verified through the Civil Affairs database at border checkpoints, at which point they are issued a civil record extract for entry. Children under 18 returning to Syria must be accompanied by a parent, relative, or legal guardian, or present a travel authorisation issued by a parent abroad.<sup>921</sup>

Some sources noted that return procedures at borders are not standardised and often depend on individual officers, leading to ad hoc practices across crossings and varying documentation being requested in similar cases.<sup>922</sup> Despite these inconsistencies, returns are generally facilitated,<sup>923</sup> and authorities are reportedly working to establish a centralised system to standardise procedures.<sup>924</sup>

Authorities have allowed Syrians to re-enter using a wide range of identity proofs, including expired passports or ID cards, and in some cases even alternative evidence such as photos of documents or papers issued by local *mukhtars*.<sup>925</sup> Additionally, Syrian diplomatic missions abroad are authorised to issue temporary travel documents and passports to facilitate the return of nationals who had lost them. Replacement of lost ID cards can only be done in person inside Syria. UNHCR provides free legal assistance through its partners to IDPs and returnees on issues related to civil documentations including IDs.<sup>926</sup>

Approximately 8 million Syrians were previously on wanted lists of the former government's security agencies. According to returnee testimonies and sources, individuals returning from abroad after the fall of the Assad government have generally not faced repercussions from current authorities.<sup>927</sup> Some were even able to verify their former 'wanted' status under the previous regime.<sup>928</sup> The arrest warrants issued by any of the four intelligence agencies of the former regime or by the military police for the military service are not being enforced.<sup>929</sup>

<sup>921</sup> UNHCR, Syria is Home, n.d, [url](#)

<sup>922</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, December 2025, [url](#), p. 22 [SNHR];

<sup>923</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, December 2025, [url](#), p. 22 [SNHR]; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 142

<sup>924</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, December 2025, [url](#), p. 22 [SNHR];

<sup>925</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, December 2025, [url](#), p. 84 [SNHR];

<sup>926</sup> UNHCR, Syria is Home, n.d, [url](#)

<sup>927</sup> New York Times (The), In Syria, Being Wanted Went From Something to Fear to a Badge of Honor, 20 March 2025, [url](#); SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026

<sup>928</sup> New York Times (The), In Syria, Being Wanted Went From Something to Fear to a Badge of Honor, 20 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>929</sup> Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, online interview with EUAA, 11 June 2025; SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026





While the transitional government has annulled all arrest warrants issued by Assad-era security agencies for political reasons it retained those related to criminal cases.<sup>930</sup> During the release of detainees from Assad-era prisons, individuals accused of serious crimes such as murder and robbery were also released. Arrest warrants for these individuals remain in place, reportedly in the hope that they can be apprehended if they attempt to flee the country through border crossings. However, SJAC noted that the Assad government had often used criminal charges, such as possessing a forged passport, commonly used by those fleeing the country, to target activists.<sup>931</sup> According to sources, returnees with unresolved criminal charges may be prevented from leaving the country again until their case are reviewed,<sup>932</sup> potentially leaving them in prolonged legal limbo due to the limited capacity of the judiciary.<sup>933</sup>

By November 2025, the authorities claimed to have lifted over 5 (out of 8) million travel restrictions related notably to draft evasion or security reasons imposed by the Assad government.<sup>934</sup> Authorities reported that remaining cases included about 1.15 million state employees whose status was under review, contractors linked to security and military bodies under investigation for possible abuses, individuals subject to police records for violations or criminal cases, and persons banned from travel by the Ministry of Finance.<sup>935</sup>

## 3.2. Return trends and conditions upon return

### 3.2.1. Return trends

According to official data, over 1.6 million Syrian refugees have returned since December 2024, including more than 250 000 in the first quarter of 2026. Syrian refugees returned mainly from Türkiye (40 %), Lebanon (38 %) and Jordan (18 %), with smaller numbers from Iraq (3 %), Egypt (2 %) and other countries.<sup>936</sup> As of 30 April 2026, most returns from abroad have been recorded to Damascus, Idlib, Aleppo, Rural Damascus, Homs, and Hama. UNHCR monitoring indicates that returnees were 52 % female and 48 % male, with children aged 0–17 constituting the largest age group, followed by working-age adults (18–59).<sup>937</sup> Returns from

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<sup>930</sup> Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, online interview with EUAA, 11 June 2025; SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026

<sup>931</sup> Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, online interview with EUAA, 11 June 2025

<sup>932</sup> Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, online interview with EUAA, 11 June 2025; SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026; DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 66-67[Syrian human rights organisation]

<sup>933</sup> Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, online interview with EUAA, 11 June 2025; SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 26 May 2026

<sup>934</sup> Enab Baladi, Syrian Interior Ministry removes five million names from travel ban lists, 20 November 2025, [url](#); SANA, Interior Ministry is removing restrictions imposed by former regime – Spokesperson, 20 November 2025, [url](#)

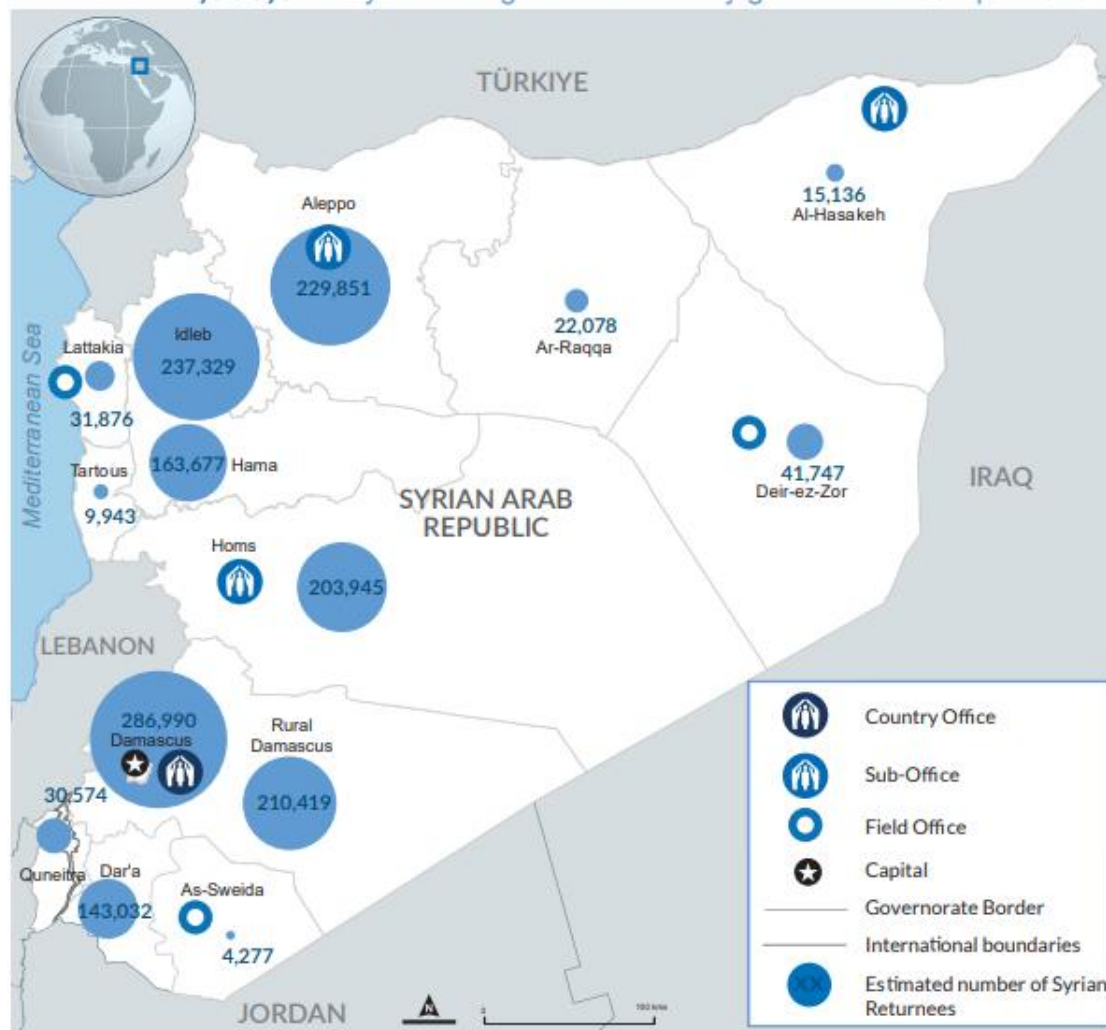
<sup>935</sup> Enab Baladi, Syrian Interior Ministry removes five million names from travel ban lists, 20 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>936</sup> UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights. Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>937</sup> UNHCR, Comprehensive Overview of Refugee Returns Dashboard, 30 April 2026, [url](#)

Europe occur<sup>938</sup> but remain limited,<sup>939</sup> as refugees there generally have access to more comprehensive services and are less inclined to relinquish them.<sup>940</sup>

Locations of **1,630,874** Syrian Refugees returnees by governorate 30 April 2026



**Map 4. © UNHCR, Locations of 1,630,874 Syrian Refugees returnees by governorate 30 April 2026**

Most returnees from abroad surveyed by UNHCR reported returning spontaneously (78 %), accompanied by their immediate family (88 %) and to the same location they had lived before fleeing Syria (76 %).<sup>941</sup> The main pull factors for returnees from abroad were family unity and reunification (58 %), perceived improved security conditions (56 %), and the desire to access/recover HLP (42 %).<sup>942</sup> Most returnees from abroad did not carry out prior visits before

<sup>938</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), pp. 141-142

<sup>939</sup> DW, German government pushes Syrians to return to their homeland, 11 February 2026, [url](#); DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, [url](#), p. 78 [SNHR]

<sup>940</sup> DK, DIS, Security Situation, Return and Documents, December 2025, [url](#), p. 78 [SNHR]

<sup>941</sup> UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights. Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 8-9

<sup>942</sup> UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights. Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 10-11

returning (75 %) relying on information from family and community networks (71 %) to make their decision.<sup>943</sup>

### 3.2.2. Conditions upon return

UNOCHA noted that the main humanitarian challenges for returnees from abroad are damaged infrastructure, a declining economy, limited access to essential services, and scarce livelihood opportunities.<sup>944</sup> Meanwhile, the main barriers to return cited in a 2026 UNHCR survey were limited access to housing (39 %) and basic infrastructure (including electricity and water) (35 %), lack of resources to return (34 %) and security concerns (32 %).<sup>945</sup>

According to an International Organization for Migration (IOM) assessment based on data collected between March and April 2026, the conditions in Idlib governorate were assessed as ‘mostly conducive’ (3.5) for the return and reintegration of IDPs and returnees. The conditions in Damascus (3.5), Tartous (3.4) and Aleppo (3.3)<sup>946</sup> governorates scored the highest amongst governorates assessed as being ‘partially conducive’.<sup>947</sup> In contrast, Hasaka (2.3), Raqqa (2.5) and Sweida (2.7) had the least conducive conditions. No governorate or location presented ‘fully conducive’ conditions for return and reintegration.<sup>948</sup>

Around 77 % returnees surveyed by UNHCR in the first quarter of 2026 reported feeling safe, while feelings of insecurity concentrated in areas affected by violence like Sweida, Quneitra, Raqqa, Tartous and Latakia governorates. Criminality was viewed as the main reason for not feeling safe (47 %).<sup>949</sup>

### 3.2.3. Measures to support integration of returnees

It is estimated that at least 60 % of the Syrian refugees who returned in 2025 (around 1.4 million) and are projected to return in 2026 (between 1 million – 1.6 million) will require humanitarian assistance.<sup>950</sup> UNHCR supports voluntary returnees to Syria with one-time cash grants for vulnerable households (approx. USD 600 per household), transportation assistance, legal counselling for documentation, and rehabilitation of damaged shelters. Support also

<sup>943</sup> UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights. Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>944</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2026), 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>945</sup> UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights. Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 10-11

<sup>946</sup> IOM uses a five-tier scoring index to indicate the relative conduciveness of conditions for return and sustainable reintegration. The criteria assessed are: safety and security; adequate standards of living; access to livelihoods; housing, land and property; access to documentation. An unweighted average of the five criteria scores is calculated to produce a single composite index for each location, on a 0–5 scale, where higher scores indicate more conducive conditions for return and reintegration. IOM, Syrian Arab Republic — Communities of Return Index — Round 1 (15 March - 05 April 2025), 13 May 2025, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>947</sup> A score between 2.6 – 3.5 indicates that the conditions are ‘partially conducive’ – some conditions support return, but notable barriers remain.

<sup>948</sup> IOM, Syrian Arab Republic — Communities of Return Index — Round 4 (1 January - 4 February 2026), 3 April 2026, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>949</sup> UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights. Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>950</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2026), 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 19



includes protection services, mental health support, and relief items through community centres.<sup>951</sup> By November 2025, UNHCR had provided USD 600 cash grants to over 115 000 refugee returnees, as well as shelter grants ranging from USD 1 300 to 3 500 to 6 194 vulnerable individuals including refugee returnees.<sup>952</sup> UNHCR plans to provide direct assistance to around 600 000 returnees in 2026, focusing on vulnerable refugees in host countries and returnees identified as vulnerable upon arrival in Syria.<sup>953</sup>

## 4. Socio-economic situation with a focus on Damascus city

### 4.1. Overview of economic situation

In 2025, Syria experienced a modest but fragile economic recovery, with real GDP growth estimated at 2-4 %, driven by the lifting of sanctions, renewed trade, increased public-sector wages, and refugee returns.<sup>954</sup> Authorities have taken steps towards the liberalisation of the economy, while making efforts to unify macroeconomic, fiscal, and monetary policies.<sup>955</sup> Despite these improvements, economic conditions remained severe, with inflation, high unemployment, and declining purchasing power significantly impacting daily life.<sup>956</sup> Price increases affecting many basic goods and food items were reported in the first quarter of 2026, driven by rising production costs, currency depreciation,<sup>957</sup> and regional geopolitical tensions.<sup>958</sup> The regional conflict in the Middle East has led to increased import costs, disrupted supply chains, negatively affected food production,<sup>959</sup> and reduced electricity supply.<sup>960</sup> Authorities efforts to improve access to food, fuel<sup>961</sup> and services such as electricity have often come with significant price increases.<sup>962</sup> As a result, services are more accessible

<sup>951</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2026), 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 73

<sup>952</sup> UNHCR, UNHCR Cash Assistance For Syrian Returnees 2025, 31 December 2025, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>953</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2026), 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 74

<sup>954</sup> World Bank (The), Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan & Pakistan Economic Update: Challenges of Conflict and Industrial Policy for Development, April 2026, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>955</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2026), 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>956</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 9

<sup>957</sup> Enab Baladi, Rising prices in Syria, two experts assess the economic situation, 11 March 2026, [url](#); SANA, Regional tensions, currency volatility drive price instability in Syrian markets, 4 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>958</sup> Enab Baladi, Rising prices in Syria, two experts assess the economic situation, 11 March 2026, [url](#); Syria Report (The), War-Induced Shock Drives Sharp Price Increases in Syria, 17 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>959</sup> OSES, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Claudio Cordone - Briefing to the Security Council, 22 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>960</sup> OSES, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Claudio Cordone - Briefing to the Security Council, 18 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>961</sup> Haid, H., One year of new Syrian rule: progress and challenges, Al Majalla, 10 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>962</sup> OSES, Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Claudio Cordone - Briefing to the Security Council, 22 April 2026, [url](#)



but often unaffordable,<sup>963</sup> leading to public protests against rising cost of living, particularly high fuel and electricity bills.<sup>964</sup>

The World Food Programme's (WFP) Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB)<sup>965</sup> far exceeded the minimum wage, leaving nearly 90 % of households struggling to meet basic needs, while Syria's 2025 humanitarian plan was only 35 % funded.<sup>966</sup> WFP has cut emergency food assistance by 50 %, reducing support from 1.3 million to 650 000 people in May 2026, and ended a nationwide bread subsidy programme that had assisted millions each day.<sup>967</sup> In 2025, Syria faced its most severe drought in nearly 40 years, significantly impacting water availability and food security, with an estimated 2.7 million-ton wheat deficit affecting at least 16.2 million people.<sup>968</sup> Since late May 2026, severe flooding along the Euphrates in Deir Ez-Zor and Raqqa has caused displacement, damaged infrastructure, and disrupted livelihoods during the harvest season, further exacerbating food insecurity in some of Syria's most vulnerable areas.<sup>969</sup>

UNOCHA estimated that in 2026, 15.6 million people in Syria require humanitarian assistance, including over 5.5 million IDPs, as well IDP returnees and refugee returnees. This represents a decrease of 900 000 people compared to 2025, which was attributed to 'some nominal improvements' and stricter scope of humanitarian assistance.<sup>970</sup>

## 4.2. Employment

Syria's labour market remains highly precarious,<sup>971</sup> with significant lack of employment opportunities.<sup>972</sup> According to a 2026 UNHCR study based on household interviews with refugee returnees, IDP returnees, and host communities across all governorates, high unemployment was reported across all categories, with about 30 % of working-age respondents jobless and only 6-7 % accessing formal employment. Around 21 % of refugee returnees and 23 % of IDP returnees worked in the informal sector, while 14 % and 13 % respectively relied on daily or casual labour. Women (33 %) face slightly higher unemployment than men (28 %), and while patterns are broadly similar across groups, refugee returnees

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<sup>963</sup> Haid, H., One year of new Syrian rule: progress and challenges, Al Majalla, 10 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>964</sup> Zelin, A., Syria's Protest Wave: A Governance Stress Test, TWI, 3 June 2026, [url](#)

<sup>965</sup> According to WFP, the 'Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) is defined as what a household requires to meet essential needs, conceptually equivalent to a poverty line. It includes the cost of food, utilities, services and resources required monthly.' WFP, Monthly Market Price Bulletin November 2025, 6 January 2026, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>966</sup> World Bank (The), Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan & Pakistan Economic Update: Challenges of Conflict and Industrial Policy for Development, April 2026, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>967</sup> WFP, WFP scales back food assistance in Syria amid funding shortfalls, 13 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>968</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2026), 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>969</sup> WFP Syria Country Brief, May 2026, 8 June 2026, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>970</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2026), 2 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 2, 6, 8

<sup>971</sup> AT, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Staatendokumentation Country Report Syria, 28 February 2026, [url](#), p. 364

<sup>972</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 144; UNDP, Syria's Economy After the 2024 Transition: Jobs, Enterprise, and a Path Forward, 25 February 2026, [url](#)

experience higher unemployment (36 %) and host communities have somewhat better access to formal jobs (12 % employed in formal sector).<sup>973</sup>

An April 2026 report by IOM found that 76 % of respondents identified lack of livelihoods as one of the main risks and barrier to return. Most communities identified agriculture and livestock as the primary source of income (74 %), followed by employment in the public sector (7 %), daily labour (6 %), small business (6 %) and trade (6 %).<sup>974</sup> Damascus recorded an average score of 2.9 out of 5 on access to livelihoods, tying with Aleppo governorate and ranking second highest in the country after Tartous governorate. The score is classified as 'partially conducive' for the return and sustainable reintegration of IDPs and returnees, according to IOM's indicators.<sup>975</sup>

A study commissioned by the Country of Origin Information Unit of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, based on a survey of Syrians aged 16–35 conducted in May 2025,<sup>976</sup> found that continuous employment was most prevalent in Damascus (33 %), followed by Aleppo (31 %) and Homs (25 %). Occasional work was most common in Homs (23 %), compared with Aleppo (14 %) and Damascus (13 %). Unemployment or non-participation in the labour market was highest in Aleppo (26 %), followed by Homs (16 %) and Damascus (15 %). It should also be noted that the proportion of students in the respondents' sample was relatively high, with the highest proportion in Damascus (26 %), followed by Aleppo (19 %) and Homs (17 %).<sup>977</sup>

According to a Danish Refugee Council study,<sup>978</sup> informality dominates the agriculture, construction and textile sectors, with over 80 % of small and micro-enterprises operating without registration or formal labour arrangements, limiting their access to finance, insurance, and legal protection. Youth under 30 make up the majority of the workforce in these sectors, largely engaged in daily or temporary jobs, with generally low skill levels. Women's participation to this workforce remains largely informal. Wages across these fields are low, irregular, and often insufficient to cover basic living costs, with construction workers earning about USD 7–12 per day and factory and agricultural workers typically under USD 100 per month, while payment delays are frequent.<sup>979</sup>

<sup>973</sup> The study is based on 7 120 household interviews with refugee (52 %) and IDP returnees (25 %), and host community members (23 %), conducted across all 14 governorates in Syria during the first quarter of 2026. UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights. Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>974</sup> IOM, Syrian Arab Republic — Communities of Return Index — Round 4 (1 January - 4 February 2026), 3 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 4, 12

<sup>975</sup> IOM, Syrian Arab Republic — Communities of Return Index — Round 4 (1 January - 4 February 2026), 3 April 2026, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>976</sup> The survey consisted of a total 600 respondents aged between 16 and 35 years: 200 residents of Damascus, 200 residents of Aleppo, and 200 residents of Homs. AT, Country of Origin Information Department of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration, Statistics Lebanon: Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2025, 27 October 2025, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>977</sup> AT, Country of Origin Information Department of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration, Statistics Lebanon: Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2025, 27 October 2025, [url](#), pp. 10-11

<sup>978</sup> The study was conducted across the governorates of Aleppo, Homs, Dar'a, Damascus and Rural Damascus between August and November 2025, and examines three sectors: agriculture, construction, and textile. DRC, Syria: Labour Market Assessment Report, 17 March 2026, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>979</sup> DRC, Syria: Labour Market Assessment Report, 17 March 2026, [url](#), p. 6



## 4.3. Poverty

At least one quarter of the population lives in extreme poverty (below USD 2.15/day), while 67 % live below the lower middle-income poverty line of USD 3.65 per day.<sup>980</sup> Syria's Minister of Social Affairs and Labour stated that around 80 % of Syrians live below the poverty line, with rising living costs outpacing incomes and limiting access to adequate nutrition.<sup>981</sup>

As of February 2026, the cost of living continued to outpace income growth, with wages covering only about one-third of basic household needs.<sup>982</sup> Authorities introduced major wage increases for public-sector workers, a 200 % rise in June 2025 followed by a further 50 % in March 2026, raising the minimum wage by over 400 % overall to SYP 1 256 000 (about EUR 97). Despite their scale, the measures had limited impact: wages remain insufficient to meet basic needs and have been quickly eroded by inflation. Most Syrians, particularly those outside the public sector, saw no benefit from these wage increases.<sup>983</sup> Syria's Minister of Social Affairs and Labour stated that despite a wage increase of 100 %, salaries range between USD 200 and 300 while the average rent in Damascus is around USD 1 000.<sup>984</sup>

In February 2026, average monthly wages varied significantly across sectors, reaching around SYP 1.13 million (around USD 102) for entry-level public sector employees, SYP 1.32 million (around USD 120) in the private sector, and SYP 3.1 million (around USD 280) in the civil sector, though all were deemed insufficient to meet living costs.<sup>985</sup>

The adequate standard of living Index compiled by the IOM<sup>986</sup> in April 2026 across all 14 governorates, recorded an average score of 3.2 out of 5. This score, classified as 'partially conducive', reflected the limited availability of electricity, safe drinking water and waste management services, as well as insufficient access to education services.<sup>987</sup> Damascus governorate recorded the strongest availability of services (4.0 out of 5), including 9 hours/day of public electricity available during the previous month, the second highest average after Tartous (13 hours/day).<sup>988</sup>

## 4.4. Food security

An estimated 13.3 million people in Syria were assessed as food insecure, including 7.2 million acutely and 0.7 million severely food insecure. Despite slight improvements recorded

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<sup>980</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2026), 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>981</sup> New Arab (The), 80% of Syrians still suffering food insecurity, despite conflict dying down, 6 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>982</sup> WFP, Syria Country Brief, March 2026, 26 March 2026, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>983</sup> Haid, H., One year of new Syrian rule: progress and challenges, Al Majalla, 10 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>984</sup> New Arab (The), 80% of Syrians still suffering food insecurity, despite conflict dying down, 6 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>985</sup> SCPR, Monthly Bulletin for Consumer Price Index and Inflation in Syria - February 2026, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>986</sup> The assessment is based on ' data collected between 1 January and 4 February 2026, through a network of 409 field enumerators and 11,343 key informants (KIs) across 3,686 locations in all 14 governorates in Syria'. IOM, Syrian Arab Republic — Communities of Return Index — Round 4 (1 January - 4 February 2026), 3 April 2026, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>987</sup> IOM, Syrian Arab Republic — Communities of Return Index — Round 4 (1 January - 4 February 2026), 3 April 2026, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>988</sup> IOM, Syrian Arab Republic — Communities of Return Index — Round 4 (1 January - 4 February 2026), 3 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 9-10



compared to 2025 when 14.5 million were assessed as food insecure, the situation was assessed as fragile, with 6.2 million more are at risk of falling into food insecurity amid instability, funding shortfalls, drought, and economic hardship.<sup>989</sup> In 2025, approximately 18.4 % of households nationwide were food secure (19 % for households living in urban areas and 16.4 % in rural areas), compared with 4.2 % among in camp populations. Food security varied significantly by region, with Tartous reporting the highest share of food-secure households (29.9 %), followed by Rural Damascus (27.6 %) and Damascus (21.9 %), while Raqqa (4.2 %), Hasaka (4.6 %) and Sweida (5.4 %) recorded the lowest levels. Food security remained significantly lower in governorates facing security challenges such as Hasaka, Raqqa and Sweida, compared to more stable areas.<sup>990</sup>

Improved food availability in 2025 was driven by a combination of increased remittance inflows, reduced import tariffs, easing food price inflation, and a rise in the minimum wage, which together enhanced households' purchasing power and access to food. Vulnerable groups, including IDPs, returnees, persons with disabilities, and female-headed households, continued to face disproportionately low levels of food security.<sup>991</sup> For instance, in 2025, female-headed households faced lower food security, with only 12.0 % classified as food-secure compared to 18.5% of male-headed households.<sup>992</sup>

As of February 2026, the national average MEB<sup>993</sup> was on average around 2.43 million SYP (around USD 220 at an official exchange rate of SYP 11 055 = 1 USD) for a family of five which was 31 % covered (47 % of its food component) by the official monthly minimum wage. Damascus recorded the fourth highest MEB costs out of all governorates (after Sweida, Hasaka and Tartous governorates) in February 2026 with 2.55 million SYP (around USD 230) while also recording a month-on-month price increase of 1.7 %.<sup>994</sup> In Damascus and Aleppo, 'stressed' (Phase 2)<sup>995</sup> food security conditions persist in urban areas as of May 2026, as fuel shortages limit purchasing power and force many households to rely on black-market liquefied petroleum gas.<sup>996</sup>

In January 2026, the WFP assisted 6.7 million people in Syria with food distributions and cash transfers to support purchasing power, but needs remain critical, with 6.4 million requiring daily food assistance, while declining international funding, particularly reduced U.S. support, threatens continued operations.<sup>997</sup>

<sup>989</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2026), 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 49

<sup>990</sup> WFP, Food Security Assessment 2025 – Syria, n.d., [url](#), pp. 2-4

<sup>991</sup> WFP, Food Security Assessment 2025 – Syria, n.d., [url](#), pp. 4-5

<sup>992</sup> WFP, Food Security Assessment 2025 – Syria, n.d., [url](#), p. 2

<sup>993</sup> According to WFP, the 'Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) is defined as what a household requires to meet essential needs, conceptually equivalent to a poverty line. It includes the cost of food, utilities, services and resources required monthly.' WFP, Monthly Market Price Bulletin November 2025, 6 January 2026, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>994</sup> WFP, Monthly Market Price Bulletin February 2026, 10 May 2026, [url](#), pp. 1, 4

<sup>995</sup> IPC (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification) scale ranges from 1 (None/Minimal) to 5 (Famine). Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, IPC Mapping Tool, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>996</sup> WHO, Public Health Situation Analysis (PHSA) - Syrian Arab Republic, 4 May 2026, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>997</sup> New Arab (The), 80% of Syrians still suffering food insecurity, despite conflict dying down, 6 April 2026, [url](#)



## 4.5. Housing, water, and sanitation

### 4.5.1. Housing

Around one-third of the country's housing units, corresponding to 1.3 million, have been either destroyed or severely damaged over the conflict.<sup>998</sup> The World Bank estimated the direct physical damage to infrastructure, residential buildings, and non-residential buildings to be at USD 108 billion.<sup>999</sup> Conflict-related housing damage is widespread across Syria, with the highest proportions of completely destroyed homes reported in Hama, Idlib, Rural Damascus, and Homs governorates.<sup>1000</sup> Around 6.2 million people in Syria are in need of shelter repair assistance while 4.1 million Syrians, particularly returnees, face challenges with documentation and housing, land and property due to destroyed homes, lost ownership records and secondary occupancy.<sup>1001</sup>

Syria's real estate sector is marked by severe inflationary stagnation, with property prices far exceeding incomes and little government intervention to address the gap. The crisis is particularly acute in cities like Damascus and Aleppo, driven by high demand, and is compounded by structural issues such as inheritance disputes, illegal occupation, and administrative and technical obstacles to proper property registration.<sup>1002</sup>

At the national level, the availability of vacant and safe housing units for rent or purchase was reported to be highly limited. Across the country, the majority of communities (60 %) across most governorates,<sup>1003</sup> reported that the average rent for a two-bedroom housing unit remained below 50 USD per month. A notable exception was Damascus, where average rents were reported to exceed 300 USD per month. An increase in rental prices was reported nationwide during 2025, with particularly significant rises observed in Damascus, Dar'a and Hama governorates. Rising rental costs are driven by increased demand from returnees and population growth, alongside higher reconstruction costs, limited housing availability, and broader inflation.<sup>1004</sup> In Damascus city, due to widespread destruction in the suburbs, there is a severe shortage of housing and limited availability of residential areas.<sup>1005</sup>

Around 23 % of Damascus respondents to a 2025 survey managed to afford housing costs, including rent, electricity and water, 50 % just about managed to afford them, while 6 % did not manage to afford housing costs. Most respondents in Damascus lived with their immediate family (78 %), followed by those living with extended family (16 %) and with housing partners

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<sup>998</sup> UNDP, The impact of the conflict in Syria, 20 February 2025, [url](#), p. 38

<sup>999</sup> World Bank (The), The Syrian Conflict, Physical Damage and Reconstruction Assessment (2011-2024), August 2025, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>1000</sup> Global Shelter Cluster, Syria Nationwide Housing Damage Assessment, 26 January 2026, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1001</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2026), 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>1002</sup> Enab Baladi, Syrians Without Homes, Stagnant Market and Awaited Investments, 16 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>1003</sup> The assessment was carried out using a total of 1 725 Key Informants Interviews across 1 221 communities which took place between 14 October and 4 December 2025. Global Shelter Cluster, SYR Shelter Sector Housing Damage Assessment, 26 January 2026, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1004</sup> Global Shelter Cluster, Syria Nationwide Housing Damage Assessment, 26 January 2026, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>1005</sup> Syria Direct, Reconstruction plan for eastern Damascus neighborhoods alarms residents, 20 April 2026, [url](#); Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, online interview with EUAA, 11 June 2025

(5 %), while only 1 % reported living alone.<sup>1006</sup> In April 2026, Syria's Minister of Social Affairs and Labour stated that the average rent in Damascus is around USD 1 000, which cannot be covered by salaries which range between USD 200 and 300.<sup>1007</sup>

Women's access to housing and property is largely dependent on male relatives, as ownership is typically registered in the names of husbands or other male family members.<sup>1008</sup> Although alternative proof of ownership may exist, such as customary contracts, testimonies, or financial records, restrictive social norms, limited financial means and economic dependence make it difficult for women to secure formal ownership or tenure.<sup>1009</sup> Additionally, discriminatory inheritance laws and norms limit women's access to property, which is predominantly passed to men.<sup>1010</sup>

#### 4.5.2. Water and sanitation

More than 12 million people in Syria have limited access to basic water, sanitation and hygiene services. Access to water is a major challenge due to widespread damage to infrastructure, power shortages, climate change impacts, and limited service capacity, leaving over 30 % of households without improved water sources. In 2025, reduced rainfall and drought-like conditions further worsened the situation, reducing key water resources such as the Euphrates River, groundwater and springs by 30–50 %.<sup>1011</sup>

### 4.6. Health care

UNOCHA indicated that 12.8 million people were in need of humanitarian health assistance. Only 57 % of hospitals and 30 % of primary healthcare centres are fully functional, with the rest partially or non-functional due to shortages of staff, equipment, medicines, and utilities.<sup>1012</sup>

Health needs in Syria are rising amid increasing returns, particularly in areas with damaged infrastructure, poor water and sanitation, and limited basic services. The country continues to face outbreaks of communicable diseases such as polio, measles and hepatitis A. Mental health needs are also significant, with one in ten people experiencing mild to severe conditions, while access to psychosocial support remains limited. Barriers such as stigma,

<sup>1006</sup> AT, Country of Origin Information Department of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration, Statistics Lebanon: Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2025, 27 October 2025, [url](#), pp. 1, 16

<sup>1007</sup> New Arab (The), 80% of Syrians still suffering food insecurity, despite conflict dying down, 6 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>1008</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 61; Syria Report (The), Report: Ownership, Planning, and Population Transformations in Damascus' Informal Settlements, and Their Impact on Women's Rights, 30 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>1009</sup> Syria Report (The), Report: Ownership, Planning, and Population Transformations in Damascus' Informal Settlements, and Their Impact on Women's Rights, 30 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>1010</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), para 61

<sup>1011</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2026), 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 66

<sup>1012</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2026), 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 54

harmful gender norms and financial constraints further restrict access to services, especially for women seeking GBV support.<sup>1013</sup>

Syria's health workforce density remains critically low, with severe shortages in key areas such as family medicine, nursing, midwifery and specialist care. Low pay, limited career prospects and poor working conditions continue to undermine retention and contribute to ongoing emigration of trained health professionals.<sup>1014</sup> Between 50 to 70 % of the health workforce is estimated to have left the country.<sup>1015</sup>

In February 2026, doctors in several Damascus-area hospitals staged protests calling for better pay and working conditions.<sup>1016</sup> In March 2026, the transitional government issued Decree No. 68 of 2026, which introduced salary increases for employees across several public institutions, including the Ministry of Health.<sup>1017</sup>

Around 83 % of households spent money on health<sup>1018</sup> in the context of sharply rising costs of health services and medicines which increased by 220 % over two years.<sup>1019</sup> In Damascus, most respondents to a 2025 survey reported physical access to healthcare services, but affordability remains a major barrier. Around 56 % can access and afford vaccinations, compared to 43 % who can access but not afford them, while 1 % lack access. Similarly, 63 % can access and afford medication, while 34 % cannot afford it and a small minority have no access. For primary care, 66 % report both access and affordability, compared to 33 % who cannot afford visits. Access to specialists is more constrained, with only 46 % able to afford care, 49 % unable to afford it despite access, and 5 % lacking access altogether.<sup>1020</sup>

## 4.7. Education

UNOCHA assessed that 6.5 million people were in need of education assistance in 2026. Although enrolment increased in 2025, access to education remains limited, with 2.75 million children (37 % of school aged children) out of school. Nearly 8 000 schools, around 30 % of the total, are non-functional, and many that remain open lack safe water and sanitation, heating, electricity, and sufficient space.<sup>1021</sup> Over a million children were at risk of dropping out, leaving them in increasing 'susceptibility to exploitation and early marriage'.<sup>1022</sup>

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<sup>1013</sup> ECHO, Humanitarian Implementation Plan. Syria Regional and Lebanon Crisis, 20 January 2026, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1014</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2026), 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 55

<sup>1015</sup> ECHO, Humanitarian Implementation Plan. Syria Regional and Lebanon Crisis, 20 January 2026, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1016</sup> New Arab (The), As government fails on economy, Syrians must mobilise from below, 25 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>1017</sup> SANA, Syria's health minister says Decree 68 will boost staff stability, care quality, 21 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>1018</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2026), 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 54

<sup>1019</sup> ECHO, Humanitarian Implementation Plan. Syria Regional and Lebanon Crisis, 20 January 2026, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1020</sup> AT, Country of Origin Information Department of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration, Statistics Lebanon: Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2025, 27 October 2025, [url](#), p. 40

<sup>1021</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2026), 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>1022</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian needs and response plan, 2 April 2026, [url](#), pp. 11, 38



Classrooms are overcrowded<sup>1023</sup> and face shortages of staff<sup>1024</sup> and learning materials, leading to reduced learning time for many students.<sup>1025</sup> Limited school availability, unsafe conditions, affordability challenges and funding gaps continue to undermine education access.<sup>1026</sup> The Ministry of Education stated in November 2025 that since the fall of the previous regime it has completed the renovations of 823 schools across the country, including 88 in Damascus.<sup>1027</sup> According to a report by Action for Humanity (AFH), formal and informal education programs are being offered to support children, however, these remained 'limited in scope'.<sup>1028</sup>

## 4.8. Mobility and admittance

### 4.8.1. Freedom of movement at country level and in Damascus

Freedom of movement within Syria has improved since the fall of the Assad government<sup>1029</sup> and people are generally able to travel between cities such as Damascus, Aleppo, Raqqa, and Hasaka without facing restrictions.<sup>1030</sup> The collapse of SDF control in the northeast led to the removal of checkpoints, enabling relatively free movement of goods and people compared with previous years.<sup>1031</sup>

Geographic disparities in freedom of movement were reported, with the highest levels of movement restrictions perceived by respondents to an UNHCR survey in Sweida (36 %), followed by Tartous (29 %), Latakia (13 %) and Hasaka (11 %). These areas also reported higher perceptions of insecurity, suggesting a link between safety concerns and limitations on freedom of movement.<sup>1032</sup> According to UNHCR, checkpoints along key routes between Sweida and Damascus continue to severely restrict movement, with travel largely limited to essential or emergency purposes.<sup>1033</sup> Israel's operations in southern Syria, particularly Quneitra

<sup>1023</sup> ECHO, Humanitarian Implementation Plan. Syria Regional and Lebanon Crisis, 20 January 2026, [url](#), p. 9; Enab Baladi, Damascus schools: High costs and favouritism, 3 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>1024</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (April 2026), 2 April 2026, [url](#), p. 45; ECHO, Humanitarian Implementation Plan. Syria Regional and Lebanon Crisis, 20 January 2026, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>1025</sup> ECHO, Humanitarian Implementation Plan. Syria Regional and Lebanon Crisis, 20 January 2026, [url](#), p. 9; NRC, Beyond return: Ensuring sustainable recovery & (re)-integration in Syria, May 2025, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1026</sup> UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights. Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>1027</sup> SANA, Syrian Education Ministry completes renovation of 823 schools, 1 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>1028</sup> AFH, Civilian Perspectives on Humanitarian Needs and Recovery Priorities in Syria, 13 March 2026, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>1029</sup> DK, DIS, Syria - Security situation, June 2025, [url](#), pp. 52, 55, 56

<sup>1030</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 113 [TDA]

<sup>1031</sup> Etana Syria, Analysis: Opportunities & challenges in integrating north-east Syria, 12 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>1032</sup> UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights. Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>1033</sup> UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights. Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), p. 14





governorate have led to restrictions on the freedom of movement of civilians<sup>1034</sup>, including preventing returns<sup>1035</sup> and access to land and essential services.<sup>1036</sup>

Major highways remain generally secure during daytime travel, allowing travellers arriving via Damascus International Airport, now also used by UN personnel, to travel onward within government-controlled areas without difficulty, aside from isolated security incidents such as attacks on civilian vehicles reported in summer 2025 on the road between Damascus and Sweida as part of the conflict between Bedouins and Druze.<sup>1037</sup> The road leading from Damascus airport to the city is well secured, with the government actively trying to demonstrating its presence and control.<sup>1038</sup> According to Haid Haid, travel is generally considered relatively safe in Damascus and surrounding areas, including along routes between Damascus and other cities and towards border crossings.<sup>1039</sup>

Many residents limited their movement after dark, including in and around Damascus and on main travel routes between Damascus and Dar'a, Sweida and Homs<sup>1040</sup> due to security risks<sup>1041</sup> such as fear of kidnappings and theft.<sup>1042</sup> In Haid Haid's assessment, although criminal incidents do occur in and around Damascus, they are not considered to be at a level that significantly restricts freedom of movement.<sup>1043</sup>

Since the fall of the former government, the number of checkpoints on major roads has significantly decreased and routine inspections of IDs, vehicles, and searches are no longer common, although occasional incidents occur due to manpower shortages and command gaps.<sup>1044</sup> In areas controlled by the transitional government, internal security forces typically staffed urban checkpoints, while Syrian army soldiers were more common in rural areas, with some checkpoints included mixed personnel. Identification was not always clear due to unclear insignia, and checkpoints were generally located at major junctions, city access roads, main routes, and near government buildings.<sup>1045</sup>

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<sup>1034</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 113, 115, 118; Enab Baladi, Israeli Incursions Continue in Quneitra as Raids and Arrests Expand, 8 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>1035</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 113, 115, 118

<sup>1036</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/61-62), 12 March 2026, [url](#), paras 113, 115, 118; HRW, World Report 2026; Syria, 4 February 2026, [url](#)

<sup>1037</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 109 [international security organisation]

<sup>1038</sup> Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, online interview with EUAA, 11 June 2025

<sup>1039</sup> Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026

<sup>1040</sup> Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, online interview with EUAA, 11 June 2025

<sup>1041</sup> DK, DIS, Syria - Security situation, June 2025, [url](#), pp. 52, 55; NRC, Beyond Return: Ensuring sustainable recovery & (re)-integration in Syria, 15 May 2025, [url](#), p. 13; International Crisis Group, The New Syria: Halting a Dangerous Drift, 28 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>1042</sup> Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026; DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), p. 92; Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, online interview with EUAA, 11 June 2025;

<sup>1043</sup> Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026

<sup>1044</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 109 [international security organisation]

<sup>1045</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), pp. 125-126



Checkpoint procedures vary significantly,<sup>1046</sup> ranging from minimal oversight as documented by some sources in Latakia and Tartous to extensive inspections elsewhere.<sup>1047</sup> Checks could include questioning travellers about the purpose of their journey, identity verification, vehicle searches, and, in some locations, examination of mobile phones or inquiries into religious background. Security forces occasionally fired at vehicles that failed to stop, while particularly strict controls were reported on roads between Dar'a and Sweida and on routes toward northeast Syria.<sup>1048</sup> According to International Crisis Group, guards' behaviour at checkpoints ranged from respectful to, at times, predatory.<sup>1049</sup> According to multiple sources, non-Sunni citizens could face humiliating treatment and intrusive questioning at checkpoints.<sup>1050</sup> Personnel at checkpoints in Damascus did not systematically request identification from travellers and people do not generally report any issues.<sup>1051</sup>

Women's freedom of movement in Syria varies by region: in Damascus, many move independently with precautions, while in smaller towns and rural areas, cultural norms impose stricter limitations on freedom of movement.<sup>1052</sup> In the coastal region, fears of kidnapping have disrupted girls' education, and in Aleppo, some women cover their hair to avoid harassment, which is primarily reported from armed men or at checkpoints rather than from regular police.<sup>1053</sup> Respondents to an UNHCR study<sup>1054</sup> focused on IDP returnees and refugee returnees across all Syrian governorates indicated that safety concerns (91 %) were the main factors limiting women and girls' freedom of movement, followed by harassment and intimidation (16 %), discrimination (7 %), socio-cultural barriers (7 %) and lack of IDs (5 %).<sup>1055</sup>

Most respondents to the same UNHCR study reported being able to move freely within their area of residence, including 94 % of returnees and 82 % of host community members. The main barriers to movement were due to safety and security concerns, fear of abduction, explosive ordnance, and the presence of armed actors.<sup>1056</sup>

During the reporting period some border crossings have been either temporarily closed or reopened. The Jdeibet Yabous crossing with Lebanon which was temporarily closed on 5

<sup>1046</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>1047</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), pp. 128-129

<sup>1048</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), pp. 128-129

<sup>1049</sup> International Crisis Group, Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida, 26 November 2025, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>1050</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, January 2026, [url](#), p. 127

<sup>1051</sup> Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026

<sup>1052</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), pp. 111 [TDA]

<sup>1053</sup> DK, DIS, Syria, Situation of Certain Groups, December 2025, [url](#), 102 [international organisation]

<sup>1054</sup> The study is based on 7 120 household interviews with refugee (52 %) and IDP returnees (25 %), and host community members (23 %), conducted across all 14 governorates in Syria during the first quarter of 2026. UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights. Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>1055</sup> UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights. Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>1056</sup> UNHCR, Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights. Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026), 28 April 2026, [url](#), p. 13



April as a response to Israel's warning to evacuate the area was reopened on 9 April.<sup>1057</sup> The Yarubiyah (Rabia) border crossing between Syria and Iraq was reopened in April 2026 after more than a decade, with the aim of facilitating oil transportation and trade.<sup>1058</sup> The Akcakale crossing between Türkiye and Syria was reopened after 12 years bringing the total number of crossings open between the two countries at 12.<sup>1059</sup>

#### 4.8.2. International flight connections

International commercial flights to and from Damascus were being operated to several countries including Türkiye, Iraq, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Jordan,<sup>1060</sup> Qatar, Saudi Arabia,<sup>1061</sup> Libya, Oman<sup>1062</sup> and Romania.<sup>1063</sup> Following the escalation of hostilities across the Middle East after 28 February 2026, the Syrian airspace was closed on 1 March.<sup>1064</sup> Operations resumed at Aleppo International Airport on 4 March,<sup>1065</sup> while the reopening of all air corridors and of Damascus International Airport was announced on 8 April.<sup>1066</sup> Temporary closures of Syrian airspace were reported again in early June 2026 in response to the renewed exchange of attacks between Israel and Iran.<sup>1067</sup>

Starting with 28 February 2026, Israeli and Iranian forces have exchanged strikes through Syrian airspace, resulting in civilian casualties, disruption of services and damage to property,<sup>1068</sup> particularly in southern Syria.<sup>1069</sup>

#### 4.8.3. Requirements for settling in Damascus

Prior to the fall of the Assad regime, obtaining a security clearance was a prerequisite for establishing residence in any part of Damascus city. Following the fall of the Assad regime, there are no longer legal requirements such as obtaining a security clearance for individuals wishing to settle in Damascus by renting or purchasing property.<sup>1070</sup>

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<sup>1057</sup> Enab Baladi, Syria Reopens Airspace and Jdeidet Yabous Border Crossing With Lebanon, 9 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>1058</sup> AP, A long-shuttered Iraq-Syria border crossing reopens for the first time in more than a decade, 20 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>1059</sup> New Arab (The), Turkey-Syria border gate to reopen after 12-year closure, 12 May 2026, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Türkiye Reopens Key Border Crossing With Syria After 12-Year Closure as Security Challenges Persist, 12 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>1060</sup> FlightConnections, Direct flights to Damascus (DAM), last updated 4 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>1061</sup> Arab News, Flights from Doha and Jeddah resume to Syria in May, 23 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>1062</sup> FlightConnections, Direct flights to Damascus (DAM), last updated 4 May 2026, [url](#)

<sup>1063</sup> Flightradar24, [url](#); Enab Baladi, After Damascus, Dan Air Adds Aleppo Flights From Bucharest, 30 April 2026, [url](#)

<sup>1064</sup> IOM, Syrian Arab Republic — Emergency Mobility Tracking and Cross Border Monitoring Situation Update — Round 2, 16 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>1065</sup> IOM, Syrian Arab Republic — Emergency Mobility Tracking and Cross Border Monitoring Situation Update — Round 2, 16 March 2026, [url](#)

<sup>1066</sup> Enab Baladi, Civil Aviation Authority Announces Reopening of Syrian Airspace, Resumption of Operations at Damascus Airport, 8 April 2026, [url](#)

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According to a study commissioned by the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, family is the primary source of support for Syrians returning from abroad. Returnees often depend on relatives for immediate accommodation, local orientation, and connections needed to navigate bureaucracy and recover identity documents or property. Economic reintegration is likewise heavily mediated by kinship ties, as employment is typically accessed through personal networks rather than formal recruitment.<sup>1071</sup> Strong family and community support is crucial for women returnees, particularly those without a male head of household, who often depend on extended relatives for accommodation and assistance.<sup>1072</sup>

In practice, people will settle in places where they have family connections, tribal kinship or similar sectarian background.<sup>1073</sup> Most returnees from abroad surveyed by UNHCR reported returning accompanied by their immediate family (88 %) and to the same location they had lived before fleeing Syria (76 %).<sup>1074</sup>

Many returnees cannot rely on kinship networks due to loss of relatives, estrangement, or displacement of family members. In these cases, alternative support mechanisms such as religious institutions, NGOs, and community associations may play a role in assisting reintegration. However, this support is often less comprehensive and less durable than that provided by family networks.<sup>1075</sup>

There is a degree of social discrimination against individuals relocating to Damascus from other parts of the country. While not driven by state policy, this bias stems from a long-standing distinction between Damascenes and non-locals. Locals are often reluctant to rent to newcomers or charge them higher prices, based on the perception that they may not properly maintain the property.<sup>1076</sup>

Women returning to Damascus face major barriers to housing and employment amid stalled reconstruction and scarce job opportunities. High rental costs have forced many former camp residents in Idlib who attempted to resettle in the capital to return to displacement camps. Female public-sector employees have been unable to regain their former positions, as staff from the previous administration remain in post despite the formation of the new government.<sup>1077</sup>

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Haid Haid, online interview with EUAA, 28 April 2026. Dr. Haid Haid is a Syrian columnist and a Senior Non-Resident Fellow at the Arab Reform Initiative. He is also a Consulting Research Fellow at Chatham House's Middle East and North Africa Programme. Dr. Haid's main research interests include security policies, governance, conflict resolution, and non-state actors.

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Wladimir van Wilgenburg, telephone interview with EUAA, 27 April 2026. Wladimir van Wilgenburg is a journalist and analyst specialised in Kurdish affairs. He co-authored two books on the Kurds of Syria and has contributed with research and analysis to several think tanks, including the Carnegie Endowment, the Atlantic Council, the Jamestown Foundation, and The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

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## Annex 2: Terms of Reference

### ☐ State structure and governance

- Political developments
  - Political context and international relations
  - Developments in the composition and functioning of state institutions
  - Developments in the relationship between the Transitional Government and armed actors controlling parts of Syria
- Security institutions
  - Military reforms and integration of armed groups
  - Capacity, integrity and effectiveness of security forces
- Judicial system
  - Capacity, integrity and effectiveness of the judiciary
  - Death penalty
  - Prison conditions and treatment of detainees

### ☐ Treatment of certain profiles and groups of the population

- Individuals affiliated or perceived to be affiliated with the former Government of Syria
- Individuals opposing or perceived to be opposing the Transitional Government
- Journalists and other media professionals
- Individuals perceived to be opposing the SDF/YPG
- Individuals with (perceived) affiliation to ISIL
- Individuals fearing forced or child recruitment by Kurdish-led forces
- Individuals perceived to have transgressed religious/moral laws, norms or codes
- Ethno-religious minorities
  - Kurds (including stateless Kurds)
  - Alawites
  - Druze
  - Christians
  - Palestinians
- LGBTIQ persons
- Women and girls
- Children

### ☐ Returns from abroad

- Administrative requirements for returnees
- Return trends and conditions upon return





❑ **Socio-economic situation with a focus on Damascus city**

- Overview of economic situation
- Availability and accessibility of basic infrastructure, services and subsistence:
  - Employment
  - Poverty
  - Food security
  - Housing, water, and sanitation
  - Health care
  - Education
- **Mobility and admittance**
  - Freedom of movement at country level and in Damascus
  - International flight connections and road security
  - Requirements for settling in Damascus

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