



Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken

Country of Origin Information Report on Syria

Date	May 2025
Status	Final

Publication details

Version number	1.0
Town/city	The Hague
Prepared by	Country of Origin Information Unit

Disclaimer: The Dutch version of this report is leading. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands cannot be held accountable for misinterpretations based on the English version of the report.



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Contents

	Publication details.....	3
	Introduction.....	7
1	Political developments.....	8
1.1	Fall of the Assad regime.....	8
1.2	Areas of control.....	9
1.2.1	Fragmentation.....	10
1.2.2	DAANES territory.....	12
1.2.3	Foreign military presence.....	13
1.3	Political transition.....	13
1.3.1	Composition of the interim administration.....	14
1.3.2	Composition of the transitional government.....	15
1.3.3	Developments concerning legislation.....	16
2	Armed actors.....	19
2.1	Armed groups.....	19
2.1.1	HTS.....	19
2.1.2	SNA.....	20
2.1.3	Armed groups in the south.....	21
2.1.4	SDF.....	21
2.2	The former security apparatus of the Assad regime.....	22
2.2.1	Registration and disarmament.....	23
2.2.2	Socio-economic impact.....	25
2.2.3	Security measures.....	25
2.3	New security apparatus.....	26
2.3.1	Formation of national army.....	28
2.3.2	General security forces.....	30
2.3.3	Police.....	31
2.3.4	Security and intelligence services.....	31
2.3.5	Recruitment and training.....	31
2.3.6	Performance of the security apparatus.....	33
2.4	Compulsory military service in the DAANES territory.....	34
2.5	Recruitment of minors.....	35
3	The security situation.....	36
3.1	General overview.....	36
3.2	Israeli military activities.....	40
3.2.1	Ground operations and air strikes.....	40
3.2.2	Consequences for civilians.....	41
3.3	Security situation by region.....	42
3.3.1	Syrian-Lebanese border.....	42
3.3.2	Damascus.....	44
3.3.3	Southern Syria.....	51
3.3.4	Central Syria.....	56
3.3.5	West Syria.....	59
3.3.6	North Syria.....	62
3.4	ISIS.....	68
3.5	Crime.....	70

4	Displaced persons	72
4.1	New displacement	72
4.2	Return of displaced persons	74
4.2.1	Devastation	75
4.2.2	Tensions in returnee communities	76
4.3	Explosive remnants of war	77
5	Living conditions	80
5.1	Humanitarian situation	80
5.2	Developments under the new administration	81
6	Human rights situation	85
6.1	Position of specific groups	85
6.1.1	Religious and ethnic groups	85
6.1.2	Atheists and apostates from Islam	97
6.1.3	LGBTIQ+ people	97
6.1.4	Palestinians in Syria	98
6.1.5	Former Assad supporters	100
6.1.6	Relatives of former Assad supporters	102
6.1.7	Former Ba'ath party members	102
6.1.8	Women	102
6.2	Socially undesirable behaviour, dress codes and issues of honour	104
6.2.1	Alcohol	104
6.2.2	Ramadan	105
6.2.3	Blasphemy	105
6.2.4	Dress code	106
6.2.5	Segregation of the sexes	106
6.2.6	Honour-based violence	107
6.3	Freedom of expression	107
6.3.1	Possibility of expressing criticism	107
6.3.2	Relatives of critics	108
6.3.3	Demonstrators	108
6.3.4	Journalists	109
7	Freedom of movement	112
7.1	Travelling in Syria	112
7.2	Checkpoints	112
7.2.1	Procedure at checkpoints	114
7.2.2	Problems at checkpoints	114
7.3	International airports of Damascus and Aleppo	115
8	Legal protection and the justice system	116
8.1	Legal protection	116
8.2	The justice system	116
8.3	Prison conditions	117
8.3.1	Types of prisons	117
8.3.2	Conditions in prisons	117
8.4	Severe ill-treatment and torture	118
8.5	Arrests and detentions of civilians	120
8.5.1	Numbers and responsible parties	120
8.5.2	Possible reasons for arrests and detentions	120
9	Return	122
9.1	Syrians abroad	122

9.2	Returns from abroad.....	122
9.2.1	Return from Türkiye	123
9.2.2	Return from Lebanon	124
9.2.3	Return from Jordan	125
9.2.4	Return from Iraq	126
9.2.5	Returning from the Netherlands and Germany	126
9.3	Access and settlement	127
9.4	Problems after return.....	127
9.5	Claiming property	130
9.6	Organisations providing support to returnees.....	131
9.7	Reconstruction	132
10	Appendices	133
10.1	List of abbreviations used	133
10.2	Reports and publications	134
10.3	Websites	151
10.4	News sources.....	152
10.5	Map of Syria with provinces and capitals	154
10.6	Overview of violent incidents recorded by ACLED	155
10.7	Overview of civilian deaths recorded by the SNHR	157

Introduction

This Country of Origin Information (COI) Report was drawn up on the basis of the points for attention mentioned in the Terms of Reference (ToR) compiled by the Ministry of Asylum and Migration. The ToR for this COI Report were adopted on 31 January 2025. At the request of the Ministry of Asylum and Migration, this COI Report was compiled in a shorter period than usual.

This COI Report describes the situation in Syria from the start of the large-scale ground offensive on 27 November 2024. This offensive led to the departure of President Bashar al-Assad (hereafter: Assad) from Syria on 8 December 2024. This COI Report is an update of the General COI Report from December 2024. The reporting period is from 27 November 2024 up to and including April 2025. Outlines of relevant developments of importance for answering the questions posed in the ToR are included up to the date of delivery.

This COI Report is a factual, neutral and objective representation of the findings that were made during the period under consideration. It is not a policy document and does not reflect the vision or policy of the Dutch government in relation to Syria. The report does not contain any conclusions concerning immigration policy.

This COI Report has been compiled on the basis of public and confidential sources, using carefully selected, analysed and verified information. In the compilation of this report, use was made of information from various United Nations (UN) organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), reports from the European Country of Origin Information (COI) organisations, specialist literature and media reporting. Except where the facts are generally undisputed or unless stated otherwise, the contents of this report are based on multiple sources. The public sources that were consulted are listed in Chapter 6 of this COI Report.

This COI Report also uses information obtained from interviews conducted with relevant and expert sources. These interviews were conducted partly in person – in particular, during fact-finding missions to Syria, Türkiye, Jordan, Lebanon and Switzerland – and partly online during the research for this COI Report. Some confidential information originates from the foreign diplomatic missions of the Netherlands. The information gleaned in this way was mainly used to support and augment passages founded on publicly available information. Each of these sources is marked as a 'confidential source' in the footnotes and accompanied by a date. Where possible, information obtained from a confidential source is supported by information from another source.

Chapter 1 addresses political developments. Chapter 2 discusses armed actors. Chapter 3 covers the security situation. Chapter 4 addresses the situation of displaced persons. Chapter 5 covers living conditions. Chapter 6 discusses the human rights situation. Chapter 7 covers freedom of movement. Chapter 8 concerns legal protection and the justice system. The report concludes with a chapter on return from abroad.

1 Political developments

1.1 Fall of the Assad regime

On 8 December 2024, the regime of President Bashar al-Assad was overthrown by a broad coalition of armed (opposition) groups led by *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham* (the Levant Liberation Committee, HTS). A twelve-day offensive ended the Assad family's rule of more than fifty years in Syria.¹ As cities were captured, thousands of prisoners were released from the regime's prisons and detention centres.²

On 27 November 2024, HTS and affiliated groups³ launched an offensive from the north-west of Syria, unexpectedly⁴ resulting in a complete collapse of the Assad regime's security apparatus. According to the loose coalition in which the groups had united, the initial aim of the Deterrence of Aggression operation was to reduce the regime's military positions in north-western Syria and, thereby, to reduce attacks on the opposition territory.⁵ The offensive followed a weeks-long escalation of airstrikes, shelling and kamikaze drone attacks by the regime, with Russian support, in which many civilians were killed or injured.⁶

The key moment was the fall of Aleppo, Syria's second city. When the opposition took this city on 1 December 2024, the regime and its military allies proved unable to regroup. The regime's security apparatus was surprised by the rapid advance of the armed opposition. Army units left their positions and fled *en masse*.⁷ While HTS and other groups from the north captured the central cities of Hama (on 5 December 2024) and Homs (on 7 December 2024), an *ad hoc* coalition of local armed groups (the Southern Operations Room) drove the regime out of the southern provinces of Daraa and Suweida. Fighters from Daraa reached Damascus on 8 December 2024 and were able to take the capital without opposition. They left the city after the arrival of HTS. Bashar al-Assad had meanwhile fled from Damascus to Moscow.⁸

External, geopolitical factors played an important role in the success of the offensive. The Assad regime's military allies – Russia, Iran and the Lebanese militia Hezbollah – were distracted and weakened. They proved unable or unwilling to come to the aid of the Assad regime.⁹ Since 2022, Russia has focused on the war in Ukraine.¹⁰ In the days following 27 November 2024, it provided only limited air

¹ Reuters, *Syrian rebels topple Assad who flees to Russia in Mideast shakeup*, 9 December 2024; ICG, *Priorities after Assad's fall*, 12 December 2024.

² Reuters, *Bewildered, elated prisoners pour out as Assad's jails flung open*, 8 December 2024; The fate of the many people who disappeared while in prisons or detention centres of the Assad regime – estimated at more than 100,000 individuals – remained unclear. It is feared they were executed or died in detention; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, pp. 1 and 3.

³ These groups included *Ahrar al-Sham*, *Faylaq al-Sham* and other armed groups in the north-west, which fought alongside HTS under a joint military command. They were joined by armed factions of the Syrian National Army (see 2.1); ICG, *Syria's north-western front erupts*, 5 December 2024.

⁴ ICG, *Priorities after Assad's fall*, 12 December 2024; WSJ, *What Syria's secret police saw as the regime crumbled*, 29 January 2025.

⁵ The New Arab, *'Deter the Aggression': What is behind the new rebel offensive in northwest Syria?*, 28 November 2025; The New York Times, *Why did Syria's civil war reignite?*, 24 December 2024.

⁶ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, pp. 2 and 4.

⁷ WSJ, *What Syria's secret police saw as the regime crumbled*, 29 January 2025; New Lines Magazine, *The disintegration of Assad's army*, 6 March 2025.

⁸ Reuters, *Syrian rebels topple Assad who flees to Russia in Mideast shakeup*, 9 December 2024.

⁹ ICG, *Priorities after Assad's fall*, 12 December 2024.

¹⁰ ICG, *Syria's north-western front erupts*, 5 December 2024.

support to government forces.¹¹ Iran was embroiled in armed conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Israel had inflicted heavy losses on Hezbollah, including on the organisation's leadership. Hezbollah had also moved units from Syria into Lebanon.¹²

Above all, the rapid collapse of the regime was due to structural weaknesses of the Syrian army and affiliated Syrian militias. Years of corruption and decay within the army had eroded combat power and undermined troop morale.¹³ Following the recapture (with support from Russia and Iran) of opposition areas in the period 2016–2018, the regime had done little to strengthen its armed forces. The army relied largely on conscripts and reservists, who were poorly paid, lacked internal unity and were not motivated to fight.¹⁴ This was in contrast to the gradual professionalisation of the combat strength of HTS and affiliated groups that had been taking place since 2020. According to some sources, they were better organised, more disciplined and better equipped than they had been at any other point in the conflict. Among other things, they made effective use of new weapons, especially kamikaze drones.¹⁵

During the rapid advance, HTS declared that it would protect the civilian population in the former regime area.¹⁶ It conducted a diplomatic offensive towards various religious communities and managed to take areas where these communities lived without much violence.¹⁷ In addition, the coalition led by HTS announced a general amnesty for conscripts in the Syrian army.¹⁸

1.2 Areas of control

After taking power, HTS leader Ahmed al-Sharaa (hereafter al-Sharaa) – formerly known as Abu Mohammed al-Jolani – stressed his desire to unite all of Syria under one central administration. He rejected the idea of a federalist model for the country.¹⁹ Al-Sharaa immediately began forming an interim administration for a transitional period until March 2025. It was headed by interim Prime Minister Mohammed al-Bashir, who had previously been the prime minister of the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG), the former administration of HTS-controlled north-western Syria.²⁰ Al-Sharaa promised a national dialogue, leading to a more inclusive

¹¹ ICG, *Syria's north-western front erupts*, 5 December 2024; Reuters, *How Assad's government in Syria fell*, 10 December 2025.

¹² The Syrian Observer, *Hezbollah withdraws forces from Syria to strengthen its front in Lebanon amid rising tensions*, 24 September 2025; Syria Direct, *Hezbollah and Iran-backed militias reposition in Syria*, 8 November 2024; Reuters, *Who is fighting in Syria and why?*, 3 December 2024; Reuters, *Syrian military and rebels battle north of Hama*, 4 December 2024; ICG, *Syria's north-western front erupts*, 5 December 2024.

¹³ Syria Revisited, *The slow collapse of the Syrian army*, 4 December 2024; ICG, *Syria's north-western front erupts*, 5 December 2024; ICG, *Priorities after Assad's fall*, 12 December 2024; WSJ, *What Syria's secret police saw as the regime crumbled*, 29 January 2025.

¹⁴ ICG, *Priorities after Assad's fall*, 12 December 2024.

¹⁵ War on the Rocks, *The patient efforts behind Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's success in Aleppo*, 3 December 2024; Syria Weekly, *Special: Syria. Nov 26-Dec 3, 2024*, 3 December 2024; ICG, *Syria's north-western front erupts*, 5 December 2024; The National, *Militias in Syria show chilling future of guerrilla war with 3D printed drones and night-vision units*, 4 December 2024; FT, *How Syria's rebels became makers of drones and guided missiles*, 5 December 2024.

¹⁶ ICG, *Priorities after Assad's fall*, 12 December 2024; Atlantic Council, *Inside Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's diplomatic offensive with Syria's Christians and Ismailis*, 19 March 2025.

¹⁷ Atlantic Council, *Inside Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's diplomatic offensive with Syria's Christians and Ismailis*, 19 March 2025.

¹⁸ The New Arab, *HTS-led coalition announces general amnesty for Assad soldiers*, 9 December 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 9.

¹⁹ The Economist, *An interview with Ahmed al-Sharaa, Syria's president*, 3 February 2025; ICG, *A glimmer of peace in Syria's North East*, 28 March 2025.

²⁰ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 3.

transitional government, followed by constitutional reforms and, eventually, elections.²¹

The territory that was ostensibly under the interim administration included the former opposition territory in the north-west and the former regime territory.²² After capturing the major, central cities of Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Damascus, the HTS-led coalition spread to the coastal provinces of Latakia and Tartous in the west, and to the part of the province of Deir ez-Zor that is located west of the Euphrates river, in the east of the country.²³ Much of northern and eastern Syria was controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and administered by the SDF-affiliated Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES).²⁴

1.2.1 Fragmentation

On paper, Syria appeared to be divided into two areas of control after the power shift. In practice, however, there was a high degree of territorial fragmentation within the interim administration's area of control.²⁵ According to one source, al-Sharaa ruled over a Syria that was about as fragmented as it had been under Assad.²⁶

In the north, against the Turkish border, two areas remained under the control of armed factions of the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA). Turkish troops were present there as well. It covered the north and east of Aleppo province, around the towns of A'zaz, Afrin and – after 11 December 2024 – Manbij; as well as a strip along the border, from Tel Abyad in the province of Raqqa to Ras al-Ain in the province of Hasaka.²⁷ In addition, the southern provinces of Daraa and Suweida, where the former regime's control was shaky, came under the control of local armed groups that had been operating there semi-autonomously for years.²⁸

East of Suweida, around the Al-Tanf military base near the border with Iraq and Jordan, an extensive zone of desert territory was under the control of the US-trained Syrian Free Army²⁹ (formerly also known as *Maghawir al-Thawra*).³⁰ The group is said to have tripled this zone in the Badia desert during the rotation of power, from about 55 square kilometres to some 150, up to the city of Palmyra (Arabic: Tadmor). The fighters who controlled this largely unpopulated area reported that they cooperated with the new authorities in Damascus.³¹

²¹ France 24, *Syria's interim president says organising elections could take up to five years*, 3 februari 2025; UN HRC, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66), 14 March 2025, p. 1.

²² Referred to as 'government territory' in previous COI Reports.

²³ New Lines Magazine, *Life returns to a Syrian border town after Iranian militias flee*, 30 January 2025.

²⁴ ICG, *A glimmer of peace in Syria's North East*, 28 March 2025.

²⁵ The New York Times, *Syria's struggle to unify military was evident in outburst of violence*, 17 March 2025; Syria in Transition, *Swallowing the state: HTS is fashioning Syria in its own image*, 6 March 2025; New Lines Magazine, *The fragile foundations of Arab-Kurdish coexistence*, 1 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

²⁶ Confidential source, March 2025.

²⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Explainer: Rivalries and alliances in the Turkey-backed Syrian National Army*, 27 January 2025; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025, p. 9.

²⁸ WSJ, *What Syria's secret police saw as the regime crumbled*, 29 January 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

²⁹ This should not be confused with the eponymous umbrella organisation of rebel factions, formed largely by officers deserted from the (former) Syrian army, from the early years of the war in Syria. Thereafter, the name 'the Free Syrian Army' (*Al-Jaish as-Souri al-Hurr*) lived on as a label that would later be used by armed factions as well. See: Brookings, *The Free Syrian Army: A decentralized insurgent brand*, November 2016; Syria Direct, *Missing in action: What happened to the once prominent Free Syrian Army?*, 24 March 2021.

³⁰ The New Arab, *US-backed Syrian opposition militia changes name amid reforms*, 25 October 2022.

³¹ NPR, *Syria's U.S.-trained opposition fighters wait to learn of their role in a new Syria*, 31 December 2024; The National, *Withdrawal of US support in Syria would be 'nightmare' in fight against ISIS, says commander of allies*, 23 January 2025.

The interim administration was steadily trying to extend its authority to the various regions. For example, on 7 February 2025, the Interior Ministry's general security forces made their entry into the Afrin region, in the northern region of Aleppo province.³² On 10 March 2025, al-Sharaa and SDF leader Mazloum Abdi, representing the *de facto* autonomous northeast, signed an agreement to integrate the SDF's civilian and military apparatus into the central state.³³ A day after the agreement with the SDF, the interim administration appeared to have reached an apparently similar agreement with representatives of the predominantly Druze³⁴ city of Suweida. This agreement provided for the integration of Druze armed groups into state institutions and a police force that purportedly consisted of members of the local population (see 3.3.3.3).³⁵ Furthermore, the Eighth Brigade – a prominent armed group stationed in the city of Busra al-Sham – was disbanded on 13 April 2025 in Daraa. The general security forces reportedly took control in this part of the province (see 3.3.3.2).³⁶

Despite the apparent extension of the interim administration's authority to the north, north-east and south, the status quo in these areas – with non-state armed actors actually in power – remained virtually unchanged in practice. The northern areas, including Afrin, remained largely under the control of SNA factions – which formally joined the national army in formation, but was still operating independently in practice (see 2.1.2).³⁷ The SNA reportedly turned over control of border crossings to the interim administration. Otherwise, however, the presence and influence of the authorities remained limited for the time being.³⁸

The southern provinces of Suweida and Daraa were also integrated into the state to only a limited extent.³⁹ There was distrust in the relations between the central authorities in Damascus and the dominant factions in these provinces. For various reasons, the diverse local armed groups did not (or, at least, not yet) wish to lay down their arms and disband themselves to merge with the new army and general security forces (see 3.3.3.1).⁴⁰ In Suweida, which retained some degree of autonomy relative to the regime,⁴¹ a new agreement was reached between Damascus and representatives of the Druze community in early May 2025. This agreement nevertheless largely maintained the status quo (see 3.3.3.3).⁴²

In Daraa, which was already a very fragmented province in terms of the military before the power shift, the diverse local armed groups that had ousted the regime continued to form the *de facto* security forces in many areas thereafter. These armed groups took a wait-and-see attitude towards the new authorities in

³² Syria Direct, *Waning hopes: Will Damascus help Afrin's Kurds reclaim their homes?*, 12 February 2025.

³³ Reuters, *Syria's interim president signs deal with Kurdish-led SDF to merge forces*, 11 March 2025; ICG, *A glimmer of peace in Syria's North East*, 28 March 2025.

³⁴ See 6.1.1.5 for more information on the Druze (and their position).

³⁵ The New Arab, *Syrian government boosts national unity with 'Suweida integration deal'*, 11 March 2025; The New Arab, *Druze leader dismisses chance of agreement with 'radical' Syria government after constitution emerges*, 14 March 2025; Syria Direct, *Is Suwayda heading for a showdown with Damascus?*, 15 March 2025.

³⁶ The New Arab, *UAE-linked southern Syria militia to be dissolved after Sharaa-MbZ meeting*, 14 April 2025.

³⁷ Daraj, *Is the influence of armed factions in Afrin declining with the arrival of the General Security?*, 26 February 2025; Syria Direct, *SDF-Damascus agreement in Aleppo a litmus test, and a possible path forward*, 7 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

³⁸ Confidential source, February 2025.

³⁹ Syria Direct, *Is Suwayda heading for a showdown with Damascus?*, 15 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁴⁰ Etana, *Explainer: Political & military dynamics in Suwayda province*, 20 February 2025; L'Orient Today, *Israeli temptation and tension with Damascus: in Sweida, Syrian Druze stuck 'between two evils'*, 5 March 2025; The Atlantic, *Can one man hold Syria together?*, 24 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁴¹ Syria Direct, *As tensions run high, will Suwayda's security agreement hold?*, 7 May 2025.

⁴² The Syria Report, *Tensions in Druze areas highlight challenges of Syrian political transition*, 6 May 2025; Syria Direct, *As tensions run high, will Suwayda's security agreement hold?*, 7 May 2025; Enab Baladi, *Jaramana sectarian fuse reveals fragility of new balances*, 8 May 2025; Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025; confidential source, May 2025.

Damascus.⁴³ Extending control over the south was further complicated by the stance of Israel, which declared in late February 2025 that it would not tolerate the presence of 'HTS or the new Syrian army' in Quneitra, Daraa, and Suweida. Israel demanded that the area be demilitarised (see 3.2).⁴⁴

1.2.2

DAANES territory

The future of the north-east – where about eighty to ninety percent⁴⁵ of Syria's oil and gas reserves are located – remained dependent on further negotiations between Damascus and the SDF/DAANES. The parties had different views on how the 10 March 2025 agreement should be put into practice.⁴⁶ With this agreement, the most worrisome scenarios – large-scale military confrontation or territorial division – seemed averted (at least for the time being). In fact, the eight points of the agreement outlined only shared objectives, with a focus on 'integrating all civilian and military institutions in north-eastern Syria into the governance of the Syrian state'.⁴⁷ No details were included on how the SDF was to be integrated into the new security sector, whether as individuals or as territorially defined units. Moreover, the agreement did not make clear whether north-east Syria would be part of a centralised state (the position held by Damascus) or a more decentralised administration (the position held by the SDF).⁴⁸ The agreement provided for the establishment of negotiating committees and a timeline until the end of 2025 to work towards implementation of the targets.⁴⁹

After 10 March 2025, no visible progress was made on integrating the SDF into the Ministry of Defence.⁵⁰ In other areas, there were developments that could be seen in the light of the agreement. In the city of Aleppo, which they had controlled following an agreement in early April 2025, Kurdish fighters withdrew from the Ashrafieh and Sheikh Maqsoud districts that they had previously controlled. An agreement on control of the Tishreen Dam followed shortly thereafter (see 3.3.6.2).⁵¹

On 10 April 2025, the Reuters news agency reported that, according to Kurdish sources, rival Syrian-Kurdish political groups⁵² had agreed on a common political vision, which included federalism. The Kurdish-led *de facto* autonomous north-east would allegedly be demanding a federal system that allowed for regional autonomy and security forces – the type of system the central authorities opposed. According to the news agency, the desire for federal rule had purportedly increased following the escalation of violence in Syria's coastal region in early March 2025 (see 3.3.5.2).⁵³

⁴³ The Guardian, 'The army just ran away': how Bashar al-Assad lost his brutal grip on Syria, 14 December 2024; AP News, Southern rebels loom large as Syria's new rulers try to form a national army, 23 January 2025.

⁴⁴ Reuters, Israel won't allow HTS forces in southern Syria, Netanyahu says, 23 February 2025; ICG, The new Syria: Halting a dangerous Drift, 28 March 2025, Etana, Syria Update #23, 31 March 2025; p. 9; Reuters, Israel steps up Syria strikes, says Turkey aims for 'protectorate', 3 April 2025.

⁴⁵ ICG, A glimmer of peace in Syria's North East, 28 March 2025.

⁴⁶ Syria in Transition, It's all about implementation. A conversation with Xerib Hiso, March 2025; ICG, A glimmer of peace in Syria's North East, 28 March 2025; Reuters, Kurds say they will push for federal system in post-Assad Syria, 10 April 2025.

⁴⁷ Atlantic Council, EIP & MEI, Reimagining Syria. A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad, 13 March 2025, p. 34; UN OSES, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council, 25 March 2025.

⁴⁸ Carnegie, A deal in Damascus, 14 March 2025.

⁴⁹ Carnegie, A deal in Damascus, 14 March 2025; UN OSES, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council, 25 March 2025; ICG, A glimmer of peace in Syria's North East, 28 March 2025.

⁵⁰ The New Arab, Syrian government begins talks with SDF to integrate Kurdish forces into army, 20 March 2025; Etana, Syria Update #22, 24 March 2025; Syria Direct, Can the SDF-Damascus deal withstand internal divisions and geopolitical shifts?, 31 March 2025.

⁵¹ Syria Direct, SDF-Damascus agreement in Aleppo a litmus test, and a possible path forward, 7 April 2025; The New Arab, Syria Kurds say struck deal with Damascus on battleground dam, 11 April 2025.

⁵² De Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Kurdish National Council (ENKS); Reuters, Kurds say they will push for federal system in post-Assad Syria, 10 April 2025.

⁵³ Reuters, Kurds say they will push for federal system in post-Assad Syria, 10 April 2025.

1.2.3 *Foreign military presence*

Finally, a foreign military presence remained in various parts of Syria after the fall of the Assad regime.⁵⁴ Russia retained two military bases in the western provinces of Latakia and Tartous;⁵⁵ Turkish troops remained present in northern areas and supported SNA factions; and, despite a withdrawal, US troops remained present in the north-east for the time being and supported the SDF (see 3.3.6).

Israel occupied territory in the southern provinces of Quneitra and Daraa after the power shift (see also 3.2). This included territory in the buffer zone separating Syria and the Golan Heights, which has been occupied by Israel since 1967, as well as territory beyond this buffer zone. On 28 January 2025, Israel's defence ministry declared that the Israeli army would remain indefinitely on top of the strategic Hermon Mountain (in Arabic: *Jabal al-Sheikh*), which had been captured in December 2024.⁵⁶ On 16 April 2025, Israel's Defence minister said that the army would remain indefinitely in the recently captured 'security zone' in Syria.⁵⁷

1.3 **Political transition**

The political transition began on 10 December 2024, with the self-appointment of an interim administration, which was intended for a three-month period.⁵⁸ The interim administration steadily continued the transition process. The following is a brief, chronological overview of the main steps, which together provided a framework for the political transition.

In a meeting on 29 January 2025, the joint military command of HTS and affiliated armed groups (the Military Operations Command, or MOC) proclaimed al-Sharaa – who had been the *de facto* leader of the interim administration up to that point – interim president for the transition period.⁵⁹ It was also announced that the 2012 Syrian constitution had been suspended and that the former regime's parliament, Ba'ath Party, and security apparatus (including the army) had been officially dissolved. All armed groups would be integrated under a unified command (see 2.3.1). In addition, a judicial system would be set up to try individuals accused of atrocities during the Assad regime.⁶⁰

On 12 February 2025, interim president al-Sharaa appointed a preparatory committee to convene meetings within the framework of a national dialogue. The committee held a series of meetings, with a total of several thousand civilians from each of Syria's fourteen provinces, in preparation for the National Dialogue Conference.⁶¹ The substantive sessions of this conference were held on 25 February 2025.⁶² In light of Syria's modern history, the conference was a more inclusive process than the country had experienced in decades. It was nevertheless criticised for having been hastily organised – participants had received invitations only a few

⁵⁴ Reuters, *Foreign armies in Syria and how they came to be there*, 6 December 2025.

⁵⁵ Reuters, *Russia gambles to keep military bases in post-Assad Syria*, 2 March 2025.

⁵⁶ Reuters, *Israel says its troops in Syria will remain atop Mt Hermon indefinitely*, 28 January 2025.

⁵⁷ AP News, *Israeli defense minister says troops will remain in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria indefinitely*, 16 April 2025.

⁵⁸ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Reuters, *Syria's Sharaa declared president for transition, consolidating his power*, 30 January 2025; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 4.

⁶⁰ BBC News, *Ahmed al-Sharaa named Syria's transitional president*, 31 January 2025; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 4; confidential source, January 2025.

⁶¹ Enab Baladi, *Al-Sharaa forms preparatory committee for National Dialogue Conference*, 12 February 2025; The New Arab, *Syria's transitional government forms national dialogue committee*, 12 February 2025.

⁶² Reuters, *Syrians back freedoms, constitutional process at landmark dialogue*, 25 February 2025.

days in advance – and for being insufficiently representative.⁶³ Discussions at the conference led to the publication of a non-binding statement with recommendations for the future of Syria.⁶⁴

On 2 March 2025, interim president al-Sharaa appointed a committee of seven legal experts to draft a constitutional declaration. It was to serve as a legal framework for a five-year transitional phase, after which a permanent constitution would be adopted, followed by elections. Al-Sharaa signed the 'constitutional declaration' on 13 March 2025 (see 1.3.3).⁶⁵

On 12 March 2025, the interim administration released a decree from al-Sharaa announcing that it would establish a National Security Council, chaired by the interim president. The decree stated that the council would take decisions related to national security and challenges facing the state. Other members of the council included the ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Interior, along with the head of the intelligence service. In addition, al-Sharaa would appoint two 'advisory' members and a technical expert to join the council.⁶⁶

1.3.1

Composition of the interim administration

The interim administration was predominantly associated with HTS.⁶⁷ After the capture of Damascus, HTS had largely moved the administration of the SSG (established by the group) from Idlib to the capital.⁶⁸ The interim prime minister, Mohammad al-Bashir, had assembled a cabinet consisting primarily of technocrats, all of whom had served in the SSG.⁶⁹ Several cabinet reshuffles took place in subsequent weeks.⁷⁰ Al-Sharaa largely surrounded himself with confidants, including the interim Foreign Affairs minister Asaad Hassan al-Shibani, the interim Defence minister Murhaf Abu Qasra and the intelligence chief Anas Khattab.⁷¹ Even outside the interim administration, with a few exceptions, no appointments to key administrative positions were made outside its own circle.⁷² The vast majority of all ministers and individuals in other senior administrative positions were male and Sunni Muslim.⁷³

Early in the transition period, some Syrians became increasingly concerned about the perceived drive on the part of al-Sharaa and HTS to monopolise power.⁷⁴ Early on, al-Sharaa had defended the need to form a 'harmonious, homogeneous'

⁶³ Reuters, *Syria to hold dialogue conference amid criticism over inclusivity*, 24 February 2025; Syria Direct, *Women delegates weigh in on Syria's national dialogue conference*, 27 February 2025; Al-Jumhuriya, *Civil society seeks political agency*, 20 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁶⁴ Atlantic Council, EIP & MEI, *Reimagining Syria. A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad*, 13 March 2025, p. 37.

⁶⁵ AFP, *Syria's leader proclaims 'new history' after signing constitutional declaration*, 13 March 2025; ICG, *What lies in store for Syria as a new government takes power?*, 25 April 2025.

⁶⁶ France 24, *Syria's interim president announces formation of national security council*, 13 March 2025.

⁶⁷ This Week in Northern Syria, *Update: Syrian caretaker government links*, 5 March 2025; Jihadology+, *Every known position in the new Syrian government*, 23 March 2025; Syria in Figures, *What does the composition of Syria's caretaker government tell us?*, March 2025.

⁶⁸ Syria in Transition, *Swallowing the state: HTS is fashioning Syria in its own image*, 6 March 2025; confidential source, January 2025.

⁶⁹ Le Monde, *Syrian transitional cabinet is stocked with Ahmad al-Sharaa's loyalists*, 10 January 2025.

⁷⁰ The Syrian Observer, *Syria appoints Ali Kidada as minister of Interior in a significant reshuffle*, 20 January 2025; Syria in Transition, *Swallowing the state: HTS is fashioning Syria in its own image*, 6 March 2025.

⁷¹ Le Monde, *Syrian transitional cabinet is stocked with Ahmad al-Sharaa's loyalists*, 10 January 2025.

⁷² Atlantic Council, EIP & MEI, *Reimagining Syria. A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad*, 13 March 2025, p. 38; Syria in Figures, *What does the composition of Syria's caretaker government tell us?*, March 2025.

⁷³ This Week in Northern Syria, *Update: Syrian caretaker government links*, 5 March 2025; Jihadology+, *Every known position in the new Syrian government*, 23 March 2025; Syria in Figures, *What does the composition of Syria's caretaker government tell us?*, March 2025.

⁷⁴ Le Monde, *Syrian transitional cabinet is stocked with Ahmad al-Sharaa's loyalists*, 10 January 2025; ECFR, *The road ahead: Six ways Europeans can urgently support a stable Syria*, 6 March 2025; Atlantic Council, EIP & MEI, *Reimagining Syria. A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad*, 13 March 2025, p. 37; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025;

government during a period of extraordinary instability and promised greater openness and inclusion in the course of the political transition.⁷⁵ According to several sources, however, it seemed that al-Sharaa was shaping the transition period in a way that would further consolidate his power as president of Syria.⁷⁶ In any case, the contours of the new system indicated that power could remain highly centralised in the hands of the president.⁷⁷ In addition to being the president, al-Sharaa was commander-in-chief of the armed forces.⁷⁸ The constitutional declaration established a strong presidential system.⁷⁹ The president was given strong control over the newly formed parliament and the judiciary (see 1.3.3).⁸⁰ According to multiple sources, decision-making within the interim administration took place in a very small group around al-Sharaa, with little input from the larger circle of the Syrian elite.⁸¹

1.3.2 *Composition of the transitional government*

Almost four months after the seizure of power, the transitional government that had been expected on 1 March was sworn in on 29 March 2025. It replaced the interim administration that had been established in December 2024. The new government was supposed to rule the country for five years, until a new constitution was drafted and elections were held.⁸² As stipulated in the constitutional declaration of 13 March 2025, the transitional government had no prime minister.⁸³

The transitional government consisted of a mix of individuals from a variety of backgrounds.⁸⁴ The 23 members included several well-known ministers belonging to HTS circles. Al-Sharaa retained relatively strong control over the core ministries – Foreign Affairs, Defence, Interior and Justice – through the appointment of confidants.⁸⁵ The interim Foreign Affairs minister (al-Shibani) and Defence minister (Abu Qasra) remained in their positions. Khattab, the interim administration's chief intelligence officer, became Syria's minister of the Interior. Mazhar al-Wais became the minister of Justice. The interim administration's prime minister, al-Bashir, became the minister of Energy.⁸⁶ The appointments included a total of seven ministers who had been attached to the SSG in Idlib.⁸⁷ Al-Sharaa further appointed nine independent ministers, including technocrats and civil society leaders, and he included five people in the cabinet who had served in a government under Bashar al-Assad before 2011.⁸⁸

⁷⁵ Le Monde, *Syrian transitional cabinet is stocked with Ahmad al-Sharaa's loyalists*, 10 January 2025.

⁷⁶ Le Monde, *Syrian transitional cabinet is stocked with Ahmad al-Sharaa's loyalists*, 10 January 2025; Lawfare, *Lawfare Daily: The new Syrian government and its problems*, 19 March 2025.

⁷⁷ Lawfare, *Lawfare Daily: The new Syrian government and its problems*, 19 March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁷⁸ Le Monde, *Syrian transitional cabinet is stocked with Ahmad al-Sharaa's loyalists*, 10 January 2025; Lawfare, *Lawfare Daily: The new Syrian government and its problems*, 19 March 2025.

⁷⁹ ICG, *What lies in store for Syria as a new government takes power?*, 25 April 2025.

⁸⁰ Reuters, *'There is no blank check': Syrian leader told to rein in jihadis*, 26 March 2025; Lawfare, *Lawfare Daily: The new Syrian government and its problems*, 19 March 2025.

⁸¹ ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁸² AP News, *Syria swears in new transitional government 4 months after Assad's removal*, 29 March 2025; Reuters, *Syria's president al-Sharaa forms new transitional government*, 29 March 2025; MEE, *Syria reveals new religiously diverse interim government*, 30 March 2025; SANA, *President al-Sharaa announces formation of the New Government: We are witnessing the birth of a new phase in our national process*, 30 March 2025.

⁸³ AP News, *Syria swears in new transitional government 4 months after Assad's removal*, 29 March 2025.

⁸⁴ ICG, *What lies in store for Syria as a new government takes power?*, 25 April 2025.

⁸⁵ Syria Weekly, *Assessing Syria's transitional government*, 30 March 2025; ICG, *What lies in store for Syria as a new government takes power?*, 25 April 2025.

⁸⁶ SANA, *Biographies of the ministers appointed in the new Syrian government*, 30 March 2025; The New Arab, *What to know about Syria's new cabinet and its top ministers*, 30 March 2025.

⁸⁷ The New York Times, *Syrians wake up to a new government*, 30 March 2025.

⁸⁸ The New York Times, *Syrians wake up to a new government*, 30 March 2025; ICG, *What lies in store for Syria as a new government takes power?*, 25 April 2025.

Despite the appointment of nineteen Sunni Arab men, the composition of the transitional government was⁸⁹ broader and more diverse than that of the interim administration, albeit to a limited extent. Al-Sharaa had been under pressure from Western countries and members of Syrian civil society to form an inclusive government.⁹⁰ The new faces included ministers from the country's largest ethnic and religious communities: the Christian Hind Kabawat, the only woman in the cabinet, as minister of Social Affairs and Employment; the Alawite Yarub Badr as minister of Transport; and Amgad Badr, from the Druze community, as minister of Agriculture. Mohammed Terko, a professor of Kurdish origin, was appointed as minister of Education. The transitional government did not include a representative of the Kurdish-led authorities in north-east Syria.⁹¹

Many Syrians from the country's various ethnic and religious communities were critical of the fact that ministers from their communities had no formal political base.⁹² Authorities in north-east Syria rejected the transitional government in Damascus, saying that it did not adequately reflect the 'diversity and plurality' of Syria.⁹³ In a statement, the DAANES administration said that it did not consider itself bound by decisions to be taken by this transitional government.⁹⁴ Other Kurdish parties that were not affiliated with DAANES also criticised the exclusion of Kurdish political representatives.⁹⁵

According to the International Crisis Group, the composition of the transitional government indicated that al-Sharaa and his close associates were keeping a firm hand in all strategic issues, while seeking to engage others to help consolidate the government's grip on the country and ensure broader public legitimacy. In addition, the appointment of several technocrats reportedly indicated that al-Sharaa valued technocratic expertise and relevant experience in initiating economic recovery.⁹⁶

1.3.3 *Developments concerning legislation*

The interim administration effectively adopted an interim constitution with the 13 March 2025 constitutional declaration, which was intended to serve as a base for the period of political transition. This replaced the 2012 Syrian constitution, which was suspended in January 2025, as the main source of legislation in Syria.⁹⁷

The interim constitution concentrated a large amount of power in the hands of the interim president.⁹⁸ It gave the interim president executive powers and the ability to propose legislation. It also gave him the power to declare a state of emergency for up to three months, subject to approval by the National Security Council, which he will also appoint. The interim president will further appoint one third of the legislature, which will serve as an interim parliament for the transitional period. The other two thirds will be elected by electoral committees, overseen by a commission appointed by the president. Although the document describes the judiciary as 'independent', it empowers the interim president to appoint members of the new

⁸⁹ Syria Weekly, *Assessing Syria's transitional government*, 30 March 2025.

⁹⁰ AP News, *Syria swears in new transitional government 4 months after Assad's removal*, 29 March 2025; The New York Times, *Syrians wake up to a new government*, 30 March 2025.

⁹¹ AP News, *Syria swears in new transitional government 4 months after Assad's removal*, 29 March 2025; Reuters, *Syria's president al-Sharaa forms new transitional government*, 29 March 2025; ICG, *What lies in store for Syria as a new government takes power?*, 25 April 2025.

⁹² ICG, *What lies in store for Syria as a new government takes power?*, 25 April 2025.

⁹³ SDC, *Statement on the formation of the new Syrian government*, 30 March 2025.

⁹⁴ BBC Monitoring, *Kurdish media highlight 'rejection' of new Syrian government*, 30 March 2025; MEE, *Syria reveals new religiously diverse interim government*, 30 March 2025.

⁹⁵ Asharq al-Awsat, *Syrian Kurds frustrated with Damascus over exclusion from transitional govt formation*, 29 March 2025.

⁹⁶ ICG, *What lies in store for Syria as a new government takes power?*, 25 April 2025.

⁹⁷ Reuters, *Syria keeps role for Islamic law in 5-year transition*, 13 March 2025.

⁹⁸ The New York Times, *Syria has a new temporary constitution. Here are the highlights*, 14 March 2025.

Constitutional Court of Syria, the country's highest judicial authority, without parliamentary or other oversight.⁹⁹

The constitutional declaration guarantees freedom of religion. At the same time, however, all rights – including freedom of religion – can be curtailed under the law if they would infringe national security or public order.¹⁰⁰ Like the old constitution, the interim constitution contains a provision requiring the president of Syria to be a Muslim and assigns central value to Islamic law/jurisprudence. One important change from the previous constitution seems to be that Islamic jurisprudence is now described as 'the main source' of legislation, rather than merely 'a prominent source'.¹⁰¹

The interim constitution promises to protect the rights of all Syrians and shield them from discrimination.¹⁰² The pledge to guarantee freedom of opinion, expression, information, publication and press has some exceptions, including glorification of the Assad regime. The law further guarantees women's rights to education and employment, adding that they will have full 'social, economic and political rights'.¹⁰³

The constitutional declaration contains references to fundamental human rights and general provisions on transitional justice. It also recognises the constitutional validity of 'all rights and freedoms' enshrined in international human rights treaties, charters and agreements ratified by the Syrian state in the past – even though most treaties still require appropriate legislation to implement them.¹⁰⁴

The Kurdish-led SDF and the Kurdish National Council in Syria (KNCS) sharply criticised the constitutional declaration for not explicitly recognising the cultural, linguistic and political rights of the various ethnic and religious groups in Syria.¹⁰⁵ In a statement, the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), the political wing of the SDF, rejected the constitutional declaration and 'any attempt to reproduce dictatorship'. The SDC criticised what it referred to as unchecked executive powers and called for 'a fair distribution of power', 'the recognition of the rights of all Syrian components' and 'the adoption of a decentralised democratic system of government'.¹⁰⁶ On 14 March 2025, hundreds of Kurds in north-eastern Syria reportedly demonstrated against the constitutional declaration.¹⁰⁷

Some Syrians expressed reservations about the opaque process of drafting the constitutional declaration, as well as about its content. They were particularly concerned about the strong presidency, with unclear checking mechanisms between state powers and ambiguity about the steps in the political transition.¹⁰⁸

⁹⁹ AFP, *Syria's new constitution gives sweeping powers, ignores minority rights*, 14 March 2025; The New York Times, *Syria has a new temporary constitution. Here are the highlights*, 14 March 2025; HRW, *Syria: Constitutional declaration risks endangering rights*, 25 March 2025; ICG, *What lies in store for Syria as a new government takes power?*, 25 April 2025.

¹⁰⁰ AFP, *Syria's new constitution gives sweeping powers, ignores minority rights*, 14 March 2025; The New York Times, *Syria has a new temporary constitution. Here are the highlights*, 14 March 2025; Carnegie, *Syria's leaders show their intentions*, 19 March 2025.

¹⁰¹ AFP, *Syria's new constitution gives sweeping powers, ignores minority rights*, 14 March 2025.

¹⁰² The New York Times, *Syria has a new temporary constitution. Here are the highlights*, 14 March 2025.

¹⁰³ The New York Times, *Syria has a new temporary constitution. Here are the highlights*, 14 March 2025; Carnegie, *Syria's leaders show their intentions*, 19 March 2025.

¹⁰⁴ Carnegie, *Syria's leaders show their intentions*, 19 March 2025; ICG, *What lies in store for Syria as a new government takes power?*, 25 April 2025.

¹⁰⁵ Kurdistan24, *KNCS meets SDF amid rising concerns over Syria's new constitutional declaration*, 14 March 2025; ICG, *What lies in store for Syria as a new government takes power?*, 25 April 2025.

¹⁰⁶ AFP, *Syria's new constitution gives sweeping powers, ignores minority rights*, 14 March 2025; Reuters, *Kurdish-led Syrian group rejects Islamist authorities' new constitution framework*, 14 March 2025; The New York Times, *Syria has a new temporary constitution. Here are the highlights*, 14 March 2025.

¹⁰⁷ AFP, *Syria's new constitution gives sweeping powers, ignores minority rights*, 14 March 2025.

¹⁰⁸ Enab Baladi, *Syrian constitutional declaration: Controversy over identity and presidential powers*, 17 March 2025; UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 March 2025; ICG, *What lies in store for Syria as a new government takes power?*, 25 April 2025.

The new Syrian constitution was criticised on social media by several well known and less well known hardline Islamists, including Syria-based Islamist clerics. They regarded key provisions in the text as 'un-Islamic', and they were particularly opposed to the article stating that Islamic jurisprudence is 'the main', rather than 'the only' source of legislation.¹⁰⁹

The international human rights organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW) warned that the draft constitutional declaration risked strengthening authoritarian control, rather than facilitating a transition to a democracy that would respect civil rights. According to HRW, the constitutional declaration gave the president considerable powers, without any control or oversight, and it could undermine the independence of the judiciary. Although the declaration contained provisions that appeared to promote justice and human rights, its effectiveness was uncertain without independent oversight. In addition, HRW expressed concerns about restrictions on freedom of expression. Article 49(3) criminalises 'glorification of the obsolete al-Assad regime or its symbols' and 'denial of its crimes or praising, justifying or trivialising them', which the organisation says could be used to limit freedom of expression, given the broad and vague terms.¹¹⁰

As far as is known, there were no other relevant legislative or regulatory developments during the reporting period.

¹⁰⁹ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria's new constitution sparks Islamist, jihadist backlash*, 14 March 2025.

¹¹⁰ HRW, *Syria: Constitutional declaration risks endangering rights*, 25 March 2025.

2 Armed actors

2.1 Armed groups

The following is a brief description of the main armed groups, with references to other sections in this COI Report that contain relevant information on developments concerning the groups in question within the reporting period. The fragmented landscape of armed groups in Syria changed significantly during the reporting period, as compared to the previous one, particularly in terms of the areas of control of certain actors and the degree of integration under the new central authorities. The overview below is therefore effectively a snapshot in a process that was still far from crystallised. Where the number of fighters in each group is mentioned, this should be regarded as an estimate from sources, rather than as a verifiable, absolute number.

2.1.1 HTS

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham was the dominant player in the broad coalition of armed groups that overthrew the Assad regime in early December 2024.¹¹¹ HTS led the Military Operations Command (MOC), the overarching command that coordinated the offensive against the Assad regime. When HTS and affiliated armed groups launched the Deterrence of Aggression offensive in late November 2024, HTS itself had about 30,000 fighters. The other armed opposition groups taking part in the offensive together had at least twice that number.¹¹²

In previous years, HTS had emerged as the hegemonic group in the north-west of Syria (Idlib province and adjacent areas), which was controlled by the armed opposition.¹¹³ In that region, HTS set up a group-affiliated government, the Syrian Salvation Government (*Hukumat al-Inqadh as-Suriyyah*, SSG) to govern the area of control, having a population of some two million people. This government was led by Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, who is now the interim president of Syria under his real name, Ahmed al-Sharaa.

The group from which HTS emerged, *Jabhat al-Nusra*, was a breakaway from al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). In the past, the group has been involved in internal conflicts with other armed opposition groups and jihadist groups.¹¹⁴ HTS was formally established in 2017, having broken with both organisations.¹¹⁵ In subsequent years, HTS became more pragmatic and, in general, distanced itself from jihadism and Salafism.¹¹⁶

In December 2024 and January 2025, al-Sharaa stated several times that HTS would be dissolved.¹¹⁷ At the 'Victory of the Syrian Revolution' conference in Damascus on 29 January 2025, the armed groups that had participated in the

¹¹¹ ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025; The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025; The Atlantic, *Can one man hold Syria together?*, 24 March 2025.

¹¹² ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025.

¹¹³ The Guardian, *Who are the main actors in the fall of the regime in Syria?*, 9 December 2025.

¹¹⁴ ICG, *Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West*, 7 March 2023, p. 5.

¹¹⁵ The Guardian, *Who are the main actors in the fall of the regime in Syria?*, 9 December 2025.

¹¹⁶ BBC News, *Syria's rebel leaders say they've broken with their jihadist past - can they be trusted?*, 20 December 2024; Foreign Affairs, *Syria's uncertain new order*, 11 April 2025.

¹¹⁷ Enab Baladi, *What are the dimensions of Tahrir al-Sham dissolving itself?*, 12 December 2024; Reuters, *Syria's de facto leader says holding elections could take up to four years*, 30 December 2024.

overthrow of the Assad regime were officially declared dissolved.¹¹⁸ It was not possible to establish the extent to which HTS had actually merged into state institutions thereafter (see also 2.3.1).

2.1.2

SNA

The Syrian National Army (SNA) is a coalition of armed groups in northern Syria backed by Türkiye. Formed in 2017, the SNA comprises a wide range of Sunni, Arab and Turkmen groups and fighters, including some veterans of the beginning of the armed struggle against the Assad regime.¹¹⁹ At the beginning of the reporting period, the SNA formally consisted of three army corps and the National Liberation Front, a nexus of established armed opposition groups, including *Ahrar al-Sham* and *Suqour al-Sham*.¹²⁰ In practice, it was a coalition of factions with a variety of ideological orientations and levels of discipline, without a unified command structure. With that, the SNA was less organised than HTS.¹²¹ According to one source, certain factions were already relatively closely associated with HTS. These were expected to integrate faster and further under the HTS-led interim authorities after the power shift than other factions, some of which had a long history of hostility to HTS (and the former Jabhat al-Nusrah).¹²²

In the past, SNA groups had fought ISIS and the Assad regime, although the largest SNA offensives – which were partly in the service of Turkish security interests – were opposed to the Kurdish-led SDF.¹²³ In previous years, tensions between mutually rival factions of the SNA had repeatedly ended in violent clashes.¹²⁴ In addition to internal fighting, the SNA was also known for widespread human rights violations, including against Kurds in the Turkish-backed Afrin region in northern Aleppo province (see 3.3.6.5).¹²⁵

In early December 2024, all SNA groups reportedly participated in the HTS-led offensive that led to the fall of the Assad regime.¹²⁶ At the same time, the SNA began a parallel offensive against the regime and mainly the SDF in eastern Aleppo province.¹²⁷ After the fall of Assad, several SNA factions and a large part of their fighters left for their areas of origin in the former regime territory, particularly rural towns in the provinces of Hama, Homs and Rural Damascus.¹²⁸

Despite a reduced factional presence, much of northern Syria, along the border with Türkiye, was still largely under the control of the SNA by the end of the reporting period, with a limited presence of the transitional government.¹²⁹ According to some

¹¹⁸ TWI, *The status of Syria's transition after two months*, 12 February 2025; France 24, *HTS rebel leader Ahmed al-Sharaa is named interim president of Syria*, 29 January 2025.

¹¹⁹ Al Jumhuriya, *Five days that shifted Syria's balance of power*, 3 December 2024; The Guardian, *Who are the main actors in the fall of the regime in Syria?*, 9 December 2025.

¹²⁰ BBC Monitoring, *Explainer: Rivalries and alliances in the Turkey-backed Syria National Army*, 27 January 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Syria's new rulers are working to unify military power*, 25 February 2025.

¹²¹ BBC Monitoring, *Explainer: Rivalries and alliances in the Turkey-backed Syria National Army*, 27 January 2025; ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025; The Atlantic, *Can one man hold Syria together?*, 24 March 2025.

¹²² Confidential source, February 2025.

¹²³ Al Jumhuriya, *Five days that shifted Syria's balance of power*, 3 December 2024; The Guardian, *Who are the main actors in the fall of the regime in Syria?*, 9 December 2025.

¹²⁴ Al Jumhuriya, *Five days that shifted Syria's balance of power*, 3 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Explainer: Rivalries and alliances in the Turkey-backed Syria National Army*, 27 January 2025.

¹²⁵ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024, pp. 13-14; HRW, *'Everything is by the power of the weapon'. Abuses and impunity in Turkish-occupied northern Syria*, 29 February 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, pp. 14-16.

¹²⁶ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹²⁷ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 7.

¹²⁸ Foreign Affairs, *Syria's uncertain new order*, 11 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁹ Chatham House, *Syria needs security – can Al-Sharaa build a united army to provide it?*, 10 March 2025.

sources, although SNA groups were now attached in name to the Ministry of Defence, they actually retained a separate command structure.¹³⁰

2.1.3 *Armed groups in the south*

During the HTS-led offensive, armed groups in southern Syria pushed back against the Assad regime. These armed opposition groups from the province of Daraa united with Druze militias from the province of Suweida in the *ad hoc* coalition known as the Southern Operations Room.¹³¹ Fighters from the south were the first to reach Damascus, and they withdrew after HTS took control of the capital.¹³²

Further information on developments concerning armed groups in the province of Daraa and Druze militias in the province of Suweida is presented in 3.3.3.3.

2.1.4 *SDF*

The US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) are a Kurdish-led military alliance that controls a large part of the territory in north-eastern Syria, including large parts of the provinces of Raqqa, Hasaka and Deir ez-Zor.¹³³

In the fight against ISIS, the SDF has been receiving military support from the US for a decade.¹³⁴ During the reporting period, the SDF continued to monitor approximately 9,000 ISIS fighters (actual or alleged) and more than 40,000 women and children associated with them in a network of prisons and camps in the north-east.¹³⁵

In December 2024, the SDF lost several areas west of the Euphrates River to the Turkish-backed SNA (see 2.1.2). The violence between the two parties subsided at the end of March 2025.¹³⁶

The SDF, which also includes Arab fighters, is dominated by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (in Kurdish: *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*, YPG). Türkiye regards the YPG and SDF as equivalent to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK), with which it has been in conflict for decades and which is considered a terrorist organisation by Ankara, the US and the European Union.¹³⁷ In late February 2025, the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan called on this group to disband.¹³⁸ The longer-term implications of this for the SDF in Syria were not yet clear. According to the International Crisis Group, this could help reduce the threat that Türkiye perceived in the SDF, thereby potentially reducing the likelihood of a new armed confrontation between the two sides.¹³⁹

On 10 March 2025, the SDF signed an agreement with the interim authorities, agreeing to merge with the state. In early 2025, Abdi stated that the SDF was prepared to integrate under the Ministry of Defence. At the same time, however, he insisted that his fighters remain a separate military 'block' that would be deployed

¹³⁰ Al Jazeera, 'Don't trust anyone': Have Syria's Alawites lost faith in new government?, 20 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹³¹ The Guardian, *Who are the main actors in the fall of the regime in Syria?*, 9 December 2025.

¹³² AP News, *Southern rebels loom large as Syria's new rulers try to form a national army*, 23 January 2025.

¹³³ Chatham House, *Syria needs security – can Al-Sharaa build a united army to provide it?*, 10 March 2025.

¹³⁴ The Guardian, *Isis defeated, US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces announce*, 23 March 2019; The Guardian, *Who are the main actors in the fall of the regime in Syria?*, 9 December 2025.

¹³⁵ Atlantic Council, EIP & MEI, *Reimagining Syria. A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad*, 13 March 2025, p. 34; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 8; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025, p. 13.

¹³⁶ Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 1-8, 2025)*, 10 April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹³⁷ ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.

¹³⁸ AP News, *Kurdish leader Ocalan issues message from prison, urging PKK to disarm to make peace with Turkey*, 27 February 2025.

¹³⁹ ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.

only in the north-east.¹⁴⁰ During the reporting period, no further clear progress was made to resolve this issue after 10 March.¹⁴¹ It was difficult for Kurdish fighters to imagine how they could be part of a national army alongside fighters from the SNA, which was hostile to them. For female fighters, who were part of the female equivalent of the YPG (the *Yekîneyên Parastina Jin*, or the YPJ), it remained uncertain whether they would have a future in an army under the HTS-led interim Ministry of Defence.¹⁴²

In some other areas, the interim authorities and the SDF are taking concrete steps, for example with regard to control of Kurdish neighbourhoods in Aleppo and management of the Tishreen Dam (see 3.3.6.2).¹⁴³

Around mid-April 2025, the US began a partial withdrawal of American troops from the north-east.¹⁴⁴ This increased uncertainty about the future of the SDF.¹⁴⁵

2.2 The former security apparatus of the Assad regime

The Assad regime's security apparatus consisted of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA), a network of diverse militias (some of which had ties to the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, IRGC) and the security and intelligence services.¹⁴⁶

On 29 January 2025, the Syrian army and security services were officially disbanded as part of a series of official announcements during the 'Victory of the Syrian Revolution' conference (see 1.3).¹⁴⁷ During the Deterrence of Aggression offensive, however, the Assad regime's security apparatus collapsed (see 1.1). Many soldiers, intelligence officers and police officers fled from the advancing opposition groups during the twelve-day offensive.¹⁴⁸ This meant that, in practice, the army, the regime's security and intelligence services, the affiliated militias and the police force had already ceased to exist.¹⁴⁹

On 9 December 2024, one day after the capture of Damascus, the HTS-led MOC announced amnesty for all military personnel who were conscripts in the army. At the same time, the new authorities promised to bring individuals who had committed serious crimes to justice.¹⁵⁰ During the reporting period, there were incidents in which leaders and other former members of the former security apparatus were killed in assassination attacks¹⁵¹ committed by unidentified individuals or groups, and others were arrested by the authorities.¹⁵² Other leaders had fled abroad or were still residing in Syria. Some of them were involved in armed

¹⁴⁰ Atlantic Council, EIP & MEI, *Reimagining Syria. A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad*, 13 March 2025, p. 34.

¹⁴¹ The New Arab, *Syrian government begins talks with SDF to integrate Kurdish forces into army*, 20 March 2025; Etana, *Syria update #22*, 24 March 2025; Syria Direct, *Can the SDF-Damascus deal withstand internal divisions and geopolitical shifts?*, 31 March 2025.

¹⁴² France 24, *Kurdish fighters hesitate to join Syria's vision of a unified army*, 3 April 2025, [url](#).

¹⁴³ The New Arab, *Syrian forces deploy at key dam under deal with Kurds: media*, 12 April 2025; The National, *Kurdish militia cedes control to regime in Aleppo and north-east Syria*, 13 April 2025.

¹⁴⁴ The New York Times, *US is withdrawing hundreds of troops from Syria*, 17 April 2025.

¹⁴⁵ ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.

¹⁴⁶ Known colloquially as the *mukhabbarat*; Chatham House, *Syria's transactional state*, 10 October 2018.

¹⁴⁷ The Guardian, *Rebel leader Ahmed al-Sharaa made transitional president of Syria*, 29 January 2025.

¹⁴⁸ Reuters, *How Assad's army collapsed in Syria: demoralised conscripts, absent allies*, 13 December 2024; WSJ, *What Syria's secret police saw as the regime crumbled*, 29 January 2025; New Lines Magazine, *The disintegration of Assad's army*, 6 March 2025.

¹⁴⁹ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹⁵⁰ The New Arab, *HTS-led coalition announces general amnesty for Assad soldiers*, 9 December 2024; The New York Times, *Al-Assad's soldiers hope for amnesty. First, they have to take a number*, 18 December 2024.

¹⁵¹ X.com, *Qalaat Al Mudiq*, 14 April 2025, [url](#); X.com, *Qalaat Al Mudiq*, 20 April 2025, [url](#).

¹⁵² X.com, *Qalaat Al Mudiq*, 13 April 2025, [url](#); X.com, *Qalaat Al Mudiq*, 16 April 2025, [url](#); X.com, *Qalaat Al Mudiq*, 19 April 2025, [url](#); The New Arab, *Syria arrests leading member of Assad regime's Air Force Intelligence in Aleppo*, 20 April 2025; AFP, *Syria arrests Assad-era officer accused of 'war crimes': ministry*, 22 April 2025.

resistance against the interim authorities, which took on an organised character, particularly in the coastal provinces of Latakia and Tartous, and which led to a major escalation of violence in March 2025 (see 3.3.5.2).¹⁵³

2.2.1 *Registration and disarmament*

Immediately after the capture of Aleppo on 30 November 2024, the MOC took measures concerning the personnel of Assad's security apparatus who had remained behind there. This was achieved through various measures, including setting up reconciliation centres (*marakiz at-taswiya*). These centres served to disarm and dismantle the military and security apparatus of the former regime.¹⁵⁴ The interim authorities opened dozens¹⁵⁵ of these centres spread across their new control area, starting in Aleppo on 6 December 2025.¹⁵⁶ These centres oversaw the process, known as *taswiyat al-wada'* (or *taswiya* for short), in which former members of the former security apparatus surrendered their weapons and registered their personal details in exchange for temporary identification cards.

Around mid-December 2024, the MOC called on all former Syrian military and security personnel (including both officers and soldiers in compulsory national service) to report to the centres set up for this purpose and surrender their weapons.¹⁵⁷ In a 17 December call for former military personnel to report to the city of Daraa, the authorities warned that those refusing to cooperate or providing incorrect or incomplete information would risk facing legal action.¹⁵⁸ The call to report also applied to Syrians who had been members of the police force and to those who had joined militias formally integrated into the military apparatus.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, those who were required to report included medical personnel from the army¹⁶⁰ and members of the Ba'ath party.¹⁶¹

Those who reported were required to surrender their documents, weapons and service vehicles. Several days later, they received a civil identity card that would be valid for three months. This meant that, at least temporarily, they were exempt from legal prosecution and, in theory, could move around freely.¹⁶² The further course of the proceedings was not entirely clear.¹⁶³

The authorities stated that they conducted an extensive investigation, which could take three months, to determine that the person in question had not committed any crimes.¹⁶⁴ According to various reports, individuals were expected to report back three months after registration.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵³ Atlantic Council, EIP & MEI, *Reimagining Syria. A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad*, 13 March 2025, p. 31.

¹⁵⁴ The Guardian, *Syria's new rulers invite Assad security officials to surrender*, 13 January 2025.

¹⁵⁵ Enab Baladi, *Military Operations Administration opens settlement centers for former regime elements*, 18 December 2024; The New Arab, *No going back as post-Assad Syria enters a new era after five decades of terror*, 7 February 2025.

¹⁵⁶ The New Arab, *'Reconciliation centres' for Assad regime personnel spark debate*, 19 December 2024.

¹⁵⁷ The New Arab, *'Reconciliation centres' for Assad regime personnel spark debate*, 19 December 2024.

¹⁵⁸ The New Arab, *'Reconciliation centres' for Assad regime personnel spark debate*, 19 December 2024.

¹⁵⁹ The New Arab, *'Reconciliation centres' for Assad regime personnel spark debate*, 19 December 2024; BBC News, *Inside a Syrian 'reconciliation centre' where Assad's soldiers give up their weapons*, 29 December 2024; The New York Times, *As people are abducted on unpatrolled streets, Syrians demand better protection*, 10 March 2025.

¹⁶⁰ The New York Times, *Al-Assad's soldiers hope for amnesty. First, they have to take a number*, 18 December 2024; BBC News, *Inside a Syrian 'reconciliation centre' where Assad's soldiers give up their weapons*, 29 December 2024.

¹⁶¹ The National, *Inside a Syrian 'reconciliation centre' handling soldiers of fallen Assad regime*, 20 December 2024; confidential source, February 2025.

¹⁶² The New Arab, *'Reconciliation centres' for Assad regime personnel spark debate*, 19 December 2024; The New Arab, *No going back as post-Assad Syria enters a new era after five decades of terror*, 7 February 2025.

¹⁶³ The New York Times, *Al-Assad's soldiers hope for amnesty. First, they have to take a number*, 18 December 2024.

¹⁶⁴ AFP, *'We're all Syrians': Soldiers hand in weapons, hope for quiet lives*, 16 December 2024; AP News, *Former Syrian soldiers seek amnesty, return to civilian life*, 21 December 2024; The New Arab, *No going back as post-Assad Syria enters a new era after five decades of terror*, 7 February 2025.

¹⁶⁵ The New York Times, *Al-Assad's soldiers hope for amnesty. First, they have to take a number*, 18 December 2024; AP News, *Former Syrian soldiers seek amnesty, return to civilian life*, 21 December 2024.

Staff from various centres reported that turnout was high. During the first few weeks, the centres had long queues of men who had come to register.¹⁶⁶ According to some sources, those who reported to the centres were generally treated well and according to clear procedures.¹⁶⁷ An official at a centre in Homs indicated that the number of weapons surrendered at that location was very low.¹⁶⁸ Another source confirmed that many had kept at least some of their weapons.¹⁶⁹

Many responded to the call to report in exchange for a temporary identity card.¹⁷⁰ Among them were also high-ranking officers.¹⁷¹ In the past, conscripts had been required to surrender their identity cards and were given military identity cards instead.¹⁷² Without a civil identity card, it was difficult to find a job or to move freely through the country past checkpoints.¹⁷³ The temporary identity card provided enabled individuals who had worked for the former security apparatus to demonstrate that they had officially severed their ties with the Assad regime. At the top of each card it said 'Desertion Card' in large letters.¹⁷⁴ It was not clear how long the identity cards would be valid.

In principle, the temporary identity card is said to guarantee freedom of movement. According to some sources, however, former military personnel still had not been issued any permanent identity documents several months after their registration, during which their identity cards had been confiscated. This reportedly prevented them from travelling outside their own areas or regions, for fear of being recognised as former military personnel at a checkpoint and encountering problems as a result.¹⁷⁵

According to one source, *ad hoc* decisions were sometimes made to allow certain individuals, who were considered useful by the new authorities because of their former positions, to retain their status. For example, a former liaison officer with Interpol was reportedly allowed to keep the house and car assigned to him by the former government for the time being while he was assisting the authorities.¹⁷⁶ At a later stage, various technical specialists from the former military apparatus were able to return to their former positions.¹⁷⁷

Some Syrians feared that the *taswiya* could serve to protect members of the Assad regime's security apparatus who had been responsible for crimes against civilians during the preceding fourteen years of war.¹⁷⁸ It was noteworthy that, in January and February 2025, local media and organisations reported that the interim authorities had granted amnesty to several high-ranking individuals from the former regime, including Fadi Saqr, a former leader of the National Defence Forces (NDF)

¹⁶⁶ France 24, *Former Syrian army soldiers line up to reconcile status with new government*, 2 January 2025, [url](#).

¹⁶⁷ The New Arab, *'Reconciliation centres' for Assad regime personnel spark debate*, 19 December 2024; The Guardian, *Syria's new rulers invite Assad security officials to surrender*, 13 January 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁶⁸ France 24, *Former Syrian army soldiers line up to reconcile status with new government*, 2 January 2025, [url](#).

¹⁶⁹ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁷⁰ The National, *Inside a Syrian 'reconciliation centre' handling soldiers of fallen Assad regime*, 20 December 2024; BBC News, *Inside a Syrian 'reconciliation centre' where Assad's soldiers give up their weapons*, 29 December 2024.

¹⁷¹ The National, *Inside a Syrian 'reconciliation centre' handling soldiers of fallen Assad regime*, 20 December 2024; Al Jazeera, *Former Assad military officers reconcile with Syria's new authorities*, 8 January 2025, [url](#).

¹⁷² BBC News, *Inside a Syrian 'reconciliation centre' where Assad's soldiers give up their weapons*, 29 December 2024.

¹⁷³ The National, *Inside a Syrian 'reconciliation centre' handling soldiers of fallen Assad regime*, 20 December 2024; BBC News, *Inside a Syrian 'reconciliation centre' where Assad's soldiers give up their weapons*, 29 December 2024.

¹⁷⁴ The National, *Inside a Syrian 'reconciliation centre' handling soldiers of fallen Assad regime*, 20 December 2024.

¹⁷⁵ New Lines Magazine, *How desperation sowed the seeds of rebellion in Syria's Latakia province*, 17 March 2025; Orient XXI, *Syria. The Alawites' great dismay*, 22 March 2025.

¹⁷⁶ The Guardian, *Syria's new rulers invite Assad security officials to surrender*, 13 January 2025.

¹⁷⁷ Chatham House, *Syria needs security – can Al-Sharaa build a united army to provide it?*, 10 March 2025.

¹⁷⁸ The New Arab, *'Reconciliation centres' for Assad regime personnel spark debate*, 19 December 2024.

militia.¹⁷⁹ According to multiple sources, by the end of April 2025, tensions were rising among many Sunni Syrians due to the lack of criminal proceedings against such individuals. This increased the risk of individuals taking the law into their own hands.¹⁸⁰

2.2.2 *Socio-economic impact*

The collapse of the former regime's security apparatus had far-reaching socio-economic consequences for part of Syrian society. With the official dissolution of the former army and the security and intelligence services, roughly hundreds of thousands of people lost their salaries.¹⁸¹ An unknown number of families were left without military (or other) housing.¹⁸² After years of service, many military personnel found themselves in a poor economic position, as they had not received any training or gained any relevant professional experience.¹⁸³

Many feared being excluded from the new system.¹⁸⁴ This situation sometimes led to protests. In January 2025, hundreds of former police officers reportedly staged a sit-in at a central square in Damascus. They were protesting their dismissal, the loss of their allocated housing, and the economic situations in which they and their families found themselves as a result. Some hoped to be reintegrated into the new police force.¹⁸⁵

2.2.3 *Security measures*

The security apparatus of the former regime had not been fully demobilised and disarmed. According to some sources, thousands of men had avoided the *taswiya* (by fleeing to the mountains of Latakia, for example). This also applied to members of the dreaded *mukhabbarat* (the regime's security and intelligence services), who seemed to have simply disappeared, but were still believed to be hiding everywhere.¹⁸⁶ According to another source, they included individuals who had been complicit in the most brutal human rights violations of the former regime, who knew they would have no future in the 'new Syria'.¹⁸⁷

Towards the end of December 2024, the interim authorities intensified their efforts to apprehend individuals suspected of having ties to the former regime, including those accused of human rights violations.¹⁸⁸ The general security forces of the interim Ministry of the Interior carried out daily searches and targeted raids in various areas, with a focus on the provinces of Latakia, Homs, Hama and Damascus, according to the independent Syrian human rights organisation Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR).¹⁸⁹ These actions took place in various areas, including some

¹⁷⁹ The New Arab, *Fury in Syria as reconciled 'war criminal' from Assad regime visits site of Tadamon massacre*, 8 February 2025.

¹⁸⁰ X.com, Qalaat al Mudiq, 20 April 2025, [url](#); Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 19*, 21 April 2025.

¹⁸¹ UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 March 2025.

¹⁸² France 24, *Syria's new leaders reckon with reintegrating vestiges of Assad regime*, 18 January 2025; Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 7*, 28 January 2025.

¹⁸³ The Guardian, *Syria's new rulers invite Assad security officials to surrender*, 13 January 2025; France 24, *Syria's new leaders reckon with reintegrating vestiges of Assad regime*, 18 January 2025.

¹⁸⁴ UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 March 2025.

¹⁸⁵ Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 7*, 28 January 2025.

¹⁸⁶ Atlantic Council, EIP & MEI, *Reimagining Syria. A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad*, 13 March 2025, p. 31; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁸⁷ MERIP, *Syria's new men. Masculinities and the post-Asad political order*, 16 April 2025.

¹⁸⁸ The New York Times, *Syria's new government steps up pursuit of Assad loyalists*, 28 December 2024; AP News, *Syria's embassy in Lebanon suspends services as Lebanon hands over former Syrian army officers*, 28 December 2024; SNHR, *At least 229 arbitrary detentions documented in January 2025*, 4 February 2025.

¹⁸⁹ SNHR, *At least 229 arbitrary detentions documented in January 2025*, 4 February 2025; Atlantic Council, EIP & MEI, *Reimagining Syria. A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad*, 13 March 2025, p. 31.

with Alawite communities.¹⁹⁰ In many cases, arrests were made and large quantities of weapons and ammunition were seized.¹⁹¹

In addition to these security operations, incidents that were presumably acts of revenge – including killings, kidnappings and arson – were documented from the first weeks after the power shift. The perpetrators were generally unidentified, and the scale of such incidents remained unclear.¹⁹² In January 2025, more reports emerged about executions carried out by armed individuals against former members of Assad's security apparatus and former employees of his regime.¹⁹³

The mass discharges and security operations by the interim authorities, which targeted men who had not yet laid down their arms, contributed to growing unrest and uncertainty in the coastal region from the first weeks after the power shift.¹⁹⁴ Towards the end of December 2024, sporadic armed clashes broke out between HTS-led security forces and armed individuals or cells, particularly in Latakia and Tartous.¹⁹⁵ They carried out small-scale, targeted attacks on the new security forces.¹⁹⁶ These were cells or groups that had emerged from the military and paramilitary structures of the Assad regime. In the vernacular, they were often referred to as *fulul*¹⁹⁷ (Arabic for remnants). Hereinafter, they are referred to in this COI Report as the armed remnants of the Assad regime.

Around the end of February 2025, the increasing violence by armed remnants of the regime took the form of an incipient armed uprising, with its roots in the Alawite community.¹⁹⁸ Various sources attribute the tense situation in the coastal region to factors including the socio-economic consequences of the mass discharge of military and security personnel from the former regime. Many of the men affected by this came from Alawite communities in Latakia and Tartous, or had fled to the coastal provinces after the power shift, which meant that these areas were disproportionately affected.¹⁹⁹

A description of the events in Latakia and Tartous in March 2025 is provided in 3.3.5.2.

2.3 New security apparatus

The reform of the state security sector and the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of the many and diverse armed groups constituted one of the greatest

¹⁹⁰ AP News, *Syria's embassy in Lebanon suspends services as Lebanon hands over former Syrian army officers*, 28 December 2024.

¹⁹¹ SNHR, *At least 229 arbitrary detentions documented in January 2025*, 4 February 2025.

¹⁹² EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, 21 March 2025, p. 28.

¹⁹³ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 6.

¹⁹⁴ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 6; New Lines Magazine, *How desperation sowed the seeds of rebellion in Syria's Latakia province*, 17 March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹⁹⁵ AP News, *Syria's embassy in Lebanon suspends services as Lebanon hands over former Syrian army officers*, 28 December 2024.

¹⁹⁶ ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025.

¹⁹⁷ According to Syrian academic Dr Rahaf al-Doughli, the term *fulul* was new in Syria and was a loanword from the Egyptian lexicon after Mubarak's rule, used to describe the former administration. Al-Doughli described how, after Assad's fall, Syrians used the term to describe 'former regime commanders with histories of atrocities who had repositioned themselves in the war's shifting power dynamic'. These *fulul* were '[m]ore than mere remnants of the old order, [they] had embedded themselves in illicit economies, leveraging smuggling, extortion and war profiteering to maintain'. See: MERIP, *Syria's new men. Masculinities and the post-Assad political order*, 16 April 2025.

¹⁹⁸ Atlantic Council, EIP & MEI, *Reimagining Syria. A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad*, 13 March 2025, p. 31; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.

¹⁹⁹ New Lines Magazine, *How desperation sowed the seeds of rebellion in Syria's Latakia province*, 17 March 2025; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

challenges for the new central authorities during the reporting period.²⁰⁰

Immediately after the power shift in early December 2024, the HTS-led interim authorities began building a new security apparatus from the broad and loose coalition of armed groups. During the course of January 2025, most of the armed groups formally committed themselves to the goal of a single army, without weapons outside state control.²⁰¹

In practice, however, the integration process of the patchwork of former opposition groups and other militias, each with its own leaders and interests, was slow and remained fragile.²⁰² By the end of the reporting period, there was still no professional, centralised army.²⁰³ Although many groups were formally affiliated with the Ministry of Defence, little concrete progress had been made overall.²⁰⁴ Most armed groups remained semi-autonomous:²⁰⁵ they received no training or salary from the government, retained possession of their weapons, and remained loyal to their own leadership.²⁰⁶ In addition, other armed groups were active that had no ties whatsoever to the interim authorities, as well as civilians who had armed themselves.²⁰⁷ There was therefore no question of the transitional government having a monopoly on the use of force within its own area of control.²⁰⁸

According to one source, the process of military integration was characterised by favouritism and a lack of transparency concerning the chain of command.²⁰⁹ Within the new security apparatus, positions were often assigned according to loyalty and other strategic considerations, rather than expertise and professionalism.²¹⁰ The officers and personnel of the security apparatus consisted almost exclusively of Sunnis.²¹¹

²⁰⁰ New Lines Magazine, *Syria's new rulers are working to unify military power*, 25 February 2025; Syria in Figures, *External contribution: A panoramic view of the status quo in Syria and the emerging US position*, March 2025; UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 March 2025; Syria Revisited, *The new Syrian army: Structure and commanders*, 28 March 2025.

²⁰¹ UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 March 2025.

²⁰² AP News, *Southern rebels loom large as Syria's new rulers try to form a national army*, 23 January 2025; Etana, *Syria update #17*, 9 February 2025; TW1, *Inside the new Syria: The first three months*, 7 March 2025; UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 March 2025; New Lines Magazine, *The fragile foundations of Arab-Kurdish coexistence*, 1 April 2025; MERIP, *Syria's new men. Masculinities and the post-Asad political order*, 16 April 2025.

²⁰³ The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025; AP News, *Syria flashes signs of peril and promise in a week of violence and diplomacy*, 13 March 2025; The New York Times, *Syria's struggle to unify military was evident in outburst of violence*, 17 March 2025; UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 March 2025; AFP, *Who are Syria's new security forces?*, 2 May 2025; This Week in Northern Syria, *This Week in Northern Syria [18.2025]*, 8 May 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

²⁰⁴ The New York Times, *Syria's struggle to unify military was evident in outburst of violence*, 17 March 2025; Syria in Transition, *Swallowing the state: HTS is fashioning Syria in its own image*, 6 March 2025.

²⁰⁵ ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025.

²⁰⁶ AP News, *Syria flashes signs of peril and promise in a week of violence and diplomacy*, 13 March 2025; The Century Foundation, *Damascus dispatch: Fear and hope in a divided Syria*, 17 March 2025; The New York Times, *Syria's struggle to unify military was evident in outburst of violence*, 17 March 2025; UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 March 2025; Al Jazeera, *'Don't trust anyone': Have Syria's Alawites lost faith in new government?*, 20 March 2025; AFP, *Who are Syria's new security forces*, 2 May 2025.

²⁰⁷ The New York Times, *Syria's struggle to unify military was evident in outburst of violence*, 17 March 2025; Syria in Transition, *Swallowing the state: HTS is fashioning Syria in its own image*, 6 March 2025.

²⁰⁸ The Syria Report, *Tensions in Druze areas highlight challenges of Syrian political transition*, 6 May 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

²⁰⁹ MERIP, *Syria's new men. Masculinities and the post-Asad political order*, 16 April 2025.

²¹⁰ New Lines Magazine, *Syria's new rulers are working to unify military power*, 25 February 2025; MERIP, *Syria's new men. Masculinities and the post-Asad political order*, 16 April 2025.

²¹¹ Confidential source, March 2025.

After the power shift, the MOC initially functioned as a replacement military apparatus, while the General Security Service (GSS) served as a kind of hybrid security and police force under the Ministry of the Interior.²¹² Meanwhile, the authorities were working on rebuilding a police force.²¹³

2.3.1 Formation of national army

On 17 December 2024, HTS leader al-Sharaa declared that all armed groups would be disbanded and integrated into the ranks of the Ministry of Defence.²¹⁴ On 24 December 2024, al-Sharaa met with a number of commanders from various armed factions to discuss the disarmament and dissolution of the factions, as well as their integration into a national army under the Ministry of Defence.²¹⁵ On 25 December, the interim authorities announced that they had reached an agreement with armed groups on their dissolution and integration. Al-Sharaa stated that the authorities 'would absolutely not allow weapons to be in the country that are outside state control'.²¹⁶

The Ministry of Defence established a number of army divisions and appointed officers to head them.²¹⁷ According to some sources, the ministry was purportedly also forming an air force and a Republican Guard.²¹⁸ On 29 December 2024, the Ministry of Defence announced dozens of high-level appointments in the army. Among the senior officers were members of HTS, leaders of factions affiliated with HTS, former army officers who had deserted at the start of the war, and several foreign fighters, including three who were reportedly assigned the rank of brigadier general.²¹⁹

According to some sources, the appointments of senior officers showed that they were based more on loyalty than on competence, as had been the case under the Assad regime.²²⁰ High ranks were awarded primarily to individuals who had demonstrated loyalty to HTS in the years prior to the fall of the regime, including foreigners of various nationalities.²²¹

On 31 December 2024, Murhaf Abu Qasra was appointed interim minister of Defence. Under his supervision, discussions with various armed groups about integration into the ministry continued in the weeks that followed.²²² Dozens of armed groups, most of which had fought against the Assad regime, formally joined the new national army in January 2025, under the Ministry of Defence.²²³

According to Defence minister Abu Qasra, the groups that joined the Defence Forces would not be able to continue to exist in their current form, and all factions would

²¹² BBC News, *Syria frontline patrol: the rebel gunmen who now police the streets*, 17 December 2024, [url](#); MEI, *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025; confidential source, January 2025.

²¹³ France 24, *Syria's new HTS-led regime reinforces police force with the help of its fighters*, 19 January 2025; Reuters, *Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police*, 23 January 2025.

²¹⁴ The Guardian, *Syrian HTS leader says rebel factions that overthrew Assad will be 'disbanded'*, 17 December 2024.

²¹⁵ Reuters, *Syrian ex-rebel factions agree to merge under defence ministry*, 24 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Analysis: Why are hardliners against surrendering weapons to new Syrian state?*, 3 January 2025.

²¹⁶ AFP, *South Syria fighters reluctant to give up weapons: spokesman*, 10 January 2025.

²¹⁷ New Lines Magazine, *Syria's new rulers are working to unify military power*, 25 February 2025; Syria in Transition, *Swallowing the state: HTS is fashioning Syria in its own image*, 6 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

²¹⁸ New Lines Magazine, *Syria's new rulers are working to unify military power*, 25 February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

²¹⁹ France 24, *'Foreign jihadists' in Syria leader's pick for army officers: monitor, experts*, 30 December 2024; Reuters, *Syria appoints some foreign Islamist fighters to its military, sources say*, 31 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Tajik given key position in new Syrian army*, 6 January 2025.

²²⁰ New Lines Magazine, *Syria's new rulers are working to unify military power*, 25 February 2025; Syria in Transition, *Swallowing the state: HTS is fashioning Syria in its own image*, 6 March 2025.

²²¹ New Lines Magazine, *Syria's new rulers are working to unify military power*, 25 February 2025.

²²² BBC Monitoring, *Syrian defence ministry begins 'sessions' to integrate armed factions*, 6 January 2025.

²²³ TWI, *The status of Syria's transition after two months*, 12 February 2025; AP News, *Syria flashes signs of peril and promise in a week of violence and diplomacy*, 13 March 2025.

eventually be disbanded.²²⁴ In theory, the factions, their commanders and their fighters would be redistributed across new territories. According to one source, the reason for this was to prevent acts of revenge and to stop faction leaders (such as local warlords) from remaining in their own areas and ultimately fuelling organised crime.²²⁵

According to one source, HTS was in the process of disbanding in February 2025.²²⁶ The HTS fighters were incorporated into the army and the general security forces under the Ministries of Defence and the Interior, respectively, both of which were led by HTS members.²²⁷ The extent to which HTS had actually been absorbed into state institutions was unclear. According to one source, although HTS had adopted the language and symbols of the state early in December, new institutions (such as the general security forces) still consisted primarily of HTS military units at the end of April 2025.²²⁸ In practice, some former HTS fighters could purportedly still be identified as such in February as they were still wearing SSG insignia from Idlib on their uniforms.²²⁹

Apart from a series of formal steps, the integration of the other armed groups proceeded slowly in practice.²³⁰ In January 2025, minister Abu Qasra stated that he hoped to complete the integration process before 1 March, which was the target date for the transitional government to take office.²³¹

Towards the end of the reporting period, many armed groups remained outside the full control of the transitional government.²³² The SNA factions were nominally affiliated with the Ministry of Defence, but some sources stated that they still had their own command structure.²³³ In the south, the leaders of armed groups in Daraa and Suweida were resisting attempts (focused on negotiations for the time being) to bring their groups under state control (see 2.3.1).²³⁴ Various factions in Daraa had concerns, including their representation in the new military structure. In neighbouring Suweida, Druze militias demanded greater political autonomy and guarantees.²³⁵ Towards the end of the reporting period, there appeared to be some progress being made in the process in Daraa, but the authorities' relationship with Suweida in particular remained complex (see 3.3.3.3).²³⁶ The integration of armed groups in the south was further complicated by the Israeli military posture (see 3.2).²³⁷ Finally, on 10 March 2025, the interim authorities and the SDF concluded an agreement to integrate the SDF's civil and military apparatus into the central state. The two parties nevertheless still had very different views on how this should be put into practice (see 1.2.2 and 2.1.4).

Various challenges stood in the way of uniting the former opposition groups and other militias. First, the interim authorities did not have the financial resources to pay salaries. As long as this was the case, groups would not be encouraged to join a

²²⁴ The Washington Post, *Syria could allow Russia to keep its bases, new defense minister says*, 6 February 2025.

²²⁵ Syria Weekly, *10 key takeaways from Syria*, 10 February 2025.

²²⁶ Syria Weekly, *10 key takeaways from Syria*, 10 February 2025.

²²⁷ FT, *Can Syria's new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025.

²²⁸ AFP, *Who are Syria's new security forces?*, 2 May 2025.

²²⁹ FT, *Can Syria's new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025.

²³⁰ TWI, *Inside the new Syria: The first three months*, 7 March 2025; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.

²³¹ Reuters, *Syrian defence minister rejects Kurdish proposal for its own military bloc*, 19 January 2025.

²³² ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

²³³ Al Jazeera, *'Don't trust anyone': Have Syria's Alawites lost faith in new government?*, 20 March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

²³⁴ Foreign Affairs, *Syria's uncertain new order*, 11 April 2025.

²³⁵ New Lines Magazine, *Syria's new rulers are working to unify military power*, 25 February 2025.

²³⁶ Syria in Figures, *External contribution: A panoramic view of the status quo in Syria and the emerging US position*, March 2025.

²³⁷ TWI, *Inside the new Syria: The first three months*, 7 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

single command structure, and the Ministry of Defence would not be able to exercise full control over all armed groups.²³⁸ On the other hand, according to one source, it was also questionable whether former rebel leaders, who earned money independently through such activities as smuggling, extortion at checkpoints or the levying of unofficial border taxes, could be persuaded to accept a state salary.²³⁹ For example, the SNA factions had a great deal to lose from integration, including illegal income-generating practices in the areas they controlled, according to one source.²⁴⁰ Furthermore, according to various sources, some SNA fighters were still receiving salaries from Türkiye.²⁴¹

In addition, various groups remained reluctant to disarm due to a lack of confidence in the HTS-led central authorities. Leaders of various armed groups already harboured mistrust towards HTS, which was linked to loyalty to tribal ties or grievances from the preceding years of war. According to some sources, this created a kind of security dilemma, with these leaders viewing the surrender of weapons and the dissolution of the group as a risk.²⁴²

2.3.2 General security forces

The interim authorities relied on former HTS fighters and the troops of allied factions as the core of the new *Idarit al-Amn al-'Am* (English: General Security Service, GSS).²⁴³ Unlike the army in formation, these security forces, which originated largely from the general security and intelligence service of HTS and, later, the former SSG administration in Idlib,²⁴⁴ formed cohesive units under a clear chain of command.²⁴⁵ They were essentially heavily armed police officers who provided support while new local police forces were being formed.²⁴⁶ At the same time, however, the GSS was also short-staffed.²⁴⁷

After the takeover in December 2024, the HTS-led MOC deployed affiliated armed groups to support the overburdened security forces and fill gaps in the security situation.²⁴⁸ These MOC units carried out specific operations targeting armed members of the former regime's security apparatus, in addition to assisting with patrolling towns and staffing checkpoints.²⁴⁹

The GSS quickly expanded their reach to different parts of the country, particularly the capital and central cities such as Aleppo and Hama, but they lacked the capacity to cover the area of control effectively.²⁵⁰ In several areas, including Homs, the GSS

²³⁸ Al Jazeera, 'Don't trust anyone': Have Syria's Alawites lost faith in new government?, 20 March 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

²³⁹ The Atlantic, *Can one man hold Syria together?*, 24 March 2025.

²⁴⁰ Confidential source, March 2025.

²⁴¹ TWI, *Inside the new Syria: The first three months*, 7 March 2025; Arab Reform Initiative, *Post-War Syria: Paths to stability* (webinar), 5 May 2025, [url](#); Al Majalla, *Much-maligned Syrian commander rebuts massacre claims*, 10 May 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

²⁴² AP News, *Southern rebels loom large as Syria's new rulers try to form a national army*, 23 January 2025; Chatham House, *Syria needs security – can Al-Sharaa build a united army to provide it?*, 10 March 2025; MERIP, *Syria's New Men. Masculinities and the Post-Assad political order*, 16 April 2025; Enab Baladi, *Jaramana sectarian fuse reveals fragility of new balances*, 8 May 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

²⁴³ ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025; The New York Times, *Syria's struggle to unify military was evident in outburst of violence*, 17 March 2025; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.

²⁴⁴ MEI, *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025; CTC Sentinel, *The new Syrian government's fight against the Islamic State, Hezbollah, and captagon*, March 2025, p. 31.

²⁴⁵ The New York Times, *Syria's struggle to unify military was evident in outburst of violence*, 17 March 2025.

²⁴⁶ MEI, *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025.

²⁴⁷ ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.

²⁴⁸ BBC News, *Syria frontline patrol: the rebel gunmen who now police the streets*, 17 December 2024, [url](#); MEI, *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025.

²⁴⁹ MEI, *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025.

²⁵⁰ ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025; The New York Times, *Syria's struggle to unify military was evident in outburst of violence*, 17 March 2025; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.

also deployed newer and less effective troops, with recruits who had received only minimal training.²⁵¹

2.3.3 Police

By the end of December 2024, many MOC units were reportedly withdrawn from cities to bases and checkpoints to make room for the GSS and the police force that was being established.²⁵² Due to the collapse of the former police force, the interim Ministry of the Interior faced a significant shortage of enforcement capacity, even in the major cities.²⁵³ According to one source, the police had initially been completely absent in certain rural areas.²⁵⁴

For example, police officers from the former GSS from Idlib were working in the central districts of Damascus.²⁵⁵ The police force that was being set up operated from some of the former police stations, with a fraction of the capacity of the police force that had existed before the power shift.²⁵⁶ The authorities utilised HTS fighters and volunteers to compensate somewhat for the lack of staffing capacity.²⁵⁷ The overburdened police force faced various problems, including rising crime (see 3.5) and disputes over home ownership (see 9.5).²⁵⁸ In addition, police officers did not receive any salary in the first few months.²⁵⁹

2.3.4 Security and intelligence services

As far as is known, the interim authorities had thus far set up one new intelligence service under the Ministry of the Interior.²⁶⁰ This intelligence service replaced the various competing intelligence services of the former Assad regime.²⁶¹ According to one source, the new intelligence service was known as the *jihaz al-istikhbarat*.²⁶² Another source stated that the authorities had a surveillance network, which had been taken over from the SSG in Idlib and was supervised by the minister of the Interior, Anas Khattab. A confidant of al-Sharaa, Khattab had previously been responsible for the security service of HTS.²⁶³

2.3.5 Recruitment and training

Apart from the fact that compulsory national service had been abolished in the transitional government's area of control,²⁶⁴ not much was known about the rules and procedures surrounding recruitment for the army, the GSS and the police during the reporting period. According to President al-Sharaa and Defence minister Abu Qasra, there were sufficient volunteers for the army.²⁶⁵

²⁵¹ ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025.

²⁵² MEI, *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025.

²⁵³ Syria Revisited, "We need to know what comes next" – *Voices from Tartous after Assad*, 21 December 2025; France 24, *Syria's new HTS-led regime reinforces police force with the help of its fighters*, 19 January 2025; Reuters, *Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police*, 23 January 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

²⁵⁴ Syria Revisited, "We need to know what comes next" – *Voices from Tartous after Assad*, 21 December 2025.

²⁵⁵ Syria Revisited, "We need to know what comes next" – *Voices from Tartous after Assad*, 21 December 2025; Reuters, *Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police*, 23 January 2025.

²⁵⁶ France 24, *Syria's new HTS-led regime reinforces police force with the help of its fighters*, 19 January 2025; Reuters, *Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police*, 23 January 2025.

²⁵⁷ France 24, *Syria's new HTS-led regime reinforces police force with the help of its fighters*, 19 January 2025.

²⁵⁸ Reuters, *Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police*, 23 January 2025; Daraj, *I'm a female judge in Homs.. What will happen to my career in the new Syria?*, 7 April 2025.

²⁵⁹ The New York Times, *Syrians want to go home, but many no longer have one to return to*, 13 March 2025; France 24, *Syria's new HTS-led regime reinforces police force with the help of its fighters*, 19 January 2025.

²⁶⁰ The New Arab, *Syria Defence Minister to The New Arab: Above all Syria wants peace*, 3 February 2025; The Century Foundation, *Damascus dispatch: Fear and hope in a divided Syria*, 17 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

²⁶¹ Syria Revisited, "We need to know what comes next" – *Voices from Tartous after Assad*, 21 December 2025; The New Arab, *Syria Defence Minister to The New Arab: Above all Syria wants peace*, 3 February 2025; The Century Foundation, *Damascus dispatch: Fear and hope in a divided Syria*, 17 March 2025.

²⁶² Confidential source, February 2025.

²⁶³ The New Arab, *Who is Syria's new intelligence chief, Anas Khattab?*, 27 December 2024.

²⁶⁴ The New Arab, *Why Al-Sharaa's scrapping of conscription for Syrians matters*, 16 December 2024.

²⁶⁵ The New Arab, *Syria Defence Minister to The New Arab: Above all Syria wants peace*, 3 February 2025; Al Arabiya, *'Thousands' are joining Syria's new army, President al-Sharaa says*, 10 February 2025.

The recruitment of new recruits for the security apparatus initially seemed to generate a large amount of interest.²⁶⁶ According to one source, the Ministry of the Interior set the age for joining the GSS at between 20 and 30 years. As far as is known, the Ministry of Defence had not announced an age limit for joining the army.²⁶⁷ Former police officers who had defected to the opposition before the fall of Assad fall were reportedly welcome to apply for the new police force. It was not yet clear whether police officers who had been serving at the time of Assad's fall would be able to apply to join the new police force in the future.²⁶⁸

As early as the beginning of December 2024, the interim ministries of Defence and the Interior began recruiting and training new soldiers, security forces and police officers.²⁶⁹ The training was very limited.²⁷⁰ According to a report by Reuters, at the end of January 2025, recruits were being prepared at the police academy in Damascus through ten-day training courses, mainly in the use of weapons and Islamic sharia law.²⁷¹ The intention was to extend the training to nine months as soon as the security situation improved, using a system introduced by HTS in Idlib.²⁷²

During the reporting period, the military and security apparatus consisted almost exclusively of Sunnis. According to some sources, the recruitment campaigns attracted Sunni recruits almost exclusively.²⁷³ Although in theory Alawites could report to recruitment centres, some sources noted that relatively few did so, due to the deep mistrust between Sunnis and Alawites.²⁷⁴ Reuters reported that new recruits were asked about their religious beliefs. According to police officers, the focus on religion in recruitment and short training courses was a move intended to instil a sense of morality in recruits.²⁷⁵ According to the head of the police academy in Damascus (who had formerly been the head of the HTS academy in Idlib), the religious education offered to recruits included principles of Islamic jurisprudence and rules of conduct.²⁷⁶ In March 2025, there were reports that several Christian men had joined the general security forces in the Christian-inhabited region of Wadi Nasara.²⁷⁷ Towards the end of the reporting period, one source observed that little to no visible progress had been made in recruiting non-Sunni residents for the local police and general security forces.²⁷⁸

On 27 April, the Ministry of Defence announced that it was accepting applications from former soldiers who had deserted the Assad regime's army and wished to re-enlist in the armed forces.²⁷⁹

²⁶⁶ AP News, *New Syrian officials conduct first police and security cadet graduation post-Assad*, 14 January 2025, [url](#); ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.

²⁶⁷ Syria Direct, *Why the delay in merging Daraa's factions into a new Syrian army?*, 21 February 2025.

²⁶⁸ Reuters, *Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police*, 23 January 2025.

²⁶⁹ Reuters, *Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police*, 23 January 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

²⁷⁰ Reuters, *Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police*, 23 January 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

²⁷¹ Reuters, *Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police*, 23 January 2025.

²⁷² Reuters, *Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police*, 23 January 2025.

²⁷³ Confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

²⁷⁴ Reuters, *Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police*, 23 January 2025; Carnegie, *Rebuilding the Syrian nation: Impressions from the ground*, 23 April 2025.

²⁷⁵ Reuters, *Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police*, 23 January 2025.

²⁷⁶ Reuters, *Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police*, 23 January 2025.

²⁷⁷ Confidential source, March 2025.

²⁷⁸ Syria Revisited, *Are Damascus' new security reforms a form of federalism?*, 18 May 2025.

²⁷⁹ FT, *Syria's defence ministry opens applications for Assad-era troops*, 27 April 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 22-29, 2025*, 29 April 2025.

2.3.6 *Performance of the security apparatus*

From the moment they took Aleppo, it was a priority for the MOC and the subsequent interim authorities to ensure security and stability in the area under their control.²⁸⁰ The HTS-led authorities acted swiftly to secure the main population centres.²⁸¹ According to some sources, protecting the various religious communities was a priority in this regard.²⁸² For example, according to one source, they had set up checkpoints outside Christian and Alawite towns and villages in the countryside of Hama province, partly to protect local communities from possible revenge attacks.²⁸³ On 19 April, the GSS was deployed to protect churches in Damascus and other locations while Christians gathered to celebrate Easter.²⁸⁴

Another priority for the authorities was dismantling drug networks (see 3.5).²⁸⁵

According to one source, HTS had initially relied primarily on its own units and those of close allies to secure the provinces in the west of the country, where many different religious groups lived.²⁸⁶ HTS had an elite unit, the 'Red Bands' (*Al-Asa'ib al-Hamra'*), which reportedly led many of the security operations of the interim authorities.²⁸⁷

Several security forces of the interim authorities were masked. This was a new phenomenon for many Syrians in the former regime area.²⁸⁸ Externally, the masks were presented as a safety measure to protect staff. According to one source, however, the wearing of masks was a strategic choice within the security apparatus, intended to intimidate. The source stated that this way of projecting power also served to mask the fragility of the security institutions. In April 2025, the GSS issued a new directive prohibiting members of the security forces in Damascus from wearing masks in public unless they were carrying out a special assignment. This ban was reportedly not widely enforced.²⁸⁹

Relatively soon, authorities in various parts of the country set up special telephone lines for civilians to report crime.²⁹⁰ Various sources indicated that the authorities generally responded quickly to reports of abuses and crimes and took action to maintain order, especially when serious incidents that could potentially disrupt stability or reports of ill-treatment by members of the security apparatus were involved.²⁹¹ However, they did not have the resources or enough security forces to cover all areas.²⁹² In addition, there was often a lack of capacity to prevent incidents.²⁹³

During the first three months when the interim administration was in power, it ensured relative calm in a large part of its area of control, according to various sources. The authorities succeeded in limiting revenge-driven violence to isolated

²⁸⁰ Confidential source, February 2025.

²⁸¹ ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.

²⁸² MEI, *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

²⁸³ Confidential source, February 2025.

²⁸⁴ Enab Baladi, *Protection of Christian holidays in Syria: Relief amid security presence*, 21 April 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 15-22, 2025*, 22 April 2025; Syria Revisited, *A Christian activist's hopes for the future*, 6 May 2025.

²⁸⁵ CTC Sentinel, *The new Syrian government's fight against the Islamic State, Hezbollah, and captagon*, March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

²⁸⁶ MEI, *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025.

²⁸⁷ MEI, *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025.

²⁸⁸ Al Jumhuriya, *From fallen statues to masked men*, 14 April 2025.

²⁸⁹ MERIP, *Syria's new men. Masculinities and the post-Asad political order*, 16 April 2025.

²⁹⁰ Confidential source, February 2025.

²⁹¹ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025;

confidential source, March 2025.

²⁹² Confidential source, March 2025.

²⁹³ Confidential source, March 2025.

incidents. According to some sources, they attempted to prevent reprisals against individuals with ties (actual or alleged) to the former regime.²⁹⁴ In addition, they took action against individuals who were guilty of violent acts of revenge, kidnappings and the expropriation of property, even when these individuals came from their own supporters or other armed factions.²⁹⁵ Furthermore, there were known instances where the authorities arrested members of the security apparatus when abuses against civilians were reported.²⁹⁶

In practice, there were differences between the way in which various elements of the new security apparatus acted with respect to maintaining order and their relations with local communities. The transitional government remained dependent on locally based armed groups, including former SNA factions, to maintain order. The GSS and armed groups engaged in dialogue with local leaders on security-related issues, including in areas with non-Sunni communities.²⁹⁷ According to one source, the variety of military and security forces deployed in the different regions had contributed to differences in experiences in these areas.²⁹⁸ According to another source, the GSS was respected by many people for the discipline of the security forces.²⁹⁹ Certain SNA factions, which were formally linked to the Ministry of Defence, caused local unrest.³⁰⁰

In contrast to the functioning of the Assad regime's security apparatus,³⁰¹ as far as is known, there was no widespread corruption at checkpoints after the power shift. Citizens did not have to pay bribes.³⁰² According to one source, SNA groups in northern Syria were an exception to this. In that region, groups and fighters could still be observed earning income through bribery. According to the source, it was unclear whether SNA factions and fighters who had returned to their original places of residence exhibited the same patterns of behaviour there.³⁰³

For information about arrests by the new security apparatus and conditions in detention, see 8.3 through 8.5.

2.4 Compulsory military service in the DAANES territory

According to one source, there were no developments in the area of compulsory military service in the DAANES territory.³⁰⁴ For further information, see 2.2.2 of the General COI Report on Syria of December 2024.

²⁹⁴ ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

²⁹⁵ BBC News, *Syria frontline patrol: the rebel gunmen who now police the streets*, 17 December 2024, [url](#); ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

²⁹⁶ Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 7*, 28 January 2025.

²⁹⁷ MEI, *Governing the day after in Syria*, 19 December 2024; Enab Baladi, *Protection of Christian holidays in Syria: Relief amid security presence*, 21 April 2025.

²⁹⁸ MEI, *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025.

²⁹⁹ Confidential source, April 2025.

³⁰⁰ Le Monde, *Syria's infernal cycle of revenge: 'I don't trust men from my own community'*, 18 March 2025; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.

³⁰¹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Syria*, December 2024, pp. 41-42.

³⁰² Carnegie, *The view from Damascus*, 13 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

³⁰³ Confidential source, February 2025.

³⁰⁴ Confidential source, April 2025.

2.5 Recruitment of minors

According to various sources, recruitment of Kurdish and Arab minors and young adults, both boys and girls, took place in the north-east by the Kurdish group Revolutionary Youth Movement of Syria. These recruits often ended up with armed groups affiliated with the SDF.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁵ SNHR, *Girl named Malak Kawa Abdou abducted by SDF in Aleppo, March 24, 2025*, 25 March 2025; Enab Baladi, *SDF-Damascus agreement in Aleppo: A test balloon for broader consensus*, 7 April 2025; SOHR, *Ongoing violations. "Revolutionary Youth" continues to recruit children in north-eastern Syria and SOHR calls for "Autonomous Administration to intervene*, 9 April 2025; SNHR, *SDF abducts a girl named Sulava Qader in Aleppo, April 10, 2025*, 12 April 2025; SNHR, *SDF abducts a girl named Rujin Ahmad in Hasaka, April 16, 2025*, 21 April 2025.

3 The security situation

3.1 General overview

The security situation in Syria remained volatile throughout the reporting period.³⁰⁶ This section provides a brief overview of the various armed conflicts and foreign military operations in Syria in the first five months after the power shift in early December 2024, as well as other relevant factors that influenced the security situation. The rest of this chapter examines this in more detail, describing various forms of violence in each region and, where possible, observable trends. It should be noted that the security situation was not only volatile, but also highly fragmented.³⁰⁷ This means that levels of violence fluctuated and the security situation could vary from area to area (in cities, even from neighbourhood to neighbourhood) and from week to week.³⁰⁸

After the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, there were still several active armed conflicts in the country. In the north, in the province of Aleppo, the conflict between the Turkish-backed SNA and the Kurdish-led SDF escalated between December 2024 and March 2025. (see 3.3.6). In the north-west, in the provinces of Latakia and Tartous, the new authorities faced an uprising by armed remnants of the Assad regime's security apparatus,³⁰⁹ which led to an escalation of at least partly sectarian violence in March 2025, resulting in hundreds of civilian deaths (see 3.3.5.2). Both of these developments led to large-scale displacement. (see 4.1). In the west, the Syrian-Lebanese border region was the scene of cross-border fighting in February and March 2025 (see 3.3.1). In the east, ISIS was still active. After a period of reduced activity immediately following the power shift, ISIS began steadily stepping up its attacks from around February 2025 onwards (see 3.4).

Foreign military spheres of influence and operations in Syria also limited the transitional government's ability to exercise full control over its territory.³¹⁰ During the reporting period, the Israeli army bombed military targets in at least eight provinces, occupied a previously demilitarised buffer zone and advanced deeper into south-western Syria. Israel also demanded a 'demilitarised south' and stated that it would provide military support to the Druze in Syria in the event of a confrontation between the community and the central authorities in Damascus.³¹¹

³⁰⁶ L'Orient Today, *In Syria, the fear of collapse*, 8 March 2025; ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025; UN News, *Syria: UN envoy warns of escalating violence in Syria*, 30 April 2025; UN OHCHR, *UN Syria Commission: Fresh clashes and Israeli intervention threaten fragile peace*, 2 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

³⁰⁷ FT, *Can Syria's new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

³⁰⁸ See, for example, the weekly updates from the authoritative blogs *Syria Weekly* (focus on Syria as a whole; [url](#)) and *Syria Revisited* (focus on western Syria, with an emphasis on areas where different religious population groups live; [url](#)), maintained by the researchers/analysts Charles Lister and Gregory Waters, respectively, on the security situation and the activities of the security apparatus of the new central authorities; *Syria Weekly, Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025; *Syria Revisited, Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 22*, 15 May 2025; *Syria Weekly, Weekly data update (May 6-13, 2025)*, 15 May 2025; *Syria Revisited, Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 23*, 19 May 2025.

³⁰⁹ These are combat groups that have emerged from the military (and paramilitary) structures of the Assad regime. In the vernacular, they are often referred to as 'remnants' (Arabic: *fulul*). Throughout the rest of this COI Report, they are referred to as the armed remnants of the Assad regime's security apparatus.

³¹⁰ ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025; ICG, *What lies in store for Syria as a new government takes power?*, 25 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

³¹¹ Reuters, *'There is no blank check': Syrian leader told to rein in jihadis*, 26 March 2025.

In north-eastern Syria, the stability of the DAANES administration was threatened by the possibility that American anti-ISIS coalition forces would withdraw.³¹² It was partly the American military presence that kept the DAANES territory intact, as they guaranteed the security structure for the SDF leadership.³¹³ In April 2025, the US began withdrawing hundreds of troops from the north-east.³¹⁴

Sectarian tensions flared up several times, leading to violent and large-scale unrest.³¹⁵ The security situation was particularly fragile in this regard in the coastal provinces of Latakia and Tartous, as well as in the city of Homs and surrounding areas.³¹⁶ Following an escalation of violence in Latakia and Tartous in early March 2025, in which hundreds of Alawite civilians were killed, the situation there remained tense (see 3.3.5.3).³¹⁷ Another escalation of violence occurred in late April and early May 2025, this time in predominantly Druze areas near Damascus and in the province of Suweida (see 3.3.2.8 and 3.3.3.3). According to some sources, the two escalations of violence underscored the challenge facing the transitional government in keeping armed groups and individuals under control,³¹⁸ in addition to reinforcing distrust among non-Sunni population groups towards the HTS-led central authorities.³¹⁹

While the transitional government failed to take steps in the area of transitional justice, armed groups and individuals took the law into their own hands, resulting in revenge-driven kidnappings and killings.³²⁰

In April 2025, some sources noted that there was evidence of heightened sectarianism among some Sunni communities, particularly in central and western Syria, with increasing calls for revenge against Alawites.³²¹ Several radical groups were active, targeting individuals accused of crimes under the Assad regime, as well as Alawites.³²² One of these groups, *Saraya al-Sunnah*, claimed responsibility for attacks on Alawites in several provinces.³²³

³¹² Reuters, *US military poised to slash troops in Syria, officials say*, 16 April 2025.

³¹³ MEE, *The long path to recovery in northeastern Syria*, 11 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

³¹⁴ The New York Times, *U.S. is withdrawing hundreds of troops from Syria*, 17 April 2025.

³¹⁵ New Lines Magazine, *Sectarian violence simmers in Homs*, 10 March 2025; ICG, *Fighting in Damascus exposes Syria's sectarian tensions*, 2 May 2025; Al Majalla, *Syria's sectarian violence is a ticking time bomb*, 3 May 2025; confidential source, May 2025.

³¹⁶ New Lines Magazine, *Sectarian violence simmers in Homs*, 10 March 2025; Syria Direct, *Extrajudicial killings of Alawites plague Homs city*, 9 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

³¹⁷ The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025; Syria Direct, *As Jableh picks up the pieces, can residents overcome 'sectarian tensions'?*, 12 March 2025; Atlantic Council, EIP & MEI, *Reimagining Syria. A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad*, 13 March 2025, p. 32; The New Arab, *Three members of one family kidnapped, killed in Syria's Latakia*, 24 March 2025; Al Majalla, *Security along the Syrian coast is a work-in-progress*, 28 April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

³¹⁸ The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025; The New York Times, *Clashes erupt in Damascus outskirts, killing 9*, 29 April 2025; LA Times, *Israel launches attack in Syria to protect Druze minority*, 30 April 2025.

³¹⁹ ICG, *Fighting in Damascus exposes Syria's sectarian tensions*, 2 May 2025; The New York Times, *'We're all in one ship': Druze in Syrian town rocked by violence agree to disarm militias*, 3 May 2025; The Syria Report, *Tensions in Druze areas highlight challenges of Syrian political transition*, 6 May 2025; Le Monde, *Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, weakened by sectarian violence, looks to rebuild ties with France*, 7 May 2025; The Washington Post, *As Syria's Druze minority reels from violence, Israel pursues an opening*, 10 May 2025; Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 21*, 12 May 2025.

³²⁰ Confidential source, May 2025.

³²¹ Foreign Affairs, *Syria's uncertain new order*, 11 April 2025; Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 19*, 21 April 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian jihadist group 'executes' hostages following prisoner release*, 29 April 2025; Le Monde, *Syrian president Ahmed al-Sharaa, weakened by sectarian violence, looks to rebuild ties with France*, 7 May 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

³²² BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: New Syria jihadist group claims ongoing attacks on Alawites*, 21 April 2025; L'Orient Today, *The long road to justice in post-Assad Syria*, 4 May 2025; confidential source, May 2025.

³²³ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: New Syria jihadist group claims ongoing attacks on Alawites*, 21 April 2025; confidential source, May 2025.

According to multiple sources, revenge killings committed by groups or individuals operating outside the law became an increasingly significant source of violence in Syria from mid-April 2025³²⁴ onwards.³²⁵ These attacks were generally directed against individuals associated with the Assad regime, either through ties to the army, the intelligence services or the business elite of the former regime, or because they belonged to the Alawite population group.³²⁶ Revenge-driven killings of former members (both Sunnis and Alawites)³²⁷ of the former security apparatus and of Alawite civilians occurred mainly in the provinces of Latakia, Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Damascus in late April and early May 2025.³²⁸

Armed groups and individuals took advantage of a partial power vacuum in the former regime area.³²⁹ Outside Damascus and the north-western province of Idlib, which had been dominated by HTS for years, the transitional government had not yet fully established its authority, and its control over armed groups was somewhat limited.³³⁰ Many different armed groups were still active, operating independently of the Ministry of Defence to varying degrees. At the local level, these diverse groups constituted the *de facto* authorities, at least to a certain extent (see also 1.2.1).³³¹ This was not only the case in the south, but also to a certain extent in areas in the central provinces of Hama, Homs and Rural Damascus, where armed groups from the north had returned and had taken control of their former area of influence, partly in coordination with HTS.³³²

All in all, the country was highly militarised, with many armed factions and a huge quantity of weapons in circulation.³³³ In addition, many deep divisions still existed within the population.³³⁴ As a result of mass killings during the early years of the war in rural areas in Hama and Homs, feuds had arisen between neighbouring villages inhabited by different population groups.³³⁵ According to one source, grievances dating back to the 1980s, linked to the violent suppression by former President Hafez al-Assad's regime of an uprising in Hama³³⁶ in 1982, were still playing a role. Many civilians harboured deep resentment about past injustices and

³²⁴ Also referred to in media and literature as 'vigilante violence' or 'vigilante justice'.

³²⁵ Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 22-29, 2025)*, 1 May 2025; SOHR, *Amid absence of accountability. 49 people executed in different areas across Syria in ten days*, 11 May 2025; Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (May 13-20, 2025)*, 22 May 2025.

³²⁶ Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (May 13-20, 2025)*, 22 May 2025.

³²⁷ X.com, Gregory Waters, 29 March 2025, [url](#); Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 21*, 12 May 2025.

³²⁸ Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 20*, 30 April 2025; Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 22-29, 2025)*, 1 May 2025; SOHR, *Amid absence of accountability. 49 people executed in different areas across Syria in ten days*, 11 May 2025; Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 21*, 12 May 2025; Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 22*, 15 May 2025; confidential source, May 2025.

³²⁹ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

³³⁰ FT, *Can Syria's new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025; The Guardian, *'The streets are empty, no one dares go outside': Syria's Alawites terrorised by revenge killings*, 15 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

³³¹ Foreign Affairs, *Syria's uncertain new order*, 11 April 2025; ICG, *What lies in store for Syria as a new government takes power?*, 25 April 2025; UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

³³² The Century Foundation, *Damascus dispatch: Fear and hope in a divided Syria*, 17 March 2025; Le Monde, *Syria's infernal cycle of revenge: 'I don't trust men from my own community'*, 18 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

³³³ FT, *Can Syria's new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025; The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

³³⁴ The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025; Chatham House, *Independent Thinking: Will Syria's new leader rescue or destroy the country?*, 14 March 2025; The Century Foundation, *Damascus dispatch: Fear and hope in a divided Syria*, 17 March 2025; Mercy Corps, *Fractured Stability: Communal Tensions, Political Strain, and Emerging Spoilers in Syria*, May 2025; p. 14; Carnegie, *Syria's misunderstood minority question*, 7 May 2025; Syria Direct, *Extrajudicial killings of Alawites plague Homs city*, 9 May 2025; The Washington Post, *The fall of Assad's informant state leaves Syria riven by betrayals*, 19 May 2025.

³³⁵ The Guardian, *'They killed him in cold blood': the cycle of revenge in north-west Syria*, 15 March 2025.

³³⁶ For more information on the immediate and intergenerational impact of the 1982 Hama massacre on Syrian society, see, for example: AP News, *Why the rebel capture of Syria's Hama, a city with a dark history, matters*, 6 December 2024; The Washington Post, *In Hama, survivors of the Assad family's first massacre can finally speak*, 26 December 2025; MEE, *Violence in Syria may have altered survivor genomes for generations, study suggests*, 7 March 2025.

felt that these should be addressed.³³⁷ In some cases, such sentiments led Sunni Syrians to support – or at least remain indifferent to – violence against their Alawite compatriots.³³⁸

Within this unstable context, widespread disinformation and hate speech on social media contributed to fear and tensions. In certain cases, this fuelled sectarian (or other) violence.³³⁹ This had very clearly been the case prior to and during the escalation of violence in Tartous and Latakia in early March 2025³⁴⁰ (see 3.3.5.2), as well as the escalation of violence in the Druze-inhabited suburbs of Damascus, Jaramana and Ashrafiyet Sahnaya in late April 2025 (see 3.3.2.8).³⁴¹ In some cases, disinformation also played a very local role in the escalation of violence, for example between families or tribal groups.³⁴²

For many civilians, the security situation was exacerbated by a severe shortage of electricity, leaving streets and sometimes entire neighbourhoods – from Latakia and Tartous³⁴³ to Homs³⁴⁴ and Suweida³⁴⁵ – in darkness at night.³⁴⁶ Depending on the local situation, sectarian tensions, crime or other threats meant that many civilians no longer dared to go outside after sunset, given the presence of various armed actors.³⁴⁷ In practice, there was a self-imposed curfew.³⁴⁸

Finally, sources expressed concern about further fragmentation and violence in Syria resulting from the hopeless economic situation in which the vast majority of Syrians found themselves (see 5.5.1 and 5.5.2). According to some of these sources, it was only a matter of time before widespread economic despair would fuel violence, partly due to the lack of effective state security institutions.³⁴⁹ Syrians across the country suffered from the economic situation, and there was little prospect of immediate relief, even after the May 2025 announcements by the US and the EU that sanctions would be lifted.³⁵⁰ Some sources warned that economic despair

³³⁷ Atlantic Council, EIP & MEI, *Reimagining Syria: A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad*, 13 March 2025.

³³⁸ The National, 'Are you Alawite?': Killings in Syrian village of Arza raise fears of endless sectarian violence, 14 March 2025; X.com, Jihad Yazigi, 21 March 2025, [url](#); Daraj, *The collective psychology of genocide: Syria as a case study*, 22 April 2025; L'Orient Today, Mira, *the forcibly or consensually married student, a reflection of a torn Syrian society*, 10 May 2025.

³³⁹ Syria Revisited, *An Alawite voice from Homs city*, 12 February 2025; UN OHCHR, *Syria: Distressing scale of violence in coastal areas*, 11 March 2025; UN OHCHR, *UN Syria Commission: Fresh clashes and Israeli intervention threaten fragile peace*, 2 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

³⁴⁰ UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 March 2025.

³⁴¹ The New York Times, *Clashes erupt in Damascus outskirts, killing 9*, 29 April 2025; FT, *Sectarian clashes in Syria raise questions about al-Sharaa's rule*, 30 April 2025; Al Majalla, *Syria's sectarian violence is a ticking time bomb*, 3 May 2025.

³⁴² Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

³⁴³ Confidential source, February 2025.

³⁴⁴ Syria Revisited, *An Alawite voice from Homs city*, 12 February 2025; FT, *Can Syria's new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Sectarian violence simmers in Homs*, 10 March 2025; The New York Times, *As people are abducted on unpatrolled streets, Syrians demand better protection*, 10 March 2025.

³⁴⁵ Confidential source, March 2025.

³⁴⁶ The New York Times, *As people are abducted on unpatrolled streets, Syrians demand better protection*, 10 March 2025; AP News, *Syrians left in the dark as the interim government struggles to restore electricity*, 28 March 2025; The Irish Times, *'We are nice people, but poor': After Assad's fall, economic problems are Syrians' biggest concern*, 20 April 2025.

³⁴⁷ FT, *Can Syria's new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025; The New York Times, *As people are abducted on unpatrolled streets, Syrians demand better protection*, 10 March 2025; *Beyond Return: Ensuring Sustainable Recovery & (Re)-Integration in Syria*, May 2025, p. 13; X.com, Zaina Erhaim, 7 May 2025, [url](#); confidential source, March 2025.

³⁴⁸ FT, *Can Syria's new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025; NRC, *Beyond Return: Ensuring Sustainable Recovery & (Re)-Integration in Syria*, 15 May 2025, p. 13.

³⁴⁹ ECFR, *The road ahead: Six ways Europeans can urgently support a stable Syria*, 6 March 2025; UN HRC, *Statement by Paulo Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic at the 58th Session of the UN Human Rights Council*, 18 March 2025; Al Jumhuriya, *Europe's tightrope, The EU can do more to help Syria's transition – and faster*, 19 March 2025; Reuters, *'There is no blank check': Syrian leader told to rein in jihadis*, 26 March 2025; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

³⁵⁰ ICG, *A glimmer of peace in Syria's North East*, 28 March 2025; ICG, *What next for Syria after Trump lifts sanctions?*, 15 May 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

across the country provided fertile ground for groups seeking to undermine or overthrow the new political order.³⁵¹

For a statistical overview of recorded violent incidents and civilian casualties per province, see Appendices 10.6 and 10.7.

3.2 Israeli military activities

3.2.1 Ground operations and air strikes

After the fall of the Assad regime, the Israeli army occupied territory in south-western Syria and regularly carried out air strikes on Syrian military targets in various parts of the country.³⁵²

In late February 2025, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned the Syrian interim government not to deploy its forces south of the capital city of Damascus, stating that he would 'not tolerate any threat to the Druze community in southern Syria'. Israel demanded the 'complete demilitarisation' of the southern provinces of Quneitra, Daraa and Suweida.³⁵³ Israeli Defence minister Israel Katz said that the army had been instructed to 'create a sterile defence zone, free of weapons and terrorist threats in southern Syria'.³⁵⁴

Immediately after the fall of Assad, Israeli ground forces crossed the demilitarised buffer zone along the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights – thereby violating the 1974 ceasefire, according to UN officials³⁵⁵ – to take up strategic positions on Syrian territory, including Mount Hermon.³⁵⁶ According to one source, the Israeli army could see both Damascus and the Lebanese Beqaa Valley from the Syrian peaks of the mountain.³⁵⁷ Senior Israeli officials indicated that the army would remain there indefinitely.³⁵⁸

Between 8 and 17 December 2024, the Israeli Air Force carried out large-scale bombings across western Syria, with sources reporting between 350 and 600 air strikes on military infrastructure, weapons and supplies belonging to the Syrian navy and air force.³⁵⁹ Many air strikes targeted locations in the provinces of Latakia and Tartous. On 16 December 2024, a suspected Israeli attack on an arms depot near the city of Tartous caused a huge explosion, which was reportedly registered locally as a magnitude 3 earthquake.³⁶⁰

³⁵¹ Al Jumhuriya, *Europe's tightrope, The EU can do more to help Syria's transition – and faster*, 19 March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

³⁵² Syria Direct, *Israel in Syria: 'Permanent' fortifications and attempts to win over residents*, 26 February 2025; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 6; ICG, *How Israel's overreach in Syria may backfire*, 17 March 2025; AP, *Israeli military strikes near Syria's presidential palace after warning over sectarian attacks*, 2 May 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

³⁵³ AP News, *Netanyahu says Israel won't allow Syrian forces 'south of Damascus'*; 24 February 2025; WSJ, *Israel sees growing threat in Islamists trying to unify Syria*, 4 March 2025; Arab News, *Why Syrian Druze are placing faith in Damascus and not Israel for security*, 12 March 2025; The Jordan Times, *Syrian Druze plan first Israel pilgrimage: source close to delegation*, 13 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Explainer: Why is Israel pushing for ties with Syrian minority groups?*, 21 March 2025; Trouw, *Israël verdeelt Syrische druzen: 'Ze proberen ons los te weken van de rest'*, 27 March 2025; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.

³⁵⁴ The National, *Why is Israel still bombing Syria?*, 30 March 2025.

³⁵⁵ AP News, *Israeli strikes in southwestern Syria kill 6 people as troops clash with residents*, 25 March 2025; UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 March 2025.

³⁵⁶ Syria Direct, *Israel in Syria: 'Permanent' fortifications and attempts to win over residents*, 26 February 2025; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 6; ICG, *How Israel's overreach in Syria may backfire*, 17 March 2025.

³⁵⁷ ICG, *How Israel's overreach in Syria may backfire*, 17 March 2025.

³⁵⁸ The Times of Israel, *Atop Mt. Hermon, Katz says Syrian leader will see indefinite IDF deployment*, 11 March 2025.

³⁵⁹ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 6; Foreign Policy, *Israel is escalating its war in Syria*, 27 March 2025; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.

³⁶⁰ The National, *Israeli strike on Syrian weapons depot shows up on earthquake charts*, 16 December 2024; The National, *Why is Israel still bombing Syria?*, 30 March 2025.

After December 2024, the Israeli army continued ground operations and air strikes.³⁶¹ Between mid-February and late March 2025, the army purportedly carried out at least 70 ground raids in south-western Syria and at least 31 air strikes (in the south-west, near Damascus, Homs and in the coastal provinces).³⁶² According to one source, Israeli patrols and raids on Syrian territory extended at least 12 kilometres beyond the buffer zone occupied by Israel in late March 2025.³⁶³

Between late 2024 and March 2025, Israeli forces had established at least nine additional military posts on Syrian territory.³⁶⁴ According to multiple sources, the military infrastructure that the troops built there indicated a permanent presence.³⁶⁵ The Israeli army reinforced the positions and built roads there.³⁶⁶ On 16 April 2025, the Israeli Defence Minister declared that Israeli troops would remain indefinitely in the recently conquered 'security zone' in Syria – as well as in Gaza and Lebanon.³⁶⁷

In early March 2025, Israel threatened military intervention to defend the Druze in Jaramana, near Damascus.³⁶⁸ The threat followed tensions in the city between the interim administration's security forces and local armed Druze. These tensions escalated when a local militia in Jaramana killed a member of the security forces, after which the authorities launched a large-scale security operation (see 3.3.2.8).³⁶⁹

On 25 March 2025, at least six people were killed in the village of Koya in the province of Daraa during a confrontation between Israeli troops and residents. Israeli troops had reportedly used tank fire and a drone strike against a group of armed residents who were resisting them.³⁷⁰

On 2 May 2025, four people had reportedly been killed in a drone strike on a farm west of Suweida, which sources attributed to the Israeli army. The four men had allegedly fired at the drone, after which the drone returned fire and killed them.³⁷¹

3.2.2 Consequences for civilians

In addition to fatalities, Israeli military incursions into south-western Syria caused local displacement (see 4.1), in addition to having further consequences for the local population.³⁷² Israeli troops set up checkpoints, conducted patrols, carried out raids

³⁶¹ Foreign Policy, *Israel is escalating its war in Syria*, 27 March 2025; AP News, *Israeli military strikes near Syria's presidential palace after warning over sectarian attacks*, 2 May 2025; confidential source, March 2025

³⁶² UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 March 2025; Foreign Policy, *Israel is escalating its war in Syria*, 27 March 2025.

³⁶³ Foreign Policy, *Israel is escalating its war in Syria*, 27 March 2025.

³⁶⁴ Syria Direct, *Israel in Syria: 'Permanent' fortifications and attempts to win over residents*, 26 February 2025; ICG, *How Israel's overreach in Syria may backfire*, 17 March 2025.

³⁶⁵ UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 March 2025; Foreign Policy, *Israel is escalating its war in Syria*, 27 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

³⁶⁶ Syria Direct, *Israel in Syria: 'Permanent' fortifications and attempts to win over residents*, 26 February 2025.

³⁶⁷ AP News, *Israeli defense minister says troops will remain in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria indefinitely*, 16 April 2025.

³⁶⁸ AP News, *Israel's military is told to prepare to defend a Druze community outside Syria's capital*, 1 March 2025; The New Arab, *Israel accused of targeting Syria under pretext of 'protecting Druze' in Jaramana*, 2 March 2025; Al Jazeera, *Syrian forces deployed in Jaramana to end unrest*, 3 March 2025; MEE, *Jaramana: The Damascus suburb targeted by Israel*, 4 March 2025; The Syrian Observer, *Druze spiritual leader rejects separatism as Israeli flag burns in Suweida*, 5 March 2025.

³⁶⁹ Foreign Policy, *Israel is escalating its war in Syria*, 27 March 2025.

³⁷⁰ AP News, *Israeli strikes in southwestern Syria kill 6 people as troops clash with residents*, 25 March 2025; Reuters, *Israel kills six in southern Syria, Syrian ministry says*, 25 March 2025; Foreign Policy, *Israel is escalating its war in Syria*, 27 March 2025.

³⁷¹ Enab Baladi, *As-Suwayda: Four killed while attempting to confront Israeli aircraft*, 2 May 2025; The New Arab, *Four Syrian Druze killed in Israeli airstrike on Suweida province*, 2 May 2025.

³⁷² Syria Direct, *Israel in Syria: 'Permanent' fortifications and attempts to win over residents*, 26 February 2025.

and fired on Syrians protesting their presence.³⁷³ There were repeated reports that Israeli troops had briefly detained local men.³⁷⁴

Some farmers and herders in Quneitra and Daraa were cut off from their farmland and fields where they grazed their livestock.³⁷⁵ In addition, multiple sources reported that Israeli troops had destroyed agricultural land, flattened olive trees and damaged houses and roads.³⁷⁶ According to one source, Israeli troops had also laid minefields.³⁷⁷

In addition to using military force to consolidate its presence in south-western Syria, Israel ran a campaign to win the 'hearts and minds' of the local population, according to multiple sources.³⁷⁸ For example, Israeli troops had reportedly offered emergency aid, support for local basic services and employment to villagers in Quneitra.³⁷⁹

3.3 Security situation by region

3.3.1 Syrian-Lebanese border

The Syrian-Lebanese border was unstable after the fall of the Assad regime, and it was the scene of cross-border fighting in February and March 2025.³⁸⁰ This took place primarily in border regions between the city of Qusayr (approximately thirty kilometres south-west of the city of Homs) in Syria and the Hermel region in north-eastern Lebanon.³⁸¹ During the fourteen-year conflict in Syria, these border regions served as a gateway to the country for the Lebanese militia Hezbollah, which had openly participated in the conflict on the side of the regime for the first time in Qusayr in 2013.³⁸² In December 2024, a fragile security situation arose on both sides of the border. After the takeover in Syria, armed factions affiliated with the MOC spread across the nearly 400-kilometre-long Syrian-Lebanese border, where the former Syrian army and Hezbollah had previously been present.³⁸³ With Hezbollah weakened and the regime fallen, the authorities in both countries sought to regain control of their borders and address smuggling.³⁸⁴

³⁷³ New Lines Magazine, *Israel's Syria gambit*, 20 February 2025; Syria Direct, *Israel in Syria: 'Permanent' fortifications and attempts to win over residents*, 26 February 2025; ICG, *How Israel's overreach in Syria may backfire*, 17 March 2025; UN HRC, *Statement by Paulo Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic at the 58th Session of the UN Human Rights Council*, 18 March 2025.

³⁷⁴ Enab Baladi, *Israeli forces arrest civilian, injure another in Quneitra*, 24 January 2025; Enab Baladi, *Israel arrests two Syrians in Quneitra*, 1 February 2025; Syria Direct, *Israel in Syria: 'Permanent' fortifications and attempts to win over residents*, 26 February 2025; SNHR, *Israeli occupation forces conduct three incursions in Quneitra governorate over three days*, 24 March 2025; SNHR, *SNHR condemns Israeli occupation forces' arbitrary detention of three civilians following an incursion into Koya village, W. Daraa*, 29 March 2025; Enab Baladi, *Israel prevents farmers from accessing their lands in Daraa*, 8 April 2025; The New Arab, *Israel steps up Quneitra incursions, abducts man, teenager in Syria*, 10 May 2025; SNHR, *Statement: Condemnation of the detention of the civilian Firas al Mohammad and his child Bashar by Israeli forces during the incursion on the village of Seyda al Hanout in Quneitra suburbs on May 10, 2025*, 12 May 2025.

³⁷⁵ Syria Direct, *Israel in Syria: 'Permanent' fortifications and attempts to win over residents*, 26 February 2025.

³⁷⁶ New Lines Magazine, *Israel's Syria gambit*, 20 February 2025; Syria Direct, *Israel in Syria: 'Permanent' fortifications and attempts to win over residents*, 26 February 2025.

³⁷⁷ Foreign Policy, *Israel is escalating its war in Syria*, 27 March 2025.

³⁷⁸ Syria Direct, *Israel in Syria: 'Permanent' fortifications and attempts to win over residents*, 26 February 2025; Syria in Transition, *Tanks and cash. Israel's hearts and minds campaign in southern Syria*, March 2025; The New Arab, *Israel steps up Quneitra incursions, abducts man, teenager in Syria*, 10 May 2025.

³⁷⁹ Syria Direct, *Israel in Syria: 'Permanent' fortifications and attempts to win over residents*, 26 February 2025.

³⁸⁰ Le Monde, *Fighting between Syria's new army and Lebanese militias rages on border*, 10 February 2025; Carnegie, *Pushing back against Hezbollah*, 12 February 2025; The Guardian, *Border wars: Syria's new authorities grapple with Lebanese smugglers*, 1 April 2025.

³⁸¹ Le Monde, *Fighting between Syria's new army and Lebanese militias rages on border*, 10 February 2025; The Guardian, *Border wars: Syria's new authorities grapple with Lebanese smugglers*, 1 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

³⁸² Le Monde, *Fighting between Syria's new army and Lebanese militias rages on border*, 10 February 2025.

³⁸³ Carnegie, *Pushing back against Hezbollah*, 12 February 2025; The Guardian, *Border wars: Syria's new authorities grapple with Lebanese smugglers*, 1 April 2025.

³⁸⁴ The Guardian, *Border wars: Syria's new authorities grapple with Lebanese smugglers*, 1 April 2025.

The demarcation of borders in these regions has traditionally been weak. Some local communities had been living on both sides of the border for a long time. For example, villages inhabited by Shiite Lebanese were located on the Syrian side of the border.³⁸⁵ The Lebanese army had limited authority on the other side of the border, in the Hermel region.³⁸⁶ Heavily armed Shiite families lived and smuggled here, including the Jaafar and Zaiter clans, some of whom are said to be affiliated with Hezbollah.³⁸⁷ Items smuggled included weapons, drugs, fuel and commercial goods. In Syria, elements of the Assad regime had previously profited from smuggling drugs and other goods, and in Lebanon, Hezbollah depended on cross-border smuggling routes to receive weapons from Iran.³⁸⁸

The Syrian interim authorities attempted to consolidate their authority along the border and combat the remaining influence of Hezbollah in the Qusayr countryside.³⁸⁹ Attempts to close the porous border disrupted decades of smuggling between Syria and Lebanon and led to tensions between groups in the border villages and the new Syrian authorities. These local tensions subsequently escalated into deadly, cross-border incidents of violence and tensions between the two countries.³⁹⁰

From early January 2025 onwards, skirmishes occasionally took place between troops affiliated with the Syrian interim government and smugglers or, occasionally, the Lebanese army.³⁹¹ In early February 2025, heavier fighting broke out on the border between Qusayr and the Hermel region.³⁹² These incidents had purportedly started with security operations and various incidents in villages on the Syrian side of the border and culminated in cross-border artillery and rocket fire.³⁹³

In March 2025, the most intense fighting since the fall of the Assad regime broke out in these regions, killing several people and injuring dozens on both sides of the border. On 16 March 2025, three Syrian soldiers were killed on Lebanese territory, prompting Syrian troops to fire on the Lebanese town of Qasr and surrounding villages with mortars and other weapons. Clans and smuggling gangs in the villages fired back, and the Lebanese army also responded with cross-border strikes.³⁹⁴ On 17 March, four Syrian journalists embedded with Syrian troops were slightly injured after an artillery shell from the Lebanese side of the border hit their position. The Lebanese authorities further reported that 7 Lebanese civilians were killed, and 52 others were injured.³⁹⁵

The Syrian interim government accused Hezbollah of kidnapping the three Syrian soldiers on Syrian territory and killing them on Lebanese soil. The Lebanese

³⁸⁵ L'Orient Today, *What we know about the border clashes between Lebanese 'clans' and Syrian security forces*, 8 February 2025; Carnegie, *Pushing back against Hezbollah*, 12 February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

³⁸⁶ Carnegie, *Pushing back against Hezbollah*, 12 February 2025; The Guardian, *Border wars: Syria's new authorities grapple with Lebanese smugglers*, 1 April 2025.

³⁸⁷ L'Orient Today, *What we know about the border clashes between Lebanese 'clans' and Syrian security forces*, 8 February 2025; Le Monde, *Fighting between Syria's new army and Lebanese militias rages on border*, 10 February 2025; The Guardian, *Border wars: Syria's new authorities grapple with Lebanese smugglers*, 1 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

³⁸⁸ The Guardian, *Border wars: Syria's new authorities grapple with Lebanese smugglers*, 1 April 2025.

³⁸⁹ Le Monde, *Fighting between Syria's new army and Lebanese militias rages on border*, 10 February 2025.

³⁹⁰ The Guardian, *Border wars: Syria's new authorities grapple with Lebanese smugglers*, 1 April 2025.

³⁹¹ L'Orient Today, *What we know about the border clashes between Lebanese 'clans' and Syrian security forces*, 8 February 2025.

³⁹² Carnegie, *Pushing back against Hezbollah*, 12 February 2025.

³⁹³ L'Orient Today, *What we know about the border clashes between Lebanese 'clans' and Syrian security forces*, 8 February 2025.

³⁹⁴ AP News, *Lebanon and Syria agree to ceasefire after 2 days of border clashes, Syrian defense ministry says*, 17 March 2025; AP News, *Lebanon and Syria sign agreement on border demarcation and easing tensions*, 28 March 2025; The Guardian, *Border wars: Syria's new authorities grapple with Lebanese smugglers*, 1 April 2025.

³⁹⁵ AP News, *Lebanon and Syria agree to ceasefire after 2 days of border clashes, Syrian defense ministry says*, 17 March 2025; AP News, *Lebanon and Syria sign agreement on border demarcation and easing tensions*, 28 March 2025; The Guardian, *Border wars: Syria's new authorities grapple with Lebanese smugglers*, 1 April 2025.

government stated that the three people who were killed had been smugglers.³⁹⁶ Hezbollah denied involvement. The group reportedly announced that four of its fighters had been killed in the fighting. However, the militia purportedly did not do any fighting; the fighters were alleged to have participated in the fighting as local residents (many people in the area were members of Hezbollah).³⁹⁷

On 17 March 2025, Lebanese and Syrian defence officials reached an agreement on a ceasefire to end two days of fighting along the border.³⁹⁸ On 28 March 2025, Lebanon and Syria subsequently signed an agreement to discuss border demarcation and to improve mutual security coordination along the tense border.³⁹⁹ The situation at the border remained fragile after the ceasefire agreement.⁴⁰⁰

3.3.2

Damascus

After the power shift, Damascus was relatively safe compared to the rest of the country.⁴⁰¹ According to various sources, however, the security situation was fragile here as well.⁴⁰² The capital and its suburbs (which fall under the province of Rural Damascus but actually constitute the urban fringe of Damascus) are perhaps the most diverse and demographically complex region in all of Syria.⁴⁰³ On 8 December 2024, it was taken without bloodshed by the armed opposition against Assad.⁴⁰⁴ After the power shift, the HTS-led interim authorities managed to gain some control over the security situation, despite a severe shortage of personnel.⁴⁰⁵

Just outside the centre of Damascus, several violent incidents took place, including sectarian violence and Israeli air strikes.⁴⁰⁶

In Damascus and surrounding areas, many of the various security challenges faced by the interim administration – and, later, by the transitional government – in the rest of its area of control were also present, including social tensions, a partial power vacuum, crime, sectarian violence, the threat of attacks by armed remnants of the former regime and terrorist attacks by ISIS cells, as well as Israeli attacks and military threats. These challenges are described briefly below within the context of the capital and its suburbs.

3.3.2.1

Social tensions

Damascus and surrounding areas in Rural Damascus encompass virtually all socio-economic groups in the country, as well as the tensions between these groups. In the days immediately following the power shift, amid the general euphoria over the fall of the regime there was also uncertainty about the future and fear among part of the population of Damascus. This was partly due to the influx of armed groups from outside the city.⁴⁰⁷ In the weeks that followed, the presence of armed 'outsiders' – both religiously conservative Syrians from rural areas in Idlib and

³⁹⁶ AP News, *Lebanon and Syria sign agreement on border demarcation and easing tensions*, 28 March 2025.

³⁹⁷ Atlantic Council, *Dispatch from Bekaa: Inside the sectarian skirmishes on the Syria-Lebanon border*, 25 March 2025; The Guardian, *Border wars: Syria's new authorities grapple with Lebanese smugglers*, 1 April 2025.

³⁹⁸ AP News, *Lebanon and Syria agree to ceasefire after 2 days of border clashes, Syrian defense ministry says*, 17 March 2025.

³⁹⁹ AP News, *Lebanon and Syria sign agreement on border demarcation and easing tensions*, 28 March 2025.

⁴⁰⁰ The National, *Eight wounded in drone strike on Lebanon-Syria border*, 25 April 2025; The National, *'They attacked from all sides': How Lebanon's Bekaa valley became conflict flashpoint with Syria*, 7 May 2025.

⁴⁰¹ ICG, *Promoting a stable, peaceful transition in Syria*, 30 January 2025; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁴⁰² Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁴⁰³ Confidential source, February 2023.

⁴⁰⁴ BBC News, *Rebels seize Damascus as Assad flees Syrian capital*, 8 December 2024.

⁴⁰⁵ ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025, p. 4; Le Monde, *In Damascus, volunteers protect Christian neighborhoods*, 11 April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁴⁰⁶ Reuters, *Israel conducts airstrike on edge of Syrian capital, three reported hurt*, 13 March 2025; Reuters, *Exclusive: Syria's sectarian violence reached capital, terrorizing Alawites, residents say*, 27 March 2025.

⁴⁰⁷ Confidential source, March 2025.

foreign fighters affiliated with HTS⁴⁰⁸ – continued to provoke mistrust and resentment among the Damascene population,⁴⁰⁹ according to various sources.

3.3.2.2 Power vacuum

After the power shift, there was even a partial power vacuum in Damascus – the new political centre of gravity of the interim administration, which had largely come over from Idlib – due to a lack of capacity on the part of the security institutions of the new authorities.⁴¹⁰ The general security forces that were being set up and the police stations faced severe staff shortages (see 2.3.3).⁴¹¹ Some civilians therefore asked the police for permission to set up neighbourhood guards – a proposal to which the authorities would generally have been sympathetic.⁴¹² According to one source, the authorities in Damascus even distributed AK-47 rifles to neighbourhood guards to prevent looting and theft.⁴¹³ The security of Christian neighbourhoods was partly outsourced to a neighbourhood guard of lightly armed volunteers set up by the local community.⁴¹⁴ For most of the reporting period, the traffic police were completely absent from the streets of the capital.⁴¹⁵

As the International Crisis Group wrote in late March 2025 – and as observed in Damascus during the fact-finding mission for this COI Report – control of the security situation was exercised without any excessive show of force. For example, the main road from the Lebanese border to Damascus had only one checkpoint, at the entrance to the city, where the on-site security personnel waved traffic through.⁴¹⁶ According to another source, in addition to having positive consequences for freedom of movement for civilians (see Chapter 7), the absence of checkpoints was also indicative of the lack of control on the part of the authorities. The source reported that the limited presence of security forces on the streets impeded the possibility of a quick response to security incidents.⁴¹⁷ Another problem was that large quantities of weapons were also in circulation in Damascus.⁴¹⁸

3.3.2.3 Crime

According to various sources, crime increased in Damascus in the first few months after the power shift.⁴¹⁹ Around the end of February 2025, multiple sources reported a deterioration in the security situation in the country, which was also noticeable in Damascus, particularly with regard to crime.⁴²⁰ Unknown parties committed armed robberies and kidnappings for ransom (see 3.5).⁴²¹ This also occurred in the affluent neighbourhoods of the city and on major roads.⁴²² For example, a man was abducted on the main road to Damascus airport on 15 April 2025. According to

⁴⁰⁸ Foreign Policy, *What are Uyghurs doing in Syria?*, 4 April 2025.

⁴⁰⁹ X.com, Peter Harling, 11 February 2025, [url](#); Syria in Transition, *Damascus re-born*, April 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁴¹⁰ Reuters, *Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police*, 23 January 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁴¹¹ France 24, *Syria's new HTS-led regime reinforces police force with the help of its fighters*, 19 January 2025; Reuters, *Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police*, 23 January 2025; Le Monde, *In Damascus, volunteers protect Christian neighborhoods*, 11 April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁴¹² Reuters, *Syria's new leaders turn to Islamic law in effort to rebuild Assad's police*, 23 January 2025; Le Monde, *In Damascus, volunteers protect Christian neighborhoods*, 11 April 2025.

⁴¹³ FT, *Can Syria's new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025.

⁴¹⁴ Le Monde, *In Damascus, volunteers protect Christian neighborhoods*, 11 April 2025.

⁴¹⁵ AFP, *When Damascus traffic cops fled, volunteers stepped in*, 21 December 2025; Enab Baladi, *Damascus: What plans does Interior Ministry have for traffic organization?*, 28 March 2025.

⁴¹⁶ ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025, p. 4.

⁴¹⁷ Confidential source, April 2025.

⁴¹⁸ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁴¹⁹ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁴²⁰ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁴²¹ SNHR, *Doctor Qusai al-Zeer abducted by unidentified gunmen in Damascus city, January 19, 2025*, 22 January 2025; MEE, *Jaramana: The Damascus suburb targeted by Israel*, 4 March 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 8-15, 2025*, 15 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁴²² Syria Weekly, *April 8-15, 2025*, 15 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

various sources, he had been taken by his abductors to the province of Suweida. He was freed on 17 April during a targeted operation by the general security forces.⁴²³ According to various sources, employees of NGOs in Damascus had also been victims of attacks.⁴²⁴

3.3.2.4 Sectarian violence

In early March 2025, sectarian violence took place in the southern suburbs of Damascus. An escalation of sectarian and revenge-driven violence against Alawites in the coastal region (see 3.3.5.2) had also led to kidnappings and murders in Damascus, according to the press agency Reuters. As reported by Reuters, more than ten witnesses confirmed that masked men had stormed the homes of Alawite families in the Al Qadam neighbourhood on the evening of 6 March 2025 and had arrested at least 25 unarmed men. According to family members and neighbours interviewed by the news agency, at least eight of them were later declared dead. They said they had seen photographs of the bodies or found them dead in the neighbourhood. Nothing more was heard from the other men. These events had led some Alawite residents to leave Al Qadam or plan to do so, out of fear of renewed violence against Alawites. According to Reuters, others said that they no longer went to work or that they travelled only during the day to avoid possible arrest.⁴²⁵

According to several witnesses, the armed men who came to Al Qadam identified themselves as members of the GSS. The details about the alleged violent incidents, which were released by Reuters on 27 March 2025, had not been previously disclosed.⁴²⁶

3.3.2.5 Security operations

Armed remnants of the Assad regime's security apparatus were active in Damascus.⁴²⁷ On several occasions, including on 10 March and 9 April 2025, armed men carried out attacks on GSS troops in Damascus, resulting in several casualties.⁴²⁸ According to one source, light weapons and hand grenades were typically used in these types of attacks.⁴²⁹ The authorities continued to carry out security operations throughout the city, searching for armed remnants of the former regime and confiscating weapons.⁴³⁰ According to one source, such security operations and pursuit of suspects often resulted in gun battles involving light weapons.⁴³¹ In late March 2025, the GSS carried out a security operation in Old Damascus, arresting alleged members of the former regime's security apparatus.⁴³² The authorities also announced in late March 2025 that they had made arrests in the vicinity of Sayyida Zainab, in southern Damascus, in a crackdown targeting armed cells linked to Hezbollah.⁴³³

3.3.2.6 Threat of terror

In Damascus, potential attacks by ISIS posed a threat during the reporting period. According to various sources, after the power shift, the organisation took advantage

⁴²³ Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 19*, 21 April 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 15-22, 2025*, 22 April 2025.

⁴²⁴ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁴²⁵ Reuters, *Exclusive: Syria's sectarian violence reached capital, terrorizing Alawites, residents say*, 27 March 2025.

⁴²⁶ Reuters, *Exclusive: Syria's sectarian violence reached capital, terrorizing Alawites, residents say*, 27 March 2025.

⁴²⁷ Al Jazeera, *Syrian forces repelled an overnight attack on Damascus checkpoint, two Assad loyalists arrested*, 10 March 2025, [url](#); The New York Times, *Skirmish in Syrian capital raises fears of expanding violence*, 10 March 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 8-15, 2025*, 15 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁴²⁸ Al Jazeera, *Syrian forces repelled an overnight attack on Damascus checkpoint, two Assad loyalists arrested*, 10 March 2025, [url](#); The New York Times, *Skirmish in Syrian capital raises fears of expanding violence*, 10 March 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 8-15, 2025*, 15 April 2025.

⁴²⁹ Confidential source, March 2025.

⁴³⁰ Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 21*, 12 May 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁴³¹ Confidential source, March 2025.

⁴³² Enab Baladi, *Arrests and explosive seizures in security campaign in old Damascus*, 27 March 2025.

⁴³³ The New Arab, *Masked assailants kill four, injure two in northwestern Syria on first day of Eid al-Fitr*, 31 March 2025.

of the partial power vacuum outside the capital to organise itself. The limited control exercised by the authorities also increased the risk of ISIS members entering the cities.⁴³⁴ One source described the situation in Damascus as highly vulnerable to organised or lone wolf terrorist attacks, due to limited and inadequate security at strategic government (or other) buildings.⁴³⁵ According to the authorities, on 11 January 2025, ISIS had attempted to carry out an attack on the Sayyida Zainab Shiite shrine in Damascus.⁴³⁶ In late March 2025, warnings of an increased threat of terror led to the cancellation or postponement of several foreign diplomatic and high-level visits to Damascus as a precautionary measure.⁴³⁷

3.3.2.7 Israeli air strikes

During the current reporting period, Israel carried out multiple air strikes on targets in and near Damascus.⁴³⁸ There was a decrease in air strikes in Damascus compared to the previous reporting period, when the Israeli army regularly carried out air strikes on targets in the Mezzeh and Kafr Sousah neighbourhoods.⁴³⁹

On 13 March 2025, Israel carried out an air strike on a Palestinian Islamic Jihad target in the Mashrou' Dummar neighbourhood, in the north-west of the city.⁴⁴⁰ According to the Palestinian armed group, several people were killed and injured. As reported by SNHR, four civilians were injured in this attack, including two women.⁴⁴¹ On 2 April 2025, the Israeli army carried out an air strike in the vicinity of a military research centre in the Barzeh district.⁴⁴²

During the late April 2025 escalation of violence in the predominantly Druze suburbs of Jaramana and Ashrafiyet Sahnaya, Israel carried out several air strikes. Some of these attacks were directed against troops of the transitional government, while others served as a 'warning' to the authorities.⁴⁴³ For example, on 29 April, the Israeli army carried out an attack near Sahnaya on an 'extremist group' that was allegedly targeting the Druze population, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu stated.⁴⁴⁴ In March 2025, his government had stated that it was prepared to 'defend' the Druze in Syria militarily, if necessary (see 3.2).⁴⁴⁵

According to Syrian authorities, Israeli air strikes targeting GSS units in Sahnaya killed one member of the security forces and one civilian.⁴⁴⁶ On 2 May 2025, the Israeli army subsequently carried out a warning strike near the presidential palace in Damascus.⁴⁴⁷ In a statement, Netanyahu and Defence minister Katz said that the

⁴³⁴ ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025, p. 13; confidential source, April 2025.

⁴³⁵ Confidential source, February 2025.

⁴³⁶ AP News, *Syrian intelligence agency says it thwarted a planned Islamic State attack on a Shiite shrine*, 11 March 2025; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025, p. 13.

⁴³⁷ Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, *The current security situation in Syria*, 27 March 2025; AFP, *Paris and Washington warn of increased risk of attacks in Syria*, 29 March 2025.

⁴³⁸ SNHR, *Four civilians, including two women, injured in an Israeli occupation airstrike on Mashrou Dummar in Damascus, March 13, 2025*, 15 March 2025; Al Jazeera, *Israel launches air attacks on Syria's Damascus and Hama*, 2 April 2025.

⁴³⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Syria*, December 2024, p. 42.

⁴⁴⁰ Le Monde, *In Lebanon and Syria, Israel continues its war of attrition*, 18 March 2025.

⁴⁴¹ SNHR, *Four civilians, including two women, injured in an Israeli occupation airstrike on Mashrou Dummar in Damascus, March 13, 2025*, 15 March 2025.

⁴⁴² Al Jazeera, *Israel launches air attacks on Syria's Damascus and Hama*, 2 April 2025; The Times of Israel, *IDF strikes hit 'remaining military capacities' at Syrian airbases*, 3 April 2025.

⁴⁴³ ICG, *Fighting in Damascus exposes Syria's sectarian tensions*, 2 May 2025; Le Monde, *Israel strikes in Syria amid sectarian clashes*, 2 May 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 29-May 6, 2025*, 6 May 2025.

⁴⁴⁴ Le Monde, *Israel strikes in Syria amid sectarian clashes*, 2 May 2025.

⁴⁴⁵ Reuters, *After violence in Syria, Israel says it is prepared to defend Syria's Druze*, 10 March 2025.

⁴⁴⁶ BBC News, *Israel says it struck gunmen attacking Druze in Syria after deadly clashes*, 30 April 2025; The Guardian, *Deadly Syria clashes continue for second day outside Damascus*, 30 April 2025; AP News, *Israeli military strikes near Syria's presidential palace after warning over sectarian attacks*, 2 May 2025.

⁴⁴⁷ AP News, *Israeli military strikes near Syria's presidential palace after warning over sectarian attacks*, 2 May 2025.

attack was a 'clear message' to Syrian leaders: 'We will not allow forces to be sent south of Damascus or any threat to the Druze community'.⁴⁴⁸

3.3.2.8 Fighting in the suburbs

In the predominantly Druze suburb of Jaramana, several brief episodes of violence took place during the reporting period, with local Druze armed groups taking up arms against GSS troops and other forces.⁴⁴⁹ In late February and early March 2025, tensions ran high between the central authorities and local Druze fighters. A series of skirmishes between these factions and the interim administration's security forces culminated in an incident in which a security officer was killed by armed Druze. In response, security forces carried out raids that reportedly led to one civilian death, thereby exacerbating tensions. The Israeli Defence minister then said that the Druze were at risk of an 'extremist Islamist terror regime' and declared that Israel intended to defend them. Shortly thereafter, the central authorities reached an agreement with the local armed factions and representatives of the Druze community, temporarily de-escalating the situation.⁴⁵⁰ It is reported that Druze militias from the province of Suweida had come to Jaramana during the escalation of tensions and that their leaders had played a role in the negotiations.⁴⁵¹

In late April 2025, a new, more drastic escalation of violence occurred in Jaramana and in the predominantly Druze suburb of Ashrafiyet Sahnaya, both located on the southern outskirts of Damascus. The brief violence was intense and complex, involving a variety of armed actors.⁴⁵² Dozens of people were killed in fighting over several days, including Sunni and Druze fighters, security forces of the transitional government, and civilians.⁴⁵³ The Israeli army also carried out several air strikes in the immediate vicinity of Damascus (see 3.2).⁴⁵⁴ These developments led the UN envoy for Syria, Geir O. Pedersen, to make a statement expressing concern about the violence and the possibility that the 'extremely fragile situation' could escalate further.⁴⁵⁵

Sectarian tensions

The escalation of violence took place amid heightened sectarian tensions.⁴⁵⁶ Although deeper grievances and divisions from the war years played a role in the violence,⁴⁵⁷ the immediate cause was an audio recording circulating online in which the Prophet Muhammad was cursed. It was attributed to a religious leader of the Druze. The recording sparked protests among Sunnis in several cities, as well as an increase in anti-Druze hate speech on social media.⁴⁵⁸ Some protests had a

⁴⁴⁸ AP News, *Israeli military strikes near Syria's presidential palace after warning over sectarian attacks*, 2 May 2025; The Times of Israel, *Israel strikes targets near Damascus presidential palace in 'message to Syrian regime'*, 2 May 2025.

⁴⁴⁹ Syria Weekly, *Feb 25-March 4, 2025*, 4 March 2025; Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025.

⁴⁵⁰ Haaretz, *Netanyahu, Katz order Israeli military to prepare to defend Druze city in Syria*, 2 March 2025; ICG, *How Israel's overreach in Syria may backfire*, 17 March 2025.

⁴⁵¹ L'Orient Today, *Jaramana, a reflection of ongoing tensions in southern Syria*, 4 March 2025; Foreign Policy, *Israel is escalating its war in Syria*, 27 March 2025.

⁴⁵² X.com, Charles Lister, 30 April 2025, [url](#); Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025; confidential source, May 2025.

⁴⁵³ The New York Times, *Death toll rises sharply in a wave of sectarian violence in Syria*, 1 May 2025; UN OHCHR, *UN Syria Commission: Fresh clashes and Israeli intervention threaten fragile peace*, 2 May 2025; Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025.

⁴⁵⁴ The New York Times, *Sectarian clashes spread around Syria's capital, drawing in Israel*, 30 April 2025; The Times of Israel, *Israel says it carried out strike to protect Druze in Syria, warns Damascus to ensure their safety*, 30 April 2025; Le Monde, *Israel strikes in Syria amid sectarian clashes*, 2 May 2025.

⁴⁵⁵ UN OSES, *Statement by the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Geir O. Pedersen*, 30 April 2025.

⁴⁵⁶ The New York Times, *Clashes erupt in Damascus outskirts, killing 9*, 29 April 2025; FT, *Sectarian clashes in Syria raise questions about al-Sharaya's rule*, 30 April 2025.

⁴⁵⁷ Etana, *Brief: The Jaramana & Ashrafiyat Sahnaya crisis*, 4 May 2025; Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025; Daraj, *Syria's sectarian fires reignite amid silence of justice*, 12 May 2025.

⁴⁵⁸ Syria Weekly, *April 22-29, 2025*, 29 April 2025; ICG, *Fighting in Damascus exposes Syria's sectarian tensions*, 2 May 2025; The New York Times, *Clashes erupt in Damascus outskirts, killing 9*, 29 April 2025.

sectarian tone, with demonstrators allegedly calling for violence against the Druze.⁴⁵⁹ The Ministry of the Interior examined the audio recording, declared the leader in question innocent and called for calm, but this could not prevent violence from breaking out in the partly Druze suburbs.⁴⁶⁰

Fighting in Jaramana

On 28 April 2025, fierce gun battles broke out in Jaramana, just south-east of Damascus.⁴⁶¹ According to various sources, the violence began when unidentified armed Sunnis from the neighbouring town of Maliha attacked the suburb.⁴⁶² The attackers are said to have used a variety of weapons, including mortar shells.⁴⁶³ According to another account, the violence in Jaramana erupted after Druze fighters killed several members of the security forces.⁴⁶⁴ At least six Druze and seven Sunni fighters were reportedly killed in the fighting.⁴⁶⁵

The fighting in Jaramana came to an end on 29 April 2025, when the authorities and Druze leaders from Jaramana reached a new security agreement. In it, they agreed to take a series of measures, including compensation for the families of victims from Jaramana and prosecution of those responsible for the violence.⁴⁶⁶ In addition, GSS troops created a buffer zone around Jaramana to ensure security.⁴⁶⁷

Fighting in Ashrafiyet Sahnaya

On the same day, however, the violence spread to the partly Druze town of Ashrafiyet Sahnaya, south-west of Damascus. According to various sources, as in Jaramana, the violence began when Sunni fighters from neighbouring towns attacked the suburb.⁴⁶⁸ As reported by the authorities, the fighting had been caused by attacks by unspecified 'criminal groups', in which more than 10 members of the security forces were reportedly killed.⁴⁶⁹ All this culminated in street fighting in Ashrafiyet Sahnaya, with GSS and troops affiliated (at least officially) with the Ministry of Defence-affiliated troops clashing with local Druze fighters.⁴⁷⁰

On 30 April 2025, the authorities and Druze leaders also reached a security agreement in Ashrafiyet Sahnaya, and security forces gained control of the suburb.⁴⁷¹ The agreement provided for the release of captured local fighters, the handover of weapons and the deployment of newly formed local security forces.⁴⁷²

⁴⁵⁹ The New York Times, *Clashes erupt in Damascus outskirts, killing 9*, 29 April 2025; The Syrian Observer, *The view from Damascus – A night of sectarian strife in Jaramana: Deadly clashes, escalating incitement, and a fractured state*, 30 April 2025; Carnegie, *Minority retort in Syria*, 9 May 2025; Carnegie, *Syria's Druze stand alone*, 14 May 2025.

⁴⁶⁰ FT, *Sectarian clashes in Syria raise questions about al-Sharaa's rule*, 30 April 2025; The New York Times, *Sectarian clashes spread around Syria's capital, Drawing in Israel*, 30 April 2025.

⁴⁶¹ AP News, *Israel says it carried out operation against gunmen attacking Druze fighters in Syria*, 30 April 2025; France 24, *Druze fighter among several killed in fresh sectarian clashes near Damascus*, 30 April 2025.

⁴⁶² Al-Monitor, *Syria: 9 killed as clashes erupt in Druze-majority town*, 29 April 2025; France 24, *Deadly clashes in Damascus plunge Syria's Druze minority into uncertainty*, 30 April 2025; Reuters, *Israel says it carried out warning strike in defence of Druze in Syria*, 30 April 2025; The Guardian, *Deadly Syria clashes continue for second day outside Damascus*, 30 April 2025; The Syrian Observer, *The view from Damascus – A night of sectarian strife in Jaramana: Deadly clashes, escalating incitement, and a fractured state*, 30 April 2025; Le Monde, *Israel strikes in Syria amid sectarian clashes*, 2 May 2025; Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 21*, 12 May 2025.

⁴⁶³ ICG, *Fighting in Damascus exposes Syria's sectarian tensions*, 2 May 2025.

⁴⁶⁴ Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 21*, 12 May 2025.

⁴⁶⁵ ICG, *Fighting in Damascus exposes Syria's sectarian tensions*, 2 May 2025.

⁴⁶⁶ Syria Weekly, *April 22-29, 2025*, 29 April 2025; The Guardian, *Deadly Syria clashes continue for second day outside Damascus*, 30 April 2025; Syria Direct, *Escalation and appeals for calm: Is civil peace crumbling in Syria's Druze communities?*, 1 May 2025.

⁴⁶⁷ ICG, *Fighting in Damascus exposes Syria's sectarian tensions*, 2 May 2025.

⁴⁶⁸ ICG, *Fighting in Damascus exposes Syria's sectarian tensions*, 2 May 2025; Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025.

⁴⁶⁹ BBC News, *Israel says it struck gunmen attacking Druze in Syria after deadly clashes*, 30 April 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 29-May 6, 2025*, 6 May 2025.

⁴⁷⁰ The Guardian, *Deadly Syria clashes continue for second day outside Damascus*, 30 April 2025.

⁴⁷¹ BBC News, *Israel says it struck gunmen attacking Druze in Syria after deadly clashes*, 30 April 2025; Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025.

⁴⁷² Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 21*, 12 May 2025; Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 22*, 15 May 2025.

The recapture of Ashrafiyet Sahnaya was accompanied by reports of human rights violations, including several killings of civilians. For example, the mayor of the suburb, Hussam Warwar, and his son were killed by unidentified assailants.⁴⁷³

Actors involved

Various claims emerged about exactly how and by whom the violence in the suburbs had been initiated.⁴⁷⁴ This revealed a common image in which local armed Sunni factions and Druze groups had been involved in the initial violence in both Jaramana and Ashrafiyet Sahnaya.⁴⁷⁵ According to the International Crisis Group, at the start of the fighting, both suburbs had been under the shared control of local Druze armed groups and the security forces of the authorities.⁴⁷⁶ It was not entirely clear from the reports whether the security forces and troops affiliated with the Ministry of Defence were merely attempting to control the violence, or whether – as some eyewitnesses and sources claimed⁴⁷⁷ – they had been at least partly responsible for attacks on the Druze communities.⁴⁷⁸ The authorities reportedly denied any involvement in the attacks on the Druze community and emphasised that the deployment of troops was intended solely to prevent further sectarian attacks.⁴⁷⁹

According to various sources, the local Druze armed groups in Jaramana were not part of the military structures in Suweida (see 3.3.3). Before the power shift, some of their fighters had belonged to the regime's militia networks and were involved in violence against civilians and organised crime at the time.⁴⁸⁰ Following the power shift, these local groups had resisted attempts by the interim authorities to take control of Jaramana.⁴⁸¹ According to one source, Ashrafiyet Sahnaya was also considered by some Syrians to be a community that opposed the new administration.⁴⁸² In addition to the established Druze armed groups in the two suburbs, some Druze residents took up arms in late April, claiming that it was to protect their community.⁴⁸³ A correspondent from *Agence France-Presse* (AFP) reported observing that there appeared to be minors among them.⁴⁸⁴

Finally, during the fighting in Ashrafiyet Sahnaya, the Israeli army carried out several air strikes (see 3.3.2.7).⁴⁸⁵

-
- ⁴⁷³ Enab Baladi, *Assassinations reported in Sahnaya after entry of General Security Service*, 1 May 2025; MEE, *Syria's Druze fearful after deadly attacks on Damascus suburbs*, 1 May 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 29-May 6, 2025*, 6 May 2025; Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 21*, 12 May 2025.
- ⁴⁷⁴ AP News, *Israel says it carried out operation against gunmen attacking Druze fighters in Syria*, 30 April 2025; ICG, *Fighting in Damascus exposes Syria's sectarian tensions*, 2 May 2025; Le Monde, *Israel strikes in Syria amid sectarian clashes*, 2 May 2025; The New York Times, *'We're all in one ship': Druze in Syrian town rocked by violence agree to disarm militias*, 3 May 2025; confidential source, May 2025.
- ⁴⁷⁵ SANA, *Interior Ministry: We will bring in who contributed to inciting chaos and undermining stability*, 29 April 2025; The Syrian Observer, *The view from Damascus – A night of sectarian strife in Jaramana: Deadly clashes, escalating incitement, and a fractured state*, 30 April 2025; New Lines Magazine, *An unwelcome homecoming*, 6 May 2025; The Syria Report, *Tensions in Druze areas highlight challenges of Syrian political transition*, 6 May 2025; Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 21*, 12 May 2025.
- ⁴⁷⁶ ICG, *Fighting in Damascus exposes Syria's sectarian tensions*, 2 May 2025.
- ⁴⁷⁷ AP News, *Israel says it carried out operation against gunmen attacking Druze fighters in Syria*, 30 April 2025; Etana, *Brief: The Jaramana & Ashrafiyat Sahnaya crisis*, 4 May 2025; Daraj, *Syria's sectarian fires reignite amid silence of justice*, 12 May 2025.
- ⁴⁷⁸ Daraj, *Syria's sectarian fires reignite amid silence of justice*, 12 May 2025.
- ⁴⁷⁹ Al Jazeera, *Syria's Druze divided as sectarian tensions linger after violence*, 9 May 2025.
- ⁴⁸⁰ X.com, Gregory Waters, 1 March 2025, [url](#); X.com, Suhail AlGhazi, 29 April 2025, [url](#); Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025.
- ⁴⁸¹ Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025.
- ⁴⁸² Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025.
- ⁴⁸³ AFP, *Syria's Druze take up arms to defend their town against Islamists*, 1 May 2025; MEE, *Syria's Druze fearful after deadly attacks on Damascus suburbs*, 1 May 2025; The New York Times, *Armed Syrians take defense of a besieged Druze city into their own hands*, 1 May 2025.
- ⁴⁸⁴ AFP, *Syria's Druze take up arms to defend their town against Islamists*, 1 May 2025.
- ⁴⁸⁵ BBC News, *Israel says it struck gunmen attacking Druze in Syria after deadly clashes*, 30 April 2025; The Guardian, *Deadly Syria clashes continue for second day outside Damascus*, 30 April 2025.

Consequences for civilians

The escalation of violence in Jaramana and Ashrafiyet Sahnaya had a major impact on the local population.⁴⁸⁶ The intense gun battles forced residents to take shelter indoors.⁴⁸⁷ They also resulted in displacement from the suburbs.⁴⁸⁸ According to OCHA, the violence led to the displacement of approximately 15,000 people.⁴⁸⁹ According to one source, hundreds of families attempted to flee from Jaramana to the province of Suweida. In doing so, they faced the problem that the motorway between Damascus and Suweida was largely closed off due to the fighting.⁴⁹⁰ Local Druze feared that the large-scale sectarian violence in the coastal region, which began in March 2025, would be repeated in their community.⁴⁹¹

The violent clashes in the two suburbs of Damascus further led to increased tensions and violence in the southern province of Suweida (see 3.3.3), where the majority of the population is Druze.⁴⁹²

3.3.3

Southern Syria

Daraa and Suweida were largely outside the control of the central authorities in Damascus (see 1.2.1). Both provinces were characterised by a complex security situation, with many different armed groups,⁴⁹³ large quantities of weapons in circulation⁴⁹⁴ and a high degree of impunity.⁴⁹⁵ In both Daraa and Suweida, local dynamics of violence continued even after the fall of the Assad regime,⁴⁹⁶ including tribal violence between different groups or families.⁴⁹⁷ In Suweida, violence regularly broke out between Druze and Bedouins.⁴⁹⁸

In addition, Israeli military activities (in Quneitra and Daraa) and political interference (with regard to the Druze community; see 6.1.1.5) contributed to an uncertain political and security situation throughout the south.⁴⁹⁹

-
- ⁴⁸⁶ Enab Baladi, *Schools suspend classes in Sahnaya and Jaramana*, 30 April 2025; The National, *'Living in fear': Syria's Druze towns caught in flurry of violence*, 1 May 2025; Al Jazeera, *Syria's Druze divided as sectarian tensions linger after violence*, 9 May 2025.
- ⁴⁸⁷ AFP, *Nine dead, mostly Druze, in clashes near Damascus*, 29 April 2025; Reuters, *Israel says it carried out warning strike in defence of Druze in Syria*, 30 April 2025; The National, *'Living in fear': Syria's Druze towns caught in flurry of violence*, 1 May 2025; L'Orient Today, *'I feel like they've stolen our revolution': After clashes in Syria, anxiety flares*, 2 May 2025.
- ⁴⁸⁸ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #26. Syria situation crisis*, 9 May 2025; Daraj, *Syria's sectarian fires reignite amid silence of justice*, 12 May.
- ⁴⁸⁹ UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 21 May 2025.
- ⁴⁹⁰ X.com, Al-Jumhuriya English, 7 May 2025, [url](#); X.com, Al-Jumhuriya English, 7 May 2025, [url](#); Daraj, *Syria's sectarian fires reignite amid silence of justice*, 12 May.
- ⁴⁹¹ Reuters, *Israel says it carried out warning strike in defence of Druze in Syria*, 30 April 2025; The New York Times, *Armed Syrians take defense of a besieged Druze city into their own hands*, 1 May 2025; L'Orient Today, *'I feel like they've stolen our revolution': After clashes in Syria, anxiety flares*, 2 May 2025.
- ⁴⁹² The Guardian, *Deadly Syria clashes continue for second day outside Damascus*, 30 April 2025; MEE, *Syria's Druze fearful after deadly attacks on Damascus suburbs*, 1 May 2025; The Syria Report, *Tensions in Druze areas highlight challenges of Syrian political transition*, 6 May 2025; Syria Direct, *As tensions run high, will Suwayda's security agreement hold?*, 7 May 2025; Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025; The Washington Post, *As Syria's Druze minority reels from violence, Israel pursues an opening*, 10 May 2025.
- ⁴⁹³ Etana, *Explainer: Political & military dynamics in Suwayda province*, 20 February 2025; Syria Direct, *Why the delay in merging Daraa's factions into a new Syrian army?*, 21 February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.
- ⁴⁹⁴ New Lines Magazine, *Joy and trepidation among Syria's Druze*, 2 January 2025; Syria Direct, *Is Suwayda heading for a showdown with Damascus?*, 15 March 2025; The Century Foundation, *Cross-border shuffle: Refugee movement between Lebanon and Syria after Assad*, 31 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.
- ⁴⁹⁵ Syria Direct, *Is Suwayda heading for a showdown with Damascus?*, 15 March 2025; The New Arab, *Syria: Suwayda protesters demand 'transitional justice' amid kidnappings*, 26 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.
- ⁴⁹⁶ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.
- ⁴⁹⁷ Syria Weekly, *March 11-18, 2025*, 18 March 2025; Syria Weekly, *March 18-25, 2025*, 25 March 2025.
- ⁴⁹⁸ Syria Weekly, *March 18-25, 2025*, 25 March 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 29-May 6, 2025*, 8 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.
- ⁴⁹⁹ Syria Direct, *Is Suwayda heading for a showdown with Damascus?*, 15 March 2025; Etana, *Syria update #23*, 31 March 2025; The New York Times, *These militias refuse to join Syria's new army*, 1 April 2025.

3.3.3.1 Local armed groups

According to one source, there were approximately 220 armed groups in Daraa between 2018 and December 2024, several dozen of which were still active during the reporting period.⁵⁰⁰ According to Etana, an organisation that focuses on reporting and analysing the political and security situation in Syria, there were around 160 armed factions in Suweida, some of which had organised themselves into four different alliances.⁵⁰¹

After the fall of the regime, a new armed group was formed in Suweida – the *Suweida Military Council* – which was hostile towards the central authorities.⁵⁰² The group's leadership reportedly consisted of several former generals from the Assad regime.⁵⁰³ There were rumours that the Suweida Military Council had ties to the SDF,⁵⁰⁴ as well as to Israel.⁵⁰⁵

The integration of the many armed groups in the south under the new Ministry of Defence proved difficult (see also 2.3.1). This concerned both the Sunni groups in Daraa and the Druze militias in Suweida.⁵⁰⁶ Tensions arose due to the political deadlock caused by a failure to agree on the conditions under which local groups would be integrated into the ministry. In Suweida, this contributed to internal divisions among the main military and political factions within the Druze community.⁵⁰⁷ They were divided on whether they should merge with the new authorities. Various leading figures, including the most important religious leader of the Druze, Sheikh⁵⁰⁸ Hikmat al-Hijri, and armed factions in Suweida were opposed to the arrival of HTS-led authorities in the province.⁵⁰⁹ This became apparent through many developments, including on 31 December 2024, when local factions stopped a convoy of the new authorities' security service that was on its way to Suweida.⁵¹⁰

In the east of Daraa province, the Eighth Brigade (Arabic: *Al-Liwaa' al-Thamin*) – a prominent armed group led by Ahmed al-Awdeh – was disbanded in mid-April 2025, under pressure from both local civilians and the authorities.⁵¹¹ The killing of a senior provincial representative of the Ministry of Defence in Busra al-Sham on 10 April 2025 had caused residents of the area controlled by the Brigade to turn against the group.⁵¹² The transitional government dispatched military and security forces to the area.⁵¹³ There were reports of brief clashes between the armed group and government forces.⁵¹⁴ After these skirmishes, several units of the Brigade

⁵⁰⁰ Confidential source, March 2025.

⁵⁰¹ Etana, *Explainer: Political & military dynamics in Suwayda province*, 20 February 2025.

⁵⁰² Syria Direct, *Is Suwayda heading for a showdown with Damascus?*, 15 March 2025.

⁵⁰³ Syria Weekly, *March 11-18, 2025*, 18 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁵⁰⁴ Syria Direct, *Is Suwayda heading for a showdown with Damascus?*, 15 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁵⁰⁵ Syria Weekly, *March 11-18, 2025*, 18 March 2025.

⁵⁰⁶ AP News, *Southern rebels loom large as Syria's new rulers try to form a national army*, 23 January 2025; Syria Direct, *Why the delay in merging Daraa's factions into a new Syrian army?*, 21 February 2025; FT, *Can Syria's new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025; Syria Direct, *Is Suwayda heading for a showdown with Damascus?*, 15 March 2025; Etana, *Explainer: Political & military dynamics in Suwayda province*, 20 February 2025.

⁵⁰⁷ Syria Direct, *Why the delay in merging Daraa's factions into a new Syrian army?*, 21 February 2025; Syria Direct, *Is Suwayda heading for a showdown with Damascus?*, 15 March 2025; The New York Times, *These militias refuse to join Syria's new army*, 1 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁵⁰⁸ Sheikh is a title given to religious leaders, among others.

⁵⁰⁹ Etana, *Explainer: Political & military dynamics in Suwayda province*, 20 February 2025; Syria Direct, *Is Suwayda heading for a showdown with Damascus?*, 15 March 2025.

⁵¹⁰ Enab Baladi, *Factions prevent Military Operations Administration convoy from entering As-Suwayda*, 1 January 2025.

⁵¹¹ Mercy Corps, *Crisis analysis - Syria. Syria monthly report. April 2025*, May 2025, pp. 5, 11-12.

⁵¹² Enab Baladi, *Eighth Brigade in Daraa dissolves itself*, 13 April 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 8-15, 2025*, 15 April 2025; Mercy Corps, *Crisis analysis - Syria. Syria monthly report. April 2025*, May 2025, p. 5.

⁵¹³ L'Orient Today, *The Eighth Brigade: A 'serious start' to dismantling Syria's paramilitary structures*, 15 April 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 8-15, 2025*, 15 April 2025.

⁵¹⁴ The New Arab, *UAE-linked southern Syria militia to be dissolved after Sharaa-MbZ meeting*, 14 April 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 8-15, 2025*, 15 April 2025.

surrendered to troops affiliated with the Ministry of Defence.⁵¹⁵ Following an agreement between the authorities and the group, military and security forces officially took control of Busra al-Sham.⁵¹⁶ On 13 April 2025, the Eighth Brigade formally announced its complete disbandment.⁵¹⁷ Little was known about the further disarmament and integration of the personnel of the Eighth Brigade.⁵¹⁸

Known as a well-armed and influential force, the former armed opposition group had remained outside the control of the Ministry of Defence until that time. Al-Awdeh and his group effectively had their own centre of power in eastern Daraa.⁵¹⁹ Al-Awdeh was seen as 'Russia's man in the South'⁵²⁰ and was also linked to regional powers (such as the UAE). After the power shift, this fuelled speculation that he could be used as a tool to undermine the new Syrian government.⁵²¹ According to multiple sources, the disbanding of the formerly autonomous Eighth Brigade meant that the transitional government would likely be better able to consolidate its authority in eastern Daraa and maintain security in the province.⁵²²

3.3.3.2 Daraa

In Daraa, as had been the case before the fall of the Assad regime, violent incidents took place on an almost daily basis, including shootings, kidnappings and killings.⁵²³

While towns and villages in a large part of the province remained under the control of local armed groups, the GSS carried out operations targeting armed remnants of the Assad regime, criminal gangs, and drug and arms traffickers.⁵²⁴

Israel carried out several air strikes in the province, which also resulted in civilian casualties. On 17 March 2025, Israeli air strikes near the provincial capital of Daraa killed at least 3 people and, according to the Syria Civil Defence (known as the White Helmets), wounded 25, including 4 children, 1 woman and 3 of its volunteers. The Israeli army confirmed that it had carried out the attack and said that military infrastructure had been the target.⁵²⁵ The air strike hit a reportedly abandoned army barracks near a residential area.⁵²⁶

The increasing and ever-expanding incursions by Israeli troops into Daraa (see 3.2), which also involved raids on villages, caused tensions among the population in the west of the province.⁵²⁷

⁵¹⁵ Syria Weekly, *April 8-15, 2025*, 15 April 2025; Mercy Corps, *Crisis analysis - Syria. Syria monthly report. April 2025*, May 2025, p. 5.
⁵¹⁶ Syria Weekly, *April 8-15, 2025*, 15 April 2025.
⁵¹⁷ L'Orient Today, *The Eighth Brigade: A 'serious start' to dismantling Syria's paramilitary structures*, 15 April 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 8-15, 2025*, 15 April 2025.
⁵¹⁸ L'Orient Today, *The Eighth Brigade: A 'serious start' to dismantling Syria's paramilitary structures*, 15 April 2025.
⁵¹⁹ L'Orient Today, *The Eighth Brigade: A 'serious start' to dismantling Syria's paramilitary structures*, 15 April 2025.
⁵²⁰ Until 2018, Ahmed al-Awdeh had led an armed opposition group (*Shabab al-Sunna*) in Busra al-Sham. After the Assad regime recaptured the province of Daraa with Russian support, al-Awdeh agreed to join the 'Fifth Corps'. This was a new military unit that was directly under Russian command. Within this corps, al-Awdeh was in charge of the 'Eighth Brigade'. This allowed him to maintain control over his home base and a position of influence in the province of Daraa. See: EUI, *The Eighth Brigade: Striving for supremacy in Southern Syria*, 1 December 2020.
⁵²¹ The New Arab, *Syria faction leader killed by Eighth Brigade in Daraa security forces clash*, 12 April 2025; The New Arab, *UAE-linked southern Syria militia to be dissolved after Sharaa-MbZ meeting*, 14 April 2025; Mercy Corps, *Crisis analysis - Syria. Syria monthly report. April 2025*, May 2025, p. 5.
⁵²² Etana, *Brief: The dissolution of Ahmad al-Awdeh's groups in Daraa*, 16 April 2025; Mercy Corps, *Crisis analysis - Syria. Syria monthly report. April 2025*, May 2025, p. 5.
⁵²³ Syria Weekly, *March 18-25, 2025*, 25 March 2025; Syria Weekly, *March 25-April 1, 2025*, 1 April 2025; Enab Baladi, *Assassinations: a continuing phenomenon in Daraa*, 13 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.
⁵²⁴ Asharq Al-Awsat, *3 Members of Syrian security forces killed in clashes with regime remnants in Daraa*, 6 March 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 15-22, 2025*, 22 April 2025; SANA, *Public Security Directorate launches a security campaign targeting outlaws in Daraa Governorate*, 28 April 2025.
⁵²⁵ Reuters, *At least two people killed, 19 injured in Israeli strikes on Syria's Daraa*, 17 March 2025; AP News, *Mourners attend funeral of man killed in Israeli airstrikes on Syrian city of Daraa*, 18 March 2025.
⁵²⁶ AP News, *Mourners attend funeral of man killed in Israeli airstrikes on Syrian city of Daraa*, 18 March 2025.
⁵²⁷ The New Arab, *Israeli incursions spark tensions in Syria's Daraa and Quneitra*, 9 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

3.3.3.3 Suweida

As was the case in Daraa, there was a security vacuum in Suweida, where there was no functioning police force and where kidnappings and killings took place.⁵²⁸ The internally divided armed groups acted as *de facto* police or security forces in the province. For example, they carried out arrests.⁵²⁹ Armed factions also staffed checkpoints and patrolled the border with Jordan. The larger armed groups are said to have reinforced their ranks with large numbers of recruits in order to 'protect' the Druze community in the uncertain political situation.⁵³⁰

According to multiple sources, unidentified gunmen repeatedly fired on the motorway between Damascus and the provincial capital of Suweida, targeting civilian vehicles and causing civilian casualties.⁵³¹ In late February 2025, one source reported that such incidents had forced them to wait for days before being able to travel to the city of Suweida.⁵³² According to another source, on 20 March 2025, gunmen ambushed at least four vehicles on the route between Damascus and Suweida. The vehicles were stolen, allegedly to be used in an exchange to recover property stolen by another armed party.⁵³³

Fighting and security agreement

The escalation of violence in the predominantly Druze towns of Jaramana and Ashrafiyet Sahnaya in late April 2025 (see 3.3.2.9) led to increased tensions and violence in Suweida.⁵³⁴ The violence in Suweida consisted primarily of fighting between Druze armed groups and armed groups of local Bedouins from western Suweida and eastern Daraa.⁵³⁵ During the fighting in the suburbs of Damascus, armed groups in Suweida attempted to send reinforcements to Ashrafiyet Sahnaya.⁵³⁶ Fighting then broke out on the motorway between Damascus and Suweida between a military convoy of factions from Suweida, which was on its way to support Druze groups in the suburb, and armed (Sunni) Bedouins.⁵³⁷ At least 35 Druze fighters were reportedly killed in an ambush by local Bedouins.⁵³⁸ This confrontation is said to have triggered further fighting between Sunni and Druze factions in the west of Suweida province.⁵³⁹

Internal division

The violence and the transitional government's attempts to intervene deepened the divisions that had emerged: on one side, Druze religious leaders and militias willing to maintain a pragmatic relationship with the new authorities; on the other, a minority — led primarily by Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri and the newly formed Suweida Military Council — who opposed any form of recognition of the Damascus-based

⁵²⁸ Syria Direct, *Is Suwayda heading for a showdown with Damascus?*, 15 March 2025; Syria Weekly, *March 18-25, 2025*, 25 March 2025; The New Arab, *Syria: Suwayda protesters demand 'transitional justice' amid kidnappings*, 26 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁵²⁹ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁵³⁰ The New York Times, *These militias refuse to join Syria's new army*, 1 April 2025.

⁵³¹ Syria Weekly, *March 18-25, 2025*, 25 March 2025; X.com, Qalaat Al Mudiq, 26 April 2025, [url](#); confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁵³² Confidential source, March 2025.

⁵³³ Syria Weekly, *March 18-25, 2025*, 25 March 2025.

⁵³⁴ The Guardian, *Deadly Syria clashes continue for second day outside Damascus*, 30 April 2025; MEE, *Syria's Druze fearful after deadly attacks on Damascus suburbs*, 1 May 2025; The Syria Report, *Tensions in Druze areas highlight challenges of Syrian political transition*, 6 May 2025; Syria Direct, *As tensions run high, will Suwayda's security agreement hold?*, 7 May 2025; Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025; The Washington Post, *As Syria's Druze minority reels from violence, Israel pursues an opening*, 10 May 2025.

⁵³⁵ Syria Weekly, *April 29-May 6, 2025*, 6 May 2025; Syria Direct, *As tensions run high, will Suwayda's security agreement hold?*, 7 May 2025.

⁵³⁶ Syria Direct, *Escalation and appeals for calm: Is civil peace crumbling in Syria's Druze communities?*, 1 May 2025; The Syria Report, *Tensions in Druze areas highlight challenges of Syrian political transition*, 6 May 2025.

⁵³⁷ The Guardian, *Deadly Syria clashes continue for second day outside Damascus*, 30 April 2025; Syria Direct, *As tensions run high, will Suwayda's security agreement hold?*, 7 May 2025.

⁵³⁸ Syria Weekly, *April 29-May 6, 2025*, 6 May 2025.

⁵³⁹ Syria Direct, *As tensions run high, will Suwayda's security agreement hold?*, 7 May 2025.

leadership.⁵⁴⁰ According to various local media outlets, Druze militia leader Laith al-Balous, who belonged to the first group, was the target of a failed assassination attempt on 2 May.⁵⁴¹ On 1 May, al-Hijri sharply criticised the transitional government for what he called an 'unjustified genocidal attack' on the Druze community and called for international intervention.⁵⁴²

Security agreement

Negotiations between the transitional government and leaders of the Druze community in Suweida ultimately resulted in a security agreement on 3 May.⁵⁴³ The agreement provided for the activation of a police force in Suweida, under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, which was to consist exclusively of local residents. The transitional government also promised to secure the motorway between Damascus and Suweida, in addition to ensuring that no external armed factions would enter the province.⁵⁴⁴ Disarming the Druze armed groups was not part of the agreement.⁵⁴⁵ There seemed to be no indication that Druze groups in Suweida were prepared to surrender their weapons.⁵⁴⁶ In fact, this agreement did not bring about any radical changes in the situation in Suweida; although some were now officially under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, in practice, the Druze remained responsible for security in the province and the presence of the central authorities remained limited.⁵⁴⁷

Displacement

While the central authorities and Druze leaders worked on implementing the agreement,⁵⁴⁸ fighting broke out in the west of the province between armed Bedouins and Druze.⁵⁴⁹ During this incident, both Bedouin villages and Druze settlements were reportedly fired upon with mortars and heavy machine guns. According to multiple sources, civilians were killed and injured, and others were forced to flee their homes.⁵⁵⁰ On 9 May, UNHCR reported that 406 families (2,055 individuals) had been displaced in the province of Suweida as a result of the recent violence.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁰ Syria Direct, *Escalation and appeals for calm: Is civil peace crumbling in Syria's Druze communities?*, 1 May 2025; The Syria Report, *Tensions in Druze areas highlight challenges of Syrian political transition*, 6 May 2025; Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025; Carnegie, *Minority retort*, 9 May 2025.

⁵⁴¹ Zaman al-Wasl, *The assassination attempt on Laith al-Balous reopens case of father's assassination*, 2 May 2025; The Syria Report, *Tensions in Druze areas highlight challenges of Syrian political transition*, 6 May 2025.

⁵⁴² The National, *Mayor of predominantly Druze Syrian town and son shot dead amid escalating sectarian violence*, 1 May 2025; AP News, *Syrian Druze spiritual leader slams government over deadly sectarian clashes*, 2 May 2025; Carnegie, *Minority retort*, 9 May 2025.

⁵⁴³ Syria Direct, *As tensions run high, will Suwayda's security agreement hold?*, 7 May 2025; Enab Baladi, *Jaramana sectarian fuse reveals fragility of new balances*, 8 May 2025; Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025.

⁵⁴⁴ Enab Baladi, *As-Suwayda Agreement: Internal security activated, Damascus road secured*, 2 May 2025; The Syria Report, *Tensions in Druze areas highlight challenges of Syrian political transition*, 6 May 2025; Syria Direct, *As tensions run high, will Suwayda's security agreement hold?*, 7 May 2025; Enab Baladi, *Jaramana sectarian fuse reveals fragility of new balances*, 8 May 2025; Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025; Syria Weekly, *May 6-13, 2025*, 13 May 2025.

⁵⁴⁵ Enab Baladi, *Clashes return to As-Suwayda... Agreement with Damascus continues*, 5 May 2025.

⁵⁴⁶ Syria Direct, *As tensions run high, will Suwayda's security agreement hold?*, 7 May 2025; Carnegie, *Minority retort*, 9 May 2025; The Washington Post, *As Syria's Druze minority reels from violence, Israel pursues an opening*, 10 May 2025.

⁵⁴⁷ Syria Direct, *As tensions run high, will Suwayda's security agreement hold?*, 5 May 2025; confidential source, May 2025.

⁵⁴⁸ X.com, Al-Jumhuriya English, 7 May 2025, [url](#).

⁵⁴⁹ Enab Baladi, *Clashes return to As-Suwayda... Agreement with Damascus continues*, 5 May 2025; Asharq Al-Awsat, *Clashes erupt between local factions, armed tribal groups in Syria's Suwayda*, 6 May 2025; Etana, *Syria Update #24: 8 May 2025*, 7 May 2025; Syria Direct, *As tensions run high, will Suwayda's security agreement hold?*, 7 May 2025; Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025.

⁵⁵⁰ Enab Baladi, *Clashes return to As-Suwayda... Agreement with Damascus continues*, 5 May 2025; Asharq Al-Awsat, *Clashes erupt between local factions, armed tribal groups in Syria's Suwayda*, 6 May 2025; Syria Direct, *As tensions run high, will Suwayda's security agreement hold?*, 7 May 2025.

⁵⁵¹ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #26. Syria situation crisis*, 9 May 2025.

Other incidents

On 21 May 2025, armed men briefly held the governor of Suweida province hostage in a government building in the provincial capital. As confirmed by the Ministry of the Interior, they demanded and achieved the release of a person who had been imprisoned. The men had stormed the building and were temporarily holding a number of other people captive besides the governor. The prisoner, who had reportedly been convicted previously for stealing several vehicles, was released in exchange for the safety of the hostages.⁵⁵²

3.3.4 *Central Syria*

In parts of the provinces of Homs and Hama, and in particular in the provincial capital of Homs, the security situation was very fragile.⁵⁵³ This was largely due to a history of sectarian violence, particularly during the early years of the conflict, in the city of Homs and nearby parts of the countryside in the provinces of Homs and Hama, where the population is highly diverse.⁵⁵⁴ At that time, massacres were carried out in various (mainly Sunni) communities in these areas. The Assad regime had previously deployed local militias (mostly consisting of Alawites) against civilians in neighbouring neighbourhoods and villages.⁵⁵⁵

According to the SNHR, between January and late April 2025, at least 361 civilians in Homs and Hama were victims of what the organisation referred to as extrajudicial executions. Most incidents took place in areas where Alawites live, according to the organisation.⁵⁵⁶

3.3.4.1 Homs

The city of Homs is predominantly Sunni, but it has a significant Alawite community, as well as a small Christian community. In rural Homs, there were also significant Alawite and Shia communities alongside Sunnis.⁵⁵⁷ Homs is the third largest city in the country in terms of size and – as the gateway to the north and the coastal provinces – a strategically important hub. Nevertheless, the security forces also lacked capacity in this area.⁵⁵⁸ According to one source, responsibility for ensuring security in the city and province of Homs was shared by mutually coordinating security forces and SNA factions.⁵⁵⁹ In practice, some armed groups in Homs and the surrounding area still operated semi-independently of the general security service and, according to multiple sources, there was no centralised security authority capable of restoring order.⁵⁶⁰ According to multiple sources, there was a great sense of insecurity in these areas.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵² Reuters, *Armed group in Syria's Suwayda takes governor hostage for prisoner's release*, 21 May 2025; The New Arab, *Syria: Armed group detain Suweida governor, Hmeimim air base attacked*, 22 May 2025.

⁵⁵³ SNHR, *No fewer than 20 civilians extrajudicial killed in Homs city between April 23-28, 2025*, 30 April 2025, p. 1; SJAC, *The Syrian government must investigate the targeting of Alawite civilians in Homs*, 13 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁵⁵⁴ FT, *Can Syria's new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025; ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025; Syria Direct, *Extrajudicial killings of Alawites plague Homs city*, 9 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁵⁵⁵ FT, *Can Syria's new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025; Syria Direct, *Extrajudicial killings of Alawites plague Homs city*, 9 May 2025; SJAC, *The Syrian government must investigate the targeting of Alawite civilians in Homs*, 13 May 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁵⁵⁶ Syria Direct, *Extrajudicial killings of Alawites plague Homs city*, 9 May 2025.

⁵⁵⁷ Syria Direct, *Extrajudicial killings of Alawites plague Homs city*, 9 May 2025.

⁵⁵⁸ ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025.

⁵⁵⁹ FT, *Can Syria's new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025; Le Monde, *Syria's infernal cycle of revenge: 'I don't trust men from my own community'*, 18 March 2025.

⁵⁶⁰ ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025; SNHR, *No fewer than 20 civilians extrajudicial killed in Homs city between April 23-28, 2025*, 30 April 2025.

⁵⁶¹ ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025; Syria Direct, *Thousands of Alawites seek refuge in Lebanon, where locals lead the response*, 14 March 2025; The New Arab, *Damascus may be relatively safe but cities like Homs are emerging as a microcosm of post-Assad lawlessness*, 31 March 2025; Syria Direct, *Extrajudicial killings of Alawites plague Homs city*, 9 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

After the fall of the Assad regime, the MOC regularly carried out security operations in the city and surrounding villages, as it had in other regions. These operations were aimed at disarming members of the former regime's security apparatus who had refused to report to the registration centres (see 2.2.1).⁵⁶² Many arrests are said to have been made during these operations.⁵⁶³ According to the Associated Press news agency, more than a hundred people were arrested during one of these actions on 2 January 2025.⁵⁶⁴ In all, hundreds of people were arrested, but many were reportedly released after a short period of time.⁵⁶⁵

Following the power shift, the security situation in the city of Homs and surrounding areas continued to be strongly characterised by sectarian violence.⁵⁶⁶ According to one source, the sentiment that Alawites were by definition complicit in the atrocities committed by the Assad regime in the city of Homs was probably stronger than in other areas of Syria.⁵⁶⁷ Another source stated that, due to the history of violence between communities in Homs, 'the families of those who had been killed knew who had killed them'. This may have contributed to some people taking the law into their own hands after the fall of the regime.⁵⁶⁸

In the city of Homs, kidnappings and killings took place almost daily.⁵⁶⁹ Since early 2025, there were dozens of cases of Alawite men and women being abducted in locations near their homes or workplaces. In many of these cases, their bodies were found within a few days with gunshot wounds.⁵⁷⁰ Although not every act of violence had a clear motive, the killings of Alawites in many cases pointed to sectarian (or other) revenge attacks.⁵⁷¹

In the city of Homs and surrounding areas, this form of violence against mainly Alawites continued unabated throughout the reporting period.⁵⁷² According to the SNHR, there was a significant increase in murders in the city in late April 2025. In six days (23–28 April), at least twenty civilians were killed in separate and successive incidents. Most of the victims were Alawites. According to the human rights organisation, the incidents included both 'targeted assassinations of individuals previously affiliated with the Assad regime' and 'random killings suspected to be driven by sectarian and retaliatory motives'. Most of the victims were found shot dead, in circumstances that, according to the SNHR, clearly pointed to the involvement of armed groups operating outside the law.⁵⁷³

⁵⁶² Confidential source, April 2025.

⁵⁶³ FT, *Can Syria's new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Sectarian violence simmers in Homs*, 10 March 2025.

⁵⁶⁴ AP News, *AP photos: Syria's new security forces conduct sweeps in Homs, looking for ousted Assad's loyalists*, 2 January 2025.

⁵⁶⁵ FT, *Can Syria's new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025.

⁵⁶⁶ FT, *Can Syria's new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Sectarian violence simmers in Homs*, 10 March 2025; The Atlantic, *Can one man hold Syria together?*, 24 March 2025; Syria Direct, *Extrajudicial killings of Alawites plague Homs city*, 9 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025;

⁵⁶⁷ SJAC, *The Syrian government must investigate the targeting of Alawite civilians in Homs*, 13 May 2025.

⁵⁶⁸ Syria Direct, *Extrajudicial killings of Alawites plague Homs city*, 9 May 2025.

⁵⁶⁹ The Economist, *Homs's troubles show the challenges facing Syria's leaders*, 13 February 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Sectarian violence simmers in Homs*, 10 March 2025. ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025; The New Arab, *Lawlessness festers in Homs as Syria struggles to rebuild*, 28 April 2025; SNHR, *No fewer than 20 civilians extrajudicially killed in Homs city between April 23-28, 2025*, 30 April 2025; Syria Direct, *Extrajudicial killings of Alawites plague Homs city*, 9 May 2025; SJAC, *The Syrian government must investigate the targeting of Alawite civilians in Homs*, 13 May 2025.

⁵⁷⁰ New Lines Magazine, *Sectarian violence simmers in Homs*, 10 March 2025; SJAC, *The Syrian government must investigate the targeting of Alawite civilians in Homs*, 13 May 2025.

⁵⁷¹ ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Sectarian violence simmers in Homs*, 10 March 2025; The New York Times, *As people are abducted on unpatrolled streets, Syrians demand better protection*, 10 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁵⁷² Syria Direct, *Extrajudicial killings of Alawites plague Homs city*, 9 May 2025; SJAC, *The Syrian government must investigate the targeting of Alawite civilians in Homs*, 13 May 2025.

⁵⁷³ SNHR, *No fewer than 20 civilians extrajudicially killed in Homs city between April 23-28, 2025*, 30 April 2025.

Around April–May 2025, it was common for unidentified, masked men riding motorcycles to shoot at houses in predominantly Alawite neighbourhoods. This resulted in the killing or injuring of civilians who were on the streets or inside their homes, or who were sitting on their balconies.⁵⁷⁴

In the city of Homs, the kidnappings and murders were concentrated in the predominantly Alawite neighbourhoods of Wadi al-Dahab, Karm al-Zaitoun, Al-Nuzha and Karm al-Loz.⁵⁷⁵ According to the SNHR, the violence led to increased fear and uncertainty among the population, as well as to displacement.⁵⁷⁶

Due to sectarian tensions and the limited capacity of the security forces, the security situation in Homs posed a major challenge for the authorities.⁵⁷⁷ They listed various measures to ensure security in areas where many Alawites live. During the escalation of violence in the coastal region in early March 2025 (see 3.3.5.2), the GSS in Homs took special measures – including forming a human wall around neighbourhoods with Alawites – to prevent the outbreak of violence against Alawites in Latakia, Tartous and rural Hama from spreading to the city.⁵⁷⁸ Furthermore, semi-permanent checkpoints were set up around neighbourhoods where Alawites were in the majority.⁵⁷⁹ Around the end of April 2025, the ongoing insecurity in the city reportedly led to the establishment of GSS checkpoints at major roundabouts and intersections in Homs.⁵⁸⁰ The tightened security measures were intended to prevent kidnappers from entering certain areas.⁵⁸¹ At the same time, according to some in the local Alawite community, they also contributed to a feeling of encirclement.⁵⁸²

According to the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC), an independent Syrian human rights organisation, the presence of security forces in and around predominantly Alawite neighbourhoods was not effective as a deterrent against violent attacks on civilians.⁵⁸³ According to the organisation, local residents had doubts about the transitional government’s ability and willingness to prevent such attacks, which further contributed to mistrust and fear.⁵⁸⁴ According to the SNHR, the increasing attacks at the end of April 2025 pointed to deteriorating security conditions in Homs, and a context of impunity and ‘weak coordination between official military and security institutions’. In addition, the violence underscored the growing social instability in Homs, according to the SNHR.⁵⁸⁵

3.3.4.2 Hama

In early March 2025, the escalation of violence in Latakia and Tartous (see 3.3.5.2) also spread to the western countryside of Hama, where several Alawite communities lived. On 11 March 2025, the SNHR issued a preliminary report on the violence, stating that massacres had taken place in ten villages.⁵⁸⁶ According to the SNHR, at

⁵⁷⁴ SNHR, *A woman and her two daughters shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Homs, April 18*, 20 April 2025; SJAC, *The Syrian government must investigate the targeting of Alawite civilians in Homs*, 13 May 2025.
⁵⁷⁵ SNHR, *No fewer than 20 civilians extrajudicially killed in Homs city between April 23-28, 2025*, 30 April 2025; SJAC, *The Syrian government must investigate the targeting of Alawite civilians in Homs*, 13 May 2025.
⁵⁷⁶ SNHR, *No fewer than 20 civilians extrajudicially killed in Homs city between April 23-28, 2025*, 30 April 2025.
⁵⁷⁷ FT, *Can Syria’s new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025; The New Arab, *Lawlessness festers in Homs as Syria struggles to rebuild*, 28 April 2025.
⁵⁷⁸ ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025.
⁵⁷⁹ New Lines Magazine, *Sectarian violence simmers in Homs*, 10 March 2025; The New Arab, *Lawlessness festers in Homs as Syria struggles to rebuild*, 28 April 2025.
⁵⁸⁰ The New Arab, *Lawlessness festers in Homs as Syria struggles to rebuild*, 28 April 2025.
⁵⁸¹ New Lines Magazine, *Sectarian violence simmers in Homs*, 10 March 2025.
⁵⁸² New Lines Magazine, *Sectarian violence simmers in Homs*, 10 March 2025.
⁵⁸³ SJAC, *The Syrian government must investigate the targeting of Alawite civilians in Homs*, 13 May 2025.
⁵⁸⁴ SJAC, *The Syrian government must investigate the targeting of Alawite civilians in Homs*, 13 May 2025.
⁵⁸⁵ SNHR, *No fewer than 20 civilians extrajudicial killed in Homs city between April 23-28, 2025*, 30 April 2025.
⁵⁸⁶ SNHR, *803 individuals extrajudicially killed between March 6-10, 2025*, 11 March 2025, p. 12.

least 49 people were killed in the province of Hama between 6 and 10 March 2025, including 15 children and 10 women.⁵⁸⁷

According to multiple sources, on 7 March 2025, 25 residents of the predominantly Alawite village of Arza were reportedly killed by armed men from neighbouring villages.⁵⁸⁸ Security forces at a village checkpoint were reportedly taken by surprise by the attackers.⁵⁸⁹ The victims were asked whether they were Alawites and were then executed. Subsequently, the alleged hundreds of attackers are said to have completely ransacked the houses in the village. The rest of the Alawite community fled the same day. In January 2025, the village had already been attacked once, with at least eight men killed by masked assailants.⁵⁹⁰

In the countryside in the east of Hama province, according to one source, local tensions played out between villagers and Bedouins, fuelled by grievances related to human rights violations against the Bedouins during the war.⁵⁹¹

3.3.5 West Syria

3.3.5.1 Sectarian tensions and rising violence

After the fall of the Assad regime, sources reported significant tensions in the Alawite communities in the coastal provinces of Latakia and Tartous, as well as in areas in central Syria (Hama and Homs).⁵⁹² This was due in part to growing insecurity, characterised by multiple killings by unidentified perpetrators, kidnappings and looting.⁵⁹³ In the first three months after the power shift, kidnappings and killings occurred in Latakia and Tartous, with the victims being Alawite civilians.⁵⁹⁴ The exact scale of such violent incidents during this period was difficult to determine, partly due to a lack of transparent information from the authorities and limited reporting of incidents.⁵⁹⁵ The incidents of violence took place within a broader context of hate speech and disinformation on social media, which heightened tensions.⁵⁹⁶

In February and early March 2025, groups of armed Alawites, led by officers of the former regime, carried out dozens of attacks on security forces in Latakia, Tartous and, to a lesser extent, Hama, Homs and Rural Damascus. During this period, there was a steady increase in the frequency, scale and effectiveness of such attacks.⁵⁹⁷

3.3.5.2 Escalation of violence from 6 to 10 March 2025

On 6 March 2025, the situation escalated when armed remnants of the former regime launched coordinated attacks on security forces at various locations in and

⁵⁸⁷ SNHR, *803 individuals extrajudicially killed between March 6-10, 2025*, 11 March 2025, p. 6.

⁵⁸⁸ The National, 'Are you Alawite?': Killings in Syrian village of Arza raise fears of endless sectarian violence, 14 March 2025; The Guardian, 'They killed him in cold blood': the cycle of revenge in north-west Syria, 15 March 2025.

⁵⁸⁹ The National, 'Are you Alawite?': Killings in Syrian village of Arza raise fears of endless sectarian violence, 14 March 2025.

⁵⁹⁰ The National, 'Are you Alawite?': Killings in Syrian village of Arza raise fears of endless sectarian violence, 14 March 2025; The Guardian, 'They killed him in cold blood': the cycle of revenge in north-west Syria, 15 March 2025.

⁵⁹¹ Le Monde, *Syria's infernal cycle of revenge: 'I don't trust men from my own community'*, 18 March 2025.

⁵⁹² ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁵⁹³ UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 March 2025.

⁵⁹⁴ AFP, *Thousands of Alawites mourn 3 killed by foreign Islamists: monitor, witness*, 9 January 2025; MEI, *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025.

⁵⁹⁵ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁵⁹⁶ UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁵⁹⁷ Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 12*, 3 March 2025; Syria Weekly, *A turning point: Pro-Assad loyalists launch unprecedented escalation*, 6 March 2025; Reuters, *Syrian forces search former Assad stronghold after suspected loyalist attacks*, 4 March 2025; Atlantic Council, EIP & MEI, *Reimagining Syria: A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad*, 13 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

near the coastal cities of Jableh and Baniyas.⁵⁹⁸ The attackers targeted security and police checkpoints and hospitals.⁵⁹⁹ They also fired at vehicles (with number plates from outside the region).⁶⁰⁰ The armed remnants of the former regime are also said to have attacked Sunni civilians.⁶⁰¹

The escalating violence quickly spread across the provinces of Latakia and Tartous, with armed remnants of the former regime reportedly briefly taking control of parts of the countryside and a number of urban neighbourhoods.⁶⁰²

These developments led to a rapid and chaotic counteroffensive by the security forces and Sunni armed groups that supported the interim government.⁶⁰³ There was a broad mobilisation of security and military forces by the interim administration, as well as spontaneous movement towards the coastal provinces by armed actors operating outside the control of Damascus.⁶⁰⁴ *Ad hoc* calls for mobilisation were issued on social media and in mosques.⁶⁰⁵ This contributed to the arrival of an unorganised mass of – reportedly thousands to tens of thousands⁶⁰⁶ – heavily armed, pro-government elements and individuals, many of whom had entered the coastal region from other parts of Syria.⁶⁰⁷ They included armed factions that had recently officially joined the new army, as well as more independent groups.⁶⁰⁸ According to media reports, foreign fighters also took part in the violence.⁶⁰⁹

The mobilised troops and other armed elements spread out across towns and rural areas in Tartous and Latakia, where they became embroiled in gun battles with the Alawite rebels.⁶¹⁰ According to human rights organisations, they also fired on residential areas, looted and burned houses and shops, and some carried out sectarian revenge killings on Alawite civilians.⁶¹¹ According to the International Crisis Group, it was mainly pro-government groups and fighters operating outside

⁵⁹⁸ SNHR, *803 individuals extrajudicially killed between March 6-10, 2025*, 11 March 2025; This Week in Northern Syria, *This Week in Northern Syria [10A.2025]*, 14 March 2025; The New York Times, *Syria's struggle to unify military was evident in outburst of violence*, 17 March 2025; UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 March 2025.

⁵⁹⁹ SNHR, *803 individuals extrajudicially killed between March 6-10, 2025*, 11 March 2025; SNHR, *Daily update: Extrajudicial killings on the Syrian coast (March 6 - March 15, 2025)*, 15 March 2025.

⁶⁰⁰ SNHR, *803 individuals extrajudicially killed between March 6-10, 2025*, 11 March 2025; SNHR, *Daily update: Extrajudicial killings on the Syrian coast (March 6 - March 15, 2025)*, 15 March 2025.

⁶⁰¹ SNHR, *803 individuals extrajudicially killed between March 6-10, 2025*, 11 March 2025; Syria Direct, *As Jableh picks up the pieces, can residents overcome 'sectarian tensions'?*, 12 March 2025.

⁶⁰² This Week in Northern Syria, *This Week in Northern Syria [10A.2025]*, 14 March 2025; Syria Direct, *Thousands of Alawites seek refuge in Lebanon, where locals lead the response*, 14 March 2025.

⁶⁰³ ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025; The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025.

⁶⁰⁴ ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Islamists call for mobilisation in Syria, incite against Alawites*, 11 March 2025.

⁶⁰⁵ The Syria Report, *Systematic looting, burning and bulldozing of property on the Syrian coast*, 18 March 2025; MERIP, *Syria's new men. Masculinities and the post-Assad political order*, 16 April 2025; L'Orient Today, *Sharia, jihad and settling scores: Behind the radical wing of the new Syrian regime*, 1 May 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Investigating the Alawite massacres*, 12 May 2025.

⁶⁰⁶ The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025; This Week in Northern Syria, *This Week in Northern Syria [10A.2025]*, 14 March 2025.

⁶⁰⁷ HRW, *Syria: End coastal killing spree, protect civilians*, 10 March 2025; The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025; This Week in Northern Syria, *This Week in Northern Syria [10A.2025]*, 14 March 2025; The New York Times, *Syria's struggle to unify military was evident in outburst of violence*, 17 March 2025.

⁶⁰⁸ Syria Direct, *Thousands of Alawites seek refuge in Lebanon, where locals lead the response*, 14 March 2025.

⁶⁰⁹ Al Jazeera, *'Don't trust anyone': Have Syria's Alawites lost faith in new government?*, 20 March 2025; The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025.

⁶¹⁰ ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025; The New York Times, *Syria's struggle to unify military was evident in outburst of violence*, 17 March 2025.

⁶¹¹ UN OHCHR, *Syria: Distressing scale of violence in coastal areas*, 11 March 2025; SNHR, *803 individuals extrajudicially killed between March 6-10, 2025*, 11 March 2025; SJAC, *SJAC's analysis of atrocities committed in Latakia and Tartous*, 13 March 2025; The New York Times, *Syria's struggle to unify military was evident in outburst of violence*, 17 March 2025; Amnesty International, *Syria: Coastal massacres of Alawite civilians must be investigated as war crimes*, 3 April 2025.

the control of the central authorities who responded 'haphazardly and with great brutality'.⁶¹²

Killings were committed on a large scale. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), violence took place in at least 57 different locations in the provinces of Latakia, Tartous, Hama and Homs over a period of four days.⁶¹³ Many of the incidents documented by human rights organisations involved summary executions.⁶¹⁴ In some cases, entire families were killed, including women and children.⁶¹⁵ According to survivors, armed men went from door to door looking for Alawites.⁶¹⁶

The exact number of civilian casualties was unknown. On 11 March 2025, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR) reported that they had thus far documented the death of 111 civilians. The UN OHCHR added that the actual number of deaths was likely to be significantly higher.⁶¹⁷ On 17 March 2025, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that, since 6 March 2025, 2,089 people had been killed, including 1,557 civilians.⁶¹⁸ On 9 April 2025, the SNHR reported that it had documented 1,334 people who had been killed in the escalation of violence in the coastal region. According to the SNHR, 889 individuals, including 51 children and 63 women, were killed by armed forces involved in the counter-offensive in the region, and 446 people were killed by armed remnants of the former regime.⁶¹⁹ On 3 April 2025, Amnesty International reported that it had received information indicating that 'militias with ties to the government' had killed more than a hundred people in the coastal town of Baniyas, in Tartous province, on 8 and 9 March.⁶²⁰

The impact on civilians was very significant, both in the neighbourhoods and villages affected by the violence and among the wider Alawite population.⁶²¹ Many civilians were killed, and images of the ill-treatment and humiliation of Alawites were circulated.⁶²² In addition, houses and shops were looted on a large scale, and vehicles were stolen.⁶²³

At least six hospitals in the coastal region were affected by the fighting. Furthermore, the escalation of violence was accompanied by a power outage lasting more than a week, which affected hundreds of thousands of people in Latakia and the surrounding rural areas, with consequences including a severe water shortage.⁶²⁴ According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency

⁶¹² ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025.

⁶¹³ ACLED, *Q&A: What happened in the coastal region of Syria last week?*, 14 March 2025.

⁶¹⁴ UN OHCHR, *Syria: Distressing scale of violence in coastal areas*, 11 March 2025; Amnesty International, *Syria: Coastal massacres of Alawite civilians must be investigated as war crimes*, 3 April 2025.

⁶¹⁵ UN OHCHR, *Syria: Distressing scale of violence in coastal areas*, 11 March 2025; Amnesty International, *Syria: Coastal massacres of Alawite civilians must be investigated as war crimes*, 3 April 2025.

⁶¹⁶ BBC News, *Syria says operation against Assad loyalists over after deadly violence*, 10 March 2025; UN OHCHR, *Syria: Distressing scale of violence in coastal areas*, 11 March 2025; Amnesty International, *Syria: Coastal massacres of Alawite civilians must be investigated as war crimes*, 3 April 2025.

⁶¹⁷ UN OHCHR, *Syria: Distressing scale of violence in coastal areas*, 11 March 2025.

⁶¹⁸ SOHR, *As more massacres documented. The number of people killed during security operations in Syrian coastline exceeds 2,000*, 17 March 2025.

⁶¹⁹ SNHR, *1,562 deaths, including 102 children and 99 women, as well as 33 medical personnel, recorded in March 2025 in Syria*, 9 April 2025.

⁶²⁰ Amnesty International, *Syria: Coastal massacres of Alawite civilians must be investigated as war crimes*, 3 April 2025.

⁶²¹ The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025; The Syria Report, *Systematic looting, burning and bulldozing of property on the Syrian coast*, 18 March 2025.

⁶²² The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025.

⁶²³ BBC News, *Syrians describe terror as Alawite families killed in their homes*, 9 March 2025; The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025; The National, *Alawites trickling back to their heartland after mass killings*, 16 March 2025.

⁶²⁴ UNICEF, *Syria flash update No.1 (Violence in the coastal areas)*, 21 March 2025.

Fund (UNICEF), the number of students attending school remained low after schools in the coastal provinces reopened on 16 March 2025.⁶²⁵

On 10 March 2025, the interim Ministry of Defence declared that the military operation against the remaining Assad loyalists had come to an end.⁶²⁶ The interim administration established an investigative committee and arrested several individuals who were alleged to have committed crimes.⁶²⁷ The committee was expected to present its findings on 9 April 2025.⁶²⁸ After the committee requested more time to complete its investigation, al-Sharaa granted a non-renewable three-month extension on 10 April.⁶²⁹

According to one source, the escalation of violence did not resemble a campaign of retaliation organised by the authorities, but rather a collapse of the fragile order.⁶³⁰ According to various sources, the violent episode demonstrated the interim administration's lack of control over armed groups that were officially under its command, as well as the inability of the new authorities to control other armed groups.⁶³¹

3.3.5.3 Persistent violence against Alawites

After the escalation of violence in early March 2025, widespread fear remained⁶³² among the Alawites in the coastal region, and kidnappings and killings continued to occur on a smaller scale, particularly in rural areas.⁶³³ In the weeks following 10 March, dozens of Alawites were reportedly killed.⁶³⁴ In many cases, the victims were individuals who were not known to have had ties to the former regime.⁶³⁵ In some attacks, people were killed while working on their land.⁶³⁶ According to one source, around mid-May 2025, the countryside around Jableh and, to a lesser extent, Baniyas – were still the most dangerous areas for Alawites.⁶³⁷ One source reported that, in early May, the streets in predominantly Alawite neighbourhoods in the city of Latakia were almost empty after sunset. Many people reportedly did not dare to go out at night for fear of being kidnapped or killed.⁶³⁸

3.3.6 North Syria

Throughout the reporting period, armed conflict continued in the north between the Turkish-backed SNA and the Kurdish-led SDF. In December 2024, SNA groups advanced into areas that had previously been controlled by the SDF.⁶³⁹ According to multiple sources, in the months that followed, both sides attempted to inflict as

⁶²⁵ UNICEF, *Syria flash update No.1 (Violence in the coastal areas)*, 21 March 2025.

⁶²⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Syrian defence ministry says military operation on coast is over*, 10 March 2025; The Guardian, *Syrian defence ministry says military operation over and forces 'paving way for life to return to normal' – as it happened*, 10 March 2025.

⁶²⁷ SANA, *Presidential decision to form an independent national committee to investigate the events of the Syrian Coast*, 9 March 2025; The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025.

⁶²⁸ The New Arab, *Syria responds to damning Amnesty report on coastal massacre: 'Wait for investigation results'*, 3 April 2025.

⁶²⁹ Reuters, *Syria's Sharaa grants three-month extension to committee probing coastal killings*, 11 April 2025.

⁶³⁰ The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025.

⁶³¹ The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025; The New York Times, *Syria's struggle to unify military was evident in outburst of violence*, 17 March 2025.

⁶³² Al-Akhbar English, *Latakia in turmoil: Foreign fighters, renewed fear along Syria's coast*, 12 May 2025.

⁶³³ AP News, *Syria's Alawites still face targeted attacks a month after brutal counteroffensive*, 15 April 2025; The National, *Six Syrian Alawites killed in outbreak of sectarian violence*, 11 May 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁶³⁴ AP News, *Syria's Alawites still face targeted attacks a month after brutal counteroffensive*, 15 April 2025; The National, *Six Syrian Alawites killed in outbreak of sectarian violence*, 11 May 2025.

⁶³⁵ AP News, *Syria's Alawites still face targeted attacks a month after brutal counteroffensive*, 15 April 2025.

⁶³⁶ X.com, Al-Jumhuriya English, 7 May 2025, [url](#).

⁶³⁷ Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 22*, 15 May 2025.

⁶³⁸ X.com, Zaina Erhaim, 7 May 2025, [url](#).

⁶³⁹ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, pp. 5-6.

much damage on each other as possible, resulting in significant losses.⁶⁴⁰ The warring parties also attacked civilian infrastructure and civilian targets, resulting in civilian casualties.⁶⁴¹ The Turkish army carried out air strikes, which, according to some sources, sometimes also resulted in civilian casualties.⁶⁴² From February onwards, ISIS stepped up its operational tempo again in the east of the DAANES territory (see 3.4). At the same time, the central authorities and the SDF negotiated control over the semi-autonomous north-east (see 3.3.6.3).

3.3.6.1 SNA offensive

Parallel to the HTS-led offensive that brought down the Assad regime (with the participation of the SNA), on 30 November 2024, SNA groups launched a new offensive to capture territory west of the Euphrates from the SDF. The 'Dawn of Freedom' offensive led to large-scale displacement, primarily of Kurds (see 6.1.1.6).⁶⁴³ Until around the end of March 2025, fierce fighting, shelling and air raids took place in the frontline areas. These attacks also affected residential areas and essential infrastructure, resulting in civilian casualties. In the SDF-controlled city of Kobani (Arabic: *Ain al-Arab*), attacks on infrastructure resulted in the loss of electricity and water supplies for a period of time.⁶⁴⁴

On 8 December 2024, the SNA groups took control of the town of Tel Rif'aat. On 11 December, it then captured the city of Manbij, which had been under SDF control since 2016.⁶⁴⁵ According to the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, there were numerous reports of looting of houses, schools, medical institutions and other facilities in the conquered areas.⁶⁴⁶ In early January 2025, a Turkish-backed offensive in Kobani appeared imminent, but it was not carried out.⁶⁴⁷

There was particularly intense fighting in December 2024 and January 2025.⁶⁴⁸ Between 12 December and 31 January, fighting and bombing on both sides of the front line reportedly killed more than five hundred combatants and civilians.⁶⁴⁹ In early 2025, several attacks – reportedly at least seven within one month – were carried out with car bombs in the vicinity of Manbij.⁶⁵⁰ These attacks were linked to the SDF, which denied responsibility for the attacks.⁶⁵¹ According to a UN press release, a car bomb attack in Manbij on 3 February 2025 targeted a vehicle transporting seasonal workers.⁶⁵² According to the United Nations Office for the

⁶⁴⁰ The New Arab, *Fighting between pro-Turkey SNA, Kurdish-led SDF over two days kills 101*, 5 January 2025; ICG, *CrisisWatch. Syria: February 2025*, March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁶⁴¹ Confidential source, February 2025.

⁶⁴² Le Monde, *In northeastern Syria, 'the war is not over'*, 16 January 2025; HRW, *Northeast Syria: Apparent war crime by Türkiye-backed forces*, 30 January 2025; ICG, *CrisisWatch. Syria: January 2025*, February 2025; SNHR, *Civilians from one family killed by an airstrike suspected to be Turkish in a massacre in the vicinity of Barkh Butan village, Aleppo – March 16, 2025*, 18 March 2025; ICG, *A glimmer of peace in Syria's North East*, 28 March 2025.

⁶⁴³ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 7.

⁶⁴⁴ UN News, *Deadly attacks in eastern Aleppo highlight Syria's vulnerability*, 4 February 2025; The Guardian, *'We are part of Syria': Kurdish-led SDF fights for place in post-Assad future*, 21 February 2025; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 7.

⁶⁴⁵ Le Monde, *In northeastern Syria, 'the war is not over'*, 16 January 2025; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 7.

⁶⁴⁶ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 7.

⁶⁴⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Explainer: What are Turkey's plans for northern Syria?*, 24 December 2024; Rudaw, *US civil society coalition urges Biden to stop SNA attacks on Rojava*, 8 January 2025; The Guardian, *'We are part of Syria': Kurdish-led SDF fights for place in post-Assad future*, 21 February 2025; ICG, *A glimmer of peace in Syria's North East*, 28 March 2025.

⁶⁴⁸ The New Arab, *Fighting between pro-Turkey SNA, Kurdish-led SDF over two days kills 101*, 5 January 2025; ICG, *CrisisWatch. Syria: February 2025*, March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁶⁴⁹ ICG, *CrisisWatch. Syria: January 2025*, February 2025.

⁶⁵⁰ UN News, *Deadly attacks in eastern Aleppo highlight Syria's vulnerability*, 4 February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁶⁵¹ Confidential source, February 2025.

⁶⁵² UN News, *Deadly attacks in eastern Aleppo highlight Syria's vulnerability*, 4 February 2025.

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), 19 women and the male driver were killed in this attack. As reported by UN OCHA, four civilians had been killed and nine others – including six children – had been killed in another attack a few days earlier.⁶⁵³

3.3.6.2 Tishreen Dam

In February and March 2025, fighting and air strikes continued.⁶⁵⁴ The SNA factions and the SDF fought mainly at the strategic Tishreen Dam and the Qara Quzaq Bridge in the east of Aleppo province.⁶⁵⁵ The Tishreen Dam on the Euphrates River formed a natural buffer between the SDF – which had captured the dam from ISIS in 2015 – and the SNA factions. It was critical infrastructure, as the dam provided water for irrigation and hydroelectric power.⁶⁵⁶ The Qara Quzaq Bridge over the Euphrates, on the M4 motorway, formed the gateway from the Aleppo region to the east of the country.⁶⁵⁷

The Turkish army carried out air strikes on the active front lines near Kobani and the Tishreen Dam, but reportedly also on targets further away from the front.⁶⁵⁸ During the reporting period, Turkish air strikes were reportedly aimed at various targets, including SDF positions and supply routes around Kobani.⁶⁵⁹ Citizens protesting at the Tishreen Dam were also purportedly targeted by drone strikes, possibly by SNA factions.⁶⁶⁰ HRW condemned a drone strike on 18 January 2025, by what it referred to as the Türkiye-SNA coalition, as a war crime. The attack struck an ambulance belonging to the Kurdish Red Crescent, which was transporting a civilian at the time. He had reportedly been injured earlier that day in a drone attack on demonstrators at the Tishreen Dam. According to the Kurdish media source ANF, six civilians were killed and sixteen others were injured in these attacks.⁶⁶¹ On 16 March 2025, a suspected Turkish drone strike in the countryside of Kobani killed a family of nine, according to multiple sources.⁶⁶² The SDF carried out deadly drone strikes on SNA troops near the Tishreen Dam.⁶⁶³

3.3.6.3 Ceasefire

Following the agreement between the central authorities and the SDF on 10 March (see 2.1.4), the conflict between the SNA factions and the SDF initially continued until at least the end of the month. Fighting continued between the two sides, and the Turkish army reportedly carried out air strikes on areas controlled by the SDF.⁶⁶⁴ In late March 2025, the violence near the Tishreen Dam ceased after an informal ceasefire was reached with American mediation.⁶⁶⁵

⁶⁵³ UN OCHA, *Humanitarian situation report No. 1 (As of 12 February 2025)*, 12 February 2025.

⁶⁵⁴ ICG, *CrisisWatch. Syria: February 2025*, March 2025; ICG, *CrisisWatch. Syria: March 2025*, April 2025.

⁶⁵⁵ ICG, *CrisisWatch. Syria: January 2025*, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁶⁵⁶ The Guardian, *'We are part of Syria': Kurdish-led SDF fights for place in post-Assad future*, 21 February 2025; The New Arab, *Syria Kurds say struck deal with Damascus on battleground dam*, 11 April 2025.

⁶⁵⁷ The New Arab, *Why fighting is raging in north Syria between the Turkish-backed SNA and Kurdish-led SDF*, 21 January 2025.

⁶⁵⁸ The Guardian, *'We are part of Syria': Kurdish-led SDF fights for place in post-Assad future*, 21 February 2025; ICG, *CrisisWatch. Syria: March 2025*, April 2025.

⁶⁵⁹ BBC News, *'We are still at war': Syria's Kurds battle Turkey months after Assad's fall*, 26 February 2025.

⁶⁶⁰ HRW, *Northeast Syria: Apparent war crime by Türkiye-backed forces*, 30 January 2025; BBC News, *'We are still at war': Syria's Kurds battle Turkey months after Assad's fall*, 26 February 2025.

⁶⁶¹ HRW, *Northeast Syria: Apparent war crime by Türkiye-backed forces*, 30 January 2025.

⁶⁶² SNHR, *Civilians from one family killed by an airstrike suspected to be Turkish in a massacre in the vicinity of Barkh Butan village, Aleppo – March 16, 2025*, 18 March 2025; ICG, *CrisisWatch. Syria: March 2025*, April 2025.

⁶⁶³ Forbes, *Kurdish drones are fending off Turkish-backed militia attacks in Syria*, 17 January 2025.

⁶⁶⁴ UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 March 2025; ICG, *CrisisWatch. Syria: March 2025*, April 2025.

⁶⁶⁵ Al-Monitor, *Syrian Kurd commander: Aleppo power-sharing deal could be model for nation*, 12 April 2025; MEI, *ISIS is on the ropes in Syria. A successful transition in Damascus could deliver a knockout blow*, 14 April 2025; UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

In early April 2025, the central authorities and the SDF agreed to jointly manage the Tishreen Dam.⁶⁶⁶ According to the agreement, troops from the transitional government took over the dam, and the SDF withdrew its forces.⁶⁶⁷ According to one source, joint committees of the transitional government and the SDF discussed further steps, including the withdrawal of the SDF from other areas in eastern Aleppo province, including Deir Hafer and the Qara Quzaq Bridge.⁶⁶⁸

At the time of writing, it was unclear whether the ceasefire would hold, partly due to the lack of complete control by both the transitional government and the SDF over the armed forces on their respective sides of the front line. Although the SNA was incorporated into the Ministry of Defence in Damascus (see 2.1.2), the factions retained their own command structures and ties to the Turkish army.⁶⁶⁹ According to the International Crisis Group, however, some Kurdish fighters often operated outside the SDF and occasionally carried out attacks on the SNA and Turkish military targets.⁶⁷⁰ According to multiple sources, the Turkish army might potentially continue its long-term campaign of air strikes against SDF targets.⁶⁷¹

Around mid-May 2025, tensions between SNA factions (affiliated with the Syrian Ministry of Defence) and the SDF at the Tishreen Dam escalated into renewed fighting, reportedly resulting in the deaths of several SNA fighters.⁶⁷²

3.3.6.4 Political unrest in the north-east

In the SDF-controlled north-east, there was considerable uncertainty about the political future of the region and the safety of the population.⁶⁷³ Many Kurds and smaller population groups in the region distrusted the intentions of the interim authorities set up by HTS in Damascus.⁶⁷⁴ For the women who fought in the ranks of the Kurdish YPJ, which consists exclusively of women, there was even more uncertainty surrounding the possible integration of the SDF.⁶⁷⁵ The Kurdish-led semi-autonomous authorities in the north-east feared that a complete withdrawal of American troops would leave the region vulnerable to a possible Turkish military operation and a resurgence of ISIS.⁶⁷⁶ In April 2025, the US began withdrawing hundreds of troops from north-eastern Syria.⁶⁷⁷

From December 2024 onwards, tensions ran high in areas with an Arab majority.⁶⁷⁸ After the fall of the Assad regime, dissatisfaction with the Kurdish-dominated administration continued to grow here. Many residents hoped for reunification with

⁶⁶⁶ The New Arab, *Syria Kurds say struck deal with Damascus on battleground dam*, 11 April 2025.

⁶⁶⁷ The New Arab, *Syria Kurds say struck deal with Damascus on battleground dam*, 11 April 2025; MEI, *ISIS is on the ropes in Syria. A successful transition in Damascus could deliver a knockout blow*, 14 April 2025.

⁶⁶⁸ MEI, *ISIS is on the ropes in Syria. A successful transition in Damascus could deliver a knockout blow*, 14 April 2025.

⁶⁶⁹ This Week in Northern Syria, *This Week in Northern Syria [10B.2025]*, 14 March 2025; ICG, *A glimmer of peace in Syria's North East*, 28 March 2025.

⁶⁷⁰ ICG, *A glimmer of peace in Syria's North East*, 28 March 2025.

⁶⁷¹ This Week in Northern Syria, *This Week in Northern Syria [10B.2025]*, 14 March 2025.

⁶⁷² BBC Monitoring, *Syrian army positions 'attacked' at strategic Tishreen Dam*, 29 May 2025; UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 21 May 2025; This Week in Northern Syria, *This Week in Northern Syria [20.2025]*, 22 May 2025.

⁶⁷³ AP News, *A tour through northeastern Syria in a moment of uncertainty*, 7 February 2025; The Guardian, *'We are part of Syria': Kurdish-led SDF fights for place in post-Assad future*, 21 February 2025; BBC News, *'We are still at war': Syria's Kurds battle Turkey months after Assad's fall*, 26 February 2025.

⁶⁷⁴ AP News, *A tour through northeastern Syria in a moment of uncertainty*, 7 February 2025; The New York Times, *Kurdish distrust of Syria's new government runs deep*, 28 April 2025; MEE, *The long path to recovery in northeastern Syria*, 11 May 2025.

⁶⁷⁵ BBC News, *'We are still at war': Syria's Kurds battle Turkey months after Assad's fall*, 26 February 2025; France 24, *Kurdish fighters hesitate to join Syria's vision of a unified army*, 3 April 2025.

⁶⁷⁶ The Guardian, *'We are part of Syria': Kurdish-led SDF fights for place in post-Assad future*, 21 February 2025; BBC News, *'We are still at war': Syria's Kurds battle Turkey months after Assad's fall*, 26 February 2025.

⁶⁷⁷ The New York Times, *U.S. is withdrawing hundreds of troops from Syria*, 17 April 2025.

⁶⁷⁸ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

the rest of Syria.⁶⁷⁹ There were demonstrations in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor by citizens who wanted the new authorities in Damascus to take over the administration in their area as well. During such demonstrations, security forces purportedly fired on demonstrators. Under this increased pressure, the authorities seemed to be struggling to maintain control of the situation. They relied primarily on stricter enforcement of order. For example, security forces in Raqqa imposed a curfew and carried out arrests.⁶⁸⁰

3.3.6.5 Afrin

During the reporting period, the city of Afrin and the region of the same name in the north-west of Aleppo province remained largely under the control of SNA groups.⁶⁸¹ These SNA groups participated in two different offensives in December 2024 (see 1.1 and 2.1.2). Some of the groups (and fighters from these groups) returned to their areas of origin (for example, in rural Homs or the Eastern Ghouta region) after the fall of Assad.⁶⁸² As a result, the groups reduced their presence in Afrin.⁶⁸³ According to one source, the SNA military police were also still present.⁶⁸⁴

On 6 February 2025, the general security forces of the interim authorities entered Afrin.⁶⁸⁵ Later in February, interim president al-Sharaa visited the city of Afrin during a domestic trip to various cities and provinces.⁶⁸⁶ In Afrin, al-Sharaa met with local Kurdish representatives who shared their grievances. According to one source, al-Sharaa promised to replace the armed factions in the city with official security forces and to put an end to abuses against local Kurds.⁶⁸⁷ As reported by multiple sources, the future of Afrin, and particularly the return of displaced persons, had been an important issue in the negotiations between the central authorities and the SDF.

According to various sources, there was already talk of a reduced number of checkpoints staffed by SNA fighters in Afrin around January and February 2025.⁶⁸⁸ Several checkpoints were purportedly to be transferred to the general security forces in February 2025.⁶⁸⁹ In early April 2025, Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported that SNA groups – according to an anonymous source at the Syrian Ministry of Defence – had scaled back their military presence and checkpoints in Afrin. The same source also indicated that their presence in the area would be maintained for the time being.⁶⁹⁰ This occurred after the interim administration and the SDF signed an agreement on 10 March 2025 (see 2.1.4). At the time of writing, the extent to which this information concerned a new development was unclear, as was the relationship between the remaining SNA groups and the general security forces.

⁶⁷⁹ Le Monde, *In Raqqa, tensions are rising between Syria's Arabs and Kurds*, 28 January 2025; France 24, *Kurdish rule in northeast Syria under pressure after deal with Damascus*, 16 March 2025, [url](#); confidential source, February 2025.

⁶⁸⁰ Le Monde, *In Raqqa, tensions are rising between Syria's Arabs and Kurds*, 28 January 2025; France 24, *Kurdish rule in northeast Syria under pressure after deal with Damascus*, 16 March 2025, [url](#); confidential source, February 2025.

⁶⁸¹ Syria Direct, *Waning hopes: Will Damascus help Afrin's Kurds reclaim their homes?*, 12 February 2025; The National, *Steep uphill battle: The many challenges in building Syria's new army*, 21 February 2025; Al-Jumhuriya, *"Syria is free, but my home is still occupied"*, 25 February 2025; Syria Direct, *SDF-Damascus agreement in Aleppo a litmus test, and a possible path forward*, 7 April 2025; HRW, *Türkiye-backed armed groups detain, extort civilians*, 14 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁶⁸² Confidential source, February 2025.

⁶⁸³ Syria Direct, *SDF-Damascus agreement in Aleppo a litmus test, and a possible path forward*, 7 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁶⁸⁴ Confidential source, February 2025.

⁶⁸⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian forces enter northern towns long held by Turkey-backed groups*, 6 February 2025.

⁶⁸⁶ SANA, *President al-Sharaa meets with dignitaries of Afrin region and its countryside*, 16 February 2025.

⁶⁸⁷ Etana, *Syria update #19*, 22 February 2025.

⁶⁸⁸ The New Arab, *Northwest Syria: 70,000 Kurds have returned to Afrin since fall of Assad regime*, 29 January 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁶⁸⁹ The National, *Steep uphill battle: The many challenges in building Syria's new army*, 21 February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁶⁹⁰ AFP, *Pro-Turkey Syria groups reduce presence in Kurdish area: official*, 8 April 2025.

Despite the relatively smaller presence of armed groups, some sources noted that the security situation for civilians in Afrin was largely the same as it had been before the fall of Assad.⁶⁹¹ According to human rights organisations, the situation at that time was characterised by impunity, abductions, arrests without legal basis or the necessary legal safeguards,⁶⁹² human rights violations in detention, and the expropriation of property.⁶⁹³ According to various sources, from December 2024 onwards, there was somewhat less tension and less fighting between armed factions,⁶⁹⁴ as well as fewer abuses at checkpoints.⁶⁹⁵ As noted by multiple sources, however, the remaining groups and fighters continued their extortion⁶⁹⁶ of Kurdish citizens, abductions⁶⁹⁷ and arrests without legal basis or the required legal safeguards (including on charges of having links to the SDF, which was also a way of extorting money from people in exchange for their release).⁶⁹⁸

In December 2024, an estimated tens of thousands⁶⁹⁹ of displaced Kurds returned to their former homes in Afrin when the SNA captured Shahba and Tel Rif'aat in Aleppo province (see 2.1.2).⁷⁰⁰ At the same time, an unknown number of civilians and fighters who had been staying in Afrin returned to their original places of residence.⁷⁰¹ Some of the Kurds who returned to Afrin had initially fled to SDF-controlled areas in December 2024, but decided to go to Afrin, for such reasons as a lack of shelter (whether temporary or permanent) there. As a result, many preferred to return rather than face renewed displacement⁷⁰² after they had already fled Afrin in 2018. At that time, this was the result of Operation Olive Branch – an offensive by the Turkish army and SNA groups against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (Kurdish: *Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*, YPG).⁷⁰³

Many returnees had difficulty reclaiming their homes in Afrin. Some houses had been confiscated by commanders or fighters from SNA groups, while others had been occupied by civilians who had fled from other parts of the country.⁷⁰⁴ According to various sources, armed groups and some civilians occupying the houses demanded hundreds of dollars in exchange for returning the houses and other property.⁷⁰⁵

⁶⁹¹ Syria Direct, *Waning hopes: Will Damascus help Afrin's Kurds reclaim their homes?*, 12 February 2025; Al-Jumhuriya, "Syria is free, but my home is still occupied", 25 February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁶⁹² HRW, *Syria: "Everything is by the power of the weapon". Abuses and impunity in Turkish-occupied northern Syria*, 29 February 2024.

⁶⁹³ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024, pp. 13-14; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, pp. 14-16.

⁶⁹⁴ Confidential source, February 2025.

⁶⁹⁵ Confidential source, March 2025.

⁶⁹⁶ SNHR, *At least 229 arbitrary detentions documented in January 2025*, 4 February 2025, pp. 7-8; Al-Jumhuriya, "Syria is free, but my home is still occupied", 25 February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁶⁹⁷ Rudaw, *87 people 'kidnapped' in Afrin since start of 2025: local watchdog*, 8 February 2025; Al-Jumhuriya, "Syria is free, but my home is still occupied", 25 February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁶⁹⁸ SNHR, *At least 229 arbitrary detentions documented in January 2025*, 4 February 2025, p. 7; Al-Jumhuriya, "Syria is free, but my home is still occupied", 25 February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁶⁹⁹ Enab Baladi, *Thousands return to Afrin after Assad regime's fall*, 28 January 2025; The New Arab, *Northwest Syria: 70,000 Kurds have returned to Afrin since fall of Assad regime*, 29 January 2025.

⁷⁰⁰ Syria Direct, *Tens of thousands return to Afrin while fear of abuses keeps others away*, 3 January 2025; Enab Baladi, *Thousands return to Afrin after Assad regime's fall*, 28 January 2025.

⁷⁰¹ The New Arab, *Northwest Syria: 70,000 Kurds have returned to Afrin since fall of Assad regime*, 29 January 2025.

⁷⁰² Syria Direct, *Tens of thousands return to Afrin while fear of abuses keeps others away*, 3 January 2025.

⁷⁰³ Enab Baladi, *Thousands return to Afrin after Assad regime's fall*, 28 January 2025; Syria Direct, *Waning hopes: Will Damascus help Afrin's Kurds reclaim their homes?*, 12 February 2025.

⁷⁰⁴ Syria Direct, *Waning hopes: Will Damascus help Afrin's Kurds reclaim their homes?*, 12 February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁷⁰⁵ Syria Direct, *Waning hopes: Will Damascus help Afrin's Kurds reclaim their homes?*, 12 February 2025.

3.4 ISIS

During the reporting period, ISIS cells remained present primarily in the Badia desert and in Deir ez-Zor in eastern Syria.⁷⁰⁶ Sources recorded the most ISIS activity in this province, and particularly in the SDF-controlled area east of the Euphrates.⁷⁰⁷

An increase in the number, complexity and effectiveness of ISIS attacks had been observed in the course of 2024, during the previous reporting period (see 1.18 of the General COI Report of December 2024).⁷⁰⁸ After the power shift in December 2024, the number of attacks by the organisation had decreased significantly.⁷⁰⁹ Around the end of February 2025, however, ISIS activities purportedly increased again in the Badia and eastern Syria.⁷¹⁰ According to one source, ISIS carried out two attacks in January 2025, followed by 9 attacks in February, 19 in March, and at least 14 in the first half of April 2025.⁷¹¹

In December 2024, with the partial power vacuum that arose after the fall of the former regime and the withdrawal of the IRGC and pro-Iranian militias from Syria, fears of an ISIS resurgence increased significantly.⁷¹² According to SDF commander Mazloum Abdi, ISIS had exploited the instability and gained new momentum by seizing weapons from abandoned regime posts in eastern Syria in December 2024.⁷¹³ At the same time, concerns about possible escapes by imprisoned ISIS fighters (actual or alleged) had increased.⁷¹⁴ Approximately 9,500 men were still being detained on suspicion of being former members of or having ties to ISIS, in addition to more than 40,000 women and children associated with them, in a network of more than 20 detention centres and two camps (Al-Hol and Al-Roj) in north-eastern Syria guarded by the SDF.⁷¹⁵

According to multiple sources, after the fall of Assad, ISIS took advantage of the partial power vacuum to relocate cells and organise itself.⁷¹⁶ ISIS cells appeared to have been established in and around major cities, among other places.⁷¹⁷ Nevertheless, in late February 2025, various sources believed that ISIS was not one of the greatest challenges and priorities facing the interim administration's overburdened security forces.⁷¹⁸ At the same time, however, they warned that the security situation had become much more favourable for the organisation as the

⁷⁰⁶ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 7; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025, p. 13.

⁷⁰⁷ Syria Weekly, *March 25-April 1, 2025*, 1 April 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 1-8, 2025*, 8 April 2025; This Week in Northern Syria, *This Week in Northern Syria [15.2025]*, 17 April 2025.

⁷⁰⁸ CTC Sentinel, *The new Syrian government's fight against the Islamic State, Hezbollah, and captagon*, March 2025, p. 32; The New York Times, *Islamic State regains strength in Syria*, 9 April 2025; MEI, *ISIS is on the ropes in Syria. A successful transition in Damascus could deliver a knockout blow*, 14 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁷⁰⁹ The New York Times, *Islamic State regains strength in Syria*, 9 April 2025.

⁷¹⁰ Syria in Figures, *External contribution: A panoramic view of the status quo in Syria and the emerging US position*, March 2025; UN HRC, *Statement by Paulo Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic at the 58th Session of the UN Human Rights Council*, 18 March 2025.

⁷¹¹ MEI, *ISIS is on the ropes in Syria. A successful transition in Damascus could deliver a knockout blow*, 14 April 2025.

⁷¹² UNSC, *Twentieth 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*, 31 January 2025, p. 2; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025, p. 13; confidential source, February 2025.

⁷¹³ AP News, *A tour through northeastern Syria in a moment of uncertainty*, 7 February 2025.

⁷¹⁴ The New York Times, *Islamic State regains strength in Syria*, 9 April 2025.

⁷¹⁵ Atlantic Council, EIP & MEI, *Reimagining Syria. A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad*, 13 March 2025, p. 34; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 8; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025, p. 13.

⁷¹⁶ ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025, p. 13; confidential source, April 2025.

⁷¹⁷ Atlantic Council, EIP & MEI, *Reimagining Syria. A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad*, 13 March 2025, p. 31; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025, p. 13; The National, *Syria cracks down on ISIS remnants as authorities seek closer US ties*, 18 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁷¹⁸ The New York Times, *Islamic State regains strength in Syria*, 9 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

centralisation of power by the interim administration slowed down and the fragmentation of the territory increased.⁷¹⁹ More than a month and a half later, in mid-April 2025, another source expressed concern that the continuing power vacuum in parts of the transitional government's territory and the uncontrolled freedom of movement greatly facilitated the spread of ISIS cells. The source noted that, during this period, ISIS continued to exercise strategic patience while preparing for attacks.⁷²⁰

Various actors continued to combat ISIS in Syria during the reporting period. At the beginning of the reporting period, the US had around 2,000 troops in Syria and continued to provide air support against ISIS targets.⁷²¹ The US Central Command reported that it had attacked more than 75 ISIS targets on the day the Assad regime fell.⁷²² After that, American troops continued to attack alleged ISIS camps and members. The US-backed SDF also continued to carry out operations against ISIS, arresting ISIS members (actual or alleged).⁷²³ In April 2025, the US began withdrawing hundreds of troops from north-eastern Syria.⁷²⁴

The interim government's capacity to combat ISIS in more remote areas was unclear.⁷²⁵ On 11 January 2025, however, the GSS did prevent an attack on the Shiite shrine in Sayyida Zainab, south of Damascus.⁷²⁶ According to various sources, security forces had foiled at least eight terrorist attacks by ISIS, most of which targeted Damascus or other major urban centres.⁷²⁷ According to multiple sources, these successes against ISIS were due in part to cooperation with the US in terms of intelligence.⁷²⁸ In February and March 2025, the GSS arrested alleged ISIS cells in the province of Daraa, including in Al-Sanamayn.⁷²⁹

In May 2025, two significant violent confrontations between the central authorities and ISIS took place in quick succession. On 17 May 2025, a GSS operation against an ISIS cell in the eastern districts of the city of Aleppo led to fighting in which at least two members of the security forces and at least three ISIS militants were killed.⁷³⁰ On 18 May 2025, ISIS carried out a bomb attack outside a police station in Al-Mayadeen, in the part of Deir ez-Zor province controlled by the transitional government. According to reports, at least three people were killed in this attack.⁷³¹ This was reportedly the first car bomb attack that ISIS had carried out in Syria in more than a year.⁷³²

⁷¹⁹ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁷²⁰ Confidential source, April 2025.

⁷²¹ ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025, p. 8; The New York Times, *Islamic State regains strength in Syria*, 9 April 2025.

⁷²² U.S. Central Command, *U.S. Central Command conducts dozens of airstrikes to eliminate ISIS camps in central Syria*, 8 December 2025.

⁷²³ U.S. Central Command, *CENTCOM and partner forces conduct operations in Iraq and Syria to defeat ISIS*, 6 January 2025; AP News, *A tour through northeastern Syria in a moment of uncertainty*, 7 February 2025; CTC Sentinel, *The new Syrian government's fight against the Islamic State, Hezbollah, and captagon*, March 2025, p. 32.

⁷²⁴ The New York Times, *U.S. is withdrawing hundreds of troops from Syria*, 17 April 2025.

⁷²⁵ The New York Times, *Islamic State regains strength in Syria*, 9 April 2025.

⁷²⁶ AP News, *Syrian intelligence agency says it thwarted a planned Islamic State attack on a Shiite shrine*, 11 March 2025; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025, p. 13.

⁷²⁷ Foreign Policy, *It's time for Syria's Kurds to fold*, 20 February 2025; The New York Times, *Islamic State regains strength in Syria*, 9 April 2025.

⁷²⁸ Foreign Policy, *It's time for Syria's Kurds to fold*, 20 February 2025; CTC Sentinel, *The new Syrian government's fight against the Islamic State, Hezbollah, and captagon*, March 2025, p. 33; The New York Times, *Islamic State regains strength in Syria*, 9 April 2025.

⁷²⁹ The National, *ISIS cells and killings pose challenge for southern Syria*, 12 February 2025; CTC Sentinel, *The new Syrian government's fight against the Islamic State, Hezbollah, and captagon*, March 2025, p. 33.

⁷³⁰ Reuters, *Syrian government forces raid Islamic State hideouts in Aleppo*, 17 May 2025; Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (May 13-20, 2025)*, 22 May 2025.

⁷³¹ Reuters, *At least 3 killed in blast targeting police station in eastern Syria*, 18 May 2025; L'Orient Today, *IS 'fights to survive' amid renewed tensions in Syria*, 20 May 2025; Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (May 13-20, 2025)*, 22 May 2025.

⁷³² Syria Weekly, *Weekly data update (May 13-20, 2025)*, 22 May 2025.

3.5 Crime

Looting, robberies, kidnappings and killings were not a new phenomenon. Such crimes had occurred regularly under the Assad regime, and they had reportedly rarely been punished at the time, due to the perpetrators' close ties with local security forces.⁷³³

According to multiple sources, crime increased significantly after the fall of the Assad regime, including in the major cities of Damascus, Homs and Aleppo.⁷³⁴ This occurred within the context of a security vacuum and widespread gun ownership.⁷³⁵ The dismissal of the police (see 2.3.3) had seriously undermined law enforcement. The new police force was unable to cover the country adequately.⁷³⁶

From the first weeks after the power shift in December 2024, there were reports of kidnappings and killings, apparently driven by revenge, particularly in Homs, Latakia and Tartous (for additional information, see also 3.3.5.3).

Kidnappings for ransom and robberies constituted another widespread problem. Such incidents also occurred in the major cities of Damascus⁷³⁷ and Aleppo.⁷³⁸ According to one source, there had been at least twelve kidnappings in Damascus in January and February 2025.⁷³⁹ According to another source, robberies also occurred in Damascus in neighbourhoods known to be relatively safe, including Mezzeh and Abu Rummaneh.⁷⁴⁰ In Aleppo (Syria's second largest city), the number of kidnappings for ransom and looting had increased exponentially, according to one source.⁷⁴¹ According to another source, the incidents in Aleppo did not appear to be the result of organised crime, but were caused by extreme poverty in the city.⁷⁴² In Aleppo, sectarian motives are not thought to play a major role in kidnappings,⁷⁴³ in contrast to the situation in Homs (see 3.3.4.1).⁷⁴⁴ Kidnappings also occurred in more rural areas (including in rural Homs⁷⁴⁵ and Suweida), where the presence of police and security forces was less significant.⁷⁴⁶ In the city of Raqqa, in the DAANES territory, residents reported that looting and robbery were widespread, due to the poverty that prevailed there.⁷⁴⁷

According to multiple sources, crime also increased in the coastal cities of Latakia and Tartous in the first weeks after 8 December 2024, including robberies, thefts and extortion.⁷⁴⁸

⁷³³ MEI, *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁷³⁴ The Economist, *Homs's troubles show the challenges facing Syria's leaders*, 13 February 2025; Arab Reform Initiative, *Where does Syria's transition stand?*, 24 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁷³⁵ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁷³⁶ The New York Times, *As people are abducted on unpatrolled streets, Syrians demand better protection*, 10 March 2025; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.

⁷³⁷ SNHR, *Doctor Qusai al-Zeer abducted by unidentified gunmen in Damascus city, January 19, 2025*, 22 January 2025; Reuters, *Exclusive: Syria's sectarian violence reached capital, terrorizing Alawites, residents say*, 27 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁷³⁸ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁷³⁹ Confidential source, February 2025.

⁷⁴⁰ Confidential source, February 2025.

⁷⁴¹ Confidential source, February 2025.

⁷⁴² Confidential source, March 2025.

⁷⁴³ Confidential source, February 2025.

⁷⁴⁴ The New York Times, *As people are abducted on unpatrolled streets, Syrians demand better protection*, 10 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁷⁴⁵ The New York Times, *As people are abducted on unpatrolled streets, Syrians demand better protection*, 10 March 2025.

⁷⁴⁶ Confidential source, February 2025.

⁷⁴⁷ The Irish Times, *'We are nice people, but poor': After Assad's fall, economic problems are Syrians' biggest concern*, 20 April 2025.

⁷⁴⁸ MEI, *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025.

The fall of the Assad regime was a blow to the highly lucrative industrial drug trade, which had been controlled by prominent elements of the regime.⁷⁴⁹ According to the World Bank, the production of the drug Captagon had been the most valuable economic sector in Syria in previous years, with a total market value estimated at 5.6 billion dollars.⁷⁵⁰ After 8 December 2024, however, the production and smuggling of Captagon had largely disappeared. President al-Sharaa had promised to put an end to illegal drug trafficking.⁷⁵¹ The GSS attempted to destroy large-scale production facilities and combat smuggling networks and dealers with dozens of raids.⁷⁵² It nevertheless lacked the capacity to stop trade completely, especially in areas it did not control.⁷⁵³ According to multiple sources, the lucrative trade continued at a much lower level.⁷⁵⁴ Shipments of Captagon were still being intercepted during attempts to smuggle them into neighbouring countries.⁷⁵⁵ According to one source, Captagon production continued in northern areas under the control of SNA factions and in Suweida in the south, where prominent members of the local community were reportedly still involved in the trade.⁷⁵⁶

⁷⁴⁹ Atlantic Council, EIP & MEI, *Reimagining Syria. A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad*, 13 March 2025, p. 28.

⁷⁵⁰ Reuters, *Syria's economy: The devastating impact of war and sanctions*, 6 January 2025.

⁷⁵¹ DW, *Syria's dictator gone – but his drug dealers are still busy*, 25 March 2025.

⁷⁵² Atlantic Council, EIP & MEI, *Reimagining Syria. A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad*, 13 March 2025, p. 28; CTC Sentinel, *The new Syrian government's fight against the Islamic State, Hezbollah, and captagon*, March 2025.

⁷⁵³ New Lines Magazine, *Inside Syria's captagon industry*, 6 January 2025; DW, *Syria's dictator gone – but his drug dealers are still busy*, 25 March 2025.

⁷⁵⁴ CTC Sentinel, *The new Syrian government's fight against the Islamic State, Hezbollah, and captagon*, March 2025; Carnegie, *Double dealers: Lebanon and the risks of captagon trafficking*, 19 March 2025; ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.

⁷⁵⁵ Etana, *Brief: Arms & drug smuggling in Syria after Assad*, 29 January 2025; DW, *Syria's dictator gone – but his drug dealers are still busy*, 25 March 2025.

⁷⁵⁶ Carnegie, *Double dealers: Lebanon and the risks of captagon trafficking*, 19 March 2025.

4 Displaced persons

4.1 New displacement

As a result of various conflicts, more than 713,107 people have been internally displaced and approximately 110,000 have fled to Lebanon since November 2024.⁷⁵⁷ Even during the HTS-led advance of the armed opposition, tens of thousands of people had fled to Lebanon.⁷⁵⁸ For example, many Shiites from villages west of the city of Homs fled across the nearby Lebanese border for fear of reprisals.⁷⁵⁹ At almost the same time, an offensive by the Turkish-backed SNA against the SDF in northern Syria also led to large-scale displacement.⁷⁶⁰ In early March 2025, the escalation of violence in the coastal region of Syria (see 3.3.5.2) led to large-scale displacement, and tens of thousands of Syrians fled to Lebanon once again.⁷⁶¹ On a smaller scale, starting in December 2024, internal displacement also occurred in south-western Syria as a result of Israeli military activities in the provinces of Quneitra and Daraa.⁷⁶² Displacement due to violence also occurred locally in the city of Homs (see 3.3.4.1) and in the provinces of Rural Damascus and Suweida (see 3.3.3.3) during the reporting period.

The group that crossed the border into north-eastern Lebanon around the time of the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024 consisted mainly of Shiites.⁷⁶³ On 15 January 2025, the Lebanese government organisation Disaster Risk Management (DRM) stated that approximately 86,000 people had travelled from Syria to the Lebanese province of Baalbek-Hermel, including 20,000 Lebanese nationals.⁷⁶⁴ The UN refugee agency (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR) estimated that around 70,000 Syrians had arrived there in two weeks.⁷⁶⁵ They stayed on the streets or were taken in by homes and mosques, *husseiniyas*⁷⁶⁶ and schools.⁷⁶⁷

In the northern province of Aleppo, more than 100,000 Kurds were displaced in December 2024 during the SNA's capture of Tel Rifaat, Shahba, Manbij and surrounding areas.⁷⁶⁸ Many of them had already been displaced before, often several times, including Kurds who had been driven out of the Afrin region during

⁷⁵⁷ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #25. Syria situation crisis*, 1 May 2025; UNHCR, *Syrian Arab Republic. Syria governorates IDPs and IDP returnees overview (As of 15 May 2025)*, 15 May 2025.

⁷⁵⁸ Reuters, *Syrian Shi'ites and other minorities flee to Lebanon, fearing Islamist rule*, 13 December 2024; confidential source, March 2025.

⁷⁵⁹ Reuters, *Syrian Shi'ites and other minorities flee to Lebanon, fearing Islamist rule*, 13 December 2024; AP News, *This Ramadan, relief and hope bump against violence and uncertainty in the new Syria*, 25 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁷⁶⁰ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 7.

⁷⁶¹ The Century Foundation, *Cross-border shuffle: Refugee movement between Lebanon and Syria after Assad*, 31 March 2025.

⁷⁶² UN Office of the Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, *Highlights of the noon briefing by Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesperson for Secretary-General António Guterres*, 19 December 2024; The New Arab, *In Quneitra, Syrians hold their breath as Israel deepens its occupation of the Golan Heights*, 8 January 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Israel's Syria gambit*, 20 February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁷⁶³ Confidential source, March 2025.

⁷⁶⁴ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #11. Syria situation crisis*, 23 January 2025, p. 3; UN OCHA, *Lebanon: Flash update #56. Escalation of hostilities in Lebanon as of 23 January 2025*, 24 January 2025, p. 3.

⁷⁶⁵ NRC, *Syriërs worden online de stuipen op het lijf gejaagd, dus komen er in Libanon alleen maar méér vluchtelingen bij*, 27 January 2025; The Century Foundation, *Cross-border shuffle: Refugee movement between Lebanon and Syria after Assad*, 31 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁷⁶⁶ Shiites use these buildings for religious commemorative gatherings; L'Orient Today, *Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon will not be completed within the planned timeframe, Israel continues operations*, 24 January 2025.

⁷⁶⁷ The Century Foundation, *Cross-border shuffle: Refugee movement between Lebanon and Syria after Assad*, 31 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁷⁶⁸ Le Monde, *In northeastern Syria, 'the war is not over'*, 16 January 2025.

the 2018 Operation Olive Branch offensive of Türkiye and the SNA.⁷⁶⁹ Some of the displaced persons left for SDF-controlled areas in the provinces of Raqqa and Hasaka. When their homes were seized and during their flight to DAANES territory, these citizens were reportedly subjected to extortion⁷⁷⁰ and severe violence (including intimidation, physical attacks and killings) by SNA factions.⁷⁷¹

In the DAANES territory, this group of displaced persons stayed primarily in emergency shelters. Many families struggled to find safe and stable accommodations.⁷⁷² According to UN OCHA, in late March 2025, there were still more than 25,000 displaced persons in north-eastern Syria, spread across 208 temporary reception centres, including 135 schools.⁷⁷³ These places were poorly equipped to cope with the winter cold, and they did not offer good insulation, heating or privacy.⁷⁷⁴ In addition, according to UN OCHA, the use of these schools was restricting access to education for more than 60,000 pupils in late March 2025.⁷⁷⁵

According to UN OCHA, the escalation of violence in early March 2025 had led to the displacement of 51,000 people in Latakia and Tartous.⁷⁷⁶ An unknown number of people had fled to remote villages in the mountains of the coastal region. Others had sought refuge at the Russian-controlled Hmeimim airbase,⁷⁷⁷ where access was reportedly restricted to women and children.⁷⁷⁸ According to one source, several villages were virtually deserted after the escalation of violence.⁷⁷⁹

At least 39,000 Syrians, mainly Alawites, fled to northern Lebanon in the days and weeks following the escalation of violence.⁷⁸⁰ Fleeing families crossed unofficial border crossings, with most having to wade through a river along the border with whatever they could carry on foot from Syria. Some had walked fifty kilometres. Many reported having had difficulty reaching the border due to ongoing insecurity along the way.⁷⁸¹ The refugees included relatively many pregnant women, elderly people and people with chronic medical needs.⁷⁸² This group of Syrians found temporary shelter in Alawite villages on the other side of the border, among other places.⁷⁸³ Most of the Alawites who fled to Lebanon came from Tartous and Latakia, while others came from the provinces of Hama and Homs.⁷⁸⁴

⁷⁶⁹ UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: Flash update No. 4 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 10 December 2024)*, 10 December 2024; Le Monde, *In northeastern Syria, 'the war is not over'*, 16 January 2025; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 7.

⁷⁷⁰ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 7.

⁷⁷¹ Le Monde, *In northeastern Syria, 'the war is not over'*, 16 January 2025; MSF, *Syrians share stories of violence and displacement from temporary shelters in the northeast*, 11 February 2025.

⁷⁷² Le Monde, *In northeastern Syria, 'the war is not over'*, 16 January 2025; MSF, *Syrians share stories of violence and displacement from temporary shelters in the northeast*, 11 February 2025.

⁷⁷³ UN OCHA, *Humanitarian situation report No. 4. As of 26 March 2025*, 27 March 2025, p. 7.

⁷⁷⁴ Le Monde, *In northeastern Syria, 'the war is not over'*, 16 January 2025; MSF, *Syrians share stories of violence and displacement from temporary shelters in the northeast*, 11 February 2025.

⁷⁷⁵ UN OCHA, *Humanitarian situation report No. 4. As of 26 March 2025*, 27 March 2025, p. 7.

⁷⁷⁶ UN OCHA, *Humanitarian situation report No. 4. As of 26 March 2025*, 27 March 2025, p. 2.

⁷⁷⁷ HRW, *Syria: End coastal killing spree, protect civilians*, 10 March 2025; Shafaq News, *From base to broken homes: Fear follows Syrian return*, 15 March 2025; The Syria Report, *Systematic looting, burning and bulldozing of property on the Syrian coast*, 18 March 2025; UNICEF, *Syria flash update No.1 (Violence in the coastal areas)*, 21 March 2025.

⁷⁷⁸ UNICEF, *Syria flash update No.1 (Violence in the coastal areas)*, 21 March 2025.

⁷⁷⁹ The Syria Report, *Systematic looting, burning and bulldozing of property on the Syrian coast*, 18 March 2025.

⁷⁸⁰ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #27. Syria situation crisis*, 16 May 2025.

⁷⁸¹ Syria Direct, *Thousands of Alawites seek refuge in Lebanon, where locals lead the response*, 14 March 2025; UNHCR, *Lebanon flash update: New arrivals to North Lebanon*, 17 March 2025.

⁷⁸² Syria Direct, *Thousands of Alawites seek refuge in Lebanon, where locals lead the response*, 14 March 2025; UNHCR, *Lebanon flash update: New arrivals to North Lebanon*, 17 March 2025.

⁷⁸³ Syria Direct, *Thousands of Alawites seek refuge in Lebanon, where locals lead the response*, 14 March 2025.

⁷⁸⁴ The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025; Syria Direct, *Thousands of Alawites seek refuge in Lebanon, where locals lead the response*, 14 March 2025; UNCHR, *Lebanon flash update: New arrivals to North Lebanon*, 17 March 2025.

Due to the security situation in the coastal region and in Central Syria, where violent incidents targeting Alawites were still taking place, Syrians continued to flee to Lebanon. For example, according to a Lebanese government agency, in late March 2025, approximately five thousand people had crossed the Lebanese border in a single day, after twelve civilians, mainly Alawites, had reportedly been killed by armed elements in western Syria on 28 March 2025.⁷⁸⁵ On 15 May 2025, UNHCR reported that northern Lebanon was now experiencing a 'prolonged' influx of Syrian refugees as a result of the escalation of violence in the provinces of Latakia, Tartous, Homs and Hama in early March 2025. The number of Syrians crossing the border is said to have decreased due to 'border reinforcements' by the Syrian authorities.⁷⁸⁶

In the southern provinces of Quneitra and Daraa, Israeli military activities led to localised displacement, sometimes of a short-term nature.⁷⁸⁷ According to reports, by December 2024, around forty percent of the inhabitants of some villages in Quneitra had left their homes.⁷⁸⁸ In the months that followed, displacement occurred in the village of Koya in the province of Daraa, where a violent confrontation had taken place in March 2025 between the Israeli army and armed residents (see 3.2).⁷⁸⁹

In the province of Rural Damascus, violence in predominantly Druze suburbs of Damascus led to the displacement of approximately 15,000 people between 30 April and 6 May 2025, according to UN OCHA.⁷⁹⁰

4.2 Return of displaced persons

According to UNHCR figures, there were 7.4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Syria in mid-May 2025.⁷⁹¹ As described in 4.1, more than 675,347 people had been displaced (or re-displaced) since 27 November 2024. Of the total IDP population, an estimated 5.4 million people were living outside IDP sites, while 1.97 million were spread across 1,671 different IDP sites, mainly in displacement camps and informal settlements in north-western Syria.⁷⁹² Many people there lacked adequate electricity, sanitation facilities or shelter from extreme weather conditions.⁷⁹³

Displaced persons continued to return. According to UNHCR, 1,200,486 persons had returned to their former places of residence between 27 November 2024 and 15 May 2025.⁷⁹⁴ Despite the harsh humanitarian conditions in the displacement camps, the number of people leaving the camps remained limited. The more than 1.2 million returnees included 344,733 IDPs who had returned from IDP sites in north-

⁷⁸⁵ L'Orient Today, *Akkar surpasses 20,000 new Syrian refugees, according to latest count*, 1 April 2025.

⁷⁸⁶ UNHCR, *Lebanon flash update. New arrivals to North Lebanon*, 15 May 2025.

⁷⁸⁷ UN Office of the Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, *Highlights of the noon briefing by Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesperson for Secretary-General António Guterres*, 19 December 2024; The New Arab, *In Quneitra, Syrians hold their breath as Israel deepens its occupation of the Golan Heights*, 8 January 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Israel's Syria gambit*, 20 February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁷⁸⁸ UN Office of the Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, *Highlights of the noon briefing by Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesperson for Secretary-General António Guterres*, 19 December 2024.

⁷⁸⁹ Etana, *Syria update #23*, 31 March 2025.

⁷⁹⁰ UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 21 May 2025.

⁷⁹¹ UNHCR, *Syrian Arab Republic. Syria governorates IDPs and IDP returnees overview (As of 15 May 2025)*, 15 May 2025.

⁷⁹² UNHCR, *Syrian Arab Republic. Syria governorates IDPs and IDP returnees overview (As of 15 May 2025)*, 15 May 2025.

⁷⁹³ The New Humanitarian, *Syria faces huge humanitarian challenges as it begins post-Assad era*, 9 December 2024; NRC, *Syria: Destruction, lack of services delay safe returns within country*, 13 February 2025.

⁷⁹⁴ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #27. Syria situation crisis*, 16 May 2025, p. 1.

western Syria.⁷⁹⁵ As of 15 May 2025, according to UNHCR, most displaced persons had returned to their former places of residence in Aleppo province (41%), followed by the provinces of Hama (15%), Homs (15%), Idlib (14%) and Rural Damascus (5%).⁷⁹⁶

In addition to those returning from displaced persons camps in the north-west, displaced persons also returned from the Rukban camp, located in a desert-like area on the border with Jordan, where seven to eight thousand people had been living in harsh conditions just before the power shift.⁷⁹⁷ With the fall of the regime, routes from the previously isolated camp became passable again for these displaced persons. Reportedly, the entire remaining population was able to leave.⁷⁹⁸

At the time of writing, however, it was unclear how many displaced persons had permanently returned to their former places of residence.⁷⁹⁹ Insufficient data were available to determine what had happened to the movements of people, particularly from the north, to their areas of origin.⁸⁰⁰ Many had returned to reunite with family members or to see what had happened to their homes and birthplaces.⁸⁰¹ For many, the decision to return permanently was not an easy one, especially when they found their homes and infrastructure destroyed.⁸⁰² An unknown number of displaced persons returned to north-western Syria after visiting their original places of residence.⁸⁰³ According to UNHCR and UN OCHA, a lack of housing, inadequate basic services and employment opportunities, and other conditions prevented many displaced persons from returning.⁸⁰⁴ Another obstacle was the threat of explosive remnants of war (see 4.3).⁸⁰⁵ Many displaced persons had been living in appalling conditions in refugee camps for years, but preferred to remain there for the time being.⁸⁰⁶

4.2.1

Devastation

There were towns and villages, as well as entire neighbourhoods of cities (for example, Damascus,⁸⁰⁷ Aleppo,⁸⁰⁸ Homs,⁸⁰⁹ Raqqa⁸¹⁰ and Deir ez-Zor⁸¹¹) that were largely uninhabitable.⁸¹² According to an estimate by UN Habitat, 328,000 homes

⁷⁹⁵ UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report no. 5. As of 28 April 2025*, 8 May 2025, p. 1; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #27. Syria situation crisis*, 16 May 2025, p. 1.

⁷⁹⁶ UNHCR, *Syrian Arab Republic. Syria governorates IDPs and IDP returnees overview (As of 15 May 2025)*, 15 May 2025.

⁷⁹⁷ Amnesty International, *Syria: US must provide support to thousands stranded in horrifying conditions in Rukban camp*, 23 September 2024; NPR, *The Assad regime's fall has freed displaced Syrians stuck in a remote desert camp*, 24 December 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 7.

⁷⁹⁸ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 7.

⁷⁹⁹ The New York Times, *Syrians want to go home, but many no longer have one to return to*, 13 March 2025; NRC, *Syria: Better conditions, infrastructure investments could pave the way for millions to return*, 15 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁸⁰⁰ Confidential source, February 2025.

⁸⁰¹ UN OCHA, *Humanitarian situation report No. 4. As of 26 March 2025*, 27 March 2025.

⁸⁰² The New Humanitarian, *Syrians begin to return to destroyed homes. Will others follow?*, 19 December 2024; NRC, *Syria: Destruction, lack of services delay safe returns within country*, 13 February 2025; The New York Times, *Syrians want to go home, but many no longer have one to return to*, 13 March 2025; NRC, *Syria: Better conditions, infrastructure investments could pave the way for millions to return*, 15 May 2025.

⁸⁰³ NRC, *Syria: Better conditions, infrastructure investments could pave the way for millions to return*, 15 May 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁸⁰⁴ UNHCR, *As displaced Syrians return home, others wait and hope for more aid*, 21 March 2025.

⁸⁰⁵ UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian situation report no. 4. As of 26 March 2025*, 27 March 2025.

⁸⁰⁶ NRC, *Syria: Destruction, lack of services delay safe returns within country*, 13 February 2025.

⁸⁰⁷ The New Humanitarian, *A cautious return to a Damascus neighbourhood marred by Syria's war*, 10 April 2025.

⁸⁰⁸ The New York Times, *In Aleppo, Residents cheer and refugees return to a jubilant but ravaged city*, 11 December 2024.

⁸⁰⁹ The Irish Times, *The ghosts of Khaldiyeh, a Homs neighbourhood devastated by Syria's war*, 14 April 2025.

⁸¹⁰ Foreign Affairs, *Syria's biggest problem. How to resettle millions of refugees and displaced people*, 11 February 2025.

⁸¹¹ Los Angeles Times, *In Syria, the fighting is over, but a resource-rich region is left in limbo*, 6 February 2025.

⁸¹² Syria Direct, *In Syria's 'barrel bomb capital' Darayya, housing crisis stalls return*, 31 January 2025; Foreign Affairs, *Syria's biggest problem. How to resettle millions of refugees and displaced people*, 11 February 2025; NRC, *From ruins to renewal: How can Syria rebuild after 14 years of war?*, 26 March 2025; IGC, *The New Syria: Halting a Dangerous Drift*, 28 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

were completely destroyed.⁸¹³ The UN Commission of Inquiry reported that Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons who had finally been able to visit their original places of residence had told the Commission how entire cities and infrastructure had been destroyed. In many cases, their homes were no longer standing or had been damaged, looted and left without basic amenities.⁸¹⁴ There had been widespread looting in the former opposition area.⁸¹⁵ Many who returned despite this remained among the ruins.⁸¹⁶ In some cases, they stayed in tents – brought from the refugee camps from whence they had come – on the site of their former homes.⁸¹⁷ Others repaired a room in their damaged home.⁸¹⁸ One source reported having met several families who had returned and fallen ill because their damaged homes (with, for example, holes in the roof) did not provide shelter from the weather.⁸¹⁹

4.2.2 *Tensions in returnee communities*

According to multiple sources, divisions and tensions existed in communities where many displaced persons had returned after the fall of the regime. This was particularly evident between returnees and residents who had remained, and revolved largely around perceptions of political loyalties.⁸²⁰ According to one source, the first group of people, who had lived in exile for years, returned with the sentiment that they had sacrificed everything for the Syrian revolution.⁸²¹ Many of the displaced persons had previously been evacuated during the conflict – often after years of siege by the regime – to the parts of Idlib or Aleppo controlled by the armed opposition. Now that they had returned from the north to their former homes, some purportedly accused the population of those who had stayed behind of supporting the Assad regime.⁸²² According to one source, this was aimed at a group extending beyond the local figures known to have collaborated with the regime.⁸²³

In Daraa, returnees who had been evacuated from Daraa to the north in 2018 harboured resentment towards those who had stayed behind at the time and, in their view, had reconciled with the regime, according to one source. Certain figures from the first group now wanted to play a dominant role and take prominent positions in their communities.⁸²⁴

The city of Douma, in the Ghouta region around Damascus, was another example of a place where returnees (including members of armed groups) distrusted their neighbours who had lived under the regime after 2018. Douma was a religiously

⁸¹³ UN Habitat, *Syria country profile*, June 2023, p. 2, [url](#).

⁸¹⁴ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 8; DW, *Internally displaced Syrians long to return home*, 5 May 2025, [url](#); confidential source, March 2025.

⁸¹⁵ Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, *"Pillage and plunder: Unlawful appropriation and destruction of properties of refugees and IDPs in Syria"*, 6 December 2024; AP, *In northern Syria, displaced owners return to houses with no roofs*, 17 February 2025; The New York Times, *Syrians want to go home, but many no longer have one to return to*, 13 March 2025.

⁸¹⁶ The Irish Times, *The ghosts of Khaldiyeh, a Homs neighbourhood devastated by Syria's war*, 14 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁸¹⁷ Daily Sabah, *Syria is back... When will we be back?*, 28 March 2025; Asharq al-Awsat, *Syria's Al-Qusayr celebrates Eid al-Fitr without Hezbollah for first time in years*, 1 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁸¹⁸ NRC, *From ruins to renewal: How can Syria rebuild after 14 years of war?*, 26 March 2025; Enab Baladi, *Returnees to al-Qusayr settle on rubble of their homes*, 18 April 2025.

⁸¹⁹ Confidential source, February 2025.

⁸²⁰ The Century Foundation, *Damascus dispatch: Fear and hope in a divided Syria*, 17 March 2025; NRC, *Beyond return: Ensuring sustainable recovery & (re)-integration in Syria*, 15 May 2025, p. 13; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁸²¹ Confidential source, February 2025.

⁸²² The Century Foundation, *Damascus dispatch: Fear and hope in a divided Syria*, 17 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁸²³ Confidential source, February 2025.

⁸²⁴ Confidential source, March 2025.

conservative, almost entirely Sunni area that had been the centre of a vast opposition enclave outside the capital from 2013 to 2018.⁸²⁵ Fighters from the armed group that was dominant at the time, *Jaish al-Islam*, had returned from the north to their former stronghold in December 2024.⁸²⁶

In the city of Homs, returning Sunni fighters – including men from places that had been affected by sectarian violence during the war – now had duties that included the task of ensuring security in Alawite neighbourhoods.⁸²⁷ Many of the fighters patrolling the city had previously been expelled by the regime. This group therefore harboured mistrust towards their Alawite fellow citizens.⁸²⁸

Relatively large-scale returns also put pressure on locally available housing and already overburdened basic services and infrastructure.⁸²⁹ In many areas where displacement had occurred, the lack of housing, basic infrastructure, clean water, electricity, healthcare and schools made it difficult to accommodate large numbers of returnees.⁸³⁰ In addition, many returnees found their homes occupied by others, leading to disputes over housing, land and property.⁸³¹ According to sources, these unresolved grievances could undermine fragile stability locally.⁸³² According to a local source, they had already led to conflicts involving armed returnees in the first months after the fall of Assad.⁸³³

4.3 Explosive remnants of war

Explosive remnants of war, including mines and unexploded ordnance, posed a persistent and serious threat to the lives of civilians – particularly returning Syrians, as well as aid workers – in large parts of the country.⁸³⁴ According to UN OCHA, the presence of explosive remnants of war remained a major obstacle to return.⁸³⁵ In some places, they also obstructed access to healthcare and education, as well as the cultivation of agricultural land.⁸³⁶

Landmines, unexploded ordnance and ammunition (including cluster munitions) were scattered across the country, in major cities and in rural areas where fighting and bombing had taken place over the past fourteen years.⁸³⁷ The HALO Trust, an

⁸²⁵ The Century Foundation, *Damascus dispatch: Fear and hope in a divided Syria*, 17 March 2025.

⁸²⁶ Confidential source, January 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁸²⁷ X.com, Channel 4 News, 6 March 2025, [url](#); confidential source, February 2025.

⁸²⁸ The Economist, *Homs's troubles show the challenges facing Syria's leaders*, 13 February 2025; FT, *Can Syria's new rulers sustain its fragile peace?*, 24 February 2025.

⁸²⁹ Confidential source, April 2025.

⁸³⁰ Foreign Affairs, *Syria's biggest problem. How to resettle millions of refugees and displaced people*, 11 February 2025.

⁸³¹ The New Humanitarian, *Syrians begin to return to destroyed homes. Will others follow?*, 19 December 2024; Foreign Affairs, *Syria's biggest problem. How to resettle millions of refugees and displaced people*, 11 February 2025; NRC, *Syria: Destruction, lack of services delay safe returns within country*, 13 February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁸³² Foreign Affairs, *Syria's biggest problem. How to resettle millions of refugees and displaced people*, 11 February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁸³³ Confidential source, March 2025.

⁸³⁴ SNHR, *Maps of the most prominent areas contaminated by landmines in Syria, and recommendations to address this issue*, 31 December 2024; BBC News, *Syrians returning home face deadly threat of landmines*, 23 January 2025; VOA, *Landmines slow return to Palmyra, Syria, home of famed ancient ruins*, 19 February 2025; The Guardian, *Landmines in Syria kill hundreds of civilians returning home after fall of Assad*, 17 March 2025; The New Arab, *Years of dictatorship may be over, but the deadly threat of explosive devices is holding back post-Assad Syria's recovery*, 27 March 2025; UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report No. 4. As of 26 March 2025*, 27 March 2025, p. 4; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁸³⁵ UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report No. 2. As of 27 February 2025*, 27 February 2025, p. 3.

⁸³⁶ The New Arab, *Years of dictatorship may be over, but the deadly threat of explosive devices is holding back post-Assad Syria's recovery*, 27 March 2025.

⁸³⁷ SNHR, *Maps of the most prominent areas contaminated by landmines in Syria, and recommendations to address this issue*, 31 December 2024; The Guardian, *Landmines in Syria kill hundreds of civilians returning home after fall of Assad*, 17 March 2025.

international organisation that operates demining programmes in Syria, recorded incidents in almost all Syrian provinces after 8 December 2024.⁸³⁸ According to UN OCHA, accidents involving explosive remnants of war were a daily reality throughout the country.⁸³⁹

The return, starting in early December 2024, of hundreds of thousands of Syrians to their former homes, either temporarily or permanently, led to a sharp increase in the number of casualties.⁸⁴⁰ Following the power shift in December 2024, large-scale movements across the former front lines suddenly became possible, exponentially increasing the risk of fatal accidents and injuries.⁸⁴¹

As reported by various international humanitarian organisations, hundreds of people were killed and injured in incidents involving explosive remnants of war in Syria during the first months after the fall of the Assad regime.⁸⁴² According to an update from the Mine Action Area of Responsibility, a coordination network comprising organisations including the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and Handicap International, at least 372 people (including 89 children) were killed and 543 people (including 222 children) were injured in accidents involving explosive remnants of war between 8 December 2024 and 30 April 2025.⁸⁴³ According to the HALO Trust, the figures on victims of incidents were probably seriously underestimated, as there were also deaths and injuries in remote areas, which were not reported.⁸⁴⁴ Based on data from the HALO Trust, Save the Children reported that, in the first three months after the fall of Assad, at least 188 children in Syria were killed (more than 60) or injured by landmines and explosive remnants of war.⁸⁴⁵ Children were particularly vulnerable to accidental contact with explosive remnants of war, due to a lack of awareness of the risks and curiosity (for example, mistaking leftover grenades or cluster bomb components for toys).⁸⁴⁶ Casualties also occurred regularly among volunteers who, often without specialised equipment,⁸⁴⁷ helped to clear the land and homes of others so that they could return safely.⁸⁴⁸

Explosive remnants of war were widespread: along hundreds of kilometres of current and former front lines (often littered with invisible explosives),⁸⁴⁹ in agricultural fields, on roads, bridges and riverbeds, in critical water and electricity

⁸³⁸ For a map of Syria showing the locations where accidents involving landmines and explosive remnants of war occurred between 8 December 2024 and 2 February 2025, see: The Halo Trust, *Syria landmine crisis spirals as millions begin to return home*, 3 February 2025.

⁸³⁹ UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report No. 2. As of 27 February 2025*, 27 February 2025.

⁸⁴⁰ The Guardian, *Landmines in Syria kill hundreds of civilians returning home after fall of Assad*, 17 March 2025.

⁸⁴¹ Mine Action AoR, *Situation report No. 1 (December 2024 – January 2025)*, 17 February 2025.

⁸⁴² Mine Action AoR, *Situation update No. 2 (February – March 2025)*, 3 April 2025; AFP, *Syria explosives kill and injure over 700 since Assad fall: ICRC*, 3 April 2025; UN OCHA, *Today's top news: Myanmar, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Ukraine, Colombia*, 4 April 2025.

⁸⁴³ Mine Action AoR, *Situation update No. 3 (April)*, 13 May 2025.

⁸⁴⁴ The Halo Trust, *Syria landmine crisis spirals as millions begin to return home*, 3 February 2025.

⁸⁴⁵ Save the Children, *Syria: More than 180 children killed or injured by explosive remnants of war in three months as thousands return home*, 6 March 2025.

⁸⁴⁶ UN News, *Syria: Mine casualties persist as UN partners scale up clearance operations*, 17 February 2025; Save the Children, *Syria: More than 180 children killed or injured by explosive remnants of war in three months as thousands return home*, 6 March 2025; The Halo Trust, *One million returning Syrians at risk from unexploded bombs*, 7 March 2025; The Guardian, *Landmines in Syria kill hundreds of civilians returning home after fall of Assad*, 17 March 2025.

⁸⁴⁷ VOA, *Landmines slow return to Palmyra, Syria, home of famed ancient ruins*, 19 February 2025; The New Arab, *Years of dictatorship may be over, but the deadly threat of explosive devices is holding back post-Assad Syria's recovery*, 27 March 2025.

⁸⁴⁸ X.com, SNHR, 22 February 2025, [url](#); NPR, *Clearing Syria of unexploded munitions from the civil war*, 25 February 2025; The Guardian, *Landmines in Syria kill hundreds of civilians returning home after fall of Assad*, 17 March 2025; X.com, Qalaat Al Mudiq, 25 March 2025, [url](#); The New Arab, *Years of dictatorship may be over, but the deadly threat of explosive devices is holding back post-Assad Syria's recovery*, 27 March 2025.

⁸⁴⁹ The HALO Trust, *Syria landmine crisis spirals as millions begin to return home*, 3 February 2025; The New Arab, *Years of dictatorship may be over, but the deadly threat of explosive devices is holding back post-Assad Syria's recovery*, 27 March 2025.

infrastructure, in active and former hospitals, schools, and in residential areas.⁸⁵⁰ According to various sources, the situation was particularly serious in Deir ez-Zor, due to the massive presence of explosive remnants of war, as well as limited access to trauma care and rehabilitation for survivors.⁸⁵¹ Areas along former front lines in north-western Syria (Idlib and northern Hama) were also heavily contaminated with mines, including several medium-sized towns along the M5 motorway (Ma'arrat an-Nu'man, Khan Sheikhoun, Saraqib) and important agricultural areas south of the M4 motorway. These were agricultural areas that provided food security to the population in the north-west and beyond, and which could not now be cultivated.⁸⁵² According to various sources, devastated neighbourhoods in and around Damascus (for example, Jobar and Yarmouk) were still contaminated with explosive remnants of war.⁸⁵³

Even in areas that were less contaminated with explosive remnants of war (such as Latakia and Suweida), fatalities occurred because scrap metal dealers and others moved and collected mines, old bombs and ammunition – sometimes storing them in populated areas – in order to earn money from the metal.⁸⁵⁴ In the city of Latakia, sixteen civilians (including five women and five children) were killed on 15 March 2025, according to the SNHR and other sources, when a bomb exploded in a four-storey residential building. Eighteen others, including six children, were injured in the explosion that destroyed the building and caused damage to surrounding buildings. The explosion was reportedly caused by a scrap dealer who was working with an old bomb.⁸⁵⁵

⁸⁵⁰ Mine Action AoR, *Situation report No. 1 (December 2024 – January 2025)*, 17 February 2025; VOA, *Landmines slow return to Palmyra, Syria, home of famed ancient ruins*, 19 February 2025; The New Arab, *Years of dictatorship may be over, but the deadly threat of explosive devices is holding back post-Assad Syria's recovery*, 27 March 2025.

⁸⁵¹ UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report No. 2. As of 27 February 2025*, 27 February 2025; UN OCHA, *Today's top news: Myanmar, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Ukraine, Colombia*, 4 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁸⁵² BBC News, *Syrians returning home face deadly threat of landmines*, 23 January 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁸⁵³ The New Humanitarian, *A cautious return to a Damascus neighbourhood marred by Syria's war*, 10 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁸⁵⁴ AFP, *Blast from suspected old bomb in Syria kills 16*, 16 March 2025; SNHR, *Rocket blast results in a massacre in Latakia, March 15, 2025*, 17 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁸⁵⁵ AFP, *Blast from suspected old bomb in Syria kills 16*, 16 March 2025; SNHR, *Rocket blast results in a massacre in Latakia, March 15, 2025*, 17 March 2025.

5 Living conditions

5.1 Humanitarian situation

During the reporting period, there was a serious humanitarian crisis in Syria. The needs were greater at the time of and after the fall of the Assad regime than they had been at any other time during the war.⁸⁵⁶ Over ninety percent of all Syrians were living below the poverty line,⁸⁵⁷ with – according to the World Food Programme (WFP) – at least thirteen million people (more than half the population) who did not have access to, or who could not afford enough food of sufficient quality. According to UNICEF figures, more than 500,000 children under the age of 5 years suffered from life-threatening malnutrition, while another 2 million children were on the verge of becoming malnourished.⁸⁵⁸ According to UN OCHA, in late March 2025, more than sixteen million people (almost three quarters of the Syrian population) had insufficient food, water, shelter and medicine.⁸⁵⁹ They were dependent on humanitarian aid to meet their basic needs.⁸⁶⁰

The humanitarian situation was at risk of further deterioration due to severe underfunding of critical relief operations. Only 12.5 percent of the coordinated humanitarian response required by the UN, which amounted to 1.25 billion dollars for the country was funded, thus leaving vital sectors (such as shelter, non-food emergency aid, water and sanitation, and agriculture) facing a lack of resources.⁸⁶¹

Moreover, in late January 2025, the US decided to freeze a large part of its foreign aid funding. This had an almost immediate negative impact on conditions in displacement camps in north-western and north-eastern Syria.⁸⁶² Within weeks of the decision, medical clinics providing emergency care closed, water distribution slowed, and bread distribution came to a halt in displaced persons camps.⁸⁶³ According to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), displaced persons who had returned and Syrians who were still living in these displacement camps said that cuts to aid (including monthly food rations) had a devastating effect on families.⁸⁶⁴

⁸⁵⁶ The New Humanitarian, *Syria faces huge humanitarian challenges as it begins post-Assad era*, 9 December 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 10; confidential source, April 2025.

⁸⁵⁷ The international poverty line is set at 2.15 US dollars. This means that anyone who has to live on less than 2.15 dollars a day is considered extremely poor; World Bank Group, *Fact sheet: An adjustment to global poverty lines*, September 2022.

⁸⁵⁸ UNICEF, *As Syria's children step out of the shadows of war, securing their future is more critical than ever*, 25 March 2025.

⁸⁵⁹ HRW, *US, EU, UK: Lift Syria sanctions hindering recovery*, 18 February 2025; UN OCHA, *At Security Council, UN Relief Chief urges "decisive action" to support people of Syria*, 25 March 2025; WFP, *Syrian Arab Republic*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025; UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

⁸⁶⁰ HRW, *US, EU, UK: Lift Syria sanctions hindering recovery*, 18 February 2025; WFP, *Syrian Arab Republic*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025; UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

⁸⁶¹ UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian response priorities - January to March 2025 (January 2025)*, 28 January 2025; UN News, *Funding shortages risk undermining a 'watershed moment' for Syria*, 17 March 2025; UN OCHA, *At Security Council, UN Relief Chief urges "decisive action" to support people of Syria*, 25 March 2025.

⁸⁶² UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report no. 4. As of 26 March 2025*, 27 March 2025, p. 4; The New Humanitarian, *US aid freezes escalate Syria's crisis*, 17 February 2025.

⁸⁶³ AP News, *Trump's foreign aid freeze forces health clinics in a vulnerable region of Syria to close*, 14 February 2025; The New Humanitarian, *US aid freezes escalate Syria's crisis*, 17 February 2025; Le Monde, *Humanitarian effort in Syria decimated by US aid cuts*, 18 February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁸⁶⁴ NRC, *Syria: Turbulence and lack of investments impede people's ability to recover*, 13 March 2025.

According to UN OCHA, ninety percent of regular food aid activities in north-eastern Syria were halted in March 2025 due to the cessation of American funding. It was estimated that this affected 161,000 people and 6 displacement camps, where 9,000 households were staying and in urgent need of food aid.⁸⁶⁵

In almost fourteen years of armed conflict, Syria's infrastructure had been destroyed on a large scale.⁸⁶⁶ In a report entitled 'The Impact of the Conflict in Syria', issued in early 2025, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) wrote that the energy and electricity sector was in ruins. According to the UNDP, more than seventy percent of all power stations and transmission lines had suffered significant damage.⁸⁶⁷

The water infrastructure was also severely damaged in all parts of the country.⁸⁶⁸ According to UNICEF, at least two-thirds of all sewage treatment plants, half of all pumping stations and one-third of all water towers have been damaged since 2011.⁸⁶⁹ As a result, almost half the population had insufficient water and was dependent on alternative and often unsafe water sources to meet their water needs.⁸⁷⁰ In the north-east, the ongoing conflict had a major impact on critical infrastructure. By late March 2025, the Tishreen Dam and Alouk Water Station had been out of service for several months, leaving hundreds of thousands of people in such places as Manbij and Ain al-Arab (Kobani) in eastern Aleppo province without reliable electricity or water.⁸⁷¹

Healthcare and education were also in a critical state. More than half of all Syrian hospitals were out of service, and there were serious shortages of medical supplies and a lack of trained personnel.⁸⁷² More than seven thousand schools were damaged or destroyed, and approximately two million children were not attending school.⁸⁷³

5.2 Developments under the new administration

In the months following the power shift, there were virtually no significant improvements in the poor living conditions for the vast majority of the population.⁸⁷⁴ According to various sources, there was even some deterioration in the first few months.⁸⁷⁵ The average Syrian family was still forced to focus on daily

⁸⁶⁵ UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report no. 4. As of 26 March 2025*, 27 March 2025, p. 4.

⁸⁶⁶ World Bank Group, *Syria. Joint damage assessment of selected cities*, December 2022; Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, "Pillage and plunder: Unlawful appropriation and destruction of properties of refugees and IDPs in Syria", 6 December 2024.

⁸⁶⁷ UNDP, *The impact of the conflict in Syria*, 20 February 2025, p. 38.

⁸⁶⁸ UNICEF, *Syrian Arab Republic. Education*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁸⁶⁹ HRW, *US, EU, UK: Lift Syria sanctions hindering recovery*, 18 February 2025; UNICEF, *Syrian Arab Republic. Education*.

⁸⁷⁰ UNICEF, *Every day counts. Children of Syria cannot wait any longer*, May 2022; UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report no. 4. As of 26 March 2025*, 27 March 2025, p. 14.

⁸⁷¹ NRC, *From ruins to renewal: How can Syria rebuild after 14 years of war?*, 26 March 2025; UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report no. 4. As of 26 March 2025*, 27 March 2025, p. 8.

⁸⁷² UN News, *Syria: UN health agency launches \$56.4 million appeal to meet critical needs*, 24 December 2024; International Medical Corps, *Syria emergency response: Situation report #4*, 8 January 2025; The Washington Post, *International sanctions have left Syria's health system on life support*, 10 January 2025; AP News, *Trump's foreign aid freeze forces health clinics in a vulnerable region of Syria to close*, 14 February 2025; UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report no. 4. As of 26 March 2025*, 27 March 2025, p. 11; SAMS, *Syria's health sector. Challenges and intervention priorities*, 3 April 2025.

⁸⁷³ HRW, *US, EU, UK: Lift Syria sanctions hindering recovery*, 18 February 2025; UNDP, *The impact of the conflict in Syria*, 20 February 2025, p. 35; NRC, *From ruins to renewal: How can Syria rebuild after 14 years of war?*, 26 March 2025; UNICEF, *Syrian Arab Republic. Education*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

⁸⁷⁴ ECFR, *The road ahead: Six ways Europeans can urgently support a stable Syria*, 6 March 2025; X.com, Benjamin Fève, 19 May 2025, [url](#); confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

⁸⁷⁵ Confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

survival.⁸⁷⁶ Inflation and unemployment remained high, and basic necessities (such as food, water, rent, electricity and fuel) were too expensive or unavailable for many.⁸⁷⁷

There were some differences in this regard, for example, between urban and rural areas and between areas that had previously been separated by front lines (such as the cities of Idlib and Aleppo).⁸⁷⁸ Services were generally concentrated in the major cities. According to one source, most water stations did not pump water to villages, due to a lack of electricity.⁸⁷⁹ Türkiye supplied electricity to areas along the Turkish border in northern Syria.⁸⁸⁰ According to one source, the province of Idlib had a stable electricity supply, running water and good internet.⁸⁸¹ According to another source, however, the availability of services in Idlib had declined after the power shift, as the interim administration – formerly the Idlib administration – focused its attention on other parts of the country.⁸⁸²

There was some improvement in the electricity supply in Damascus and some other areas from March 2025 onwards, partly as a result of supplies from Qatar.⁸⁸³ Before that, the capital had electricity for about two hours a day, even in the affluent neighbourhoods.⁸⁸⁴ Syria was nevertheless still facing serious power shortages overall. In most areas, electricity from the state was available for a few hours a day at best.⁸⁸⁵ For example, parts of the provinces of Homs and Hama, would have only 45 minutes of electricity every seven or eight hours. Those who could afford it used private solar panels, but the vast majority of the population depended on the little electricity that was available.⁸⁸⁶

In addition, there was a fuel shortage in Syria, as the government was struggling to replace imports of Iranian crude oil (on which it had previously been heavily dependent).⁸⁸⁷ This oil is essential for the production of petroleum and diesel.⁸⁸⁸ In Damascus, people sold fuel – some of it smuggled in from Lebanon – along the roadside in plastic water bottles.⁸⁸⁹

⁸⁷⁶ The New York Times, *As Ramadan nears, Syrians feel the pinch of a cash shortage*, 28 February 2025; ECFR, *The road ahead: Six ways Europeans can urgently support a stable Syria*, 6 March 2025; NRC, *Syria: Turbulence and lack of investments impede people's ability to recover*, 13 March 2025; NRC, *From ruins to renewal: How can Syria rebuild after 14 years of war?*, 26 March 2025; Enab Baladi, *Syrian returnees celebrate first Eid after liberation*, 31 March 2025.

⁸⁷⁷ NRC, *From ruins to renewal: How can Syria rebuild after 14 years of war?*, 26 March 2025; UN News, *Syrians heading home find few of the basics needed to survive*, 19 May 2025.

⁸⁷⁸ Syria Direct, *Idlib faces new challenges as priorities shift to Damascus*, 19 February 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Islamism is still thriving in Idlib*, 12 March 2025; The Atlantic, *Can one man hold Syria together?*, 24 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁸⁷⁹ Confidential source, March 2025.

⁸⁸⁰ The National, *Syria's electricity crisis: Fuel shortage plunges country into darkness*, 7 February 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Islamism is still thriving in Idlib*, 12 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁸⁸¹ The Atlantic, *Can one man hold Syria together?*, 24 March 2025.

⁸⁸² Syria Direct, *Idlib faces new challenges as priorities shift to Damascus*, 19 February 2025.

⁸⁸³ Al Jazeera, *Qatar begins supplying natural gas to Syria through Jordan*, 13 March 2025; NRC, *Terug naar Syrië of in Nederland blijven?*, 22 April 2025.

⁸⁸⁴ Confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁸⁸⁵ The Economist, *Syria's economy, still strangled by sanctions, is on its knees*, 6 March 2025; Reuters, *Tankers with crude oil, gasoline arrive at Syria's Baniyas, state news agency reports*, 25 March 2025; NRC, *From ruins to renewal: How can Syria rebuild after 14 years of war?*, 26 March 2025; AP News, *Syrians left in the dark as the interim government struggles to restore electricity*, 28 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁸⁸⁶ NRC, *From ruins to renewal: How can Syria rebuild after 14 years of war?*, 26 March 2025.

⁸⁸⁷ FT, *Syria's largest refinery stops operating as Iran oil flow ceases*, 19 December 2024; The National, *Syria's electricity crisis: Fuel shortage plunges country into darkness*, 7 February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁸⁸⁸ The National, *Syria's electricity crisis: Fuel shortage plunges country into darkness*, 7 February 2025.

⁸⁸⁹ Enab Baladi, *Fuel stalls: Efforts to regulate parallel market in Damascus*, 18 February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

Although the prices of many staple foods – except for bread – had fallen,⁸⁹⁰ many Syrians still could not afford them.⁸⁹¹ The average wage (which amounted to 35 to 40 US dollars per month in the public sector) was nowhere near enough to cover the most basic living expenses.⁸⁹² In addition, Syria faced a severe shortage of banknotes.⁸⁹³ The Central Bank instructed banks to limit cash withdrawals.⁸⁹⁴ Due to a lack of cash resulting from low withdrawal limits, households found it even more difficult to meet their basic needs.⁸⁹⁵

The new authorities did not have the financial resources to pay state salaries and bear the costs of subsidies for basic goods.⁸⁹⁶ The interim administration attempted to reduce government spending by implementing mass redundancies in the bloated public sector and by partially dismantling the social safety net for the population. In January 2025, the authorities removed alleged ghost employees and people with multiple salaries from government institutions and suspended payments to military and security personnel of the former regime.⁸⁹⁷ As a result, many thousands of households lost one or more sources of income.⁸⁹⁸ Subsidies on basic commodities (such as bread) were largely discontinued, which reportedly caused an eightfold to tenfold increase in the price of bread.⁸⁹⁹

The interim administration fell behind in the payment of wages and pensions.⁹⁰⁰ In early January 2025, HTS had just promised to increase civil service salaries by four hundred percent. According to a report by the international news service Reuters in early January 2025, Qatar might potentially finance the increased salaries in the public sector.⁹⁰¹ In late January, Reuters reported that Doha had suspended the provision of funds to the Syrian interim government due to uncertainty as to whether the transfers would constitute a violation of US sanctions.⁹⁰² In late March 2025, however, the International Crisis Group (ICG) reported that civil servants were now receiving their salaries, albeit with some delay.⁹⁰³

According to multiple sources, the broad and far-reaching sanctions imposed by the United States, the European Union and the United Kingdom hindered the recovery of

⁸⁹⁰ NRC, *Syria: Turbulence and lack of investments impede people's ability to recover*, 13 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁸⁹¹ NRC, *Syria: Turbulence and lack of investments impede people's ability to recover*, 13 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁸⁹² The Economist, *Syria's economy, still strangled by sanctions, is on its knees*, 6 March 2025; Carnegie, *Three requisites for Syria's reconstruction process*, 8 May 2025; UN News, *Syrians heading home find few of the basics needed to survive*, 19 May 2025.

⁸⁹³ Reuters, *Syria receives local currency printed in Russia before Assad's fall*, 14 February 2025; The New York Times, *As Ramadan nears, Syrians feel the pinch of a cash shortage*, 28 February 2025; The Economist, *Syria's economy, still strangled by sanctions, is on its knees*, 6 March 2025; The New Arab, *As the EU eases restrictions, Syria grapples with a liquidity crisis*, 19 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁸⁹⁴ The New York Times, *As Ramadan nears, Syrians feel the pinch of a cash shortage*, 28 February 2025; The Economist, *Syria's economy, still strangled by sanctions, is on its knees*, 6 March 2025.

⁸⁹⁵ Mercy Corps, *Flash report: Syria's liquidity crunch*, February 2025, p. 2; The New York Times, *As Ramadan nears, Syrians feel the pinch of a cash shortage*, 28 February 2025; The Economist, *Syria's economy, still strangled by sanctions, is on its knees*, 6 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁸⁹⁶ ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁸⁹⁷ Le Monde, *In Syria, a climate of purge in the public sector*, 21 February 2025; The Syria Report, *Public sector workers reinstated amid government policy chaos*, 22 April 2025.

⁸⁹⁸ Reuters, *'There is no blank check': Syrian leader told to rein in jihadis*, 26 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁸⁹⁹ Los Angeles Times, *A new Syrian government struggles to reset its corrupt, besieged economy*, 30 January 2025; The New York Times, *As Ramadan nears, Syrians feel the pinch of a cash shortage*, 28 February 2025; NRC, *Syria: Turbulence and lack of investments impede people's ability to recover*, 13 March 2025; The Irish Times, *'We are nice people, but poor': After Assad's fall, economic problems are Syrians' biggest concern*, 20 April 2025.

⁹⁰⁰ The Economist, *Syria's economy, still strangled by sanctions, is on its knees*, 6 March 2025.

⁹⁰¹ Reuters, *Exclusive: Qatar plans to help boost Syrian government salaries, sources say*, 7 January 2025.

⁹⁰² Reuters, *Exclusive: US sanctions hold up Qatari support for Syria, sources say*, 27 February 2025.

⁹⁰³ ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.

the Syrian economy.⁹⁰⁴ In addition, they posed a major obstacle to the restoration of essential services (such as healthcare, water and electricity).⁹⁰⁵

Around February–March 2025, some sources indicated that the euphoria surrounding the fall of the Assad regime and a ‘new beginning’ for Syria had begun to wane. Expectations of improved living conditions were not met, despite initial promises made by HTS shortly after the takeover. Many Syrians were deeply concerned about the continuing economic decline and the apparent inability of the new government to get the economy moving.⁹⁰⁶

On 13 May 2025, US President Donald Trump announced that he would lift all American sanctions against Syria.⁹⁰⁷ Subsequently, on 20 May, EU countries reached an agreement to lift economic sanctions against Syria.⁹⁰⁸ These decisions were widely regarded as a positive development.⁹⁰⁹ Shortly after Trump announced the lifting of sanctions, the value of the Syrian pound reportedly rose by about 25 percent.⁹¹⁰ According to multiple sources, however, the process of lifting sanctions will be long and complex,⁹¹¹ and the further consequences of these decisions were therefore not yet clear at the time of writing.

⁹⁰⁴ The Economist, *Syria's economy, still strangled by sanctions, is on its knees*, 6 March 2025; ICG, *What lies in store for Syria as a new government takes power?*, 25 April 2025.

⁹⁰⁵ The Washington Post, *International sanctions have left Syria's health system on life support*, 10 January 2025; The National, *Syria's electricity crisis: Fuel shortage plunges country into darkness*, 7 February 2025; HRW, *US, EU, UK: Lift Syria sanctions hindering recovery*, 18 February 2025.

⁹⁰⁶ Los Angeles Times, *A new Syrian government struggles to reset its corrupt, besieged economy*, 30 January 2025; The Economist, *Syria's economy, still strangled by sanctions, is on its knees*, 6 March 2025; ECFR, *The road ahead: Six ways Europeans can urgently support a stable Syria*, 6 March 2025; Carnegie, *The view from Damascus*, 13 March 2025; The Irish Times, *'We are nice people, but poor': After Assad's fall, economic problems are Syrians' biggest concern*, 20 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁹⁰⁷ Reuters, *Trump says US to lift Syria sanctions, secures \$600 billion Saudi deal*, 14 May 2025.

⁹⁰⁸ Reuters, *EU agrees to lift economic sanctions on Syria, Kallas says*, 21 May 2025.

⁹⁰⁹ The Syria Report, *Analysis: US sanctions lifting to change Syria's economic and political trajectory*, 14 May 2025; UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 21 May 2025.

⁹¹⁰ L'Orient Today, *What will the lifting of US sanctions mean for Syria?*, 15 May 2025.

⁹¹¹ The Syria Report, *Analysis: US sanctions lifting to change Syria's economic and political trajectory*, 14 May 2025; Al Majalla, *Syria's long road to economic recovery can finally begin*, 15 May 2025.

6 Human rights situation

This chapter examines the human rights situation in Syria since the General COI Report of December 2024. Following the takeover on 8 December 2024, the security situation in Syria remained unstable (see 3.1). The sectarian violence against Alawites in early March 2025 (see 3.3.5.2) and against Druze in late April and early May 2025 (see 3.3.2.8) underscored the ongoing unrest and the lack of control by the authorities in Damascus.⁹¹² There were also reports of reprisals against former Assad supporters (see 6.1.5).

6.1 Position of specific groups

6.1.1 Religious and ethnic groups

The religious and ethnic composition of the Syrian population is diverse. According to some estimates, Sunnis make up between 70 and 75 percent of the population.⁹¹³ Smaller religious groups include Alawites, Druze, Christians, Ismailis, Shiites and Yazidis.⁹¹⁴ Arabs constitute the largest ethnic group.⁹¹⁵ Smaller ethnic groups include Kurds, Assyrians, Palestinians, Turkmen, Armenians and Circassians.⁹¹⁶

The HTS-led advance in late November and early December 2024 led to euphoria and hope among some Syrians. The seizure of power by armed Sunnis led by HTS simultaneously caused fear and unrest among other population groups.⁹¹⁷ During its advance, HTS stated that it sought to protect the various population groups and guarantee their rights.⁹¹⁸ In these efforts, HTS focused on groups including Christians in the city of Aleppo, as well as Alawites and Ismailis in the province of Hama.⁹¹⁹ Meetings took place between HTS and local representatives of the various population groups.⁹²⁰ This followed contacts that HTS had made with Christians and Druze in the SSG area in previous years.⁹²¹

⁹¹² The Century Foundation, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025; The New York Times, *Syria's struggle to unify military was evident in outburst of violence*, 17 March 2025; EurActiv, *Interview: UN migration director rules out 'large-scale returns' to Syria*, 10 April 2025.

⁹¹³ DW, *Syria's ethnic and religious groups explained*, 18 December 2024; PBS News, *Syria's minority sects concerned new government won't protect them*, 21 February 2025; CIA, *The world factbook – People and society – Religions*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

⁹¹⁴ DW, *Syria's ethnic and religious groups explained*, 18 December 2024; The New Arab, *Yazidis mark new year across Iraq and Syria amid ongoing challenges*, 22 April 2025; Trouw, *'Ze ontkenden ons bestaan, maar nu is er een sprankje hoop'*, 25 April 2025.

⁹¹⁵ BBC News, *Syria country profile*, 7 January 2025; CIA, *The world factbook – People and society – Ethnic groups*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

⁹¹⁶ The Conversation, *Why Syria's reconstruction may depend on the fate of its minorities*, 18 December 2024; DW, *Syria's ethnic and religious groups explained*, 18 December 2024; BBC News, *Syria country profile*, 7 January 2025; RFE/RL, *Armenian minority living in fear after violence rocks Syria*, 10 March 2025; Syria in Transition, *The new Umayyads. Syria's leaders is turning nostalgia into strategy*, April 2025; CTV News, *What it's like for minority Christians in Syria, after the fall of the longtime dictator*, 25 April 2025.

⁹¹⁷ The New Arab, *Syria's Christians caught between hope and fear for the future*, 24 December 2024; The Conversation, *Why Kurds face an uncertain future in Ahmed Al-Shara's rebel-led Syria*, 20 January 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁹¹⁸ DW, *Syria: HTS Islamists pledge to show tolerance for minorities*, 4 December 2024; Atlantic Council, *Inside Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's diplomatic offensive with Syria's Christians and Ismailis*, 19 March 2025.

⁹¹⁹ UN OHCHR, *Brutality of past years must not be repeated, or Syria will be driven onto a new trajectory of atrocities, warns UN Commission*, 3 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: HTS-linked body reaches out to minority communities amid offensive*, 5 December 2024; Syria Direct, *'Shades of gray': Aleppo's Christians between HTS promises and painful memories*, 5 December 2024; The Washington Post, *Christians in Aleppo fear for their future after Islamist takeover*, 6 December 2024.

⁹²⁰ Arab News, *Reassured 'for now', Aleppo's Christians prepare for Christmas*, 13 December 2024; Atlantic Council, *Inside Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's diplomatic offensive with Syria's Christians and Ismailis*, 19 March 2025.

⁹²¹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Syria*, December 2024, pp. 93.

After the takeover, instability among various religious and ethnic groups led to uncertainty about the future.⁹²² For this reason, they largely adopted a wait-and-see attitude.⁹²³ Among Alawites, Shiites, Druze and Kurds, there was great distrust of the interim administration and subsequently the transitional government.⁹²⁴ Alawites and Shiites also feared a reckoning. Former President Assad belonged to the Alawites. His family came from the town of Qardaha in the province of Latakia. Under Hafez al-Assad and his son Bashar al-Assad, the main administrative and military positions had been held mostly by Alawites. For this reason, other Syrians often identified Alawites with the Assad regime.⁹²⁵ Furthermore, some Syrians associated Shiites with the Shiite group Hezbollah and other Shiite militias supported by Iran.⁹²⁶ In addition, the sectarian violence against Alawites in early March 2025 (see 3.3.5.2) and against Druze in late April and early May 2025 (see 3.3.2.8) had consequences for how other population groups viewed the transitional government. They feared that the transitional government could not or would not protect them from extremist groups in Syria.⁹²⁷

During the reporting period, there were no concrete indications that the transitional government had a policy of treating specific population groups negatively.⁹²⁸ Interim President al-Sharaa promised an inclusive political transition that reflected the diversity of Syria.⁹²⁹ He promised to be tolerant towards all religious and ethnic groups.⁹³⁰ During the reporting period, al-Sharaa held numerous meetings with leading figures from various religious groups.⁹³¹ This stance adopted by al-Sharaa did not prevent other signals from emerging after the takeover, which originated from individuals with extremist views. These individuals were found within HTS, as well as outside of it (such as in ISIS).⁹³² Their extremist views appeared both online

- ⁹²² New Lines Magazine, *Assad was disengaging from Iran, but his next steps are unclear*, 3 December 2024; FT, *Inside Aleppo: the Syrian city captured by rebels*, 4 December 2024; Syria Direct, *Afrin's displaced torn between another exile and danger in northern Aleppo*, 4 December 2024; New Lines Magazine, *Aleppo's Christians weigh an uncertain future*, 4 December 2024; New Lines Magazine, *Amid chaos in Aleppo, there is a chance to discuss the future*, 4 December 2024; Syria Direct, *'Shades of gray': Aleppo's Christians between HTS promises and painful memories*, 5 December 2024.
- ⁹²³ Al-Monitor, *In Syria's Alawite area, joy at Assad fall but fear of Islamism*, 16 December 2024; Arab News, *How Syria's Christians are marking Christmas amid political change and uncertainty*, 25 December 2024; De Volkskrant, *In Syria is de wraak begonnen: 'Zijn jullie alawieten?'*, 23 January 2025; Trouw, *Geloofsgenoten van Assad wachten af: verzoening of wraak*, 25 January 2025; confidential source, March 2025.
- ⁹²⁴ BBC News, *Fear of a reckoning simmers in Assad's Alawite heartland*, 16 December 2024; The Century Foundation, *Damascus dispatch: Fear and hope in a divided Syria*, 17 March 2025.
- ⁹²⁵ The Conversation, *Why Syria's reconstruction may depend on the fate of its minorities*, 18 December 2024; New Lines Magazine, *How desperation sowed the seeds of rebellion in Syria's Latakia province*, 17 March 2025; Atlantic Council, *Inside Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's diplomatic offensive with Syria's Christians and Ismailis*, 19 March 2025; SJAC, *The Syrian government must investigate the targeting of Alawite civilians in Homs*, 13 May 2025.
- ⁹²⁶ France 24, *Once a pro-Iran bastion, Damascus shrine district now in rebel hands*, 11 December 2024; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.
- ⁹²⁷ Syria Direct, *As Israel instrumentalizes Syria's Druze, some fear 'increased sectarianism'*, 21 March 2025; France 24, *Syrians in Damascus suburb in fear after sectarian violence*, 29 April 2025; The New York Times, *What to know about Syria's minorities and sectarian violence*, 1 May 2025.
- ⁹²⁸ Arab News, *How Syria's Christians are marking Christmas amid political change and uncertainty*, 25 December 2024; VOA, *What future awaits Syria's Christian minority?*, 7 January 2025.
- ⁹²⁹ The New York Times, *Syria after al-Assad: How will the rebels govern?*, 11 December 2024; Al-Monitor, *In Syria's Alawite area, joy at Assad fall but fear of Islamism*, 16 December 2024; The New Arab, *Al-Sharaa says Syria's 'revolution for everybody' amid Afghanistan comparisons*, 19 December 2024; DW, *Syria's interim leader seeks to reassure minority groups*, 22 December 2024; AFP, *Syrian leader says working to protect minorities, emphasises coexistence*, 22 December 2024; Reuters, *Syrian leader Sharaa pledges to form inclusive government*, 30 January 2025; DW, *Syrian interim president vows to form inclusive government*, 31 January 2025.
- ⁹³⁰ France 24, *Syrian pubs cautiously reopen after Islamist victory*, 14 December 2024; Reuters, *Syria appoints some foreign Islamist fighters to its military, sources say*, 31 December 2024.
- ⁹³¹ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: HTS leader shores up diplomatic image with key meetings*, 17 December 2024; The Economist, *Everyone wants to meet Syria's new rulers*, 19 December 2024; Al Arabiya, *Lebanese Druze leader Walid Jumblatt meets al-Sharaa in Syria*, 22 December 2024; Reuters, *Syria's de facto ruler reassures minorities, meets Lebanese Druze leader*, 22 December 2024; Al Jazeera, *Syria de facto leader al-Sharaa meets Christian clerics*, 31 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria's de facto leader Sharaa meets Christian clerics*, 1 January 2025; VOA, *What future awaits Syria's Christian minority?*, 7 January 2025; SANA, *President al-Sharaa meets with Shiite dignitaries and notables*, 28 March 2025; L'Orient Today, *Sharaa meets with Shiite community representatives in Syria*, 29 March 2025.
- ⁹³² VOA, *Syrians welcome new rulers' pledge of moderation but are concerned about extremists in their midst*, 24 December 2024; confidential source, February 2025.

(on social media) and offline (for example through posters on walls; see also 6.2.4).⁹³³

In late December 2024, the interim administration announced its intention to organise the 'National Dialogue Conference' in the near future.⁹³⁴ An organising committee was presented on 12 February 2025 (see also 1.3). There were five men and two women in this committee. Most had ideological or political ties to HTS. Six members were Sunni, and one member was Christian. Other groups – including Alawites, Druze, Shiites and Kurds – were not represented.⁹³⁵ The committee commenced with a number of local meetings throughout the country. Only the sessions for the cities of Raqqa and Hasaka, located in the DAANES territory, were held in Damascus.⁹³⁶ On 23 February 2025, invitations to the conference were sent out to local leaders, academics, religious leaders, journalists, businesspeople, activists and others.⁹³⁷ The following day, on 24 February 2025, the reception of more than five hundred guests took place. That evening, a networking dinner was held at the People's Palace in Damascus.⁹³⁸ The substantive meetings took place on 25 February 2025. The final declaration contained eighteen non-binding recommendations, including the preservation of Syria's unity (Point 1), respect for human rights (Point 8) and no discrimination based on origin or religion (Point 9).⁹³⁹ According to critics, the conference was conducted too hastily and was too short to discuss all the important topics. In their opinion, it was not a genuine dialogue. They also felt that it was insufficiently representative.⁹⁴⁰ For example, representatives from DAANES and SDF were absent.⁹⁴¹ According to the organising committee, they had not been invited because they had not disarmed.⁹⁴²

The National Dialogue Conference was the prelude to the constitutional declaration of 13 March 2025. This declaration guarantees freedom of religion. At the same time, however, all rights – including freedom of religion – may be restricted by law if they infringe upon national security or public order. This declaration also promises to protect the rights of all Syrians and to protect them from discrimination (see

⁹³³ Trouw, *Geloofsgenoten van Assad wachten af: verzoening of wraak*, 25 January 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian preparatory committee nominee sparks Islamist anger*, 14 February 2025.

⁹³⁴ The National, *Syria prepares for key national conference to shape post-Assad future*, 30 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *'Preparations begin' for Syrian national dialogue, large participation expected*, 31 December 2024.

⁹³⁵ The New Arab, *Syria's transitional government forms national dialogue committee*, 12 February 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian preparatory committee holds first press conference*, 13 February 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian preparatory committee nominee sparks Islamist anger*, 14 February 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Explainer: Who is on Syria's national dialogue committee?*, 18 February 2025; Etana, *Brief: Recommendations for the Syrian National Dialogue Conference's preparatory committee*, 20 February 2025.

⁹³⁶ SANA, *First dialogue session of the Preparatory Committee for the National Dialogue Conference begins in Homs Province*, 16 February 2025; MEI, *The national dialogue in Syria: A step forward or a concerning trajectory?*, 5 March 2025.

⁹³⁷ AP News, *Syria's national dialogue conference held as the battered country seeks to rebuild*, 25 February 2025; The New York Times, *Syria's new leader calls for unity at 'National Dialogue'*, 25 February 2025.

⁹³⁸ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria's national dialogue conference to 'open on 25 February'*, 24 February 2025; Levant 24, *Syrian National Dialogue Conference begins today in Damascus*, 24 February 2025.

⁹³⁹ AP News, *Syria's national dialogue conference held as the battered country seeks to rebuild*, 25 February 2025; The New York Times, *Syria's new leader calls for unity at 'National Dialogue'*, 25 February 2025; SANA, *Final statement of Syrian National Dialogue Conference calls for preserving unity of Syria and sovereignty over its entire territory*, 25 February 2025; The Syrian Observer, *National dialogue conference concludes with 18-point final statement*, 26 February 2025; MEI, *The national dialogue in Syria: A step forward or a concerning trajectory?*, 5 March 2025.

⁹⁴⁰ Reuters, *Syria to hold dialogue conference amid criticism over inclusivity*, 24 February 2025; Etana, *Syrian National Dialogue Conference falls short of expectations*, 3 March 2025; BBC News, *Syrians have more freedom after Assad, but could they soon lose it?*, 18 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁹⁴¹ The New York Times, *Syria's new leader calls for unity at 'National Dialogue'*, 25 February 2025; AP News, *Syria's national dialogue conference held as the battered country seeks to rebuild*, 25 February 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian Kurds denounce 'exclusion' from national dialogue*, 26 February 2025; MEI, *The national dialogue in Syria: A step forward or a concerning trajectory?*, 5 March 2025.

⁹⁴² Reuters, *Syrian groups must disarm to take part in national dialogue, official says*, 13 February 2025; BBC Monitoring, *SDF says will 'not be bound' by Syria national dialogue if it remains sidelined*, 14 February 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: US-allied Kurds excluded from Syria 'national dialogue'*, 15 February 2025.

1.3.3).⁹⁴³ Furthermore, on 29 March 2025, the 23 members of the transitional government were appointed. Within this government, an Alawite, a Christian, a Druze and a Kurd were assigned ministerial posts (see 1.3.2).⁹⁴⁴

6.1.1.1 Alawites

Alawites live mainly in the coastal provinces of Latakia and Tartous, as well as in and near the cities of Homs, Hama and Damascus.⁹⁴⁵ After the Sunnis, they constitute the largest religious group. In Syria, Alawites comprise between nine and thirteen percent of the population, according to some estimates.⁹⁴⁶ Alawites regard their faith as a heterodox offshoot of Shia Islam.⁹⁴⁷ The teachings of the ninth-century Mohammed ibn Nusayr al-Namiri are considered the basis of their faith.⁹⁴⁸ A small proportion of the Alawites belong to the *Murshidis*, who emerged in the twentieth century.⁹⁴⁹ Alawites have a reputation for being secular.⁹⁵⁰

The situation of Alawites was precarious during the reporting period (see 3.3.5).⁹⁵¹ After the takeover, Alawites faced discrimination and reprisals.⁹⁵² During the offensive in late November and early December 2024, tens of thousands of Alawites fled to the coastal provinces or to Lebanon (see 4.1).⁹⁵³ In early December 2024, a large part of the Alawite population left the city of Homs for the province of Tartous.⁹⁵⁴ Some of them returned to their places of residence after a while.⁹⁵⁵

Alongside fear, there was a feeling of marginalisation on the part of Alawites.⁹⁵⁶ Thousands of Alawites lost their jobs in the civil service and in the private sector.⁹⁵⁷ After taking power, the interim administration attempted to reduce government spending by making mass redundancies in the bloated public sector. The interim

⁹⁴³ AFP, *Syria's new constitution gives sweeping powers, ignores minority rights*, 14 March 2025; The New York Times, *Syria has a new temporary constitution. Here are the highlights*, 14 March 2025; Carnegie, *Syria's leaders show their intentions*, 19 March 2025.

⁹⁴⁴ Syria Weekly, *Assessing Syria's transitional government*, 30 March 2025; Foreign Affairs, *Syria's uncertain new order*, 11 April 2025.

⁹⁴⁵ DW, *Syria's ethnic and religious groups explained*, 18 December 2024; The Conversation, *Why Syria's reconstruction may depend on the fate of its minorities*, 18 December 2024.

⁹⁴⁶ Al-Monitor, *In Syria's Alawite area, joy at Assad fall but fear of Islamism*, 16 December 2024; DW, *Syria's ethnic and religious groups explained*, 18 December 2024; The Conversation, *Why Syria's reconstruction may depend on the fate of its minorities*, 18 December 2024; New Lines Magazine, *The challenges facing Syria's Alawites*, 13 January 2025; The New York Times, *What to know about Syria's minorities and sectarian violence*, 1 May 2025.

⁹⁴⁷ Yvette Talhamy, *The Alevis and 'Alawis*, in: Muhammad Afzal Upal & Carole M. Cusack (red.), *Handbook of Islamic sects and movements*, Leiden, Brill, 2021, pp. 279-304, 279; NOS, *Wat betekent de val van het Syrische regime voor minderheden?*, 12 December 2024; The Conversation, *Why Syria's reconstruction may depend on the fate of its minorities*, 18 December 2024.

⁹⁴⁸ Yvette Talhamy, *The Alevis and 'Alawis*, 2021, p. 282; Daraj, *I'm a female judge in Homs..What will happen to my career in the new Syria?*, 7 April 2025.

⁹⁴⁹ Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 7*, 28 January 2025; CSW, *Three members of religious minority community shot and killed in Homs*, 23 April 2025.

⁹⁵⁰ NOS, *Alawieten die Syrië recent zijn ontvucht vertellen de meest gruwelijke verhalen*, 9 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Islamists call for mobilisation in Syria, incite against Alawites*, 11 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Explainer: Why is Israel pushing for ties with Syrian minority groups?*, 21 March 2025.

⁹⁵¹ The Syrian Observer, *Editorial – The unfolding crisis and its deeper meanings*, 10 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁹⁵² The Guardian, *'We live in constant fear': Alawites in Syria's Homs terrified of reprisals*, 16 February 2025; Protection Cluster/UNHCR, *Protection landscape in Syria – A snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, p. 5; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁹⁵³ Al Arabiya, *Syria war monitor says tens of thousands flee Homs as opposition group fighters advance*, 6 December 2024; Arab News, *How Syrians can pursue justice, fast-track peace in post-conflict era*, 16 February 2025; Trouw, *Geloofsgenoten van Assad wachten af: verzoening of wraak*, 25 January 2025.

⁹⁵⁴ France 24, *Thousands flee as Syrian insurgents claim to reach key city of Homs*, 6 December 2024; Al Arabiya, *Syria war monitor says tens of thousands flee Homs as opposition group fighters advance*, 6 December 2024; The Guardian, *Islamist rebels seize strategic city of Hama from Syrian regime forces*, 6 December 2024.

⁹⁵⁵ MEE, *HTS raids and forced disappearances fuel fear in Syria's Alawi heartlands*, 17 January 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁹⁵⁶ EuroNews, *As thousands celebrate al-Assad's fall, Syrian Alawites remain cautious*, 25 December 2024; The Guardian, *'We live in constant fear': Alawites in Syria's Homs terrified of reprisals*, 16 February 2025; New Lines Magazine, *How desperation sowed the seeds of rebellion in Syria's Latakia province*, 17 March 2025.

⁹⁵⁷ New Lines Magazine, *The challenges facing Syria's Alawites*, 13 January 2025; Century International, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025; New Lines Magazine, *How desperation sowed the seeds of rebellion in Syria's Latakia province*, 17 March 2025; The Century Foundation, *Cross-border shuffle: Refugee movement between Lebanon and Syria after Assad*, 31 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Syrian war monitor reports 'mass dismissals' of Alawites in Damascus*, 12 April 2025.

administration reportedly wished to address hidden unemployment by dismissing approximately 300,000 public sector employees. Although the mass dismissals in December 2024 and January 2025 affected all population groups, various sources noted that Alawites were disproportionately affected.⁹⁵⁸

Some Alawites faced the expropriation of their homes by armed groups.⁹⁵⁹ Furthermore, in early May 2025, UNHCR reported that it had received reports of land seizures in twelve villages in the north-east of Hama province by local authorities or committees. As a result, an estimated 2,000 families, mainly of Alawite origin, were reportedly displaced and moved to Hama, the countryside of Homs and the city of Homs.⁹⁶⁰ There were also Alawites who encountered intimidation, humiliation, ill-treatment or extortion at checkpoints of the security forces (see also 7.2.2).⁹⁶¹ Furthermore, Alawites were faced with the looting of their possessions.⁹⁶² There were also reports of Alawites being victims of abduction, enforced disappearance or killings (including revenge killings).⁹⁶³ Several reports concerned Alawite women and girls who had been abducted by unidentified individuals.⁹⁶⁴ Since January 2025, a Syrian non-governmental organisation has documented 72 abductions of Alawite women in western Syria.⁹⁶⁵

There were numerous instances of hate speech⁹⁶⁶ against Alawites. Within this context, Alawites were referred to with such epithets as *Nusayris*, infidels and apostates.⁹⁶⁷ In addition, some Sunni imams were reportedly calling for revenge attacks and *jihad* against Alawites.⁹⁶⁸ Videos and messages, including a large

- ⁹⁵⁸ Le Monde, *In Syria, a climate of purge in the public sector*, 21 February 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Investigating the Alawite massacres*, 12 May 2025; STJ, *Mass dismissals in Syria after the regime's fall*, 13 May 2025.
- ⁹⁵⁹ BBC News, *Syria frontline patrol: the rebel gunmen who now police the streets*, 17 December 2024, [url](#); Reuters, *In Syrian military housing, former rebels take the homes of Assad's officers*, 31 December 2024; The Syria Report, *Sectarian tensions force out some residents in government housing*, 14 January 2025; ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025; Protection Cluster/UNHCR, *Protection landscape in Syria – A snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, p. 5; The Economist, *The warlords of Syria have a daunting to-do list*, 25 April 2025; Reuters, *Minutes to leave: Syria's Alawites evicted from private homes at gunpoint*, 30 April 2025; Syria Direct, *Extrajudicial killings of Alawites plague Homs city*, 9 May 2025.
- ⁹⁶⁰ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #26. Syria situation crisis*, 9 May 2025, p. 2.
- ⁹⁶¹ Reuters, *Syria's new rulers warn against incitement as tensions brew*, 27 December 2024; France 24, *Fear grips Alawites in Syria's Homs as Assad 'remnants' targeted*, 10 January 2025; MEI, *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025; De Volkskrant, *In Syrië is de wraak begonnen: 'Zijn jullie alawieten?'*, 23 January 2025; Trouw, *Geloofsgenoten van Assad wachten af: verzoening of wraak*, 25 January 2025; New Lines Magazine, *How desperation sowed the seeds of rebellion in Syria's Latakia province*, 17 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.
- ⁹⁶² BBC News, *Fear of a reckoning simmers in Assad's Alawite heartland*, 16 December 2024; France 24, *Syria forces beef up security amid reports of mass killings of Alawites*, 8 March 2025; BBC News, *Syrians describe terror as Alawite families killed in their homes*, 9 March 2025.
- ⁹⁶³ New Lines Magazine, *The challenges facing Syria's Alawites*, 13 January 2025; France 24, *'Syrian above all': The Alawite community refuses to pay for Assad's crimes*, 13 January 2025; MEI, *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025; Arab News, *How Syrians can pursue justice, fast-track peace in post-conflict era*, 16 February 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Sectarian violence simmers in Homs*, 10 March 2025; UN OHCHR, *Syria: Distressing scale of violence in coastal areas*, 11 March 2025; MEE, *One month on, killings persist in Syria's Alawite heartlands*, 11 April 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian state media silent on sectarian 'executions' in Homs province*, 26 April 2025; SNHR, *No fewer than 20 civilians extrajudicial killed in Homs city between April 23-28, 2025*, 30 April 2025, p. 1; Syria Direct, *Extrajudicial killings of Alawites plague Homs city*, 9 May 2025; SJAC, *The Syrian government must investigate the targeting of Alawite civilians in Homs*, 13 May 2025.
- ⁹⁶⁴ Daraj, *Who is kidnapping Syrian Alawite women in broad daylight*, 18 April 2025; SOHR, *Absence of law deterrence. 50 Alawite women missing since beginning of 2025*, 18 April 2025; UN OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 April 2025, p. 2; Le Monde, *En Syrie, l'inquiétante disparition de femmes alaouites*, 28 April 2025; L'Orient Today, *Mira, the forcibly or consensually married student, a reflection of a torn Syrian society*, 10 May 2025; confidential source, April 2025.
- ⁹⁶⁵ Daraj, *Syria's sectarian fires reignite amid silence of justice*, 12 May 2025.
- ⁹⁶⁶ Amnesty International defines hate speech as language that attacks a person or group based on religion or sexual orientation, or that is an expression of xenophobia or racial discrimination; Amnesty International, *Haatzaaien and haatspraak*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.
- ⁹⁶⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Sunni cleric incites against Alawites, Druze in Syria*, 9 January 2025; New Lines Magazine, *The challenges facing Syria's Alawites*, 13 January 2025; Syria Direct, *Protection or intervention? Focus on Syria's minorities sparks controversy, fuels hate speech*, 29 January 2025; The New Arab, *Syria arrests Abaq volunteer group director after sectarian Iftar meal scandal*, 11 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: New Syria jihadist group claims ongoing attacks on Alawites*, 21 April 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 15-22, 2025*, 22 April 2025; The Economist, *The warlords of Syria have a daunting to-do list*, 25 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.
- ⁹⁶⁸ ISW, *Alawite insurgents seek to use sectarian violence to destabilize the interim government in Syria*, 3 April 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Investigating the Alawite massacres*, 12 May 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

amount of misinformation, circulated on social media about the sectarian violence. This caused a great deal of unrest.⁹⁶⁹ On 25 December 2024, Alawites in cities including Homs, Latakia, Jableh, Qardaha and Tartous took to the streets to protest after a video circulated showing the Alawite shrine of Sheikh Abu Abdullah Hussein al-Khasibi in the city of Aleppo on fire.⁹⁷⁰ According to local sheikhs, the recording dated from late November 2024 or early December 2024, when Aleppo was captured.⁹⁷¹ Attacks on Alawite shrines in other parts of the country (such as western Hama province and western Homs province) took place during the reporting period.⁹⁷²

After the takeover, deadly violence ensued, claiming Alawite victims as well.⁹⁷³ It was not always clear whether the violence was directed at certain individuals because they were Alawites, because they were former Assad supporters, in relation to criminal activity, or because of a personal feud. In most cases, the perpetrators remained unidentified.⁹⁷⁴ As far as is known, there were no large-scale acts of revenge against Alawites in the first month after the takeover.⁹⁷⁵ From January 2025 onwards, the retaliation seemed to take on greater proportions.⁹⁷⁶ The largest outbreak of sectarian violence took place between 6 and 10 March 2025, including in the Alawite neighbourhoods of the cities of Tartous, Baniyas, Jableh, Latakia and villages in the province of Hama (see 3.3.5.2).⁹⁷⁷ After 10 March 2025, attacks on Alawites continued to occur (see 3.3.5.3).⁹⁷⁸

⁹⁶⁹ Enab Baladi, *Remnants of Assad regime resort to media deception to sow discord*, 10 January 2025; DW, *Fact check: Viral claims about violence in Syria*, 11 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁹⁷⁰ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria imposes curfews on Homs, Latakia, Tartous amid unrest*, 25 December 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Calm returns to Latakia, Tartus, and Homs after protests over Alawite shrine incident in Aleppo*, 26 December 2024; New Lines Magazine, *The challenges facing Syria's Alawites*, 13 January 2025.

⁹⁷¹ Verify-sy, *Updated: Statement from shrine leaders clarifies the incident at Al-Khasibi shrine in Aleppo*, 25 December 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Calm returns to Latakia, Tartus, and Homs after protests over Alawite shrine incident in Aleppo*, 26 December 2024.

⁹⁷² Al-Monitor, *Syrians protest after video of attack on Alawite shrine*, 25 December 2024; SNHR, *Unidentified individuals desecrate a religious shrine in W. Homs, January 23, 2025*, 25 January 2025; Trouw, *Geloofsgenoten van Assad wachten af: verzoening of wraak*, 25 January 2025; SNHR, *Unidentified gunmen desecrate a religious shrine in W. Hama, February 28, 2025*, 1 March 2025.

⁹⁷³ AP News, *Sectarian violence in Syria has been less intense than feared since Assad's ouster*, 21 December 2024; New Lines Magazine, *The challenges facing Syria's Alawites*, 13 January 2025; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. December 2024-January 2025*, 22 January 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Syria arrests suspects over sectarian attacks on Alawite village in Homs*, 24 January 2025; Trouw, *Geloofsgenoten van Assad wachten af: verzoening of wraak*, 25 January 2025.

⁹⁷⁴ De Volkskrant, *In Syrië is de wraak begonnen: 'Zijn jullie alawieten?'*, 23 January 2025; Trouw, *Geloofsgenoten van Assad wachten af: verzoening of wraak*, 25 January 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁹⁷⁵ AP News, *Sectarian violence in Syria has been less intense than feared since Assad's ouster*, 21 December 2024; The New Arab, *Syria: Former regime militia leader killed as authorities try to contain sectarian strife*, 27 December 2024.

⁹⁷⁶ Arab News, *Thousands of Alawites mourn 3 killed by foreign Islamists: monitor, witness*, 9 January 2025; BBC Monitoring, *War monitor calls for end to deadly 'revenge' attacks across Syria*, 26 January 2025; France 24, *Gunmen in Syria kill at least 10 in Alawite village, war monitor says*, 1 February 2025; The New Arab, *15 people killed in 'sectarian' massacre in Alawi village in Syria*, 1 February 2025; France 24, *Syria's Alawites mourn their dead after revenge attacks*, 5 February 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Explainer: New militant group in Syria targets Alawites, Assad loyalists*, 13 February 2025.

⁹⁷⁷ NOS, *Alawieten die Syrië recent zijn ontvlucht vertellen de meest gruwelijke verhalen*, 9 March 2025; De Volkskrant, *Honderden dode burgers bij geweld in Syrië*, 10 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Syrian defence ministry says military operation on coast is over*, 10 March 2025; Century International, *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025; CNN, *'Ethnic cleansing!' Videos show Syrian government-aligned forces reveling in massacre of minorities in coastal town*, 17 March 2025; Reuters, *Exclusive: Syria's sectarian violence reached capital, terrorizing Alawites, residents say*, 27 March 2025.

⁹⁷⁸ The National, *Twelve civilians killed in apparent sectarian violence in Syria, says monitor*, 1 April 2025; AP News, *Syria's Alawites still face targeted attacks a month after brutal counteroffensive*, 15 April 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, May 2025.

6.1.1.2

Shiites

Shiites live mainly in and around the cities of Damascus and Homs and in the villages of Nubl and al-Zahraa in the province of Aleppo.⁹⁷⁹ It is not known how many Shiites were present in Syria during the reporting period. Estimates from the recent past assumed less than one percent of the population.⁹⁸⁰

According to various sources, the situation of Shia Muslims during the reporting period was precarious.⁹⁸¹ The most important Shia shrine in Syria was Sayyida Zainab, south of Damascus. Before the takeover, this had been a popular place of pilgrimage and a place where many Shias lived.⁹⁸² After the takeover, many Shiites left Sayyida Zainab, as did Shiites from western Homs, heading for Lebanon (see 4.1).⁹⁸³ According to the interim administration, ISIS members attempted to blow up this shrine on 11 January 2025. The security forces were reportedly able to prevent an attack and arrest the suspects.⁹⁸⁴ As far as is known, another incident with a possible anti-Shiite aspect took place during the reporting period. On 12 January 2025, the bodies of five Shia Muslims from the village of Al-Mazraa in the west of Homs province were found. The perpetrators remained unidentified.⁹⁸⁵

6.1.1.3

Ismailis

Ismailis live mainly in the city of Salamiyah in the province of Hama.⁹⁸⁶ Smaller communities live in the town of Masyaf in the west of the province of Hama, in the city of Hama and in the town of Qadmus in the province of Tartous.⁹⁸⁷ Ismailism is an esoteric movement within Shiism. The Nizari branch of Ismailism is the only Shiite group with an imam as its spiritual leader.⁹⁸⁸ Since early February 2025, that person has been Rahim al-Husseini: the Aga Khan V.⁹⁸⁹ According to one source, there was also a split within the Nizari branch in Syria, known as the Mu'mini-Nizari.⁹⁹⁰ It is not known how many Ismailis were present in Syria during the reporting period. Estimates from the recent past assumed 200,000 persons.⁹⁹¹

⁹⁷⁹ Enab Baladi, *Return of limited number of residents to Nubl and Zahra in Aleppo*, 5 December 2024; Kurdistan24, *An uneasy calm settles over Syrian city of Homs after outbreak of sectarian violence*, 27 December 2024.

⁹⁸⁰ Chatham House, *Iran is building a new source of Shia influence inside Syria*, 26 June 2017; DW, *Syria's ethnic and religious groups explained*, 18 December 2024.

⁹⁸¹ France 24, *Once a pro-Iran bastion, Damascus shrine district now in rebel hands*, 11 December 2024; The National, *The two lives of Syria's Sayyida Zaynab suburb*, 19 February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁹⁸² France 24, *Once a pro-Iran bastion, Damascus shrine district now in rebel hands*, 11 December 2024; The National, *The two lives of Syria's Sayyida Zaynab suburb*, 19 February 2025; The Century Foundation, *Damascus dispatch: Fear and hope in a divided Syria*, 17 March 2025; L'Orient Today, *Sharaa meets with Shiite community representatives in Syria*, 29 March 2025.

⁹⁸³ Reuters, *Syrian Shi'ites and other minorities flee to Lebanon, fearing Islamist rule*, 13 December 2024; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

⁹⁸⁴ VOA, *Syria thwarts planned Islamic State attack on Shiite shrine*, 11 January 2025; DW, *Syria authorities say foiled IS attack on Shiite shrine*, 11 January 2025; Al Jazeera, *Syrian intelligence says it thwarted ISIL attempt to blow up Shia shrine*, 11 January 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria authorities claim thwarting IS attack on iconic shrine*, 11 January 2025.

⁹⁸⁵ SOHR, *New massacre. Gunmen kill five Shiite civilians in Homs countryside*, 12 January 2025; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. December 2024-January 2025*, 22 January 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁹⁸⁶ Khaama Press, *Ismaili leadership and new Syrian authorities reach agreement on community safety*, 10 December 2024; Simerg, *Syria: Ismaili Institutions inform Ismailis worldwide that the community is safe, with latest updates from world media*, 10 December 2024.

⁹⁸⁷ Syria Weekly, *March 4-11, 2025*, 11 March 2025; Syria Revisited, *The Ismaili mediators of Qadmus*, 18 March 2025.

⁹⁸⁸ Le Monde, *Death of the Aga Khan: What is Ismailism, the esoteric branch of Shia Islam?*, 5 February 2025; The Conversation, *Who are Ismaili Muslims and how do their beliefs relate to the Aga Khan's work?*, 17 February 2025.

⁹⁸⁹ The Guardian, *Rahim al-Hussaini named as fifth Aga Khan after death of father*, 5 February 2025; BBC News, *Prince Rahim Al-Hussaini appointed new Aga Khan*, 5 February 2025.

⁹⁹⁰ Syria Revisited, *Masyaf's liberation through Ismaili eyes*, 13 May 2025.

⁹⁹¹ BBC News, *Guide: Syria's diverse minorities*, 9 December 2011; DW, *Syria's ethnic and religious groups explained*, 18 December 2024; World Population Review, *Ismaili population by country 2025*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

During the HTS-led advance, the transfer of power in the city of Salamiyah proceeded peacefully.⁹⁹² The Ismaili community maintained a neutral stance towards the interim administration.⁹⁹³

During the reporting period, several incidents with a possibly anti-Ismaili dimension took place. According to the SNHR, on 27 February 2025, unidentified armed men stormed an Ismaili shrine near the town of Masyaf. They fired shots in the sanctuary and caused destruction.⁹⁹⁴ There were no casualties.⁹⁹⁵

During the reporting period, tensions between Alawites and Ismailis rose several times in the vicinity of the town of Qadmus following incidents in which Ismaili victims had fallen. On 28 February 2025, several Alawites reportedly abducted two Ismailis in the vicinity of the town of Qadmus. Their bodies were found the next day in an abandoned Russian military base.⁹⁹⁶

6.1.1.4 Christians

Christians live mainly in and around the cities of Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Latakia and in the province of Hasaka.⁹⁹⁷ A well-known predominantly Christian community is the village of Maaloula in the province of Rural Damascus.⁹⁹⁸ According to some estimates, there are between 20,000 and 25,000 Christians living in the city of Aleppo.⁹⁹⁹ In the province of Hasaka, Christians live in the city of Hasaka, in the city of Qamishli, in the village of Qahtaniyah, in the town of Al-Malikiyah (in Aramaic: Derik) and in the village of Tell Tamir.¹⁰⁰⁰ In the province of Daraa, Christians live in villages (such as Khabab and Kharaba). In the province of Suweida, Christians live in the city of Suweida and in a few villages such as Shahba, Era and Salkhad. In all, 150 to 200 Christians are reported to live in several villages in the west of Idlib province.¹⁰⁰¹ It is not known how many Christians were present in Syria during the reporting period. Estimates on this varied considerably.¹⁰⁰²

Several Christian denominations are present in Syria. Most Christians belong to one of the Orthodox churches, including the Greek Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Church of the East.¹⁰⁰³

⁹⁹² SOHR, *After capturing strategic positions around Hama city. HTS takes control of Salamiyah city without fighting*, 5 December 2024; Atlantic Council, *Inside Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's diplomatic offensive with Syria's Christians and Ismailis*, 19 March 2025.

⁹⁹³ Syria Revisited, *The Ismaili mediators of Qadmus*, 18 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁹⁹⁴ SNHR, *1,562 deaths, including 102 children and 99 women, as well as 33 medical personnel, recorded in March 2025 in Syria*, 9 April 2025, p. 13.

⁹⁹⁵ SNHR, *Unidentified individuals desecrate a religious shrine in W. Hama, February 27, 2025*, 28 February 2025; SOHR, *Assaults on shrines of minorities. Security forces open fire to disperse protesters in Misyaf*, 27 February 2025.

⁹⁹⁶ SOHR, *After death of two young men. Violent clashes erupt between gunmen and Internal Security Forces in Tartous*, 28 February 2025; SOHR, *Following clashes. Two people killed and ten injured in a village in Tartous*, 28 February 2025; X.com, Gregory Waters, 28 February 2025, [url](#); Syria Revisited, *The Ismaili mediators of Qadmus*, 18 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

⁹⁹⁷ Minority Rights Group, *Syria*, January 2025, [url](#); confidential source, April 2025.

⁹⁹⁸ The New York Times, *Ancient Syrian town seeks interfaith peace after long war*, 14 April 2025; VRT, *In Maaloula in Syrië klinkt opnieuw de taal van Jezus, tussen angst and hoop*, 21 April 2025.

⁹⁹⁹ Syria Direct, *'Shades of gray': Aleppo's Christians between HTS promises and painful memories*, 5 December 2024; The Washington Post, *Christians in Aleppo fear for their future after Islamist takeover*, 6 December 2024; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁰⁰ The New York Times, *Kurdish distrust of Syria's new government runs deep*, 28 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁰¹ Syria Direct, *HTS looks to Idlib's Christians and Druze to whitewash violations*, 11 December 2023; Syria Times, *Governor of Sweidah visits the diocese of Bosra, Hauran, and Jabal Al-Arab for the Greek Orthodox Church*, 6 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁰² The Catholic Herald, *Christians can't be bystanders in new Syria, says Maronite archbishop*, 19 December 2024; Al-Monitor, *Christmas in post-Assad Syria tainted by fears for minority's future*, 24 December 2024; Arab News, *How Syria's Christians are marking Christmas amid political change and uncertainty*, 25 December 2024; The New York Times, *What to know about Syria's minorities and sectarian violence*, 1 May 2025; Open Doors, *Syria*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹⁰⁰³ Syriac Press, *The Syrian churches*, 28 March 2020; Syriac Press, *Patriarchs Aphrem II, John X, and Absi send joint telegram to congratulate al-Sharaa on appointment as transitional president*, 3 February 2025; The New Arab, *Syria: St. Anna Armenian church in Idlib welcomes first pilgrimage since 2011*, 5 February 2025; SANA, *President al-Sharaa receives a delegation of Syriac Orthodox Church at the People's Palace*, 29 April 2025.

Other Christians are affiliated with one of the churches united with Rome, including the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, the Syriac Catholic Church, the Armenian Catholic Church, the Chaldean Catholic Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Syriac Maronite Church.¹⁰⁰⁴ Other denominations include Baptists and Anglicans.¹⁰⁰⁵

During the reporting period, churches were open and Christians were able to celebrate their holidays, including Christmas and Easter.¹⁰⁰⁶ In general, Christian leaders had good relations with the transitional government.¹⁰⁰⁷

Several incidents targeting Christians occurred after the takeover. There were several reports of vandalism and attacks on churches. As reported by multiple sources, on 11 December 2024, unidentified individuals stormed a church in the village of Al-Suqaylabiyah in the west of the province of Hama, destroying a cross in the process.¹⁰⁰⁸ Furthermore, several sources reported that, on 18 December 2024, unidentified individuals fired shots at a church in the city of Hama and attempted to tear down a cross. There were no casualties.¹⁰⁰⁹ The SNHR reported that, on 20 February 2025, unidentified individuals fired shots at a church in the town of Al-Qusayr in the west of Homs province.¹⁰¹⁰ Furthermore, multiple sources reported that, on 6 April 2025, unidentified individuals attempted to destroy a church in the village of Bloudan in the west of the Rural Damascus province. There were no casualties.¹⁰¹¹

On 24 December 2024, protests broke out in Damascus after reports circulated that masked men had set fire to a Christmas tree on 23 December 2024 in the predominantly Christian village of Suqaylabiyah in the province of Hama.¹⁰¹² The interim administration condemned this act and stated that foreign fighters were responsible for it. According to the interim administration, several suspects had been arrested.¹⁰¹³

¹⁰⁰⁴ Syriac Press, *The Syrian churches*, 28 March 2020; The Catholic Herald, *Christians can't be bystanders in new Syria, says Maronite archbishop*, 19 December 2024; Syriac Press, *Attempted bombing at Melkite Greek Catholic Church of Saint George in rural Daramsuq (Damascus) averted, investigation underway*, 8 April 2025; The New York Times, *Syria's Easter celebrations pass peacefully, in early test of new government*, 20 April 2025.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Anglican Aid, *Damascus church aid*, 20 December 2024, [url](#); Al Jazeera, *Syria de facto leader al-Sharaa meets Christian clerics*, 31 December 2024; VOA, *What future awaits Syria's Christian minority?*, 7 January 2025; Baptist Standard, *Syrian church reopens after being padlocked for a decade*, 9 January 2025.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Arab News, *How Syria's Christians are marking Christmas amid political change and uncertainty*, 25 December 2024; Enab Baladi, *Daraa welcomes Christmas with decorations and hope*, 25 December 2024; Syria Times, *Christian denominations celebrate "Palm Sunday" and hold prayers and masses*, 13 April 2025; The New Arab, *Post-Assad, Syrian Christians embrace Easter celebrations as caution looms over nation's fragile peace*, 18 April 2025; The New York Times, *Syria's Easter celebrations pass peacefully, in early test of new government*, 20 April 2025; De Standaard, *Op Pasen voelt Homs zich een beetje verrijzen*, 22 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Syria Direct, *Protection or intervention? Focus on Syria's minorities sparks controversy, fuels hate speech*, 29 January 2025; SANA, *In a harmonious atmosphere, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Hama organizes an Iftar banquet*, 24 March 2025; Syria Times, *Heads of Christian communities in Aleppo congratulate the governor on Eid Al-Fitr*, 2 April 2025; SANA, *Director of General Secretariat for Political Affairs meet with representatives of Christian community*, 14 April 2025; CTV News, *What it's like for minority Christians in Syria, after the fall of the longtime dictator*, 25 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁰⁸ SNHR, *Unidentified individuals attack a church in NW. Hama, December 11, 2024*, 12 December 2024; L'Orient Today, *Several Christian places of worship vandalized in Syria*, 21 December 2024; Syriac Press, *Greek Orthodox Hagia Sophia Church in Suqaylabiyah, Syria, shuttered by HTS*, 10 January 2025.

¹⁰⁰⁹ SNHR, *Unidentified gunmen attack a church in Hama city, December 18, 2024*, 19 December 2024; The New Arab, *Syria police investigate attack on Greek Orthodox church in Hama as new mass grave found near Damascus*, 19 December 2024; CSW, *Gunmen open fire on Orthodox church in Hama*, 19 December 2024; Reuters, *Syria's Christians fearful of new Islamist leaders as Christmas approaches*, 23 December 2024.

¹⁰¹⁰ SNHR, *Unidentified gunmen attack a church in W. Homs, February 20, 2025*, 22 February 2025.

¹⁰¹¹ Tesaa World, *A "failed" attempt to attack the church of "Mar Georges" in the town of Bloudan in the countryside of Damascus*, 6 April 2025; SNHR, *Unidentified individuals desecrate George Church in Rural Damascus, April 6, 2025*, 8 April 2025; Syriac Press, *Attempted bombing at Melkite Greek Catholic Church of Saint George in rural Daramsuq (Damascus) averted, investigation underway*, 8 April 2025; SNHR, *The death of 174 civilian including 23 children and 13 women, and 5 deaths due to torture recorded in April 2025 in Syria*, 2 May 2025, p. 9.

¹⁰¹² BBC News, *Protests in Syria over Christmas tree burning*, 24 December 2024; VOA, *What future awaits Syria's Christian minority?*, 7 January 2025.

¹⁰¹³ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: HTS arrests foreign fighters over Christmas tree burning incident*, 24 December 2024; ABC News, *Video: Syria's ruling group condemns Christmas tree arson attack*, 25 December 2024; ABC News, *Video: Christmas tree arson protests across Syria*, 25 December 2024.

During the reporting period, Salafist preachers drove through Christian neighbourhoods, including the Bab Touma neighbourhood in Damascus, with sound amplifiers, playing Islamic music.¹⁰¹⁴ There were reportedly several incidents in which preachers called on Christian women in Damascus to wear headscarves.¹⁰¹⁵ Preachers in the Bab Sharqi district of Damascus and other places also called on Christians to convert to Islam.¹⁰¹⁶ According to an article in the French daily newspaper *Le Monde*, in March 2025, a Christian was killed in a confrontation with Salafist preachers in Dweila, a suburb of Damascus.¹⁰¹⁷ According to al-Sharaa, these acts were committed by individuals with whom the authorities had no connection.¹⁰¹⁸ In the major cities, Christians were granted permission to take security measures in their own neighbourhoods in the form of voluntary neighbourhood guard groups.¹⁰¹⁹ Furthermore, starting in late March 2025, the Ministry of Religious Affairs prohibited all Islamic proselytising activities (*dawa*), unless prior permission had been granted.¹⁰²⁰

There was a large amount of misinformation about massacres of Christians surrounding the escalation of violence in the coastal provinces in early March 2025 (see 3.3.5.2). According to various sources, several Christians were killed during this escalation of violence. It appeared that none of them had been targeted for violence because of their religious identity.¹⁰²¹

6.1.1.5

Druze

Druze live mainly in the southern province of Suweida, in the suburbs of Jaramana and Ashrafiyet Sahnaya near Damascus, on the south-eastern slope of Mount Hermon in the province of Quneitra, and in villages in the north of the province of Idlib.¹⁰²² The number of Druze present in Syria during the reporting period is not known. Recent estimates assumed three percent of the population (700,000 individuals).¹⁰²³ Druze have a syncretic faith that originated from Ismaili Shi'a Islam and incorporates elements of pre-Islamic beliefs.¹⁰²⁴

¹⁰¹⁴ Reuters, *Syria's Christians fearful of new Islamist leaders as Christmas approaches*, 23 December 2024; Trouw, *Geloofsgenoten van Assad wachten af: verzoening of wraak*, 25 January 2025.

¹⁰¹⁵ *Le Monde*, *In Damascus, volunteers protect Christian neighborhoods*, 11 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰¹⁶ Shafaq News, *Religious broadcasts spark debate in Syria's Damascus*, 22 March 2025; *Le Monde*, *In Damascus, volunteers protect Christian neighborhoods*, 11 April 2025; Enab Baladi, *Protection of Christian holidays in Syria: Relief amid security presence*, 21 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹⁰¹⁷ *Le Monde*, *In Damascus, volunteers protect Christian neighborhoods*, 11 April 2025.

¹⁰¹⁸ Syriac Press, *Rising "individual acts" threaten Christians in Syria*, 18 January 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰¹⁹ *Le Monde*, *In Damascus, volunteers protect Christian neighborhoods*, 11 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰²⁰ X.com, Cédric Labrousse, 27 March 2025, [url](#); *Le Monde*, *In Damascus, volunteers protect Christian neighborhoods*, 11 April 2025.

¹⁰²¹ Open Doors, *Misleading reports about 'slaughter of Christians' could endanger Syrians, says Open Doors expert*, 13 March 2025; VRT, *Kruisgigen, onterechte doodsverklaringen and oude bombardementen: geweld Syria is voedingsbodem voor nepnieuws*, 16 March 2025; X.com, Fadel Abdul Ghany, 21 March 2025, [url](#); Newsweek, *Christians send warning over killings in Syria*, 25 March 2025; Open Doors, *Dagelijks leven in Syrië: Juliette doet verslag*, 10 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹⁰²² Syria Direct, *HTS looks to Idlib's Christians and Druze to whitewash violations*, 11 December 2023; The New Arab, *Hope and uncertainty for the Druze community in Syria*, 14 January 2025; Syria Direct, *Protection or intervention? Focus on Syria's minorities sparks controversy, fuels hate speech*, 29 January 2025; Al Jazeera, *Syrian forces deployed in Jaramana to end unrest*, 3 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria Islamists demand 'stern' response to unrest in Druze areas*, 4 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian government vows action after sectarian clashes near capital*, 29 April 2025.

¹⁰²³ The New Arab, *Israeli says it forces on occupied Mount Hermon in Syria to remain there 'all winter'*, 13 December 2024; The Conversation, *Why Syria's reconstruction may depend on the fate of its minorities*, 18 December 2024; The New Arab, *Hope and uncertainty for the Druze community in Syria*, 14 January 2025; Levant 24, *The Druze of Syria: Between sovereignty & Israeli manipulation*, 19 May 2025.

¹⁰²⁴ The Conversation, *Why Syria's reconstruction may depend on the fate of its minorities*, 18 December 2024; AP News, *Clashes between Druze gunmen and pro-government fighters in Syrian capital kill at least 4*, 29 April 2025.

During the previous reporting period, Druze in Suweida had staged prolonged protests against the Assad regime.¹⁰²⁵ Druze armed militias had also been present in Suweida. After the power shift, they came into possession of heavy weapons.¹⁰²⁶ The interim government negotiated with the Druze about incorporating the Druze armed militias into the national army that was being established (see 2.3.1).¹⁰²⁷ In order to accommodate the Druze to some extent, on 31 December 2024, the interim administration nominated Muhsina al-Mahithawi as a candidate for the post of governor of Suweida province. Her appointment never materialised.¹⁰²⁸

In the partly Druze suburb of Jaramana, tensions ran high between the central authorities and local Druze militias in late February and early March 2025. In late April and early May 2025, violence escalated in the partly Druze suburbs of Jaramana and Ashrafiyet Sahnaya (see 3.3.2.8).¹⁰²⁹ Within this context, on 30 April 2025, an attack took place on Druze in the village of Suwara al-Kubra in the province of Suweida.¹⁰³⁰ Furthermore, Druze students at universities in various cities faced threats and intimidation in late April and early May 2025.¹⁰³¹ According to one source, a Druze sheikh was shot and a shrine was vandalised in the border town of Hader, near the Golan Heights in early May 2025.¹⁰³²

6.1.1.6 Kurds

Kurds live mainly in northern Syria, particularly in the province of Hasaka, in Afrin and in Ain al-Arab (Kurdish: Kobani) in the province of Aleppo. There are several Kurdish neighbourhoods in the cities of Aleppo and Damascus, and there is a Kurdish community in rural Damascus.¹⁰³³ After Arabs, they constitute the largest ethnic group. According to various sources, an estimated ten percent of the population is Kurdish.¹⁰³⁴ In the DAANES territory, the Kurds comprise a significant part of the population, although they are not in the majority there. Some parts of the DAANES territory (such as Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa) have an Arab majority.¹⁰³⁵ Most Syrian Kurds are Sunni.¹⁰³⁶

¹⁰²⁵ New Lines Magazine, *Syria's Druze have run out of patience with Assad*, 5 October 2023; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Syria*, December 2024, pp. 59–61.

¹⁰²⁶ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰²⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: HTS-linked convoy 'denied entry' to Syria's Druze-majority province*, 1 January 2025; The New York Times, *These militias refuse to join Syria's new army*, 1 April 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian Druze leader urges unity in meeting with Sweida governor*, 7 April 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria's Druze leaders divided over approach to new government*, 10 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰²⁸ The New Arab, *New Syrian gov't taps Druze woman as governor of southern province*, 1 January 2025; The New Arab, *Hope and uncertainty for the Druze community in Syria*, 14 January 2025; TAZ, *Lieber doch keine Frau als Gouverneurin*, 18 February 2025.

¹⁰²⁹ The New Arab, *Attack on Damascus nightclub kills woman, Druze shrine burnt in southern Syria*, 5 May 2025; The Washington Post, *As Syria's Druze minority reels from violence, Israel pursues an opening*, 10 May 2025.

¹⁰³⁰ The Washington Post, *As Syria's Druze minority reels from violence, Israel pursues an opening*, 10 May 2025; Daraj, *Syria's sectarian fires reignite amid silence of justice*, 12 May 2025.

¹⁰³¹ The New Arab, *Viral video sparks outcry over alleged Syrian Druze student evictions*, 9 May 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian officials deny 'forced departure' of Druze students from campus*, 9 May 2025; The New Arab, *Syria government clamps down on sectarian incitement at universities*, 11 May 2025; Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 21*, 12 May 2025; Syria Direct, *University students latest pressure point in Damascus-Suwayda tensions*, 20 May 2025.

¹⁰³² Carnegie, *Syria's Druze stand alone*, 14 May 2025.

¹⁰³³ L'Orient Today, *In the Kurdish street of Damascus: 'As long as Turkey has its hands in the government, we will not be safe'*, 17 February 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Hundreds of Syrian SDF fighters leave Aleppo after deal*, 10 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰³⁴ The Conversation, *Why Syria's reconstruction may depend on the fate of its minorities*, 18 December 2024; The New York Times, *Syrian government signs breakthrough deal with Kurdish-led forces*, 10 March 2025; AP News, *Kurdish fighters leave northern city in Syria as part of deal with central government*, 4 April 2025; The New York Times, *What to know about Syria's minorities and sectarian violence*, 1 May 2025.

¹⁰³⁵ The National, *In ruined Raqqa, cracks appear after the fall of the Assad regime*, 25 February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

¹⁰³⁶ New Lines Magazine, *The fragile foundations of Arab-Kurdish coexistence*, 1 April 2025; Reuters, *Kurds say they will push for federal system in post-Assad Syria*, 10 April 2025.

Under Assad, the Kurdish identity had been suppressed.¹⁰³⁷ In March 2025, Kurds were able to celebrate *Nowruz*¹⁰³⁸ openly in Damascus, Afrin and other places.¹⁰³⁹ In the transitional government, Mohammed Terko, a man of Kurdish origin from Damascus who was not affiliated with DAANES, was appointed Minister of Education.¹⁰⁴⁰

The Kurdish-led SDF functioned as the armed forces of the DAANES territory (see 2.1.4). On 10 March 2025, the SDF concluded an eight-point agreement with the interim administration (see 1.2.2). One of the points in this agreement was the recognition of the Kurdish community as an integral part of the Syrian state and the guarantee of full civil rights and all constitutional rights.¹⁰⁴¹ Thereafter, the interim authorities and the SDF took concrete steps in several other areas, including with regard to control of the two Kurdish neighbourhoods in Aleppo and management of the Tishreen Dam (see 3.3.6.2).¹⁰⁴²

According to one source, there were no problems between the Kurds in Damascus and the transitional government.¹⁰⁴³ There were, however, problems between Kurds and SNA factions. Some Kurdish displaced persons from Afrin, who had been staying in rural areas in the north of Aleppo province, faced threats, robbery and extortion at checkpoints staffed by SNA factions after the start of the SNA offensive on 30 November 2024.¹⁰⁴⁴ Upon returning to their villages in Afrin, some faced intimidation, abduction, extortion, confiscation of property, ill-treatment, torture, arrest and killings at the hands of armed factions.¹⁰⁴⁵ During the reporting period, some Kurdish men from Damascus and Aleppo who returned to Afrin to visit their original places of residence were arrested by SNA factions on charges of having ties to the DAANES, the SDF or the PKK.¹⁰⁴⁶ If it turned out that they did not have these ties, they could be released upon payment. The sources consulted cited amounts

-
- ¹⁰³⁷ New Lines Magazine, *Revisiting the erasure of Kurdish identity in Syria*, 20 December 2023; The Conversation, *Why Syria's reconstruction may depend on the fate of its minorities*, 18 December 2024; L'Orient Today, *In the Kurdish street of Damascus: 'As long as Turkey has its hands in the government, we will not be safe'*, 17 February 2025; Syria Direct, *After years of revival, what is the Kurdish language's future in Syria?*, 16 May 2025.
- ¹⁰³⁸ During Nowruz, the Kurds celebrate the beginning of the astronomical new year and the arrival of spring.; Enab Baladi, *Kurds prepare for different Nowruz celebrations in Syria*, 19 March 2025; The New Arab, *Thousands of Syrian Kurds celebrate first post-Assad Nowruz in Damascus*, 21 March 2025.
- ¹⁰³⁹ Enab Baladi, *Kurds prepare for different Nowruz celebrations in Syria*, 19 March 2025; Shafaq News, *Syrian Kurds celebrate post-Assad Nowruz*, 20 March 2025; The New Arab, *Thousands of Syrian Kurds celebrate first post-Assad Nowruz in Damascus*, 21 March 2025.
- ¹⁰⁴⁰ DW, *Syria's interim president forms new transitional government*, 30 March 2025; Trouw, *HTS houdt sleutelposities in Syrische overgangsregering*, 2 April 2025.
- ¹⁰⁴¹ The New York Times, *Syrian government signs breakthrough deal with Kurdish-led forces*, 10 March 2025; BBC News, *Kurdish-led SDF agrees to integrate with Syrian government forces*, 11 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Syria president announces deal to integrate Kurdish forces into state*, 11 March 2025; MEE, *Landmark SDF deal hailed as positive step for Syria and Kurds*, 11 March 2025; MEE, *SDF withdraws from key Syrian dam after agreement with Damascus*, 12 April 2025.
- ¹⁰⁴² AP News, *Kurdish fighters leave northern city in Syria as part of deal with central government*, 4 April 2025; The New Arab, *Syrian forces deploy at key dam under deal with Kurds: media*, 12 April 2025; MEE, *SDF withdraws from key Syrian dam after agreement with Damascus*, 12 April 2025.
- ¹⁰⁴³ Confidential source, April 2025.
- ¹⁰⁴⁴ Al-Jumhuriya, *'Syria is free, but my home is still occupied'*, 25 February 2025; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 7; STJ, *'We will kill you wherever you go': Violations committed during SNA-led operation Dawn of Freedom*, 9 May 2025; HRW, *Syria: Türkiye-backed armed groups detain, extort civilians*, 14 May 2025.
- ¹⁰⁴⁵ Syria Direct, *Tens of thousands return to Afrin while fear of abuses keeps others away*, 3 January 2025; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. December 2024-January 2025*, 22 January 2025; STJ, *'We will kill you wherever you go': Violations committed during SNA-led operation Dawn of Freedom*, 9 May 2025; HRW, *Syria: Türkiye-backed armed groups detain, extort civilians*, 14 May 2025; confidential source, April 2025.
- ¹⁰⁴⁶ SOHR, *For dealing with former Autonomous Administration. Civilians returning to their villages in Afrin arbitrary arrested*, 27 November 2024; Al-Jumhuriya, *'Syria is free, but my home is still occupied'*, 25 February 2025; STJ, *'We will kill you wherever you go': Violations committed during SNA-led operation Dawn of Freedom*, 9 May 2025.

ranging from five hundred to ten thousand dollars.¹⁰⁴⁷ According to various sources, they remained in detention if they were unable to pay.¹⁰⁴⁸

6.1.2 *Atheists and apostates from Islam*

According to various sources, in general, atheists and apostates from Islam in Syria never openly admit to their apostasy. This was a major taboo for many people. Society was generally not receptive to this. Apostates and converts risked being cast out from their own community.¹⁰⁴⁹ According to one source, an apostate who openly declared his apostasy in Idlib and northern Aleppo province risked being killed, whereas in Damascus he could probably have got away with it in certain private circles.¹⁰⁵⁰ The sources consulted were not aware of any specific examples of atheists and apostates from Islam who encountered problems after the takeover.¹⁰⁵¹

6.1.3 *LGBTIQ+ people*

6.1.3.1 Position of LGBTIQ+ people

In Syrian society, LGBTIQ+¹⁰⁵² issues were a major taboo.¹⁰⁵³ According to various sources, no LGBTIQ+ people in Syria were open about their sexual orientation, gender identity or transgender background.¹⁰⁵⁴ Society was generally homophobic and transphobic.¹⁰⁵⁵ There was no acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people.¹⁰⁵⁶ They risked being rejected by their family members, friends and others in their social environment. They could face stigmatisation, discrimination and violence.¹⁰⁵⁷ According to one source, after the takeover, there was so much fear among LGBTIQ+ people that there was no LGBTIQ+ scene in Syria (for example, with discreet nightlife venues).¹⁰⁵⁸

6.1.3.2 Criminalisation of sexual acts

Under Article 520 of the Penal Code (PC) of 1949, engaging in sexual acts between persons of the same sex could be punished with incarceration of up to three years.¹⁰⁵⁹ According to one source, the criminal courts continued to apply the old legislation during the reporting period.¹⁰⁶⁰ It is not known whether LGBTIQ+ people have been convicted under Article 520 of the Penal Code since the takeover.¹⁰⁶¹

¹⁰⁴⁷ SOHR, *After paying 10,000 USDs for his release. Young man killed inside prison of "National Army" in Aleppo*, 5 January 2025; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. December 2024-January 2025*, 22 January 2025; Al-Jumhuriya, *"Syria is free, but my home is still occupied"*, 25 February 2025; STJ, *Syria/Afrin: Promises by transitional authorities to restore rights and end violations against Kurds*, 11 April 2025; STJ, *"We will kill you wherever you go": Violations committed during SNA-led operation Dawn of Freedom*, 9 May 2025; HRW, *Syria: Türkiye-backed armed groups detain, extort civilians*, 14 May 2025.

¹⁰⁴⁸ STJ, *Syria/Afrin: Promises by transitional authorities to restore rights and end violations against Kurds*, 11 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹⁰⁵¹ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁵² Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender people, intersex people, queers and other diverse identities.

¹⁰⁵³ Confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Metro, *'I was tortured in Syria for being gay — now I'm terrified what the future will bring'*, 22 December 2024; Worldcrunch, *As Syria faces new divides, LGBTQ+ hate remains the most reliable consensus*, 22 February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁵⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian preparatory committee nominee sparks Islamist anger*, 14 February 2025; Worldcrunch, *As Syria faces new divides, LGBTQ+ hate remains the most reliable consensus*, 22 February 2025; GEM, *LGBTQIA+ individuals in Syria after the fall of the Assad regime*, 19 April 2025, p. 10; confidential source, February 2025.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Confidential source, April 2025.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Human Dignity Trust, *Syria*, 7 January 2025, [url](#); YOUR EX, *Syrian authorities arrest three trans people, intensify persecution of LGBTQ+ community*, 9 February 2025; Worldcrunch, *As Syria faces new divides, LGBTQ+ hate remains the most reliable consensus*, 22 February 2025.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁶¹ Confidential source, April 2025.

- 6.1.3.3 Discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ+ people
LGBTIQ+ people generally found it more difficult than heterosexuals to find employment or housing.¹⁰⁶² LGBTIQ+ people were more likely than heterosexuals to be victims of physical violence and/or death threats from their social environment.¹⁰⁶³ During the reporting period, there were several reports of LGBTIQ+ people facing discrimination, ill-treatment, humiliation and arrest.¹⁰⁶⁴ Multiple sources referred to hate incidents involving trans women and homosexuals in various cities, including Latakia, Aleppo and Damascus.¹⁰⁶⁵ One source cited the example of LGBTIQ+ people being denied entry to a restaurant in Damascus.¹⁰⁶⁶ Another source cited the example of trans women who were arrested in Aleppo.¹⁰⁶⁷ According to another source, between the takeover and early April 2025, there were approximately fourteen known incidents involving LGBTIQ+ people.¹⁰⁶⁸

According to one source, LGBTIQ+ people experienced problems from armed groups.¹⁰⁶⁹ Videos and photos circulated on social media showing transgender people being humiliated, beaten, threatened and verbally abused by armed men.¹⁰⁷⁰ Furthermore, hate speech appeared on social media in which LGBTIQ+ people were depicted as a threat to society.¹⁰⁷¹

- 6.1.3.4 Protection options
According to one source, there was no legislation protecting LGBTIQ+ people.¹⁰⁷² Various sources noted that it was not possible for LGBTIQ+ people to obtain protection from the authorities.¹⁰⁷³ As far as is known, there were no civil society organisations in Syria that openly advocated for the rights of LGBTIQ+ people.¹⁰⁷⁴ In case of emergencies, LGBTIQ+ people could contact the Canadian-registered LGBTIQ+ organisation Guardians of Equality Movement through a helpline (GEM).¹⁰⁷⁵

- 6.1.4 *Palestinians in Syria*
According to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, UNRWA), there were approximately 438,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria during the reporting period.¹⁰⁷⁶ After the takeover, small numbers of Palestinian refugees, mainly from Lebanon, returned to Syria.¹⁰⁷⁷

¹⁰⁶² GEM, *LGBTQIA+ individuals in Syria after the fall of the Assad regime*, 19 April 2025, p. 13; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁶³ GEM, *LGBTQIA+ individuals in Syria after the fall of the Assad regime*, 19 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁶⁴ GEM, *Urgent statement on the campaign of violations of torture and arrest, against sexual and gender minorities in Syria*, 11 February 2025; Daraj, *Should queer Syrians take up arms for self-defense?*, 10 March 2025; GEM, *LGBTQIA+ individuals in Syria after the fall of the Assad regime*, 19 April 2025, p. 7; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁶⁵ GEM, *LGBTQIA+ individuals in Syria after the fall of the Assad regime*, 19 April 2025, p. 8; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Confidential source, April 2025.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹⁰⁷⁰ YOUR EX, *Syrian authorities arrest three trans people, intensify persecution of LGBTQ+ community*, 9 February 2025; Worldcrunch, *As Syria faces new divides, LGBTQ+ hate remains the most reliable consensus*, 22 February 2025; GEM, *LGBTQIA+ individuals in Syria after the fall of the Assad regime*, 19 April 2025, p. 8; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁷¹ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian preparatory committee nominee sparks Islamist anger*, 14 February 2025; Worldcrunch, *As Syria faces new divides, LGBTQ+ hate remains the most reliable consensus*, 22 February 2025.

¹⁰⁷² Confidential source, February 2025.

¹⁰⁷³ GEM, *Statement on the fall of the Assad regime and the Syrian LGBTQIA+ post-Assad regime*, 6 January 2025; Worldcrunch, *As Syria faces new divides, LGBTQ+ hate remains the most reliable consensus*, 22 February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁷⁵ GEM, *Who we are?*, [url](#), accessed on 22 May 2025; Instagram, *guardiansofequalitymovement*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹⁰⁷⁶ UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2025*, 9 December 2024, p. 7; UNRWA, *Over 600,000 Palestine refugees in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan in need of humanitarian assistance*, 20 January 2025.

¹⁰⁷⁷ UNRWA, *UNRWA in Syria: Factsheet*, 13 March 2025, p. 1.

Palestinian refugees enjoyed almost the same rights as Syrian citizens from a legal perspective. They were not allowed to vote in elections, however, nor could they stand for election.¹⁰⁷⁸ According to one source, there was no evidence that Palestinian refugees in Syria generally experienced serious discrimination in their daily lives.¹⁰⁷⁹ In December 2024, the interim administration appointed the Palestinian Ghiyath Diab as interim Minister of Oil and Mineral Resources. On 29 March 2025, his department was merged into the Department of Energy.¹⁰⁸⁰

Like the rest of the population, most Palestinian refugees lived under difficult economic conditions.¹⁰⁸¹ According to UNRWA, nearly ninety percent of the approximately 438,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria lived below the international poverty line of less than 2.15 dollars per person per day. They depended on UNRWA support for their basic needs.¹⁰⁸² According to UNRWA, food insecurity among Palestinian refugees rose from 46% in September 2022 and 56% in September 2023 to 62% in March 2024.¹⁰⁸³ According to one source, food insecurity among Palestinian refugees had increased further during the reporting period.¹⁰⁸⁴

Twelve camps for Palestinian refugees were scattered across Syria. Nine of these camps were official, and three were unofficial.¹⁰⁸⁵ Six camps were largely destroyed during the Syrian civil war, notably the Yarmouk camp south of Damascus, the Daraa camp and the Ayn al-Tal camp in Aleppo province.¹⁰⁸⁶ The Khan Eshieh camp, southwest of Damascus, was located a few kilometres from the area where the Israeli army was present (see 3.2).¹⁰⁸⁷

According to UNRWA, approximately forty percent of the 438,000 Palestinian refugees living in Syria were long-term displaced persons.¹⁰⁸⁸ According to UNRWA, 12,638 of the most vulnerable displaced Palestinian refugees have returned to the camps in recent years because they could no longer afford to pay their rent elsewhere.¹⁰⁸⁹ In Yarmouk and in the other devastated camps, they lived among the ruins. There, they lacked basic amenities. For example, there was a lack of drinking water, food, sanitation facilities, sewage systems and electricity.¹⁰⁹⁰ Most of the houses were missing walls, doors or windows.¹⁰⁹¹ A relatively large number of

¹⁰⁷⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Syria*, May 2022, p. 51; AP News, *Palestinian refugees return to Yarmouk amid questions about their place in the new Syria*, 15 December 2024; MEE, *In shattered Yarmouk, the Palestinians of Syria mourn their 'paradise' lost to war*, 18 December 2024.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁸⁰ The Syrian Observer, *Syrian oil minister: Exploration and energy projects on the horizon*, 14 January 2025; DW, *How inclusive is Syria's new technocratic cabinet?*, 31 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

¹⁰⁸¹ UNRWA, *UNRWA in Syria: Factsheet*, 13 March 2025, p. 1; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁸² UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2025*, 9 December 2024, p. 5; UNRWA, *Statement: UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini at the Brussels Conference on Syria*, 18 March 2025.

¹⁰⁸³ UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2025*, 9 December 2024, p. 13; UNRWA, *UNRWA in Syria: Factsheet*, 13 March 2025, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁸⁵ The nine official camps were in Neirab, Hama, Homs, Jaramana, Sbeineh, Qabr Essit, Khan Dunoun, Khan Eshieh and Daraa. The three unofficial camps were in Yarmouk, Latakia and Ayn at-Tal; UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2025*, 9 December 2024, p. 7; UNRWA, *Where we work*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹⁰⁸⁶ UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2025*, 9 December 2024, p. 14; MEE, *In shattered Yarmouk, the Palestinians of Syria mourn their 'paradise' lost to war*, 18 December 2024; France 24, *'Palestinians by blood but Syrians at heart': Residents of Yarmouk refugee camp dream of revival*, 6 January 2025; The New York Times, *Syrians want to go home, but many no longer have one to return to*, 13 March 2025.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Arab Center Washington DC, *A new opportunity for Palestinians in Syria*, 21 March 2025; UNRWA, *Khan Eshieh camp*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹⁰⁸⁸ UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2025*, 9 December 2024, p. 13; UNRWA, *Over 600,000 Palestine refugees in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan in need of humanitarian assistance*, 20 January 2025.

¹⁰⁸⁹ UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2025*, 9 December 2024, p. 7.

¹⁰⁹⁰ MEE, *In shattered Yarmouk, the Palestinians of Syria mourn their 'paradise' lost to war*, 18 December 2024; UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2025*, 9 December 2024, p. 19; Le Monde, *In the Yarmouk refugee camp, the broken future of Syria's Palestinians*, 2 January 2025; France 24, *'Palestinians by blood but Syrians at heart': Residents of Yarmouk refugee camp dream of revival*, 6 January 2025; Enab Baladi, *Yarmouk Camp: Residents return to a devastated area lacking services*, 17 April 2025; confidential source, December 2024.

¹⁰⁹¹ UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2025*, 9 December 2024, p. 12; MEE, *In shattered Yarmouk, the Palestinians of Syria mourn their 'paradise' lost to war*, 18 December 2024.

explosive remnants of war had also been left behind in the camps. UNRWA cooperated with UNMAS and Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) to clear these remnants.¹⁰⁹²

According to one source, UNRWA provided support to Palestinian refugees in a variety of ways. Due to significant funding shortfalls, however, the assistance provided during the reporting period was not equally adequate in all areas.¹⁰⁹³ UNRWA provided financial support and food aid.¹⁰⁹⁴ Support for shelter repairs was also available. For basic healthcare, Palestinian refugees could visit one of the UNRWA health centres in the camps during consultation hours.¹⁰⁹⁵ There was also a mobile clinic operating around the city of Douma.¹⁰⁹⁶ Students had the opportunity to attend UNRWA schools.¹⁰⁹⁷ In addition, UNRWA provided legal support and repaired facilities (such as school buildings) in the camps.¹⁰⁹⁸ Some were able to find paid work at UNRWA.¹⁰⁹⁹

6.1.5 Former Assad supporters

Various groups can be classified under the category of former Assad supporters. These may include former Ba'ath Party members (see 6.1.7). They may also include people who had demonstrated their loyalty to Assad before the takeover, people who had never clearly spoken out against Assad before the takeover, employees and informants of the former security apparatus, former leaders of the Assad regime, or people who had close ties to the former regime.

According to one source, numerous former Assad supporters lost their jobs during the reporting period.¹¹⁰⁰ According to other sources, former Assad supporters could face confiscation of their homes, land, cars and savings.¹¹⁰¹ There were also cases in which former Assad supporters were forced to leave their homes.¹¹⁰²

There were also reports of reprisals against former Assad supporters in the form of looting, kidnappings and assassinations.¹¹⁰³ In some cases, these reprisals targeted people who were accused of having been informants for the former security

¹⁰⁹² UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2025*, 9 December 2024, p. 5; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁹³ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁹⁴ UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2025*, 9 December 2024, p. 5; UNRWA, *Over 600,000 Palestine refugees in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan in need of humanitarian assistance*, 20 January 2025.

¹⁰⁹⁵ UNRWA, *Statement: UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini at the Brussels Conference on Syria*, 18 March 2025.

¹⁰⁹⁶ UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2025*, 9 December 2024, p. 21; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁰⁹⁷ UNRWA, *Statement: UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini at the Brussels Conference on Syria*, 18 March 2025.

¹⁰⁹⁸ UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2025*, 9 December 2024, p. 22.

¹⁰⁹⁹ UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2025*, 9 December 2024, p. 19.

¹¹⁰⁰ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁰¹ Syriac Press, *Christian homes confiscated in rural Hemto (Hama) amid allegations of forced displacement by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham*, 27 January 2025; STJ, *STJ submits report to Damascus governorate on cases of home seizures and arbitrary evictions of homeowners in Harasta*, 27 February 2025; The Syria Report, *Uyghur armed faction seizes chalets in Ras Shamra in Lattakia*, 4 March 2025; The Syria Report, *Properties of former regime officials seized in Rural Damascus*, 1 April 2025; STJ, *STJ submits report on cases of home seizures and arbitrary evictions of homeowners in Muadamiyat al-Sham in Damascus countryside*, 18 April 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 15-22, 2025*, 22 April 2025; Reuters, *Minutes to leave: Syria's Alawites evicted from private homes at gunpoint*, 30 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁰² The Syria Report, *Sectarian tensions force out some residents in government housing*, 14 January 2025; The Syria Report, *Military housing in Damascus after the fall of Assad: Violations and legal ambiguity*, 4 February 2025; France 24, *UN envoy warns Syria against retribution campaign*, 12 February 2025; AP News, *Nostalgia, relief and loss as some Syrians mark their first Ramadan back home in years*, 29 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁰³ Daraj, *I'm a female judge in Homs..What will happen to my career in the new Syria?*, 7 April 2025; SOHR, *Accused of "collaborating with former regime". 6 people executed by gunmen in Aleppo*, 22 April 2025; SNHR, *No fewer than 20 civilians extrajudicial killed in Homs city between April 23-28, 2025*, 30 April 2025, p. 1; confidential source, March 2025.

apparatus.¹¹⁰⁴ Members of criminal groups sometimes pretended to be members of security services in order to carry out their acts of revenge.¹¹⁰⁵

Some former Assad supporters demonstrated their loyalty to al-Sharaa immediately after the takeover. For example, there were people in Damascus who replaced images of Assad with images of al-Sharaa. The interim administration did not permit this. In the vernacular, these people were referred to as those who had made a U-turn (*mukawwi'in*).¹¹⁰⁶

Former Assad supporters could face negative reactions from society. There was little tolerance in society for people who spoke positively about Assad or who, for example, refused to apologise for their former support for Assad. In February 2025, there was controversy surrounding a television series because it featured actors who had never clearly spoken out against Assad.¹¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, on 16 April 2025, the artists' union decided to suspend a well-known actress because of her recent statements about Assad.¹¹⁰⁸

According to one source, many Syrians reported former Assad supporters to the general security forces.¹¹⁰⁹ Security forces arrested a number of well-known former Assad supporters, including Ahmad Hassoun, who had been the Grand Mufti of Syria until the office was abolished in 2021.¹¹¹⁰ He was arrested at Damascus airport on 26 March 2025 as he was about to travel to Jordan.¹¹¹¹

In the transitional government's area of control, arrests and detentions took place of people suspected of having been involved in serious human rights violations during Assad's regime.¹¹¹² Among them were prominent figures, including a cousin of

¹¹⁰⁴ Le Monde, *Syria: Video shows summary execution of Assad regime henchmen*, 13 December 2024; The Washington Post, *Syria's new leaders struggle to contain revenge killings after Assad*, 18 December 2024; AP News, *Sectarian violence in Syria has been less intense than feared since Assad's ouster*, 21 December 2024; BBC News, *Inside a Syrian 'reconciliation centre' where Assad's soldiers give up their weapons*, 29 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Leader of local faction assassinated in southern Syria*, 2 January 2025; The New York Times, *Many Syrians want justice for regime crimes. Others want revenge*, 15 January 2025; De Volkskrant, *'Het lijkt erop dat niet iedereen veilig is in het nieuwe Syrië'*, 18 January 2025; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. December 2024-January 2025*, 22 January 2025; SOHR, *Death toll update. 16 people executed including officers of former regime in Fahl massacre*, 27 January 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Explainer: New militant group in Syria targets Alawites, Assad loyalists*, 13 February 2025; Kurdistan24, *Three ex-Syrian intelligence officers killed in Daraa attack*, 5 March 2025; The Guardian, *How did deadly Syria clashes start and who is responsible for civilian killings?*, 10 March 2025.

¹¹⁰⁵ The Guardian, *Syrian fighters execute 35 in three days, war monitor says*, 26 January 2025; Chatham House, *Syria needs security – can Al-Sharaa build a united army to provide it?*, 10 March 2025.

¹¹⁰⁶ X.com, FSA, 2 February 2025, [url](#); confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁰⁷ Tesaa World, *'Filming of the series 'Caesar' has been halted...and the reason!'*, 27 February 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian Ramadan series called Caesar suspended after backlash*, 1 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Outrage over Syrian TV show inspired by military photographer 'Caesar'*, 1 April 2025.

¹¹⁰⁸ BBC Monitoring, *Syrian media highlight lawsuit against actress for 'controversial' remarks*, 1 April 2025; Enab Baladi, *Syrian artists syndicate removes Sulaf Fawakherji from its lists*, 17 April 2025; Gulf News, *Syrian actress Sulaf Fawakherji expelled from artists' syndicate over political stance*, 18 April 2025; Los Angeles Times, *Between censorship and chaos: Syrian artists wary of new regime*, 28 April 2025.

¹¹⁰⁹ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹¹¹⁰ The Grand Mufti of Syria is regarded as the highest Sunni legal scholar in Syria. A grand mufti may issue legal opinions to Muslims. These are referred to as fatwas. The interim president reinstated the office on 28 March 2025. He appointed Osama al-Rifa'i as Grand Mufti of Syria; Al Jazeera, *Syrian president abolishes position of Grand Mufti*, 16 November 2021; The New Arab, *Syria appoints Assad opponent as top Muslim cleric*, 29 March 2025; Shafaq News, *Syria's religious leadership: Osama Al-Rifai appointed Grand Mufti*, 29 March 2025; Levant 24, *Syria appoints grand mufti, establishes independent fatwa council*, 29 March 2025.

¹¹¹¹ The New Arab, *'Assad's mufti' Ahmed Badreddin Hassoun 'arrested' trying to flee Syria for Jordan*, 27 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Syria's former grand mufti arrested in Damascus*, 27 March 2025; The Syrian Observer, *Former Assad regime mufti Ahmad Hassoun arrested at Damascus airport*, 28 March 2025.

¹¹¹² BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian authorities continue arrest campaigns of Assad-linked officials*, 15 January 2025; AP News, *Syria arrests 3 men suspected of links to Tadamon massacre in which hundreds were executed*, 18 February 2025; The New Arab, *Syria arrests Assad commander accused of war crimes, robberies and kidnappings*, 20 March 2025; confidential source, December 2024; confidential source, February 2025.

Assad and a former director of the military court, nicknamed 'the butcher of Sednaya'.^{1113, 1114}

Security forces arrested several individuals with ties to the former Assad regime, including businesspeople, civil servants and militants.¹¹¹⁵ According to various sources, several wealthy businessmen who had supported Assad were invited to the People's Palace after the takeover to discuss cooperation for the benefit of the economy.¹¹¹⁶

6.1.6 *Relatives of former Assad supporters*

During the reporting period, relatives of former Assad supporters may also have encountered difficulties. For example, some wives or daughters of former Assad supporters and former employees of Assad's security apparatus lost their jobs. It was not always clear whether these were targeted discharges, due to family ties with a specific person, or mass discharges in the public sector. Many Alawite families were affected by these mass discharges, as when the husband had served in the security apparatus and the wife had worked as a nurse.¹¹¹⁷ According to one source, the homes of relatives of former Assad supporters had reportedly been confiscated.¹¹¹⁸ Furthermore, arrests were made of relatives of former Assad supporters who were wanted by the authorities.¹¹¹⁹

6.1.7 *Former Ba'ath party members*

During the reporting period, little information was available on the position of former Ba'ath Party members.¹¹²⁰ On 12 December 2024, the Ba'ath Party declared that it was suspending all activities until further notice.¹¹²¹ Furthermore, on 29 January 2025, interim President al-Sharaa declared that the Ba'ath Party had been dissolved and that it was not permitted to return under any other name.¹¹²² According to one source, the interim leadership distinguished between the party leadership (such as members of the central committee) and passive party members. Only party officials had to report to the registration centres (see 2.2.1).¹¹²³

6.1.8 *Women*

During the reporting period, the implications of the takeover for the position of women and girls in Syria remained unclear.¹¹²⁴ On 13 March 2025, interim president al-Sharaa signed a constitutional declaration. Article 21 of this declaration

¹¹¹³ During the Assad era, Sednaya had been a notorious prison. This prison was notorious for its systematic torture practices, executions and ill-treatment, which resulted in the deaths of large numbers of prisoners; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Syria*, December 2024, p. 104.

¹¹¹⁴ France 24, *Syrian forces clash with Assad remnants over arrest of Saydnaya prison officer*, 26 December 2024; France 24, *Syria's new rulers arrest official behind Saydnaya death penalties*, 26 December 2024; Le Monde, *Syria authorities arrest official behind Saydnaya death penalties*, 27 December 2024; CNN, *Assad cousin notorious for role in suppressing protests in Syria arrested*, 31 January 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Syria arrests senior Assad-era intelligence officer*, 16 April 2025.

¹¹¹⁵ The New York Times, *Syria's new government steps up pursuit of Assad loyalists*, 28 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Syrian war monitor reports sweeping arrests, 'violations' in Homs*, 5 January 2025.

¹¹¹⁶ Reuters, *Exclusive: Syria's new leaders zero in on Assad's business barons*, 13 February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹¹⁷ MEE, *Sacked Syrian workers stage nationwide protests as government targets public sector*, 7 March 2025; ICG, *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 15 March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹¹¹⁸ The Syria Report, *Properties of former regime officials seized in Rural Damascus*, 1 April 2025.

¹¹¹⁹ SJAC, *Two months after Assad's fall, Assad-like violations are still being committed in Syria*, 13 February 2025; Daraj, *I'm a female judge in Homs..What will happen to my career in the new Syria?*, 7 April 2025.

¹¹²⁰ Confidential source, April 2025.

¹¹²¹ Shafaq News, *Syria's Baath Party suspends activities following opposition's declaration of al-Assad regime's fall*, 12 December 2024; France 24, *Once a leading force, Assad's Baath party wiped off Mideast politics: analysts*, 15 December 2024; Al Jazeera, *Syria's new rulers must not repeat the past mistakes of Lebanon and Iraq*, 16 December 2024.

¹¹²² Al Jazeera, *President al-Sharaa and no more Baath party: What else has Syria announced?*, 29 January 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria's Sharaa outlines sweeping reforms, dissolves key institutions*, 30 January 2025.

¹¹²³ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹¹²⁴ The Guardian, *'We've proved we can do anything': the Syrian women who want a say in running the country*, 5 January 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

concerned women's rights.¹¹²⁵ As in the old constitution, Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) formed the basis for legislation (see 1.3.3).¹¹²⁶ According to one source, it was unclear what this meant in practice for the position of women and girls.¹¹²⁷

According to UN OCHA, the economic downturn led to an increase in child marriages, domestic violence and economic violence against women and girls.¹¹²⁸

6.1.8.1 Access to education and employment

The extent to which women had access to education varied from region to region. At some universities (such as those in Idlib and Aleppo), female students were reportedly in the majority. One reason was that many young men had fled Syria in the recent past because of the violence or to escape compulsory military service.¹¹²⁹ According to one source, the extent to which women had access to employment also varied by region and community. The labour participation rate among women has traditionally been low. Working women have generally been paid much less than men for the same work.¹¹³⁰

6.1.8.2 Political and administrative positions

Women were virtually absent from the highest political and administrative positions.¹¹³¹ According to one source, women were not represented in the trade unions.¹¹³² In December 2024, the interim administration appointed Aisha al-Dibs as head of the Women's Affairs Office.¹¹³³ The interim administration had also appointed Maysaa Sabrine as head of the central bank, but she returned to her former position as deputy head of the central bank within three months.¹¹³⁴ On 7 April 2025, al-Sharaa appointed Abdulqader al-Hasriyah as her successor.¹¹³⁵ Furthermore, there was a woman in the transitional government (see 1.3.2).¹¹³⁶ Hind Kabawat, a woman of Christian background, was appointed Minister of Social Affairs and Employment. She had previously served on the organising committee of the National Dialogue Conference alongside another woman, Houda Atassi (see 6.1.1).¹¹³⁷

¹¹²⁵ Etana, *Blog: Syria's constitution raises concerns about inclusivity, presidential powers*, 31 March 2025.

¹¹²⁶ Reuters, *Syria keeps role for Islamic law in 5-year transition*, 13 March 2025; AFP, *Syria's new constitution gives sweeping powers, ignores minority rights*, 14 March 2025; The New York Times, *Syria has a new temporary constitution. Here are the highlights*, 14 March 2025.

¹¹²⁷ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹²⁸ UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report no. 5. As of 28 April 2025*, 8 May 2025, p. 3.

¹¹²⁹ De Volkskrant, *Vrouwen in Syrië houden hun hart vast: 'Eerlijk gezegd ziet het er niet goed uit voor onze rechten'*, 29 January 2025; The Conversation, *Syria: doubts increase over new regime's commitment to women's rights and inclusivity*, 20 February 2025.

¹¹³⁰ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹¹³¹ Atlantic Council, *What will minority and women's rights look like in the new Syria?*, 20 December 2024; confidential source, February 2025.

¹¹³² Confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹³³ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria HTS authority appoints first woman official*, 20 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Syrian women's affairs official tells Turkish paper of her plans*, 25 December 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Syrian women between the discourse of empowerment and the legacy of marginalization: A critical analysis of Aisha al-Dibs' statements*, 1 January 2025; The Guardian, *'We've proved we can do anything': the Syrian women who want a say in running the country*, 5 January 2025; De Standaard, *Straks zijn Syrische vrouwen de pineut*, 3 January 2025; The Conversation, *Syria: doubts increase over new regime's commitment to women's rights and inclusivity*, 20 February 2025.

¹¹³⁴ Al Arabiya, *Maysaa Sabrine becomes first woman appointed as Syria's Central Bank governor*, 30 December 2024; AD, *Ervaren Maysaa Sabrine moet Syrië uit economisch dal halen*, 7 January 2025; Shafaq News, *Syrian central bank governor resigns after less than three months*, 27 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Syria appoints new central bank chief*, 27 March 2025; The Syrian Observer, *Abdulkader Husarieh appointed governor of Syria's central bank, succeeding Maysa Sabrin*, 28 March 2025.

¹¹³⁵ SANA, *Presidential decree No. 10 appointing governor of Central Bank of Syria*, 7 April 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria's Sharaa appoints new central bank governor*, 8 April 2025; The New Arab, *Who is Abdul Qadir al-Hasriya, Syria's new bank governor?*, 8 April 2025.

¹¹³⁶ The New Arab, *Syria's transitional government forms national dialogue committee*, 12 February 2025; Daily Sabah, *Hind Kabawat named Syria's 1st female minister in transitional govt*, 31 March 2025; Trouw, *HTS houdt sleutelposities in Syrische overgangsregering*, 2 April 2025.

¹¹³⁷ The New Arab, *Syria's transitional government forms national dialogue committee*, 12 February 2025; The New York Times, *The only female minister in Syria's new government wants to 'get things done'*, 6 May 2025.

6.1.8.3 Women living alone

According to one source, the takeover had no impact on the position of women living alone.¹¹³⁸ Another source reported that the situation of women living alone varied from area to area (for example, with regard to finding employment and accommodations).¹¹³⁹ According to yet another source, this was compounded by the fact that all services were concentrated in the major cities.¹¹⁴⁰

According to one source, women living alone could face stigmatisation, exclusion and a lack of support. This could vary from one neighbourhood to another. Furthermore, women (or those living alone) were not accepted in certain professions in certain regions. Women living alone could be pressured by their social environment to marry or remarry. Women living alone could become victims of gender-based violence or sexual violence.¹¹⁴¹ According to the UN, gender-based violence had become normalised after years of civil war in Syria.¹¹⁴² Syrian laws did not offer women full legal protection against this form of violence.¹¹⁴³

There were widows' camps in various places, including Idlib. Widows found themselves in a vulnerable position and were at risk of economic exclusion, stigmatisation, gender-based violence, exploitation and abuse.¹¹⁴⁴ Widows or women whose husbands had gone missing could encounter problems claiming property, due to a lack of documentation. In many cases, the property remained in the name of the husband, which meant that they could not claim it. In other cases, they were even evicted from their homes by their in-laws as soon as they no longer had a husband.¹¹⁴⁵

6.2 Socially undesirable behaviour, dress codes and issues of honour

6.2.1 Alcohol

During the reporting period, the transitional government did not impose a ban on alcohol.¹¹⁴⁶ Some entrepreneurs nevertheless took precautions. For example, several cafés and restaurants stopped serving alcohol in the first week after the takeover.¹¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, alcohol could be consumed openly in various places in Damascus.¹¹⁴⁸ During Ramadan, some restaurants closed their doors during the day. Other restaurants remained open but kept their curtains closed.¹¹⁴⁹ According to a report on X.com, alcoholic beverages could also be ordered at some cafés in the centre of Damascus during Ramadan after breaking the fast (*iftar*).¹¹⁵⁰ According to

¹¹³⁸ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹³⁹ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁴⁰ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁴¹ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁴² UN News, *Funding shortages risk undermining a 'watershed moment' for Syria*, 17 March 2025.

¹¹⁴³ UNDP, *Gender justice & the law in the Arab States region*, 10 December 2018; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Syria*, May 2022, p. 61; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁴⁴ Protection Cluster/UNHCR, *Protection landscape in Syria – A snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, p. 5; confidential source, February 2025.

¹¹⁴⁵ Protection Cluster/UNHCR, *Protection landscape in Syria – A snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, p. 5; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁴⁶ France 24, *Syrian pubs cautiously reopen after Islamist victory*, 14 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: BBC interview with Syrian leader al-Sharaa angers Islamists*, 24 December 2024; New Lines Magazine, *The not-so-frivolous debate about alcohol in Syria*, 27 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Nightclub attacks in Syria fuel fears for personal freedoms*, 7 May 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Postwar Syria is still suffering under US sanctions*, 13 May 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁴⁷ France 24, *In Damascus, life resumes without Assad*, 10 December 2024; France 24, *Syrian pubs cautiously reopen after Islamist victory*, 14 December 2024; Rudaw, *Syrians cautious about pubs, liquor stores future post-Assad*, 18 December 2024.

¹¹⁴⁸ The New Arab, *Nightlife in Syria reopen with cautious optimism amid new Islamic leadership*, 21 December 2024, [url](#); BBC News, *Syria's minorities seek security as country charts new future*, 22 December 2024; confidential source, February 2025.

¹¹⁴⁹ NPR, *What happened when Syria's conservative new leaders tried to shut 60 Damascus bars*, 31 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁵⁰ X.com, Jihad Yazigi, 21 March 2025, [url](#).

one source, shops selling spirits were sometimes instructed to hang curtains.¹¹⁵¹ On 27 March 2025, local authorities in downtown Damascus attempted to close dozens of cafés for serving alcohol without a licence. In doing so, they invoked a legal provision from 1952. Following complaints about this, the mayor put an end to this action within a day.¹¹⁵²

6.2.2 *Ramadan*

According to various sources, there was an article in an old Syrian law that forbade Muslims from eating or drinking in public during the day during Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting. Under Assad, this section of the law had not been enforced.¹¹⁵³ According to various sources, on 18 February 2025, the Ministry of Religious Funds (*awqaf*) requested abstinence from eating and drinking in public, out of respect for people who were fasting. The ministry also stated that people who ate or drank in public risked a fine and, possibly, a prison sentence. The sources consulted were not aware of any examples of people who had been fined or imprisoned for this.¹¹⁵⁴ As far as is known, no sanctions were imposed on non-Muslims.¹¹⁵⁵ Residents of Damascus anticipated this request – for example, by not eating, drinking or smoking in public during the day.¹¹⁵⁶ This request did not have the desired effect everywhere, however, as some restaurants and cafés remained open during the day, even in non-Christian and non-Druze areas.¹¹⁵⁷ Eating, drinking or smoking in public during the month of fasting could lead to negative reactions in various places in Syria.¹¹⁵⁸ One source reported having heard about the arrest of someone who had declared a refusal to participate in Ramadan. There is no further information on what happened to this person.¹¹⁵⁹ According to the SNHR, arrests were made in the city of Hama of people accused of breaking their fast in public during Ramadan.¹¹⁶⁰ It is not known whether these individuals were subsequently convicted.

6.2.3 *Blasphemy*

According to the SNHR, several individuals were arrested in the city of Hama for blasphemy.¹¹⁶¹ One source indicated that they had been accused of insulting God, but it was not known exactly which act or acts had led to their arrest. According to this source, they had been subjected to ill-treatment and released after a few hours.¹¹⁶² According to an article in *Le Monde*, in March 2025, the General Security Service arrested several Christians in the Dweila suburb of Damascus for insulting God after a clash with a number of Salafist preachers.¹¹⁶³ No further information about this incident has been found. Furthermore, on 28 April 2025, an audio recording appeared on social media in which the Prophet Muhammad was cursed. It

¹¹⁵¹ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁵² This is Beirut, *Syria reverses bar closures in Damascus Christian areas*, 28 March 2025; The New Arab, *Syria reverses bar closures in Damascus Christian areas: witnesses*, 29 March 2025; NPR, *What happened when Syria's conservative new leaders tried to shut 60 Damascus bars*, 31 March 2025.

¹¹⁵³ Confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁵⁴ Confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹¹⁵⁵ Confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹¹⁵⁶ Confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁵⁷ AP News, *Syrians begin fasting during first Ramadan without Assad family rule in decades*, 2 March 2025; X.com, Jihad Yazigi, 21 March 2025, [url](#); Trouw, *Israël verdeelt Syrische druzen: 'Ze proberen ons los te weken van de rest'*, 27 March 2025; This is Beirut, *Syria reverses bar closures in Damascus Christian areas*, 28 March 2025; NPR, *What happened when Syria's conservative new leaders tried to shut 60 Damascus bars*, 31 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹¹⁵⁸ Confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁵⁹ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁶⁰ SNHR, *At least 117 arbitrary arrests recorded in Syria in March 2025*, 10 April 2025, p. 8.

¹¹⁶¹ SNHR, *At least 229 arbitrary detentions documented in January 2025*, 4 February 2025, p. 6; SNHR, *At least 216 arbitrary detentions recorded in Syria in February 2025*, 3 March 2025, p. 8.

¹¹⁶² Confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁶³ Le Monde, *In Damascus, volunteers protect Christian neighborhoods*, 11 April 2025.

was attributed to a religious leader of the Druze. This led to an escalation of violence between pro-government forces and Druze militias (see 3.3.2.8).¹¹⁶⁴

6.2.4 Dress code

During the reporting period, there was no nationwide introduction of legislation relating to dress codes, such as compulsory headscarves for women, a ban on wearing shorts or a ban on using certain types of make-up.¹¹⁶⁵ Both veiled and unveiled women could be seen on the streets of Damascus. In general, appearing in public without a veil did not cause any problems. In Idlib, most women wore veils when out in public. Some wore a *niqab*.¹¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, unveiled women were sometimes visible in Idlib (for example, in shopping centres). Women in Idlib could expect negative reactions from the public if they appeared without a headscarf.¹¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, after the takeover, more women wearing a niqab appeared on the streets and at the university in Aleppo.¹¹⁶⁸ There were numerous isolated actions by individuals, employers and radical groups wishing to promote strict dress codes.¹¹⁶⁹ For example, posters appeared on walls in various cities encouraging women to be fully veiled when going outside.¹¹⁷⁰

6.2.5 Segregation of the sexes

Although it was not imposed by law by the transitional government for Syria as a whole, gender segregation in public spaces was sometimes introduced at the local level.¹¹⁷¹ For example, some bus companies implemented this by placing signs on the side of the buses indicating that women should board at the rear and men at the front.¹¹⁷² According to one source, some gyms had separate areas for men and women.¹¹⁷³ Another source reported an incident in which armed men demanded that a gym remove a poster depicting a woman.¹¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, according to another source, there were schools that had separate entrances for boys and girls.¹¹⁷⁵ In some courts, women and men were seated separately.¹¹⁷⁶ According to the transitional government, these were individual initiatives by local administrators and entrepreneurs, local radical groups or local religious figures wishing to enforce gender segregation.¹¹⁷⁷

¹¹⁶⁴ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Islamists rage at Syrian Druze after 'insult' to Prophet*, 30 April 2025; The New York Times, *What to know about Syria's minorities and sectarian violence*, 1 May 2025; Mercy Corps, *Fractured stability: communal tensions, political strain, and emerging spoilers in Syria*, 5 May 2025, p. 4.

¹¹⁶⁵ Atlantic Council, *What will minority and women's rights look like in the new Syria?*, 20 December 2024; AP News, *Sectarian violence in Syria has been less intense than feared since Assad's ouster*, 21 December 2024; France 24, *Women in Syria: Could the future be female?*, 21 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁶⁶ A niqab is a veil that covers the face, leaving only the eyes exposed.; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Islamists criticises public appearance of Syrian leader's wife*, 14 February 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Islamism is still thriving in Idlib*, 12 March 2025.

¹¹⁶⁷ Syria Direct, *Protection or intervention? Focus on Syria's minorities sparks controversy, fuels hate speech*, 29 January 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Islamism is still thriving in Idlib*, 12 March 2025; France 24, *Women in Syria: Could the future be female?*, 21 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁶⁸ France 24, *Women in Syria: Could the future be female?*, 21 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁶⁹ Syriac Press, *Rising "individual acts" threaten Christians in Syria*, 18 January 2025; AA, *Türkiye's first lady meets with Syrian counterpart*, 4 February 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Islamists criticises public appearance of Syrian leader's wife*, 14 February 2025; Daraj, *I'm a female judge in Homs..What will happen to my career in the new Syria?*, 7 April 2025; BBC News, *Syrians have more freedom after Assad, but could they soon lose it?*, 18 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁷⁰ The New Arab, *Why Syrian women's political participation is crucial in building the new Syria*, 11 February 2025; Enab Baladi, *Syrian women's clothing: A debate reflecting societal transformations*, 14 February 2025; France 24, *Women in Syria: Could the future be female?*, 21 March 2025.

¹¹⁷¹ The Economist, *The warlords of Syria have a daunting to-do list*, 25 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁷² VOA, *What future awaits Syria's Christian minority?*, 7 January 2025; The Conversation, *Syria: doubts increase over new regime's commitment to women's rights and inclusivity*, 20 February 2025; France 24, *Women in Syria: Could the future be female?*, 21 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

¹¹⁷³ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁷⁴ France 24, *In Syria's Alawite area, joy at Assad fall but fear of Islamism*, 16 December 2024.

¹¹⁷⁵ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁷⁶ France 24, *Women in Syria: Could the future be female?*, 21 March 2025; Daraj, *I'm a female judge in Homs..What will happen to my career in the new Syria?*, 7 April 2025.

¹¹⁷⁷ France 24, *Women in Syria: Could the future be female?*, 21 March 2025.

6.2.6 Honour-based violence

Honour-based violence occurred in Syria.¹¹⁷⁸ No accurate figures were available on the number of victims. According to UN OCHA, honour-based violence occurred mainly in Manbij in the north-east of Aleppo province, as well as in rural areas in the east of Aleppo province.¹¹⁷⁹ In legal terms, the invocation of honour as a motive could lead to a reduced sentence for the perpetrators.¹¹⁸⁰

6.3 Freedom of expression

6.3.1 Possibility of expressing criticism

After the fall of the Assad regime, there was more openness and room for public criticism.¹¹⁸¹ Political discussions took place in public, which had previously been impossible.¹¹⁸² Civil society organisations were generally able to hold meetings without permission from higher authorities.¹¹⁸³ It was possible to criticise the interim administration and the transitional government (for example, out of dissatisfaction with the pace of economic recovery).¹¹⁸⁴

It nevertheless remained unclear where the red lines lay with regard to the possibilities for criticising the transitional government. After many years of repression, some people were cautious and remained wary of testing the boundaries. According to one source, people felt that they were still in a phase of exploration.¹¹⁸⁵ In early May 2025, the SNHR reported the arrest of a number of individuals, particularly in the province of Rural Damascus, for expressing criticism of the transitional government on social media.¹¹⁸⁶

According to various sources, aggressive language was used on social media towards critics and those with differing opinions.¹¹⁸⁷ According to one source, this was particularly the case with regard to women, democracy and the form of government in Syria.¹¹⁸⁸

According to various sources, on 5 April 2025, security forces stopped a bus carrying approximately twenty civil society activists from the province of Suweida at a checkpoint near the Al-Wa'er suburb of the city of Homs. They had reportedly been on their way to a meeting in the SDF-controlled city of Raqqa. These activists were

¹¹⁷⁸ Violence motivated by 'honour' is linked to certain social and gender norms within a community. For this reason, international organisations often include the term 'honour-based violence' within the category of sexual and/or gender-based violence; Worldcrunch, *Regimes may change in Syria – The scourge of honor killings persists*, 17 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁷⁹ UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report no. 5. As of 28 April 2025*, 8 May 2025, p. 3.

¹¹⁸⁰ Open Democracy, *A murder in Syria reignites the debate about so-called 'honour killings'*, 13 July 2021; Kennisplatform Inclusief Samenleven, *Eengerelateerd geweld in de Syrische gemeenschap*, 30 June 2023, p. 15; Raseef22, *When fathers turn into executioners: The dark reality of "honor crimes" in Syria's al-Suwayda*, 13 September 2024; Trouw, *'Een Syrische vrouw mag geslagen worden, of zelfs vermoord': de bittere werkelijkheid van eerwraak*, 27 January 2025; Worldcrunch, *Regimes may change in Syria – The scourge of honor killings persists*, 17 April 2025.

¹¹⁸¹ Enab Baladi, *Syrians seize freedom of expression after al-Assad's fall*, 17 December 2024; Syria Notes, *'The grapes of our country'*, 3 May 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹¹⁸² BBC News, *Syrians have more freedom after Assad, but could they soon lose it?*, 18 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹¹⁸³ Trouw, *In café Rawda leren Syriërs weer vrijuit te praten over politiek and samenleving*, 24 February 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 15-22, 2025*, 22 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁸⁴ Trouw, *In café Rawda leren Syriërs weer vrijuit te praten over politiek and samenleving*, 24 February 2025; Carnegie, *The view from Damascus*, 13 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Pro-government Syria TV airs rare criticism amid sectarian violence*, 30 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁸⁵ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁸⁶ SNHR, *At least 89 arbitrary arrests recorded in Syria in April 2025*, 3 May 2025, p. 7.

¹¹⁸⁷ Front Line Defenders, *Syria: Defamation campaign against woman rights defender Hiba Ezzideen Al-Hajji*, 23 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹¹⁸⁸ Confidential source, March 2025.

released on 6 April 2025. The following day, they visited the governor in Suweida to share their experiences.¹¹⁸⁹

According to one source, there was room for public criticism in the north-east. In this regard, the red line was drawn at criticism that could be interpreted as a threat to DAANES or the SDF. For example, this could include comments about Kurdish dominance in this area.¹¹⁹⁰ During the reporting period, several arrests were made of individuals who had criticised the SDF.¹¹⁹¹ There were also arrests of people who had expressed their support for the transitional government (for example, by displaying the Syrian revolutionary flag with the three stars,¹¹⁹² by having a photo of themselves on their mobile phone holding this flag or by celebrating Assad's departure).¹¹⁹³ No further information was available regarding the outcome of these cases.

According to various sources, arrests were reportedly made in Afrin by SNA factions of people who had waved Kurdish flags or who had cheered the arrival of the transitional government's general security forces in Afrin on 6 February 2025.¹¹⁹⁴ According to one source, most were released after a few days.¹¹⁹⁵

6.3.2 *Relatives of critics*

Little information has been found about the position of relatives of critics during the reporting period. According to a report by the human rights organisation Front Line Defenders, relatives of a women's rights activist were subjected to a smear campaign on Facebook starting on 20 April 2025.¹¹⁹⁶

6.3.3 *Demonstrators*

Demonstrations took place almost daily in the transitional government's area of control. These demonstrations were directed against a variety of issues, including irregular salary payments and pension benefits, mass redundancies in the public sector and the constitutional declaration, as well as for a transition to a secular democratic state.¹¹⁹⁷ In most cases, the transitional government permitted these demonstrations and did not intervene.¹¹⁹⁸

¹¹⁸⁹ SOHR, *Endured torture, humiliation and sectarian discrimination. General security service releases 21 members of party operating in Al-Suweida*, 6 April 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian media reports arrests in Deir al-Zour, Homs*, 6 April 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 1-8, 2025*, 8 April 2025; De Volkskrant, *In het nieuwe Syrië vertrouwen de Druzen alleen elkaar*, 8 May 2025.

¹¹⁹⁰ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹¹⁹¹ SNHR, *At least 229 arbitrary detentions documented in January 2025*, 4 February 2025, p. 7; SNHR, *At least 216 arbitrary detentions recorded in Syria in February 2025*, 3 March 2025, p. 8; SNHR, *At least 117 arbitrary arrests recorded in Syria in March 2025*, 10 April 2025, p. 4.

¹¹⁹² This flag was flown primarily by the mainstream Syrian opposition, and not by the SDF, YPG and PYD; Enab Baladi, *AANES adopts flag of Syrian revolution*, 12 December 2024; Enab Baladi, *Syrian revolution flag raised in Qamishli*, 19 December 2024.

¹¹⁹³ SNHR, *SNHR condemns SDF's continued detentions of civilians since the beginning of 2025 over voicing their opinion*, 22 February 2025; New Lines Magazine, *The fragile foundations of Arab-Kurdish coexistence*, 1 April 2025; SNHR, *At least 117 arbitrary arrests recorded in Syria in March 2025*, 10 April 2025, pp. 7-8; Mercy Corps, *Syria monthly report*, 10 April 2025, p. 10; SNHR, *At least 89 arbitrary arrests recorded in Syria in April 2025*, 3 May 2025, p. 8.

¹¹⁹⁴ SNHR, *SNHR's annual report on arrests/detentions in Syria*, 4 January 2025, p. 18; SNHR, *At least 229 arbitrary detentions documented in January 2025*, 4 February 2025, pp. 7-8; SNHR, *At least 216 arbitrary detentions recorded in Syria in February 2025*, 3 March 2025, p. 9; STJ, *Syria/Afrin: Promises by transitional authorities to restore rights and end violations against Kurds*, 11 April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹¹⁹⁵ Confidential source, April 2025.

¹¹⁹⁶ Front Line Defenders, *Syria: Defamation campaign against woman rights defender Hiba Ezzideen Al-Hajji*, 23 April 2025.

¹¹⁹⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Thousands protest in Syrian capital for a 'civil democratic state'*, 20 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Islamist cleric urges HTS to crush pro-democracy protests in Syria*, 22 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria Islamists warn of 'counter-revolution' after Damascus protests*, 24 December 2024; Asharq Al-Awsat, *Syria's new rulers overhaul economy with firing 'ghost employees'*, 1 February 2025; MEE, *Sacked Syrian workers stage nationwide protests as government targets public sector*, 7 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria's Druze, Kurds protest against constitution*, 16 March 2025; Enab Baladi, *Ghost employees...corruption or privatization. Thousands of Syrian employees await their fate*, 28 March 2025; Syria Times, *A popular demonstration held in Damascus in support of Gaza*, 7 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹¹⁹⁸ Confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

In some cases, security forces did intervene.¹¹⁹⁹ For example, on 21 December 2024, they reportedly arrested around ten women in the north-west who had demonstrated in Aleppo for the release of Abu Shuayb al-Masri, among other detainees. Al-Masri and several others had been detained in Idlib on charges of having ties to *Hizb ut-Tahrir* (Party of Liberation).¹²⁰⁰ Prisoners suspected of having ties to extremist groups – such as ISIS, *Hurras al-Din* (Guardians of the Faith)¹²⁰¹ and Hizb ut-Tahrir – were generally not granted amnesty.¹²⁰² The women were reportedly released after two weeks.¹²⁰³

Demonstrations also took place in the north-east, including Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor (for example, by teachers or citizens who wanted the transitional government to take over administration in their area). According to one source, the Kurdish-dominated self-administration intervened in some cases by making arrests and dispersing the crowd (for example, by firing shots into the air).¹²⁰⁴ During such demonstrations, security forces purportedly fired on demonstrators on occasion. It was reported that the SDF had shot a demonstrator in Hasaka on 12 December 2024.¹²⁰⁵

6.3.4

Journalists

During the reporting period, the implications of the takeover for the media landscape in Syria remained unclear.¹²⁰⁶ According to one source, the freedom of movement and rules for journalists changed weekly.¹²⁰⁷ According to another source, journalists were given a great deal of freedom in the first chaotic weeks after the takeover in Syria, as little had been regulated by the interim administration at that time.¹²⁰⁸ At that time, foreign journalists could enter Syria without much difficulty and report and film unhindered in many places.¹²⁰⁹ After a few weeks, international media had to request prior permission from the Ministry of Information, and it became more difficult to obtain visas and travel to Syria.¹²¹⁰ Journalists also had to register with the Ministry of Information. Furthermore, they had to request permission from this ministry to attend large gatherings, such as the National Dialogue Conference (see 6.1.1).¹²¹¹

On 7 February 2025, the Ministry of Information published a notice on its Facebook page warning Syrian media channels not to publish interviews or statements from

¹¹⁹⁹ France 24, *Syrians protest after video of attack on Alawite shrine*, 25 December 2024; France 24, *Syria security forces disperse rival protests in Damascus*, 9 March 2025.

¹²⁰⁰ Hizb ut-Tahrir is an international Islamic group that strives for an Islamic caliphate; France 24, *'Free Women of the Levant': Jihadists' families rally against al-Sharaa's crackdown in Syria*, 23 December 2024; The New Arab, *What can Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's years of rule in Idlib tell us about what the future of Syria could look like?*, 13 February 2025.

¹²⁰¹ Hurras al-Din was a Salafist jihadist organisation that had fought in the Syrian civil war. On 28 January 2025, this organization announced that it would disband; Enab Baladi, *Guardians of Religion announces its dissolution in Syria*, 29 January 2025; The New Arab, *Al-Qaeda's 'Syria branch' dissolves following Assad ouster but followers told to stay armed*, 29 January 2025.

¹²⁰² BBC Monitoring, *Explainer: Why are Syria's Islamists focused on prisoners in 'HTS' jails?*, 14 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Arrest of Syria preachers angers Islamist critics of HTS*, 21 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *'Mujahid' prisoner reportedly freed by Syrian authorities*, 27 March 2025.

¹²⁰³ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: HTS accused of detaining women protestors in Aleppo*, 23 December 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. December 2024-January 2025*, 22 January 2025.

¹²⁰⁴ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹²⁰⁵ SNHR, *Man named Mohammad al-Medad shot and killed by SDF in Hasaka, December 12, 2024*, 13 December 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. December 2024-January 2025*, 22 January 2025.

¹²⁰⁶ BBC News, *Syria country profile*, 7 January 2025; RSF, *Syria*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹²⁰⁷ Confidential source, May 2025.

¹²⁰⁸ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹²⁰⁹ Arab News, *Sectarian violence in Syria has been less intense than feared since Assad's ouster*, 21 December 2024; confidential source, February 2025.

¹²¹⁰ SANA, *Information Ministry invites journalists to coordinate work with it via registration links*, 12 January 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, May 2025.

¹²¹¹ Syria Times, *Information Ministry has granted about 1000 work permits so far*, 18 January 2025; Tesaa World, *The Ministry of Information in Syria grants 1750 journalist permits and launches an electronic platform to facilitate registration for media professionals*, 6 February 2025; Syria Notes, *'The grapes of our country'*, 3 May 2025.

people associated with the former Assad regime.¹²¹² The interim administration also took measures against journalists who had worked under Assad. On 13 December 2024, the interim administration announced that media personnel who had contributed to Assad's crimes would be prosecuted.¹²¹³ Furthermore, the interim administration dissolved the Syrian Journalists' Union on 6 February 2025.¹²¹⁴ According to one source, media channels operating under Assad had to post drafts of all new stories in an online chat room so that a government official could approve them.¹²¹⁵

On 5 January 2025, the Syrian News Channel (*Al-Ikhbariya al-Suriya*) ceased broadcasting.¹²¹⁶ One month later, on 10 February 2025, unidentified individuals abducted the former director of this public television station. He was released on 15 February 2025.¹²¹⁷ Furthermore, the news channel launched in a new form on 5 May 2025 with a trial broadcast by satellite.¹²¹⁸

Journalists were not always granted permission by the Ministry of Information to report on certain events. For example, foreign journalists have been denied access to the coastal provinces since the escalation of violence in early March 2025 (see 3.3.5.2).¹²¹⁹

Some journalists encountered difficulties in the course of their work.¹²²⁰ For example, according to Reporters Without Borders (*Reporters sans frontières*, RSF), an international non-governmental organisation dedicated to freedom of the press, at least five local journalists wishing to report on the escalation of violence in the coastal provinces were attacked in early March 2025. The Ministry of Information condemned these attacks.¹²²¹ Furthermore, according to various sources, on 4 May 2025, men from a local armed faction in the city of Suweida attacked seven local journalists who had come to this city to report on the signing of the agreement between the governor of Suweida and Druze leaders (see 3.3.2.8). The local authorities and the Minister of Information condemned this attack.¹²²²

¹²¹² Enab Baladi, *Syrian ministry of information prohibits interviews with figures of previous regime*, 7 February 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Syria's media ministry warns outlets against coverage of Assad-era 'symbols'*, 7 February 2025.

¹²¹³ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: IS says Assad-era Syrian state media workers should face death*, 20 December 2024; Verify-sy.com, *Is the Syrian Ministry of Information's official account still controlled by the former regime?*, 21 December 2024.

¹²¹⁴ The Syrian Observer, *The government dissolves the Syrian journalists' union board*, 12 February 2025; IFJ, *Syria: IFJ calls on authorities to reverse dissolution of journalists' union*, 12 February 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Syrian outlet highlights calls to reinstate Syria journalist union*, 13 February 2025.

¹²¹⁵ NPR, *After decades of surveillance, Syrians are cautiously testing out free expression*, 17 February 2025.

¹²¹⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian state-owned TV prepares to resume broadcasts*, 12 April 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Sanctioned Syrian state TV channel to relaunch in May*, 21 April 2025.

¹²¹⁷ SOHR, *SOHR condemns. Former director of Syrian News Agency kidnapped in Damascus*, 12 February 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Former director of Syrian state-run channel kidnapped*, 15 February 2025; SOHR, *A week after having been kidnapped. Former director of Syrian News Agency released in Damascus*, 15 February 2025.

¹²¹⁸ Tesaa World, *Syrian News Channel to launch its official broadcast with a new visual identity tomorrow*, 4 May 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria state TV resumes broadcasts with new look, direction*, 5 May 2025; Barron's, *Syria state TV relaunched, months after Assad's ouster*, 5 May 2025; Arab News, *Syria state TV relaunched, months after Assad's ouster*, 6 May 2025.

¹²¹⁹ BBC Monitoring, *War monitor condemns 'ban on foreign journalists' in Syrian coast*, 14 March 2025; SOHR, *Efforts to obliterate evidence of mass genocide. SOHR condemns prevention of foreign journalists from entering Syrian coastline*, 14 March 2025; The New York Times, *Inside a city swept by roving gunmen, deadly grudges and fear*, 20 April 2025; confidential source, May 2025.

¹²²⁰ SNHR, *SNHR's annual report on arrests/detentions in Syria*, 4 January 2025, p. 17; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. December 2024-January 2025*, 22 January 2025.

¹²²¹ RSF, *Deadly clashes in Syria: authorities must ensure journalists' safety and the public's rights to reliable information*, 11 March 2025.

¹²²² X.com, *Hussam Hammoud*, 4 May 2025, [url](#); X.com, *Mohammad Alasakra*, 4 May 2025, [url](#); Syria Times, *The Journalist's Union condemns assault on journalists*, 4 May 2025; SANA, *Journalists Union condemns assault on journalists covering agreement implementation in Sweida*, 5 May 2025; RSF, *Seven journalists attacked in Syria: RSF calls on the authorities to protect reporters*, 6 May 2025.

In the north-east, journalists faced restrictions.¹²²³ For example, one source stated that, in April 2025, some journalists were denied access to the Kurdish neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafieh in Aleppo to report on the withdrawal of the YPG.¹²²⁴

During the reporting period, several journalists were killed. For example, on 19 December 2024, two Kurdish journalists from Türkiye were killed in a drone strike near the Tishreen Dam in Aleppo province.¹²²⁵ Furthermore, a photographer from the state press agency Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) had been kidnapped by unidentified individuals. His body was found on 22 January 2025 near the city of Hama.¹²²⁶

¹²²³ Syria Direct, *Restrictions on local journalists in northeastern Syria multiply*, 4 July 2024; TRT World, *SDF's media grip in northern Syria echoes Assad's propaganda playbook*, 6 February 2025; The New Arab, *In post-Assad Syria, Kurdish-led SDF impose media blackout on Aleppo neighbourhoods*, 12 April 2025.

¹²²⁴ The New Arab, *In post-Assad Syria, Kurdish-led SDF impose media blackout on Aleppo neighbourhoods*, 12 April 2025.

¹²²⁵ IFJ, *Syria: Two Kurdish journalists killed by alleged drone attack by Türkiye*, 20 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Turkish groups, Kurdish voices condemn killing of journalists in Syria*, 20 December 2024; Le Monde, *Two Turkish journalists killed in north Syria by 'Turkish drone'*, 20 December 2024; Bianet, *Two Kurdish journalists killed in suspected Turkish drone strike in northern Syria*, 21 December 2024.

¹²²⁶ IFJ, *Ibrahim Ajaj*, 22 January 2025; SNHR, *Dead body of man named Ibrahim Ajaj found on the outskirts of Hama city, January 22, 2025*, 23 January 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Syrian government condemns killing of state news agency photographer*, 23 January 2025.

7 Freedom of movement

During the reporting period, freedom of movement in Syria increased because the front lines in the north-west had disappeared and the number of checkpoints in the transitional government's area of control had decreased compared to the previous reporting period. For example, there were no checkpoints along the motorway between the Lebanese border and Damascus, except for when entering Damascus.¹²²⁷ In March 2025, one source stated that there were no checkpoints along the motorway between Damascus and Homs.¹²²⁸ In February 2025, another source stated that there were also no checkpoints between the Turkish border and Aleppo, except near the town of A'zaz.¹²²⁹ By March 2025, hardly any checkpoints remained along the roads between Damascus, Daraa, Suweida and Hasaka.¹²³⁰ According to one source, this resulted in bus transport between major cities becoming faster and less expensive. The bus drivers no longer had to pay money to the checkpoint staff, which was passed on in the price.¹²³¹

7.1 Travelling in Syria

According to one source, travelling in Syria was not without risk, due to widespread crime (see 3.5) and the poor security situation.¹²³² For example, until the departure of the YPG in April 2025, passing vehicles were sometimes fired upon from the Kurdish neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafieh in Aleppo.¹²³³ Unknown assailants also fired shots at passing vehicles on the road between Damascus and Suweida (see 3.3.3).¹²³⁴ According to one source, it was not considered safe to travel after sunset.¹²³⁵ In the north and north-east, travel was sometimes difficult because there were still pockets of unrest, and various armed factions were present (see 3.3.6).¹²³⁶

7.2 Checkpoints

Various armed groups were present at checkpoints. These groups included the security apparatus of the transitional government (see 2.3), the SNA factions in the

¹²²⁷ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²²⁸ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹²²⁹ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹²³⁰ Enab Baladi, *End of "horror journey" on al-Hasakah-Damascus road*, 24 February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹²³¹ Enab Baladi, *End of "horror journey" on al-Hasakah-Damascus road*, 24 February 2025.

¹²³² Confidential source, February 2025.

¹²³³ X.com, Charles Lister, 1 April 2025, [url](#); Levant 24, *SDF and Syrian government reach agreement on Aleppo neighborhoods*, 2 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹²³⁴ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: More than a dozen casualties in violence in southern Syria*, 31 January 2025; Syria Weekly, *March 18-25, 2025*, 25 March 2025; X.com, Qalaat Al Mudiq, 26 April 2025, [url](#); BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Bedouins, Druze clash in Syria's Sweida province*, 5 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹²³⁵ ICG, *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.

¹²³⁶ Syria Direct, *Tens of thousands return to Afrin while fear of abuses keeps others away*, 3 January 2025; Daraj, *Is the influence of armed factions in Afrin declining with the arrival of the General Security?*, 26 February 2025; Kurdistan24, *Uncertain future in Rojava: Syrian public security forces assume control in Afrin*, 6 February 2025; STJ, *Syria/Afrin: Promises by transitional authorities to restore rights and end violations against Kurds*, 11 April 2025.

north, the SDF in the north-east and local armed groups in the southern provinces (see 2.1).¹²³⁷

In general, there were checkpoints along the access roads to major cities and at some government buildings (for example, at the entrance to Homs or in the Mezze district and the suburb of Jaramana near Damascus).¹²³⁸ These checkpoints were intended for a variety of purposes, including monitoring traffic, checking vehicles for weapons, detaining people who had not reported to a registration centre and tracking down wanted individuals.¹²³⁹ According to one source, a checkpoint had also been set up in Damascus along the access road to Mount Qasyoun. Foreign fighters were reportedly staying there.¹²⁴⁰ Following the withdrawal of the YPG from the two Kurdish neighbourhoods of Aleppo in early April 2025, the general security forces and the local Kurdish internal security forces (*Asayish*) jointly set up checkpoints at the entrances to these two neighbourhoods.¹²⁴¹ Furthermore, according to one source, a checkpoint had been set up at the entrance to the Christian village of Sednaya in the province of Rural Damascus.¹²⁴² There were also checkpoints at the entrances to the Shiite shrine of Sayyida Zainab (see 6.1.1.2).¹²⁴³

In the east of the province of Homs and in the province of Deir ez-Zor, checkpoints had been set up at locations where two main roads crossed.¹²⁴⁴ According to one source, there were at least nine checkpoints along the approximately 450-kilometre road from Damascus to Deir ez-Zor.¹²⁴⁵ According to another source, there were also relatively many checkpoints on the road to Abukamal, where one of the few border crossings into Iraq is located.¹²⁴⁶

Temporary checkpoints were also set up in the vicinity of trouble spots and in areas where there was a great deal of social unrest, crime and escalating violence.¹²⁴⁷ For example, checkpoints were set up on the access roads to villages or neighbourhoods where Alawites were in the majority (for example, near Alawite villages in the countryside in the west of the provinces of Homs and Hama).¹²⁴⁸ According to some, they were there to protect the Alawite population from sectarian violence. According to others, they were intended to keep the Alawites under control.¹²⁴⁹

¹²³⁷ AP News, *AP photos: Syrians returning to the town of Tel Rifaat find homes in ruins and underground tunnels*, 10 February 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Calm reported in Syria's Druze-majority town after deadly unrest*, 2 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian forces battle militants in Deraa after checkpoint attack*, 6 March 2025; SOHR, *Surprise attack. ISIS cells attack SDF checkpoint in Al-Raqqa countryside*, 10 March 2025; Syria Direct, *As tensions run high, will Suwayda's security agreement hold?*, 7 May 2025; The Washington Post, *As Syria's Druze minority reels from violence, Israel pursues an opening*, 10 May 2025.

¹²³⁸ BBC News, *Syria's minorities seek security as country charts new future*, 22 December 2024; The New Arab, *Hope and uncertainty for the Druze community in Syria*, 14 January 2025; Enab Baladi, *End of "horror journey" on al-Hasakah-Damascus road*, 24 February 2025; Al Jazeera, *Syria announces end of military operation against al-Assad loyalists*, 10 March 2025; The New Arab, *Deadly clashes in Syria's Jaramana after audio recording insulting Prophet Muhammad circulates*, 29 April 2025; SJAC, *The Syrian government must investigate the targeting of Alawite civilians in Homs*, 13 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹²³⁹ Confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹²⁴⁰ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹²⁴¹ AP News, *Kurdish fighters leave northern city in Syria as part of deal with central government*, 4 April 2025; SANA, *General security forces deploy at entrances to Ashrafieh and Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhoods in Aleppo*, 13 April 2025.

¹²⁴² Confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁴³ The National, *The two lives of Syria's Sayyida Zaynab suburb*, 19 February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁴⁴ New Lines Magazine, *The fragile foundations of Arab-Kurdish coexistence*, 1 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

¹²⁴⁵ New Lines Magazine, *The fragile foundations of Arab-Kurdish coexistence*, 1 April 2025.

¹²⁴⁶ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹²⁴⁷ Syria Direct, *As tensions run high, will Suwayda's security agreement hold?*, 7 May 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Investigating the Alawite massacres*, 12 May 2025.

¹²⁴⁸ The New Arab, *Lawlessness festers in Homs as Syria struggles to rebuild*, 28 April 2025; Le Monde, *En Syrie, l'inquiétante disparition de femmes alaouites*, 28 April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁴⁹ France 24, *Fear grips Alawites in Syria's Homs as Assad 'remnants' targeted*, 10 January 2025; MEE, *HTS raids and forced disappearances fuel fear in Syria's Alawi heartlands*, 17 January 2025; NRC, *'Als er in Syrië niet snel banen*

In addition, temporary and permanent checkpoints were set up along the main roads to Tartous, the motorway between Homs and Latakia, and in neighbourhoods of the city of Al-Sanamayn in the north of Daraa province.¹²⁵⁰ According to one source, the number of checkpoints increased in Damascus during the escalation of violence in the coastal region in early March 2025.¹²⁵¹

Temporary checkpoints were set up to cordon off areas during security operations (see 8.5.2).¹²⁵² Furthermore, multiple sources noted that there were relatively many checkpoints in the DAANES territory, as the situation there had not changed during the reporting period and there were tribal conflicts or active conflict between the SDF and SNA factions in some areas.¹²⁵³

7.2.1 Procedure at checkpoints

The procedures used could vary from one checkpoint to another. In most cases, vehicles were able to continue driving unhindered.¹²⁵⁴ The procedure usually consisted merely of a visual check and, sometimes, a quick glance inside the vehicles.¹²⁵⁵ According to one source, there were also instances in which only the name and destination were requested, after which the driver was allowed to continue.¹²⁵⁶ According to another source, checks were often limited to identity checks based on identity cards.¹²⁵⁷ According to yet another source, female passengers were not always required to show their identity cards.¹²⁵⁸ One source reported that, when carrying out identity checks at checkpoints, security forces in the city of Homs sometimes asked people to state which population group they belonged to. This information was not mentioned on the Syrian identity documents.¹²⁵⁹

7.2.2 Problems at checkpoints

Several sources indicated that they had not experienced extortion at checkpoints. This was a significant change compared to the previous reporting period.¹²⁶⁰ According to various sources, travellers were extorted at the SDF checkpoint in the Tabqa region under the guise of exit fees.¹²⁶¹ Furthermore, there were reports of problems encountered by Kurds at checkpoints staffed by SNA factions in Manbij and Afrin. They were subjected to interrogation, threats, robbery, extortion and arrest (see 6.1.1.6).¹²⁶² There were also reports of Alawites facing intimidation,

bijkomen, vrees ik meer geweld, 10 March 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Islamism is still thriving in Idlib*, 12 March 2025; Syria Revisited, *The Ismaili mediators of Qadmus*, 18 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹²⁵⁰ The New York Times, *Chaos sweeps coastal Syria: 'We have to get out of here'*, 9 March 2025; De Volkskrant, *Honderden dode burgers bij geweld in Syrië*, 10 March 2025; NRC, *'Als er in Syrië niet snel banen bijkomen, vrees ik meer geweld'*, 10 March 2025; UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report no. 4. As of 26 March 2025*, 27 March 2025; The New Arab, *Lawlessness festers in Homs as Syria struggles to rebuild*, 28 April 2025; SNHR, *1,562 deaths, including 102 children and 99 women, as well as 33 medical personnel, recorded in March 2025 in Syria*, 9 April 2025, p. 4; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁵¹ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹²⁵² MEI, *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁵³ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

¹²⁵⁴ New Lines Magazine, *The fragile foundations of Arab-Kurdish coexistence*, 1 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹²⁵⁵ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹²⁵⁶ Syria Direct, *Tens of thousands return to Afrin while fear of abuses keeps others away*, 3 January 2025.

¹²⁵⁷ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹²⁵⁸ New Lines Magazine, *Islamism is still thriving in Idlib*, 12 March 2025.

¹²⁵⁹ Carnegie, *Rebuilding the Syrian nation: Impressions from the ground*, 23 April 2025.

¹²⁶⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Syria*, December 2024, pp. 34-36; Enab Baladi, *End of "horror journey" on al-Hasakah-Damascus road*, 24 February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹²⁶¹ Enab Baladi, *End of "horror journey" on al-Hasakah-Damascus road*, 24 February 2025; New Lines Magazine, *The fragile foundations of Arab-Kurdish coexistence*, 1 April 2025.

¹²⁶² Al-Jumhuriya, *'Syria is free, but my home is still occupied'*, 25 February 2025; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66)*, 14 March 2025, p. 7; STJ, *Syria/Afrin: Promises by transitional authorities to restore rights and end violations against Kurds*, 11 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

humiliation, ill-treatment, extortion and arrests at checkpoints (see 6.1.1.1).¹²⁶³ In addition, there were cases in which people were arrested because they had not reported to a registration centre. One source stated that one person from his travel group had been questioned at a checkpoint for this reason and had not been allowed to continue travelling. It was not known what happened to this person afterwards.¹²⁶⁴ Furthermore, in May 2025, the independent news organisation Syria Direct quoted a Bedouin from the city of Suweida, who spoke about intimidation at checkpoints and the searching of data on mobile phones.¹²⁶⁵

7.3 International airports of Damascus and Aleppo

In January 2025, a number of foreign airlines resumed commercial flights to Damascus. The airlines involved included Qatar Airways, Royal Jordanian Airlines and Turkish Airlines.¹²⁶⁶ Syrian Air resumed flights to Dubai and Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates on 20 April 2025.¹²⁶⁷ The Syrian authorities nevertheless cancelled the first flight of the Turkish private airline AJet to Damascus on 21 April 2025.¹²⁶⁸

Beginning 18 March 2025, domestic flights operated by Syrian Air and the Syrian private airline Cham Wings Airlines departed from Damascus to Aleppo.¹²⁶⁹ Furthermore, Royal Jordanian Airlines began operating direct flights from Amman to Aleppo on 6 May 2025.¹²⁷⁰

¹²⁶³ Reuters, *Syria's new rulers warn against incitement as tensions brew*, 27 December 2024; France 24, *Fear grips Alawites in Syria's Homs as Assad 'remnants' targeted*, 10 January 2025; MEI, *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025; De Volkskrant, *In Syrië is de wraak begonnen: 'Zijn jullie alawieten?'*, 23 January 2025; Trouw, *Geloofsgenoten van Assad wachten af: verzoening of wraak*, 25 January 2025; New Lines Magazine, *How desperation sowed the seeds of rebellion in Syria's Latakia province*, 17 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁶⁴ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹²⁶⁵ Syria Direct, *As tensions run high, will Suwayda's security agreement hold?*, 7 May 2025.

¹²⁶⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Qatar Airways to resume flights to Syria after 13-year hiatus*, 3 January 2025; NOS, *Luchthaven Damascus hervat internationaal vliegverkeer*, 4 January 2025; HLN, *Luchthaven Damascus hervat internationale vluchten, Qatar Airways vliegt drie keer per week*, 4 January 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: First Turkish Airlines flight to Damascus takes off after 13 years*, 23 January 2025; The New Arab, *Royal Jordanian resumes flights to Damascus after 13-year halt*, 31 January 2025; Syrian Guides, *Visa requirements for Syria: Essential information for travelers*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹²⁶⁷ Reuters, *Syrian Air says it is resuming its direct flights to UAE on Sunday*, 18 April 2025; L'Orient Today, *Resumption of direct flights between Syria and UAE on Sunday*, 19 April 2025; The New Arab, *First Syrian passenger flight to UAE departs from Damascus*, 20 April 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 15-22, 2025*, 22 April 2025.

¹²⁶⁸ AJet, *Flights from Istanbul and Ankara to Damascus now on sale starting from 149 USD*, 29 March 2025; MEE, *Syria cancels some flights to Turkey amid aviation dispute*, 25 April 2025; Tesaa World, *Syria suspends flights coming from Turkey and requires the opening of Turkish airspace for its flights*, 25 April 2025.

¹²⁶⁹ The New Arab, *Airport to reopen in Syria's second city Aleppo*, 15 March 2025; Enab Baladi, *First passenger plane lands at Aleppo International Airport*, 18 March 2025; Flightradar24, *Damascus International Airport*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹²⁷⁰ Arab News, *First Jordanian passenger plane lands in Syria's Aleppo after 14-year hiatus*, 6 May 2025; Enab Baladi, *First international flight lands at Aleppo Airport*, 6 May 2025; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #26. Syria situation crisis*, 9 May 2025, p. 4.

8 Legal protection and the justice system

8.1 Legal protection

According to various sources, people could report incidents to the police by telephone.¹²⁷¹ It was also possible to go to a police station in person for this purpose.¹²⁷² The police force that was being established nevertheless faced a major capacity problem, which meant that it was not present everywhere, could not always respond adequately to reports of crime, and could not guarantee safety in all areas (see 2.3.3).¹²⁷³

According to one source, on 12 January 2025, the Ministry of the Interior stated that every arrest had to be accompanied by an arrest warrant signed by the Ministry of Justice.¹²⁷⁴ According to another source, procedures were not always followed in practice.¹²⁷⁵ For example, not all police officers were aware of the procedures.¹²⁷⁶ In addition, detainees were sometimes intimidated and subjected to ill-treatment.¹²⁷⁷ There were also reports of arrest/detention without legal basis or the required legal safeguards during arrest campaigns.¹²⁷⁸ According to one source, the legal grounds for these arrests remained largely unknown. Relatives of those arrested often did not know where the detainees were being taken or where they were being held.¹²⁷⁹

8.2 The justice system

Little information was available about the legal system in Syria during the reporting period. According to one source, it was unclear exactly what was still functioning.¹²⁸⁰ According to other sources, the legal system was hardly functioning at all.¹²⁸¹ After the takeover, criminal courts and civil courts addressed only urgent cases. Most court cases were postponed.¹²⁸² This reinforced the sense of impunity in Syrian society.¹²⁸³

¹²⁷¹ Le Monde, *In Damascus, volunteers protect Christian neighborhoods*, 11 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁷² Daraj, *I'm a female judge in Homs..What will happen to my career in the new Syria?*, 7 April 2025; Le Monde, *En Syrie, l'inquiétante disparition de femmes alaouites*, 28 April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁷³ The Economist, *The warlords of Syria have a daunting to-do list*, 25 April 2025; UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report no. 5. As of 28 April 2025*, 8 May 2025, p. 3; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, May 2025.

¹²⁷⁴ SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. December 2024-January 2025*, 22 January 2025.

¹²⁷⁵ Daraj, *I'm a female judge in Homs..What will happen to my career in the new Syria?*, 7 April 2025.

¹²⁷⁶ Le Monde, *In Damascus, volunteers protect Christian neighborhoods*, 11 April 2025.

¹²⁷⁷ Confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁷⁸ Protection Cluster/UNHCR, *Protection landscape in Syria – A snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, p. 6; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁷⁹ Confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁸⁰ Confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁸¹ MEE, *Sacked Syrian workers stage nationwide protests as government targets public sector*, 7 March 2025; SJAC, *SJAC's analysis of atrocities committed in Latakia and Tartous*, 13 March 2025; Protection Cluster/UNHCR, *Protection landscape in Syria – A snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, p. 6; Daraj, *I'm a female judge in Homs..What will happen to my career in the new Syria?*, 7 April 2025; The Economist, *The warlords of Syria have a daunting to-do list*, 25 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, May 2025.

¹²⁸² UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report no. 4. As of 26 March 2025*, 27 March 2025, p. 12; Daraj, *I'm a female judge in Homs..What will happen to my career in the new Syria?*, 7 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁸³ Atlantic Council, *From rubble to rebirth: A model for Syria's reconstruction*, 8 May 2025; Amnesty International, *Syria: New government must prioritize justice and truth measures to prevent further abuse*, 16 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

In the DAANES territory, 'People's Defence Courts' focused on cases related to terrorism and security (for example, cases involving Syrian ISIS fighters).¹²⁸⁴ No information was found regarding the functioning of these courts during the reporting period.

8.3 Prison conditions

8.3.1 *Types of prisons*

Many former detention facilities of the Assad regime were looted, set on fire and abandoned after the takeover. The large-scale release of prisoners in November and December 2024 applied only to prisons and military (or other) detention centres in the former control area of the Assad regime.¹²⁸⁵ The HTS detention centres, including the Harem prison in Idlib province, remained in use after the takeover.¹²⁸⁶ The interim administration took over some of the existing central prisons. As far as is known, this concerned the Adra prison in the province of Rural Damascus and the central prisons of Homs and Hama.¹²⁸⁷ The extent to which the central prisons of Daraa and Suweida were in use is not known.¹²⁸⁸ According to one source, people arrested by the general security forces of the interim administration in Daraa were transferred to detention centres in Damascus.¹²⁸⁹ There were no concrete indications that the interim administration made use of the other detention centres of the former security apparatus.¹²⁹⁰ The SNA factions in northern Syria had their own prisons and detention centres.¹²⁹¹ Furthermore, there were several prisons and detention centres in the DAANES territory. In the north-east, there was also a network of more than twenty detention centres guarded by the SDF, including the Panorama prison and the Al-Sina prison in Hasaka province, and two camps (Al-Hol and Al-Roj). These centres were used to detain men who were suspected of being former members of or having ties to ISIS, along with women and children associated with them (see 3.4).¹²⁹²

8.3.2 *Conditions in prisons*

It was not known how many prisoners were held in the central prisons.¹²⁹³ According to various sources, the central prisons were used to hold 'ordinary' criminals and members of the former security apparatus of the Assad regime,

¹²⁸⁴ Amnesty International, *New law paves way for justice for prisoners convicted in flawed trials in north-east Syria*, 23 July 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Syria today-AANES enacts amnesty law; government sued over killing of Kamalmaz*, 24 July 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁸⁵ MEE, *Syrian detainee freed by rebel forces in Aleppo after eight years in prison*, 30 November 2024, [url](#); VOA, *VOA Kurdish: Kurdish activists claim prisoners still being held in Afrin*, 12 December 2024; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁸⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Explainer: Why are Syria's Islamists focused on prisoners in 'HTS' jails?*, 14 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

¹²⁸⁷ SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. December 2024-January 2025*, 22 January 2025; SNHR, *At least 229 arbitrary detentions documented in January 2025*, 4 February 2025, p. 6; SOHR, *Second patch after rebellion in Adra prison. Authorities in Damascus release 16 detainees at eve of Eid Al-Fitr*, 30 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Syrian authorities release detained former security personnel after prison riot*, 31 March 2025; SNHR, *At least 117 arbitrary arrests recorded in Syria in March 2025*, 10 April 2025, p. 10; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁸⁸ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁸⁹ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹²⁹⁰ Confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁹¹ SOHR, *Disguised as "members of General Security". Unidentified gunmen storm Al-Ra'ay Prison and release some prisoners*, 21 March 2025; STJ, *Syria/Afrin: Promises by transitional authorities to restore rights and end violations against Kurds*, 11 April 2025; HRW, *Syria: Türkiye-backed armed groups detain, extort civilians*, 14 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

¹²⁹² MEI, *A closer look at the ISIS attack on Syria's al-Sina Prison*, 14 February 2022; BBC News, *BBC goes inside Syrian prison holding IS detainees*, 20 December 2024; AP News, *Islamic State members held for years in a Syria prison say they know nothing of the world*, 5 February 2025; The Guardian, *Forgotten by the west, Syria's IS prisons are under threat as militant group mobilises*, 25 February 2025; The National, *A rare look inside Syria's ISIS prison as jailbreak attempts surge after fall of Assad regime*, 8 March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁹³ Confidential source, April 2025.

including military personnel.¹²⁹⁴ One source reported that there were problems with hygiene and the provision of medical care in these prisons.¹²⁹⁵ Various sources stated that the cells were full and that there were food shortages.¹²⁹⁶ There were reports of ill-treatment and serious neglect of prisoners. There was also a lack of independent oversight of prison conditions and protection of the rights of detainees.¹²⁹⁷ For example, according to one source, prisoners had limited access to legal aid.¹²⁹⁸ Incommunicado detention occurred as well.¹²⁹⁹ At the time of writing, humanitarian organisations had little to no access to central prisons.¹³⁰⁰

There was little information about conditions in HTS detention centres in Idlib and North Aleppo.¹³⁰¹ According to one source, these detention centres were overcrowded.¹³⁰² At the time of writing, humanitarian organisations did not have access to the HTS detention centres.¹³⁰³

Little information was available concerning conditions in the SNA detention centres.¹³⁰⁴ According to one source, conditions there were very poor, as compared to the central prisons. The prison staff did not provide free food to the prisoners. The relatives of prisoners were therefore forced to send money so that the prisoners could buy food and medicine in prison. This source was uncertain about how the supervision of these prisons was organised.¹³⁰⁵ According to another source, these detention centres were overcrowded.¹³⁰⁶ Humanitarian organisations did not have access to the detention sites of the SNA factions.¹³⁰⁷

There was little information available about the conditions in the SDF detention centres.¹³⁰⁸ According to one source, prison staff did not provide free food. The relatives of prisoners were therefore forced to send money so that prisoners could buy food and medicine in prison. According to the same source, lawyers and relatives experienced problems gaining access to prisoners. There were also cases in which minors were placed in cells with adults.¹³⁰⁹ Humanitarian organisations had access to a few detention locations in the DAANES territory.¹³¹⁰

8.4 Severe ill-treatment and torture

During the reporting period, severe ill-treatment and torture of civilians were reportedly committed in various parts of the country. In addition to the security apparatus of the transitional government, the SDF and SNA factions in particular

¹²⁹⁴ SOHR, *Including officers of different ranks. 28 former military officers released from Adra Prison in Rif Dimashq*, 20 April 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 15-22, 2025*, 22 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

¹²⁹⁵ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹²⁹⁶ Le Monde, *In Damascus, volunteers protect Christian neighborhoods*, 11 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

¹²⁹⁷ Protection Cluster/UNHCR, *Protection landscape in Syria – A snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, p. 6; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹²⁹⁸ Protection Cluster/UNHCR, *Protection landscape in Syria – A snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, p. 6.

¹²⁹⁹ Incommunicado means that a prisoner is not allowed little, if any contact with the outside world, including with lawyers and family members; Protection Cluster/UNHCR, *Protection landscape in Syria – A snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, p. 6.

¹³⁰⁰ Protection Cluster/UNHCR, *Protection landscape in Syria – A snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, p. 6; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹³⁰¹ Confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, May 2025.

¹³⁰² L'Orient Today, *The long road to justice in post-Assad Syria*, 4 May 2025.

¹³⁰³ Confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, May 2025.

¹³⁰⁴ Confidential source, April 2025.

¹³⁰⁵ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹³⁰⁶ L'Orient Today, *The long road to justice in post-Assad Syria*, 4 May 2025.

¹³⁰⁷ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹³⁰⁸ Confidential source, April 2025.

¹³⁰⁹ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹³¹⁰ ICRC, *ICRC head of delegation in Syria: Detention work remains our top priority*, 23 December 2024; confidential source, March 2025.

were associated with this.¹³¹¹ No figures were available on the number of cases of serious ill-treatment and torture in the various parts of the country during the reporting period. It was also unclear how many cases of serious ill-treatment and torture in the reporting period could be attributed to the various armed groups.

According to one source, in the area controlled by the transitional government, the ill-treatment that occurred during security operations usually began during raids and arrests by the security forces. Torture occurred in detention centres and former military bases.¹³¹² Various sources reported that, in some cases, arrest and torture were followed by execution.¹³¹³ According to one source, revenge appeared to be the underlying motive in many cases.¹³¹⁴

There were several known deaths as a result of torture in detention.¹³¹⁵ In December 2024, the SNHR documented four civilians who had died as a result of torture. The SDF was responsible for three deaths, including a woman and a child. The SNA factions were responsible for one death.¹³¹⁶ Furthermore, in January 2025, the SNHR documented one civilian who had died as a result of torture. The SDF was responsible for this.¹³¹⁷ In February 2025, the SNHR documented nine civilians who had died as a result of torture. The security apparatus of the interim administration was responsible for seven deaths. The SNA factions were responsible for one fatality. The SDF was also responsible for one fatality.¹³¹⁸ In March 2025, the SNHR did not document any civilians who had died as a result of torture.¹³¹⁹ Furthermore, in April 2025, the SNHR documented five civilians who had died as a result of torture. The security apparatus of the transitional government was responsible for two deaths and the SDF for three.¹³²⁰

¹³¹¹ Syria Direct, *Tens of thousands return to Afrin while fear of abuses keeps others away*, 3 January 2025; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. December 2024-January 2025*, 22 January 2025; SOHR, *Arrested during security campaigns. Four civilians killed in prisons in Homs countryside*, 29 January 2025; SOHR, *Following his arrest. Young man dies in a prison in Homs*, 4 February 2025; SJAC, *Two months after Assad's fall, Assad-like violations are still being committed in Syria*, 13 February 2025; SNHR, *SNHR condemns SDF's detention of elderly man Abdul Rahman Tayeh Dawoud & his death due to medical negligence in SDF detention centers on April 20, 2025*, 26 April 2025; STJ, *"We will kill you wherever you go": Violations committed during SNA-led operation Dawn of Freedom*, 9 May 2025; HRW, *Syria: Türkiye-backed armed groups detain, extort civilians*, 14 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025;

¹³¹² Confidential source, February 2025.

¹³¹³ Etana, *Syria update #15*, 28 January 2025; SOHR, *Homs. Three detainees killed in prisons of Military Operations Administration*, 28 January 2025; SOHR, *Arrested during security campaigns. Four civilians killed in prisons in Homs countryside*, 29 January 2025; SOHR, *Arrested during security operation. Former engineer colonel dies and his body handed to hospital in Homs*, 2 February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

¹³¹⁴ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹³¹⁵ SNHR, *SNHR condemns torture, death of three detainees at the hands of the transitional government's general security directorate*, 3 February 2025; SJAC, *Two months after Assad's fall, Assad-like violations are still being committed in Syria*, 13 February 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Syrian authorities arrest 'remnants of regime' in Hama*, 28 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹³¹⁶ SNHR, *1,264 civilian deaths, including 242 children and 118 women, as well as 86 deaths due to torture, documented in Syria in 2024*, 2 January 2025, p. 12.

¹³¹⁷ SNHR, *236 civilian deaths, including 32 children and 18 women, as well as one woman's death due to torture, documented in Syria in January 2025, 21 civilians were killed by SDF*, 1 February 2025, p. 8.

¹³¹⁸ SNHR, *222 civilian deaths, including 17 children and 37 women, as well as nine deaths due to torture, recorded in February 2025 in Syria*, 1 March 2025, p. 10.

¹³¹⁹ SNHR, *1,562 deaths, including 102 children and 99 women, as well as 33 medical personnel, recorded in March 2025 in Syria*, 9 April 2025; SNHR, *The death of 174 civilian including 23 children and 13 women, and 5 deaths due to torture recorded in April 2025 in Syria*, 2 May 2025, p. 4.

¹³²⁰ SNHR, *The death of 174 civilian including 23 children and 13 women, and 5 deaths due to torture recorded in April 2025 in Syria*, 2 May 2025, p. 4.

8.5 Arrests and detentions of civilians

8.5.1 Numbers and responsible parties

The security apparatus of the transitional government, the SDF and the SNA factions were all linked to the arrest/detention of civilians without legal basis or the required legal safeguards.¹³²¹

In December 2024, the SNHR¹³²² documented at least 349 cases of arrest/detention without legal basis or the required legal safeguards. The former government forces of the Assad regime were held responsible for 251 cases of arrest/detention without legal basis or the required legal safeguards, the SDF for 51 cases, the SNA factions for 28 cases and HTS for 19 cases.¹³²³

Furthermore, in January 2025, the SNHR documented at least 229 cases of arrest/detention without legal basis or the required legal safeguards. The security apparatus of the interim administration was held responsible for 129 cases of arrest/detention without legal basis or the required legal safeguards, the SDF for 59 cases, and the SNA factions for 41 cases.¹³²⁴

Furthermore, in February 2025, the SNHR documented at least 123 cases of arrest/detention without legal basis or the required legal safeguards. The security apparatus of the interim administration was held responsible for 21 cases, the SDF for 68 cases, and the SNA factions for 34 cases.¹³²⁵

In March 2025, the SNHR documented at least 117 cases of arrest/detention without legal basis or the required legal safeguards. The security apparatus of the transitional government was held responsible for 11 cases, the SDF for 93 cases, and the SNA factions for 13 cases.¹³²⁶

Furthermore, in April 2025, the SNHR documented at least 89 cases of arrest/detention without legal basis or the required legal safeguards. The security apparatus of the transitional government was held responsible for 36 cases and the SDF for 53 cases.¹³²⁷

8.5.2 Possible reasons for arrests and detentions

Arrest campaigns took place almost daily in the transitional government's area of control.¹³²⁸ The campaigns were aimed primarily at tracking down people who had not reported to a registration centre, people who had not handed in their weapons,

¹³²¹ SNHR, *SNHR's annual report on arrests/detentions in Syria*, 4 January 2025, p. 17; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. December 2024-January 2025*, 22 January 2025; Protection Cluster/UNHCR, *Protection landscape in Syria – A snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, p. 6; STJ, *STJ submits report on cases of home seizures and arbitrary evictions of homeowners in Muadamiyat al-Sham in Damascus countryside*, 18 April 2025.

¹³²² In this regard, the SNHR noted that, in light of the exceptional difficulties and the scale of the violations in Syria, the SNHR reports reflect only the absolute minimum of the violations that have taken place and that the SNHR has been able to document. The SNHR emphasised that the actual figures were much higher; SNHR, *At least 216 arbitrary detentions recorded in Syria in February 2025*, 3 March 2025, p. 3.

¹³²³ SNHR, *At least 2,623 arbitrary detentions documented in 2024, including 349 in December*, 4 January 2025, p. 8.

¹³²⁴ SNHR, *At least 229 arbitrary detentions documented in January 2025*, 4 February 2025, p. 4.

¹³²⁵ SNHR, *At least 216 arbitrary detentions recorded in Syria in February 2025*, 3 March 2025, p. 5.

¹³²⁶ SNHR, *At least 117 arbitrary arrests recorded in Syria in March 2025*, 10 April 2025, p. 5.

¹³²⁷ SNHR, *At least 89 arbitrary arrests recorded in Syria in April 2025*, 3 May 2025, p. 5.

¹³²⁸ AP News, *AP photos: Syria's new security forces conduct sweeps in Homs, looking for ousted Assad's loyalists*, 2 January 2025; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. December 2024-January 2025*, 22 January 2025; Syria Weekly, *March 4-11, 2025*, 11 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria arrests Assad-era officer 'linked to Iran', seizes arms*, 24 March 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 1-8, 2025*, 8 April 2025; Syria Weekly, *April 15-22, 2025*, 22 April 2025.

and people who had taken up arms.¹³²⁹ These security operations sometimes led to armed confrontations with remaining Assad supporters.¹³³⁰

In the north, there were no large-scale arrest campaigns like those in the transitional government's area of control. According to one source, arrests and detentions by SNA factions included people who came from the DAANES territory.¹³³¹ There were also arrests of displaced Kurds wishing to return to their original areas of residence in the vicinity of Afrin.¹³³² This sometimes occurred on accusations of collaboration with the DAANES, the SDF or the PKK (see 6.1.1.6).¹³³³ Furthermore, the SNA factions arrested people of Kurdish origin in order to extort money from them.¹³³⁴ Additional examples of arrests in the north are presented in 6.3.1.

In the DAANES territory, arrests and detentions included individuals suspected of having ties to ISIS or of collaborating against the SDF with Arab or tribal armed groups, or with SNA factions.¹³³⁵ Arrests were also made of people suspected of expressing support for HTS. Furthermore, the authorities in the DAANES territory arrested draft evaders (see 2.4).¹³³⁶ In early May 2025, one source reported an increase in the number of arrests of Sunni men of Arab descent who were accused of wanting to defect.¹³³⁷ Additional examples of arrests in the north-east are presented in 6.3.1.

In the southern province of Suweida, Druze armed groups carried out arrests.¹³³⁸ No further information was available on this matter.

¹³²⁹ The New Arab, *Nearly 300 arrested in Syria crackdown on Assad loyalists: monitor*, 29 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria forces launch raids in Homs to 'chase pro-Assad militias'*, 2 January 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Syrian war monitor says detainees to be released after Homs 'security campaign'*, 12 January 2025; SNHR, *At least 229 arbitrary detentions documented in January 2025*, 4 February 2025, p. 6; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian authorities continue arrest campaigns of Assad-linked officials*, 15 January 2025; Etana, *Syria update #15*, 28 January 2025; SNHR, *At least 216 arbitrary detentions recorded in Syria in February 2025*, 3 March 2025, p. 8; AA, *Syrian security forces arrest remnants of Assad regime in Deir ez-Zor province*, 10 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian media detail several security operations, seizure of weapons*, 27 April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹³³⁰ The New Arab, *Syrian forces crack down on Assad loyalists in Idlib, Lebanon minister to discuss borders issue*, 24 March 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria security forces kill two 'Assad loyalists' near capital*, 1 April 2025.

¹³³¹ SNHR, *At least 117 arbitrary arrests recorded in Syria in March 2025*, 10 April 2025, p. 9.

¹³³² Syria Direct, *Tens of thousands return to Afrin while fear of abuses keeps others away*, 3 January 2025; STJ, *Syria/Afrin: Promises by transitional authorities to restore rights and end violations against Kurds*, 11 April 2025.

¹³³³ Syria Direct, *Tens of thousands return to Afrin while fear of abuses keeps others away*, 3 January 2025; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. December 2024-January 2025*, 22 January 2025; SNHR, *At least 117 arbitrary arrests recorded in Syria in March 2025*, 10 April 2025, p. 9; STJ, *Syria/Afrin: Promises by transitional authorities to restore rights and end violations against Kurds*, 11 April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹³³⁴ SNHR, *SNHR's annual report on arrests/detentions in Syria*, 4 January 2025, p. 18; SNHR, *At least 229 arbitrary detentions documented in January 2025*, 4 February 2025, pp. 7-8; SNHR, *At least 216 arbitrary detentions recorded in Syria in February 2025*, 3 March 2025, p. 9.

¹³³⁵ SNHR, *At least 117 arbitrary arrests recorded in Syria in March 2025*, 10 April 2025, p. 8; Syria Weekly, *April 15-22, 2025*, 22 April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹³³⁶ X.com, *SDF militia abducted citizen Abdul Moneim Al-Khalaf*, 19 January 2025, [url](#); New Lines Magazine, *The fragile foundations of Arab-Kurdish coexistence*, 1 April 2025.

¹³³⁷ MEI, *The Damascus-SDF agreement two months on: Fragile progress or delayed collapse?*, 9 May 2025.

¹³³⁸ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

9 Return

This chapter discusses returns since the General COI Report of December 2024. After the takeover on 8 December 2025, Syrians returned from abroad for various reasons, including to inspect their property, assess the security and economic situation, and/or reunite with their relatives.¹³³⁹ It is not known how many Syrians remained in Syria permanently after their return and how many Syrians decided to leave Syria again after their return. It is not possible for foreign governments and organisations to keep track of this.¹³⁴⁰

9.1 Syrians abroad

In the countries in the region, most Syrian refugees were registered with UNHCR or the authorities. According to information from UNHCR dated 8 May 2025, there were 4,492,790 registered Syrian refugees in the region. Türkiye had largest number with 2,744,686 individuals (61.1%),¹³⁴¹ followed by Lebanon with 722,173 (16.1%),¹³⁴² Jordan with 546,298 (12.2%), Iraq with 299,908 (6.7%) and Egypt with 136,442 (3.0%). Another 43,283 registered Syrian refugees (1.0%) were living in the rest of North Africa.¹³⁴³ The number of Syrian refugees in the region was actually higher, as not everyone was registered there.¹³⁴⁴

Since 2011, hundreds of thousands of Syrians had fled to Europe and beyond. Within the European Union, Germany was the country where most Syrians resided. According to the German Ministry of the Interior, 968,899 Syrian citizens were residing in Germany in late March 2025.¹³⁴⁵ At the end of 2023, more than 165,000 people of Syrian background were residing in the Netherlands.¹³⁴⁶

In early February 2025, UNHCR published the results of a survey conducted by this organisation among Syrian refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. The survey revealed that 80% of respondents hoped to return to Syria one day, and 27% indicated that they planned to return within twelve months.¹³⁴⁷

9.2 Returns from abroad

On 16 May 2025, UNHCR reported that an estimated 501,126 Syrians had returned by way of neighbouring countries between 8 December 2024 and 15 May 2025.¹³⁴⁸

¹³³⁹ Foreign Affairs, *Syria's biggest problem: How to resettle millions of refugees and displaced people*, 11 February 2025; UNHCR, *Repatriation explained: why Syrian refugees are voluntarily returning*, 12 March 2025.

¹³⁴⁰ The New York Times, *Syrians want to go home, but many no longer have one to return to*, 13 March 2025.

¹³⁴¹ In the case of Türkiye, UNHCR relies on information from the Turkish government; UNHCR, *Operational data portal. Syria regional refugee response*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹³⁴² An estimated 1.5 million Syrians were in Lebanon. The figure of more than 700,000 refers only to those registered by UNHCR in cooperation with the Lebanese government up to 5 May 2015. After that date, the Lebanese government no longer permitted this registration; The Conversation, *'Lebanon wanted us gone... it was a risk to leave' – Syrian refugees who fled Israeli bombs face hostility and uncertainty on return*, 5 December 2024; UNHCR, *Lebanon – Registration*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹³⁴³ UNHCR, *Operational data portal. Syria regional refugee response*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹³⁴⁴ EuroNews, *Mikati calls for Syrian refugees in Lebanon to return home citing strain on resources*, 15 December 2024; DW, *In data: Syria after the war*, 22 December 2024; France 24, *Syrian refugees in Jordan camp say they have nothing to go home to*, 28 January 2025; UNHCR, *Lebanon*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹³⁴⁵ Der Spiegel, *Nur wenige Syrer verlassen bisher Deutschland*, 25 April 2025; ZDF, *Wenige Syrer verlassen Deutschland*, 25 April 2025.

¹³⁴⁶ CBS, *Bevolkingontwikkeling; herkomstland and geboorteland (ouders)*, 29 July 2024, [url](#).

¹³⁴⁷ UNHCR, *Flash regional survey on Syrian refugees' perceptions and intentions on return to Syria*, 6 February 2025.

¹³⁴⁸ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #27. Syria situation crisis*, 16 May 2025, p. 1.

Most Syrians returned from Lebanon and Türkiye.¹³⁴⁹ The province to which most people returned was Aleppo.¹³⁵⁰

Syrians could enter Syria by presenting a document at the border proving that they were Syrian citizens.¹³⁵¹ This could be a valid national passport or a valid national identity card.¹³⁵² Syrian citizens who did not have these documents could apply for a temporary travel document (*laissez-passer*) at some Syrian representations abroad (including the Syrian Embassy in Brussels) before they could return.¹³⁵³ During the reporting period, the Syrian embassies in Beirut and Amman temporarily waived the fees for issuing *laissez-passers* to Syrians.¹³⁵⁴ In addition, Syrian citizens without identity documents but with a registration in the basic register at the Syrian migration service at the border could – after verification – obtain an extract from the basic register, according to which they were granted entry to Syria.¹³⁵⁵

In the first few weeks after the takeover, routine procedures were not carried out in all cases at border crossings. For example, entry and exit stamps were not always affixed, nor were vehicles inspected in all cases.¹³⁵⁶ According to one source, no checks were carried out at the Al-Qa'im/Abukamal border crossing, located along the border between Iraq and Syria, in late December 2024.¹³⁵⁷

No information has been found about Syrians encountering problems upon their return at the border.¹³⁵⁸

9.2.1

Return from Türkiye

According to the Turkish Presidency of Migration Management (PMM),¹³⁵⁹ 2,733,849 Syrians with temporary protection status (*kimlik*) were residing in Türkiye.¹³⁶⁰ Most Syrians with temporary protection status (hereinafter: TP status holders) were registered in the provinces of Istanbul (476,024) and Gaziantep (382,314).¹³⁶¹ Most of them were from the province of Aleppo.¹³⁶²

Any TP status holders wished to travel outside the province of registration had to be in possession of a travel permit. Any TP status holders found outside the province of registration without a travel permit had to be returned to their province of registration. In some cases, however, TP status holders without a travel permit were arrested, transferred to the closed section of a Temporary Accommodation Centre

¹³⁴⁹ IOM, *Syrian Arab Republic. Population mobility and baseline assessment. Round 3 (01-30 April 2025)*, 11 May 2025, p. 7.

¹³⁵⁰ UNHCR, *Syrian Arab Republic. Syria governorates of return overview as of 20 March 2025*, 23 March 2025; IOM, *Syrian Arab Republic. Population mobility and baseline assessment. Round 3 (01-30 April 2025)*, 11 May 2025, p. 7; UNHCR, *Syrian Arab Republic*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹³⁵¹ MEE, *Israelis and Iranians cannot fly to Syria, says Turkish Airlines*, 16 January 2025.

¹³⁵² Syria is Home, *Documentation and legal matters*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹³⁵³ Syria Direct, *Relatively few Syrians in Jordan risk one-way trip home*, 2 January 2025; Syria is Home, *Documentation and legal matters*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹³⁵⁴ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #6. Syria situation crisis*, 24 December 2024, p. 3; UNHCR, *UNHCR Jordan – Frequently asked questions on return to Syria. Update #4*, 9 January 2025; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #9. Syria situation crisis*, 10 January 2025, p. 3.

¹³⁵⁵ Syria is Home, *Documentation and legal matters*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹³⁵⁶ This is Beirut, *Syria to resume passport stamping at border crossings with Lebanon*, 31 December 2024.

¹³⁵⁷ New Lines Magazine, *Life returns to a Syrian border town after Iranian militias flee*, 30 January 2025.

¹³⁵⁸ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹³⁵⁹ In Turkish, the PMM is known as *Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı* (GİB); Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Türkiye*, February 2025, p. 95, Footnote 728.

¹³⁶⁰ In Turkish vernacular, 'kimlik' is a generic term for an identity card. It can therefore also refer to a national identity card issued to Turkish citizens. In Turkish, the status of temporary protection (TP) is known as *geçici koruma*; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Türkiye*, February 2025, p. 95; UNHCR, *Türkiye operational updates*, April 2025, p. 1.

¹³⁶¹ PMM, *Temporary protection*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹³⁶² BBC Monitoring, *What future awaits Syrian refugees in Turkey amid returns*, 14 February 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

(TAC) or to a removal centre, and/or deported to Syria. The Turkish authorities reportedly dealt with this in different ways.¹³⁶³ As in the previous reporting period, there were reports that the Turkish authorities were deporting Syrians to Syria, in addition to reports of possible coercion in signing the forms for 'voluntary' return.¹³⁶⁴

On 28 April 2025, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that approximately 200,000 Syrians had returned voluntarily since 9 December 2024.¹³⁶⁵ Most Syrians returned to the province of Aleppo.¹³⁶⁶ According to the UNHCR, voluntary returns took place by way of the Istanbul Airport and the following five border crossings:

- Cilvegözü (Hatay province)/Bab al-Hawa (Idlib province);
- Yayladağı (Hatay province)/Kessab (Latakia province);
- Öncüpınar (Kilis province)/Bab al-Salama (Aleppo province);
- Karkamış (Gaziantep province)/Jarablus (Aleppo province);
- Akçakale (Şanlıurfa province)/Tel Abyad (Raqqqa province).¹³⁶⁷

In late December 2024, the Turkish authorities introduced a go-and-see scheme. On this basis, Syrian refugees registered in Türkiye were able to visit Syria in preparation for their return. They were then allowed to re-enter Türkiye by way of the same border crossing they had used to leave.¹³⁶⁸ Between 1 January 2025 and 1 July 2025, heads of families were permitted to travel back and forth a maximum of three times to facilitate their return. If the heads of the family were unable to travel, another adult family member could go in their place.¹³⁶⁹ According to UNHCR, the go-and-see visits took place by way of three border crossings:

- Çobaybey (Kilis province)/Al Rai (Aleppo province);
- Zeytindalı (Hatay province)/Jindires (Aleppo province);
- Yayladağı (Hatay province)/Kessab (Latakia province).¹³⁷⁰

Additional information on Syrians in Türkiye is available in 10.2 and 10.7 of the General COI Report on Türkiye of February 2025.

9.2.2 *Return from Lebanon*

According to estimates by the UNHCR and the Lebanese government, there were 1.5 million Syrians in Lebanon, out of a total population of 5.7 million.¹³⁷¹ According to information from UNHCR, 755,426 Syrian refugees were registered in Lebanon on 25 March 2025.¹³⁷² Since 2015, the Lebanese government has prohibited UNHCR from registering refugees.¹³⁷³

¹³⁶³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Türkiye*, February 2025, p. 102.

¹³⁶⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Türkiye*, February 2025, p. 105.

¹³⁶⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Erdogan says 200,000 Syrians returned from Turkey since Assad's fall*, 28 April 2025; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #25. Syria situation crisis*, 1 May 2025, p. 2.

¹³⁶⁶ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #6. Syria situation crisis*, 24 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *What future awaits Syrian refugees in Turkey amid returns*, 14 February 2025; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #17. Syria situation crisis*, 7 March 2025, p. 3; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #24. Syria situation crisis*, 25 April 2025, p. 3.

¹³⁶⁷ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #27. Syria situation crisis*, 16 May 2025, p. 3; UNHCR, *Türkiye. Movement procedures*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹³⁶⁸ Syria is Home, *Border and customs regulations*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025; UNHCR, *Türkiye. Movement procedures*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹³⁶⁹ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #6. Syria situation crisis*, 24 December 2024, p. 3; BBC Monitoring, *Turkish interior minister says 25,000 Syrians returned since fall of Assad*, 24 December 2024; UNHCR, *Türkiye. Movement procedures*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹³⁷⁰ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #27. Syria situation crisis*, 16 May 2025, p. 3.

¹³⁷¹ BBC Monitoring, *Lebanese daily highlights 'shocking' surge in Syrian refugee influx*, 15 March 2025; The Century Foundation, *Cross-border shuffle: Refugee movement between Lebanon and Syria after Assad*, 31 March 2025; UNHCR, *Lebanon*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹³⁷² UNHCR, *Operational data portal. Syria regional refugee response*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹³⁷³ UNHCR, *Lebanon. Registration*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

After the takeover, tens of thousands of Syrian refugees returned to Syria from Lebanon.¹³⁷⁴ This occurred both legally and illegally, as not everyone wished to relinquish the right of residence in Lebanon.¹³⁷⁵ According to information from UNHCR, she worked with the Lebanese authorities to set up a go-and-see scheme for Syrian refugees and asylum seekers.¹³⁷⁶ Syrians in Lebanon who did not have a visa or residence permit were banned from entering Lebanon when visiting Syria.¹³⁷⁷

After the takeover, tens of thousands of Syrians fled to Lebanon due to the violence in Syria (see 4.1).¹³⁷⁸ An unknown number of Syrians who had gone to Syria from Lebanon after the takeover returned (illegally) to Lebanon after a short time. Upon arrival in Syria, for example, they discovered that their homes had been destroyed or occupied, that public services were barely functioning, and that there were no jobs or means of subsistence (see 9.4).¹³⁷⁹

During the reporting period, one formal border crossing was in use: the Masnaa/Jdeidat Yabous border crossing.¹³⁸⁰ According to one source, several additional informal border crossings were opened for returnees.¹³⁸¹ In addition to locations in Beirut and southern Lebanon, Israel also bombed several border crossings during the reporting period.¹³⁸² As a result, border crossings at Daboussieh, Jesr Qamar, Matraba and other locations were closed.¹³⁸³

According to various sources, Syrian nationals travelling through the formal border crossing into Syria had to enter their basic personal details on a form. An entry stamp was also placed on this form.¹³⁸⁴ According to one source, baggage checks were carried out to check for cigarettes, alcohol and pork.¹³⁸⁵

9.2.3

Return from Jordan

According to the Jordanian authorities, there were 1.3 million Syrians in Jordan.¹³⁸⁶ More than 546,000 Syrians were registered with UNHCR in Jordan.¹³⁸⁷ In late April 2025, nearly 70,000 Syrians were staying in the Za'atari refugee camp. There, they received financial support and were allowed to work outside the camp.¹³⁸⁸ During the same period, approximately 40,000 Syrians were staying in the Azraq refugee

¹³⁷⁴ The Century Foundation, *Cross-border shuffle: Refugee movement between Lebanon and Syria after Assad*, 31 March 2025; The New Arab, *150 families return to Syria from Lebanon amid efforts to repatriate refugees*, 11 May 2025; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #27. Syria situation crisis*, 16 May 2025, p. 4.

¹³⁷⁵ Confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹³⁷⁶ UNHCR, *Lebanon. Go-and-see visits*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025; Syria is Home, *Border and customs regulations*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹³⁷⁷ The Century Foundation, *Cross-border shuffle: Refugee movement between Lebanon and Syria after Assad*, 31 March 2025; UNHCR, *Lebanon. Detention and deportation*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025; UNHCR, *Lebanon. Legal residency*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹³⁷⁸ UNHCR, *Lebanon flash update. New arrivals to North Lebanon*, 16 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹³⁷⁹ Confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹³⁸⁰ Syrian Guides, *Visa requirements for Syria: Essential information for travelers*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹³⁸¹ Confidential source, April 2025.

¹³⁸² L'Orient Today, *Masnaa only operational border crossing between Lebanon and Syria, following 'repeated' Israeli strikes*, 6 December 2024; The New Arab, *Israel bombs Lebanon-Syria border crossings days after they reopen*, 6 December 2024; Reuters, *Israeli jets attack Syria-Lebanon border crossings to stop arms smuggling*, 27 December 2024; The New Arab, *Israel says strikes Lebanon-Syria border crossings used by Hezbollah*, 21 February 2025; Enab Baladi, *Israeli bombing targets Syrian-Lebanese border*, 21 February 2025.

¹³⁸³ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #24. Syria situation crisis*, 25 April 2025, p. 2; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #25. Syria situation crisis*, 1 May 2025, p. 2; confidential source, April 2025.

¹³⁸⁴ Syrian Guides, *Visa requirements for Syria: Essential information for travelers*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹³⁸⁵ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹³⁸⁶ AA, *Jordan reports return of 7,250 Syrians since Assad's ouster*, 19 December 2024; Enab Baladi, *About 13,000 Syrians returned from Jordan following Assad's fall*, 23 December 2024; France 24, *Syrian refugees in Jordan camp say they have nothing to go home to*, 28 January 2025.

¹³⁸⁷ UNHCR, *Operational data portal. Syria regional refugee response*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹³⁸⁸ France 24, *Syrian refugees in Jordan camp say they have nothing to go home to*, 28 January 2025; UNHCR, *Operational data portal. Zaatari refugee camp*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

camp.¹³⁸⁹ The trailers in which Syrians were staying remained the property of UNHCR. Syrians wishing to return to Syria from these camps first had to return these trailers before they were granted permission to leave.¹³⁹⁰

According to UNHCR, nearly 65,700 refugees registered with them returned to Syria from Jordan between 8 December 2024 and 10 May 2025.¹³⁹¹ Most of the Syrians who returned were from Daraa, Homs and Rural Damascus.¹³⁹² Jordan did not have a go-and-see scheme for Syrian refugees and asylum seekers. This meant that, when registered Syrians crossed the Jordanian-Syrian border, they lost their refugee status in Jordan.¹³⁹³ Syrians in Jordan who did not have a visa or residence permit were banned from entering Jordan when visiting Syria.¹³⁹⁴ They had to pay fifty dollars in fees at the border and sign a declaration of consent for a five-year entry ban.¹³⁹⁵

During the reporting period, an official border crossing was opened for Syrians wishing to return: the border crossing at Jaber/Nassib.¹³⁹⁶ Syrian nationals who entered the country by way of this border crossing were given an entry stamp in their passports.¹³⁹⁷

9.2.4 *Return from Iraq*

According to UNHCR, nearly 300,000 Syrians were residing in Iraq.¹³⁹⁸ In most cases, these were Syrian Kurds residing in the Kurdish region in northern Iraq.¹³⁹⁹

According to UNHCR, 15,500 Syrians had returned between 8 December 2024 and 1 May 2025, including approximately 1,400 refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR.¹⁴⁰⁰ Most of these returns took place by way of two border crossings: Peshkabur/Khanik and Al-Qa'im/Abukamal.¹⁴⁰¹ Iraq did not have a go-and-see scheme for Syrian refugees and asylum seekers. This meant that, when registered Syrians crossed the Iraqi-Syrian border, they lost their refugee status in Iraq.¹⁴⁰²

9.2.5 *Returning from the Netherlands and Germany*

In the Netherlands, Syrians could approach the Repatriation and Departure Service (RDS) for return assistance. They were given 900 euros in cash if they returned voluntarily (for example, by way of Jordan or Qatar). In exchange, they had to sign a statement withdrawing their asylum application or temporary residence permit.¹⁴⁰³

¹³⁸⁹ The Conversation, *Syria after Assad: why many Syrian refugees aren't returning home*, 24 March 2025; UNHCR, *Operational data portal. Azraq camp*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹³⁹⁰ Syria Direct, *Relatively few Syrians in Jordan risk one-way trip home*, 2 January 2025; UNHCR, *UNHCR Jordan – Frequently asked questions on return to Syria. Update #4*, 9 January 2025; The Conversation, *Syria after Assad: why many Syrian refugees aren't returning home*, 24 March 2025.

¹³⁹¹ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #27. Syria situation crisis*, 16 May 2025, p. 4.

¹³⁹² UNHCR, *Regional flash update #17. Syria situation crisis*, 7 March 2025, p. 4.

¹³⁹³ UNHCR, *UNHCR Jordan – Frequently asked questions on return to Syria. Update #4*, 9 January 2025; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #14. Syria situation crisis*, 13 February 2025; Open Democracy, *Syrian women and children return to rebuild, leaving husbands behind*, 8 May 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹³⁹⁴ Syria Direct, *Relatively few Syrians in Jordan risk one-way trip home*, 2 January 2025.

¹³⁹⁵ Syria Direct, *Relatively few Syrians in Jordan risk one-way trip home*, 2 January 2025; New Lines Magazine, *Syria is alive with possibility*, 10 January 2025; The Conversation, *Syria after Assad: why many Syrian refugees aren't returning home*, 24 March 2025.

¹³⁹⁶ UNHCR, *UNHCR Jordan – Frequently asked questions on return to Syria. Update #4*, 9 January 2025; Syrian Guides, *Visa requirements for Syria: Essential information for travelers*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹³⁹⁷ Syrian Guides, *Visa requirements for Syria: Essential information for travelers*.

¹³⁹⁸ UNHCR, *Operational data portal. Syria regional refugee response*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹³⁹⁹ UNHCR, *Operational data portal. Iraq operation*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹⁴⁰⁰ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #26. Syria situation crisis*, 9 May 2025, p. 5.

¹⁴⁰¹ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #17. Syria situation crisis*, 7 March 2025, p. 5; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #23. Syria situation crisis*, 17 April 2025, p. 4; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #24. Syria situation crisis*, 25 April 2025, p. 4.

¹⁴⁰² UNHCR, *For Syrian entering and leaving the Iraqi territory through Peshkhabur border crossing point*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹⁴⁰³ DTenV, *Hulp bij terugkeer naar Syrië*, 17 January 2025.

Syrians in the Netherlands could also approach the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Dutch foundation Solid Road (which collaborated with RDS for this purpose) for return assistance.¹⁴⁰⁴ According to information from RDS dated 3 April 2025, 250 Syrians had returned to Syria with the support of RDS.¹⁴⁰⁵ Furthermore, according to information from IOM Netherlands, two Syrians had returned voluntarily in February 2025, and one Syrian had returned voluntarily in April 2025 with the support of IOM.¹⁴⁰⁶ It is not known how many Syrians returned from the Netherlands without return assistance during the reporting period.

According to information from the German Home Office in April 2025, more than 600 people have returned to Syria with financial support from German government agencies since the beginning of 2024.¹⁴⁰⁷

9.3 Access and settlement

According to one source, there were no legal obstacles to prevent returning Syrians from settling in areas other than their places of origin.¹⁴⁰⁸ In practice, most returned to their original areas of residence.¹⁴⁰⁹ According to a survey conducted by the REACH research initiative among internally displaced persons in January 2025, only 1% of respondents had considered settling in an area other than their area of origin.¹⁴¹⁰ In practice, returning Syrians settling outside their original areas of residence could encounter tensions with the remaining population, resulting in them not being accepted into local communities.¹⁴¹¹

As far as is known, there were no specific procedures for access to and settlement within the transitional government's area of control.¹⁴¹² Access to the DAANES territory required a security clearance from the security forces, either at the border or at the Tabqa checkpoint.¹⁴¹³ In addition, according to multiple sources, any Syrian wishing to settle in the DAANES territory had to have a local sponsor.¹⁴¹⁴

9.4 Problems after return

One of the many obstacles preventing Syrians abroad from returning to their country of origin was the large-scale damage or destruction of homes and civil infrastructure (see 4.2.1).¹⁴¹⁵ In areas recaptured by Assad's forces, there was widespread destruction – of both homes and infrastructure.¹⁴¹⁶ The heavy bombardments by the Russian army and the former government army were

¹⁴⁰⁴ Solid Road, *About Solid Road*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025; IOM Nederland, *Landenlijst herintegratieondersteuning*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹⁴⁰⁵ DTenV, *Cijfers vrijwillige terugkeer naar Syrië*, 3 April 2025.

¹⁴⁰⁶ IOM-Nederland, *Monthly statistics voluntary return 2008-today*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Der Spiegel, *Nur wenige Syrer verlassen bisher Deutschland*, 25 April 2025; ZDF, *Wenige Syrer verlassen Deutschland*, 25 April 2025.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Confidential source, February 2025.

¹⁴⁰⁹ IOM, *Syrian Arab Republic. Population mobility and baseline assessment. Round 3 (01-30 April 2025)*, 11 May 2025, p. 7; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁴¹⁰ REACH, *Movement intentions for internally displaced persons in camps*, 11 January 2025, p. 3.

¹⁴¹¹ Confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁴¹² Confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁴¹³ Confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹⁴¹⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Syria*, December 2024, p. 149; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹⁴¹⁵ DW, *In data: Syria after the war*, 22 December 2024; NRC, *Syria: Destruction, lack of services delay safe returns within country*, 13 February 2025; The New York Times, *Syrians want to go home, but many no longer have one to return to*, 13 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

¹⁴¹⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Syria*, May 2022, p. 13.

responsible for most of the destruction.¹⁴¹⁷ In addition, under Assad, there had been targeted demographic engineering involving the expropriation of houses, flats and other property belonging to Syrians who had left the country by armed actors, particularly in former opposition areas, for the benefit of loyalists or pro-Iranian militias.¹⁴¹⁸ A large proportion of the homes of internally displaced persons and refugees had been looted and stripped to such an extent that nothing of value remained.¹⁴¹⁹ A survey conducted by UNHCR revealed that 61% of respondents owned a house in Syria. Of these, 81% indicated that their homes had been completely or partially destroyed and were uninhabitable.¹⁴²⁰ Upon returning, many Syrians discovered that their homes and farms had been completely or partially destroyed.¹⁴²¹ For example, they discovered that their homes no longer had any doors or windows, that the roof was damaged, that there was no electricity or water, and that the sewage system was not functioning. They often did not have the funds to repair their homes.¹⁴²²

The former policy of targeted demographic engineering under Assad made the return difficult.¹⁴²³ In many cases, the homes of returning Syrians had been occupied by others, and they could not be reclaimed due to the lack of proof of ownership and/or the presence of false proof of ownership.¹⁴²⁴ This policy had also led to the dismantling of the original social environment, such that people returning to their birthplaces could no longer find anything as it had been before.¹⁴²⁵

For some, returning home was an option to escape the deteriorating conditions in host countries in the region, where discrimination, economic problems and unemployment made daily life difficult.¹⁴²⁶ Some chose to dismantle their tents in the host country and set them up again in Syria, near the ruins of their former homes.¹⁴²⁷ Others rented houses upon their return. In doing so, they encountered high rents, due to the housing shortage.¹⁴²⁸

-
- ¹⁴¹⁷ SNHR, *The laws introduced by the Syrian regime to control real estate ownership and lands before and since the beginning of the popular uprising in March 2011*, 25 May 2023, p. 52; SNHR, *No home to return to: How Assad's property seizures in Daraa blocked refugee return*, 28 April 2025; The White Helmets, *Russia's devastating impact in Syria*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.
- ¹⁴¹⁸ PAX, *No return to Homs. A case study on demographic engineering in Syria*, 13 October 2017; Atlantic Council, *The institutionalization of demographic change in Syria*, 4 April 2019; SOHR, *Deir Ezzor. Iranian militias seize properties of displaced people in Al-Bokamal city*, 28 August 2024; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Syria*, December 2024, p. 159; SNHR, *No home to return to: How Assad's property seizures in Daraa blocked refugee return*, 28 April 2025.
- ¹⁴¹⁹ Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, *"Pillage and plunder: Unlawful appropriation and destruction of properties of refugees and IDPs in Syria"*, 6 December 2024; MEE, *Looting and destruction: The reality of return for Syria's 13 million displaced*, 15 January 2025; AP News, *AP photos: Syrians returning to the town of Tel Rifaat find homes in ruins and underground tunnels*, 10 February 2025; Al-Monitor, *'Where's the gold?': How the Assads sucked Syria dry*, 3 March 2025; The New York Times, *Syrians want to go home, but many no longer have one to return to*, 13 March 2025.
- ¹⁴²⁰ UNHCR, *Flash regional survey on Syrian refugees' perceptions and intentions on return to Syria*, 6 February 2025, p. 4.
- ¹⁴²¹ The Century Foundation, *Cross-border shuffle: Refugee movement between Lebanon and Syria after Assad*, 31 March 2025; Protection Cluster/UNHCR, *Protection landscape in Syria – A snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, p. 4; confidential source, March 2025.
- ¹⁴²² SARD, *The challenges facing Syria returnees*, 5 February 2025; UNHCR, *Repatriation explained: why Syrian refugees are voluntarily returning*, 12 March 2025; UNHCR, *Returning home to Syria: Four stories of hope for Syrian refugees*, 26 March 2025; AP News, *Nostalgia, relief and loss as some Syrians mark their first Ramadan back home in years*, 29 March 2025; UNHCR, *Türkiye operational updates*, April 2025, p. 4.
- ¹⁴²³ SNHR, *No home to return to: How Assad's property seizures in Daraa blocked refugee return*, 28 April 2025.
- ¹⁴²⁴ Enab Baladi, *Illegally seized properties in Syria: A multi-faceted legal issue*, 16 January 2025; The Century Foundation, *Cross-border shuffle: Refugee movement between Lebanon and Syria after Assad*, 31 March 2025; Protection Cluster/UNHCR, *Protection landscape in Syria – A snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, p. 4; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.
- ¹⁴²⁵ SNHR, *No home to return to: How Assad's property seizures in Daraa blocked refugee return*, 28 April 2025.
- ¹⁴²⁶ Foreign Affairs, *Syria's biggest problem: How to resettle millions of refugees and displaced people*, 11 February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.
- ¹⁴²⁷ The Century Foundation, *Cross-border shuffle: Refugee movement between Lebanon and Syria after Assad*, 31 March 2025; Enab Baladi, *People of Homs recall displacement suffering on ruins of their homes*, 3 April 2025; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #24. Syria situation crisis*, 25 April 2025, p. 1; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.
- ¹⁴²⁸ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #6. Syria situation crisis*, 24 December 2024, p. 2; RTL, *De één weet het zeker, de ander twijfelt over terugkeer naar Syria: 'Mijn kinderen spreken vooral Nederlands'*, 8 February 2025.

In some cases, returnees had to pay money to get people to leave their homes.¹⁴²⁹ According to one source, there were also cases in which armed factions that had seized property in Afrin threatened and/or assaulted returning Syrians – mostly Kurds – who wanted to reclaim their property. In doing so, they prevented permanent return.¹⁴³⁰ In other cases, returning Syrians had to pay hundreds to thousands of dollars to members of SNA factions to gain access to their property.¹⁴³¹ Furthermore, it was reported that returning Syrians had to pay rent for their own homes because armed factions had designated them as rental properties.¹⁴³²

Many Syrians were concerned about security.¹⁴³³ For example, some Syrians who returned to Syria from Lebanon discovered that there was fighting in their original areas of residence and that disputes quickly escalated into armed conflict, due to the large number of weapons in circulation. Because of this violence and these problems, they decided to return immediately – and illegally – to Lebanon.¹⁴³⁴ As reported by various media outlets, on 11 March 2025, unidentified assailants shot and killed two people in their home in the town of Sanamayn in Daraa province. One of the victims had been a representative of the Syrian opposition in exile. He had returned from France two weeks before his death.¹⁴³⁵ Furthermore, on 27 April 2025, unidentified assailants fatally shot a Syrian who had returned from Jordan the week before and was visiting family in the countryside near Homs.¹⁴³⁶

Other obstacles preventing Syrians from returning included the severe economic problems and lack of means of assistance, employment and facilities.¹⁴³⁷ In many areas, schools had either been destroyed or were not functioning due to a lack of staff.¹⁴³⁸ Furthermore, in many areas, hospitals had been destroyed or were not functioning due to a lack of funding.¹⁴³⁹ In some areas, there was tension and violence between Syrians returning from abroad and the people who were already living there (see also 4.2.2).¹⁴⁴⁰ Furthermore, landmines and other explosive

¹⁴²⁹ Syria Direct, *Waning hopes: Will Damascus help Afrin's Kurds reclaim their homes?*, 12 February 2025; Al-Jumhuriya, *"Syria is free, but my home is still occupied"*, 25 February 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹⁴³⁰ Al-Jumhuriya, *"Syria is free, but my home is still occupied"*, 25 February 2025.

¹⁴³¹ SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. December 2024-January 2025*, 22 January 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian forces enter northern towns long held by Turkey-backed groups*, 6 February 2025; HRW, *Syria: Türkiye-backed armed groups detain, extort civilians*, 14 May 2025.

¹⁴³² Al-Jumhuriya, *"Syria is free, but my home is still occupied"*, 25 February 2025.

¹⁴³³ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #17. Syria situation crisis*, 7 March 2025, p. 4.

¹⁴³⁴ Century International, *Cross-border shuffle: Refugee movement between Lebanon and Syria after Assad*, 31 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁴³⁵ ABC News, *Former Syrian diplomat shot dead as death toll from mass violence rises above 1,300*, 12 March 2025; Arab News, *Dissident former diplomat shot dead in southern Syria: monitor*, 12 March 2025; The New Arab, *Former Syrian diplomat assassinated by suspected regime remnants*, 12 March 2025; L'Orient Today, *Former dissident diplomat shot dead in southern Syria: SOHR*, 12 March 2025; The National, *Syrian poet and diplomat Nour Al-Din Labad killed after returning to hometown from France*, 13 March 2025.

¹⁴³⁶ X.com, Qalaat Al Mudiq, 28 April 2025, [url](#); X.com, Mohammad Alasakra, 28 April 2025, [url](#).

¹⁴³⁷ France 24, *Syrian refugees in Jordan camp say they have nothing to go home to*, 28 January 2025; SARD, *The challenges facing Syria returnees*, 5 February 2025; Trouw, *Voor de liefhebbers verkopen ze op de bazeer van Damascus sokken met Assad in onderbroek*, 13 February 2025; BBC Monitoring, *Explainer: What are the economic challenges facing Syria?*, 31 January 2025; The Century Foundation, *Cross-border shuffle: Refugee movement between Lebanon and Syria after Assad*, 31 March 2025; Enab Baladi, *Syria's war generation: Youth speak out on disconnection and struggles to belong*, 28 April 2025; IOM, *Syrian Arab Republic. Communities of Return. Index. Round 1 (15 March - 05 April 2025)*, 12 May 2025, p. 4; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁴³⁸ Reuters, *Hope turns to regret among Syrians returning home from Turkey*, 6 February 2025; UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report no. 4. As of 26 March 2025*, 27 March 2025, p. 9; The Century Foundation, *Cross-border shuffle: Refugee movement between Lebanon and Syria after Assad*, 31 March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁴³⁹ BBC Monitoring, *What future awaits Syrian refugees in Turkey amid returns*, 14 February 2025; UN OHCHR, *Syria: Distressing scale of violence in coastal areas*, 11 March 2025; The Century Foundation, *Cross-border shuffle: Refugee movement between Lebanon and Syria after Assad*, 31 March 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁴⁴⁰ The Century Foundation, *Damascus dispatch: Fear and hope in a divided Syria*, 17 March 2025; confidential source, January 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

remnants of war were left behind throughout Syria, which also claimed victims among returning Syrians (see 4.3).¹⁴⁴¹

9.5 Claiming property

One major obstacle to return was the enormous problems surrounding the ownership of houses, land and other possessions. Specific matters were often highly complex.¹⁴⁴² For example, in many cases, there was a lack of legal documents to prove ownership.¹⁴⁴³ There were also instances in which others had used false purchase agreements to take possession of properties.¹⁴⁴⁴ In many cases, properties belonging to Syrians who had left under Assad were expropriated, sold and then sometimes resold (several times).¹⁴⁴⁵ Moreover, the land registry in Syria was far from complete.¹⁴⁴⁶ In some parts of the country, the land registry was barely functioning.¹⁴⁴⁷

Various sources were aware of examples in which people had succeeded in getting their homes or shops back if they could produce proof of ownership.¹⁴⁴⁸ According to other sources, Syrians could turn to civil courts in cases involving the recovery of property, the determination of ownership, eviction through legal proceedings or similar matters.¹⁴⁴⁹ According to various sources, court rulings were not always complied with.¹⁴⁵⁰ In addition, not all civil courts were functioning.¹⁴⁵¹

According to the Paris-based NGO Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), after the takeover, committees were established in various neighbourhoods in Damascus and other provinces to deal with dispute resolution in areas including financial conflicts and conflicts over real estate. Operating from mosques, these committees included clergy, solicitors and local leaders. These local initiatives aimed to help people

¹⁴⁴¹ De Standaard, *Palmyra smeekt om toeristen: "De ruïnes hebben hulp nodig"*, 15 February 2025; HLN, *Minstens 200 doden door landmijnen in Syria na val Assad-regime*, 17 March 2025; UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report no. 4. As of 26 March 2025*, 27 March 2025; AP News, *Nostalgia, relief and loss as some Syrians mark their first Ramadan back home in years*, 29 March 2025; Protection Cluster/UNHCR, *Protection landscape in Syria – A snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, p. 4; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁴⁴² Confidential source, April 2025.

¹⁴⁴³ UN News, *Syria's humanitarian crisis: 16.5 million in need amid continuing conflict*, 20 March 2025; Protection Cluster/UNHCR, *Protection landscape in Syria – A snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, p. 7; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #23. Syria situation crisis*, 17 April 2025, p. 4.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Enab Baladi, *Illegally seized properties in Syria: A multi-faceted legal issue*, 16 January 2025; The Syria Report, *Explained: Recovering extorted properties amid fraud and other challenges*, 20 January 2025; Enab Baladi, *Presidential decree cancels precautionary asset seizure on Syrians*, 12 May 2025.

¹⁴⁴⁵ SNHR, *The laws introduced by the Syrian regime to control real estate ownership and lands before and since the beginning of the popular uprising in March 2011*, 25 May 2023, p. 22; The Economist, *The warlords of Syria have a daunting to-do list*, 25 April 2025; SNHR, *No home to return to: How Assad's property seizures in Daraa blocked refugee return*, 28 April 2025; Enab Baladi, *Presidential decree cancels precautionary asset seizure on Syrians*, 12 May 2025.

¹⁴⁴⁶ The Syria Report, *Government suspends all transactions over real estate property*, 3 February 2025; The Syria Report, *Return of refugees and IDPs fraught with challenges*, 25 February 2025; UN OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report no. 4. As of 26 March 2025*, 27 March 2025, p. 12; STJ, *Syria: Alternative committees for property and personal status disputes: Response to power vacuum or judiciary marginalization?*, 4 April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Al-Jumhuriya, *"Syria is free, but my home is still occupied"*, 25 February 2025; The Syria Report, *Real estate services in Daraa paralysed after fall of Assad*, 22 April 2025.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Enab Baladi, *Illegally seized properties in Syria: A multi-faceted legal issue*, 16 January 2025; Enab Baladi, *Presidential decree cancels precautionary asset seizure on Syrians*, 12 May 2025; confidential source, May 2025.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Enab Baladi, *Syrians search for ways to prove ownership of their homes*, 12 May 2025; confidential source, May 2025.

¹⁴⁵⁰ Syria Direct, *Waning hopes: Will Damascus help Afrin's Kurds reclaim their homes?*, 12 February 2025; Al-Jumhuriya, *"Syria is free, but my home is still occupied"*, 25 February 2025; The Syria Report, *Contradictory legal measures push real estate market into gridlock*, 11 March 2025; The Syria Report, *Explained: Preventing the execution of real estate sale judgements*, 8 April 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁴⁵¹ The Syrian Observer, *Syria's dissident judges at the heart of judicial restoration*, 15 April 2025; confidential source, May 2025.

resolve long-standing disputes without resorting to legal proceedings in the competent courts.¹⁴⁵²

9.6 Organisations providing support to returnees

In the host countries, UNHCR provided advice and information to Syrians wishing to return voluntarily, either directly or through partner organisations.¹⁴⁵³ To this end, it was present at the main border crossings in Lebanon, Jordan and Türkiye (see 9.2).¹⁴⁵⁴ The online platform Syria is Home was launched as well.¹⁴⁵⁵ In addition, UNHCR provided assistance with transport and logistics.¹⁴⁵⁶ For example, UNHCR coordinated and supported bus transport for Syrian refugees from Jordan to their final destinations in Syria.¹⁴⁵⁷ In Syria, UNHCR cooperated with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and the Ministry of Health in monitoring the movements of returning Syrians at border crossings. There, Syrians who had returned could approach employees of these organisations for advice and information. Medical support was provided there on a limited scale. Furthermore, returning Syrians could go to the border for drinking water, toilets and access to the internet and telephone lines.¹⁴⁵⁸

UNHCR supported more than 122 community centres and more than 114 mobile units in all 14 Syrian provinces.¹⁴⁵⁹ The more than 2,000 volunteers and lawyers working there provided information on a variety of topics, including the presence of landmines and the prevention of gender-based violence. They provided support in the area of mental health, as well as providing legal advice (for example, on obtaining identity cards, birth certificates, marriage certificates and proof of ownership).¹⁴⁶⁰ In addition, UNHCR arranged free transport to the final destinations of some Syrians returning home, including at the Bab al-Hawa border crossing.¹⁴⁶¹ Furthermore, there was financial support (in most cases, on a one-off basis) and material assistance in the form of tents, mattresses, blankets, winter clothing, building materials and other items.¹⁴⁶² UNHCR also worked on restoring basic infrastructure, such as sewerage and street lighting.¹⁴⁶³ During the reporting period,

¹⁴⁵² STJ, *Syria: Alternative committees for property and personal status disputes: Response to power vacuum or judiciary marginalization?*, 4 April 2025.

¹⁴⁵³ UNHCR, *UNHCR Jordan – Frequently asked questions on return to Syria. Update #4*, 9 January 2025; UNHCR, *Rebuilding home: Salih's path back to Syria*, 16 April 2025.

¹⁴⁵⁴ UNHCR, *Voluntary returns of Syrian refugees and IDPs. Three-month impact report. January-March 2025*, 11 April 2025, p. 4.

¹⁴⁵⁵ UNHCR, *UNHCR: Needs intensify as 400,000 Syrians return*, 11 April 2025.

¹⁴⁵⁶ UNHCR, *UNHCR Jordan – Frequently asked questions on return to Syria. Update #4*, 9 January 2025; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #27. Syria situation crisis*, 16 May 2025, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵⁷ UNHCR, *Regional flash update #23. Syria situation crisis*, 17 April 2025, p. 4; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #24. Syria situation crisis*, 25 April 2025, p. 2; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #25. Syria situation crisis*, 1 May 2025, p. 1.

¹⁴⁵⁸ UNHCR, *UNHCR Jordan – Frequently asked questions on return to Syria. Update #4*, 9 January 2025; UNHCR, *Voluntary returns of Syrian refugees and IDPs. Three-month impact report. January-March 2025*, 11 April 2025, p. 4; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #24. Syria situation crisis*, 25 April 2025, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵⁹ UNHCR, *UNHCR: Needs intensify as 400,000 Syrians return*, 11 April 2025; UNHCR, *Voluntary returns of Syrian refugees and IDPs. Three-month impact report. January-March 2025*, 11 April 2025, p. 4.

¹⁴⁶⁰ UNHCR, *UNHCR: Needs intensify as 400,000 Syrians return*, 11 April 2025; UNHCR, *Voluntary returns of Syrian refugees and IDPs. Three-month impact report. January-March 2025*, 11 April 2025, p. 5; UNHCR, *Syria. Main activities*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025; UNHCR, *Syria. Legal assistance for IDPs and returnees*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹⁴⁶¹ UNHCR, *UNHCR Jordan – Frequently asked questions on return to Syria. Update #4*, 9 January 2025; UNHCR, *Repatriation explained: why Syrian refugees are voluntarily returning*, 12 March 2025; UNHCR, *Returning home to Syria: Four stories of hope for Syrian refugees*, 26 March 2025; AP News, *Nostalgia, relief and loss as some Syrians mark their first Ramadan back home in years*, 29 March 2025; UNHCR, *Voluntary returns of Syrian refugees and IDPs. Three-month impact report. January-March 2025*, 11 April 2025, p. 4; Syria is Home, *Assistance and financial support*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹⁴⁶² UNHCR, *Returning home to Syria: Four stories of hope for Syrian refugees*, 26 March 2025; UNHCR, *Voluntary returns of Syrian refugees and IDPs. Three-month impact report. January-March 2025*, 11 April 2025, p. 2; UNHCR, *Regional flash update #27. Syria situation crisis*, 16 May 2025, p. 2; UNHCR, *Syria. Main activities*, [url](#), consulted on 1 May 2025; Syria is Home, *Assistance and financial support*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹⁴⁶³ UNHCR, *Voluntary returns of Syrian refugees and IDPs. Three-month impact report. January-March 2025*, 11 April 2025, p. 5.

UNHCR had to cut back on this support due to a loss of funding. For this reason, UNHCR planned to close nearly half of the community centres and limit support to the most vulnerable Syrian returnees.¹⁴⁶⁴

In Syria, UNHCR cooperated with other UN organisations, including WFP, IOM, UNDP and UNICEF.¹⁴⁶⁵

The Red Cross (International Committee of the Red Cross, ICRC) worked with SARC to provide services for tracing family members, thereby enabling families to reconnect with their missing loved ones.¹⁴⁶⁶

9.7 Reconstruction

During the reporting period, no significant initiatives were launched in Syria with regard to debris clearance and reconstruction.¹⁴⁶⁷ There were a few private and smaller-scale initiatives, such as housing construction, repair and construction of school buildings, and infrastructure projects in various locations throughout the country.¹⁴⁶⁸

¹⁴⁶⁴ UNHCR, *Statement by UNHCR's Filippo Grandi on the impact of global aid cuts on refugees*, 20 March 2025; confidential source, April 2025; confidential source, April 2025.

¹⁴⁶⁵ EurActiv, *Interview: UN migration director rules out 'large-scale returns' to Syria*, 10 April 2025; UNHCR, *UNHCR: Needs intensify as 400,000 Syrians return*, 11 April 2025.

¹⁴⁶⁶ Syria is Home, *Protection and safety*, [url](#), consulted on 22 May 2025.

¹⁴⁶⁷ The Syria Report, *Destruction, poor services and lack of a reconstruction plan hinder the return to Darayya*, 11 February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, February 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025; confidential source, March 2025.

¹⁴⁶⁸ IHH, *Türkiye and Qatar built new homes for 1,400 families in Syria*, 30 January 2025; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Türkiye*, February 2025, p. 106; Doha News, *Qatar Charity launches initiative to rebuild homes for displaced Syrians*, 25 March 2025; SANA, *Restoration and rehabilitation of about 70 schools in various governorates since liberation*, 21 April 2025; confidential source, February 2025.

10 Appendices

10.1 List of abbreviations used

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
AFP	Agence France-Presse
COI	Country of Origin Information
DAANES	Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
RDS	Repatriation and Departure Service
ERW	Explosive remnants of war
GEM	Guardians of Equality Movement
GSS	General Security Service
HRK	Harakat Rijal al-Karameh (The Men of Dignity)
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HTS	-Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KNCS	Kurdish National Council in Syria
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other diverse identities
MOC	Military Operations Command
NDF	National Defence Forces
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PMM	Presidency of Migration Management
RSF	Reporters sans frontières
SAA	Syrian Arab Army
SANA	Syrian Arab News Agency
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SDC	Syrian Democratic Council
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SJAC	Syria Justice and Accountability Centre
SNA	Syrian National Army
SNHR	Syrian Network for Human Rights
SOHR	Syrian Observatory for Human Rights
SSG	Syrian Salvation Government
STJ	Syrians for Truth and Justice
TAC	Temporary Accommodation Centre
UN OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UN OHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNMAS	United Nations Mine Action Service

UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UXO	Unexploded ordnance
UN	United Nations
WFP	World Food Programme
PC	Penal Code
YPG	Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Protection Units)
YPJ	Yekîneyên Parastina Jin (Women's Protection Units)

10.2 Reports and publications

Al Majalla

- *Security along the coast is a work in progress*, 28 April 2025.
- *Syria's sectarian violence is a ticking time bomb*, 3 May 2025.
- *Much-maligned Syrian commander rebuts massacre claims*, 10 May 2025.

Al-Monitor

- *In Syria's Alawite area, joy at Assad fall but fear of Islamism*, 16 December 2024.
- *Christmas in post-Assad Syria tainted by fears for minority's future*, 24 December 2024.
- *Syrians protest after video of attack on Alawite shrine*, 25 December 2024.
- *'Where's the gold?': How the Assads sucked Syria dry*, 3 March 2025.
- *Syria determined to 'prevent unlawful revenge' says fact-finding committee*, 11 March 2025.
- *Syrian Kurd commander: Aleppo power-sharing deal could be model for nation*, 12 April 2025.
- *Syria: 9 killed as clashes erupt in Druze-majority town*, 29 April 2025.

Amnesty International

- *New law paves way for justice for prisoners convicted in flawed trials in north-east Syria*, 23 July 2024.
- *Syria: US must provide support to thousands stranded in horrifying conditions in Rukban camp*, 23 September 2024.
- *Syria: Coastal massacres of Alawite civilians must be investigated as war crimes*, 3 April 2025.
- *Syria: New government must prioritize justice and truth measures to prevent further abuse*, 16 May 2025.

Arab Center Washington DC

- *A new opportunity for Palestinians in Syria*, 21 March 2025.

Arab Reform Initiative

- *Where does Syria's transition stand?*, 24 April 2025.
- *Post-War Syria: Paths to Stability* (webinar), 5 May 2025, [url](#).

Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)

- *Q&A What happened in the coastal region of Syria last week?*, 14 March 2025.

Atlantic Council

- *The institutionalization of demographic change in Syria*, 4 April 2019.

- *What will minority and women's rights look like in the new Syria?*, 20 December 2024.
- *Inside Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's diplomatic offensive with Syria's Christians and Ismailis*, 19 March 2025.
- *Dispatch from Bekaa: Inside the sectarian skirmishes on the Syria-Lebanon border*, 25 March 2025.
- *From rubble to rebirth: A model for Syria's reconstruction*, 8 May 2025.

Atlantic Council, European Institute of Peace (EIP) & Middle East Institute (MEI)

- *Reimagining Syria. A roadmap for peace and prosperity beyond Assad*, 13 March 2025.

Brookings

- *The Free Syrian Army: A decentralized insurgent brand*, November 2016.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

- *Pushing back against Hezbollah*, 12 February 2025.
- *The view from Damascus*, 13 March 2025.
- *A deal in Damascus*, 14 March 2025.
- *Syria's leaders show their intentions*, 19 March 2025.
- *Double dealers: Lebanon and the risks of captagon trafficking*, 19 March 2025.
- *Rebuilding the Syrian nation: Impressions from the ground*, 23 April 2025.
- *Syria's misunderstood minority question*, 7 May 2025.
- *Three requisites for Syria's reconstruction process*, 8 May 2025.
- *Minority retort in Syria*, 9 May 2025.
- *Syria's Druze stand alone*, 14 May 2025.

Century International

- *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?*, 11 March 2025.
- *Cross-border shuffle: Refugee movement between Lebanon and Syria after Assad*, 31 March 2025.

Chatham House

- *Iran is building a new source of Shia influence inside Syria*, 26 June 2017.
- *Syria's transactional state*, 10 October 2018.
- *Syria needs security – can Al-Sharaa build a united army to provide it?*, 10 March 2025.
- *Independent Thinking: Will Syria's new leader rescue or destroy the country?*, 14 March 2025.

CTC Sentinel

- *The new Syrian government's fight against the Islamic State, Hezbollah, and captagon*, March 2025.

Daraj

- *Three conflicting curricula in Syria's education system today*, 24 January 2025.
- *Is the influence of armed factions in Afrin declining with the arrival of the General Security?*, 26 February 2025.
- *Should queer Syrians take up arms for self-defense?*, 10 March 2025.
- *I'm a female judge in Homs.. What will happen to my career in the new Syria?*, 7 April 2025.
- *Who is kidnapping Syrian Alawite women in broad daylight*, 18 April 2025.

- *The collective psychology of genocide: Syria as a case study*, 22 April 2025.
- *Syria's sectarian fires reignite amid silence of justice*, 12 May 2025.

Etana

- *Syria update #15*, 28 January 2025.
- *Letter: Arms & drug smuggling in Syria after Assad*, 29 January 2025.
- *Syria update #17*, 9 February 2025.
- *Letter: Recommendations for the Syrian National Dialogue Conference's preparatory committee*, 20 February 2025.
- *Explainer: Political & military dynamics in Suwayda province*, 20 February 2025.
- *Syria update #19*, 22 February 2025.
- *Syrian National Dialogue Conference falls short of expectations*, 3 March 2025.
- *Syria update #22*, 24 March 2025.
- *Syria update #23*, 31 March 2025.
- *Blog: Syria's constitution raises concerns about inclusivity, presidential powers*, 31 March 2025.
- *Letter: The dissolution of Ahmad al-Awdeh's groups in Daraa*, 16 April 2025.
- *Letter: The Jaramana & Ashrafiyat Sahnaya crisis*, 4 May 2025.
- *Syria update #24: 8 May 2025*, 7 May 2025.

European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)

- *The road ahead: Six ways Europeans can urgently support a stable Syria*, 6 March 2025.

European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)

- *Syria: Country focus*, 21 March 2025.

European University Institute: (EUI)

- *The Eighth Brigade: Striving for supremacy in Southern Syria*, 1 December 2020.

Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community

- *The current security situation in Syria*, 27 March 2025.

Foreign Affairs

- *Syria's biggest problem: How to resettle millions of refugees and displaced people*, 11 February 2025.
- *Syria's uncertain new order*, 11 April 2025.

Foreign Policy

- *It's time for Syria's Kurds to fold*, 20 February 2025.
- *Israel is escalating its war in Syria*, 27 March 2025.
- *What are Uyghurs doing in Syria?*, 4 April 2025.

Front Line Defenders

- *Syria: Defamation campaign against woman rights defender Hiba Ezzideen Al-Hajji*, 23 April 2025.

Guardians of Equality Movement (GEM)

- *Statement on the fall of the Assad regime and the Syrian LGBTQIA+ post-Assad regime*, 6 January 2025.

- *Urgent statement on the campaign of violations of torture and arrest, against sexual and gender minorities in Syria*, 11 February 2025.
- *LGBTQIA+ individuals in Syria after the fall of the Assad regime*, 19 April 2025.

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

- *"Everything is by the power of the weapon". Abuses and impunity in Turkish-occupied northern Syria*, 29 February 2024.
- *Northeast Syria: Apparent war crime by Türkiye-backed forces*, 30 January 2025.
- *US, EU, UK: Lift Syria sanctions hindering recovery*, 18 February 2025.
- *Syria: End coastal killing spree, protect civilians*, 10 March 2025.
- *Syria: Constitutional declaration risks endangering rights*, 25 March 2025.
- *Türkiye-backed armed groups detain, extort civilians*, 14 May 2025.

Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

- *"Pillage and plunder: Unlawful appropriation and destruction of properties of refugees and IDPs in Syria"*, 6 December 2024.

İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı (IHH)

- *Türkiye and Qatar built new homes for 1,400 families in Syria*, 30 January 2025.

Institute for the Study of War (ISW)

- *Alawite insurgents seek to use sectarian violence to destabilize the interim government in Syria*, 3 April 2025.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

- *ICRC head of delegation in Syria: Detention work remains our top priority*, 23 December 2024.

International Crisis Group (ICG)

- *Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West*, 7 March 2023.
- *Syria's north-western front erupts*, 5 December 2024.
- *Priorities after Assad's fall*, 12 December 2024.
- *Promoting a stable, peaceful transition in Syria*, 30 January 2025.
- *CrisisWatch. Syria: January 2025*, February 2025.
- *CrisisWatch. Syria: February 2025*, March 2025.
- *Finding a path through a perilous moment for post-Assad Syria*, 10 March 2025.
- *How Israel's overreach in Syria may backfire*, 17 March 2025.
- *A glimmer of peace in Syria's North East*, 28 March 2025.
- *The new Syria: Halting a dangerous drift*, 28 March 2025.
- *CrisisWatch. Syria: March 2025*, April 2025.
- *What lies in store for Syria as a new government takes power?*, 25 April 2025.
- *Fighting in Damascus exposes Syria's sectarian tensions*, 2 May 2025.
- *What next for Syria after Trump lifts sanctions?*, 15 May 2025.

International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

- *Syria: Two Kurdish journalists killed by alleged drone attack by Türkiye*, 20 December 2024.
- *Ibrahim Ajaj*, 22 January 2025.

- *Syria: IFJ calls on authorities to reverse dissolution of journalists' union*, 12 February 2025.

International Medical Corps

- *Syria emergency response: Situation report #4*, 8 January 2025.

Jihadology+

- *Every known position in the new Syrian government*, 23 March 2025.

Kennisplatform Inclusief Samenleven

- *Eergerelateerd geweld in de Syrische gemeenschap*, 30 June 2023.

Lawfare

- *Lawfare Daily: The new Syrian government and its problems*, 19 March 2025.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)

- *Syrians share stories of violence and displacement from temporary shelters in the northeast*, 11 February 2025.

Mercy Corps

- *Flash report: Syria's liquidity crunch*, February 2025.
- *Syria monthly report. March 2025*, 10 April 2025.
- *Syria monthly report. April 2025*, May 2025.
- *Fractured stability: Communal tensions, political strain, and emerging spoilers in Syria*, 5 May 2025.

Metro

- *'I was tortured in Syria for being gay — now I'm terrified what the future will bring'*, 22 December 2024.

Middle East Eye (MEE)

- *Syrian detainee freed by rebel forces in Aleppo after eight years in prison*, 30 November 2024.
- *In shattered Yarmouk, the Palestinians of Syria mourn their 'paradise' lost to war*, 18 December 2024.
- *Disinformation stokes Alawi unease as Assad loyalists pursued in Syria*, 26 December 2024.
- *Looting and destruction: The reality of return for Syria's 13 million displaced*, 15 January 2025.
- *Israelis and Iranians cannot fly to Syria, says Turkish Airlines*, 16 January 2025.
- *HTS raids and forced disappearances fuel fear in Syria's Alawi heartlands*, 17 January 2025.
- *Jaramana: The Damascus suburb targeted by Israel*, 4 March 2025.
- *Violence in Syria may have altered survivor genomes for generations, study suggests*, 7 March 2025.
- *Sacked Syrian workers stage nationwide protests as government targets public sector*, 7 March 2025.
- *Landmark SDF deal hailed as positive step for Syria and Kurds*, 11 March 2025.
- *Syria reveals new religiously diverse interim government*, 30 March 2025.
- *One month on, killings persist in Syria's Alawi heartlands*, 11 April 2025.

- *SDF withdraws from key Syrian dam after agreement with Damascus*, 12 April 2025.
- *Syria cancels some flights to Turkey amid aviation dispute*, 25 April 2025.
- *Syria's Druze fearful after deadly attacks on Damascus suburbs*, 1 May 2025.
- *The long path to recovery in northeastern Syria*, 11 May 2025.

Middle East Institute (MEI)

- *A closer look at the ISIS attack on Syria's al-Sina Prison*, 14 February 2022.
- *Governing the day after in Syria*, 19 December 2024.
- *Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria*, 21 January 2025.
- *The national dialogue in Syria: A step forward or a concerning trajectory?*, 5 March 2025.
- *ISIS is on the ropes in Syria. A successful transition in Damascus could deliver a knockout blow*, 14 April 2025.
- *The Damascus-SDF agreement two months on: Fragile progress or delayed collapse?*, 9 May 2025.

Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP)

- *Syria's new men. Masculinities and the post-Asad political order*, 16 April 2025.

Mine Action Area of Responsibility (Mine Action AoR)

- *Situation report No. 1 (December 2024 – January 2025)*, 17 February 2025.
- *Situation update No. 2 (February – March 2025)*, 3 April 2025.
- *Situation update No. 3 (April)*, 13 May 2025.

Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- *General COI Report on Syria*, May 2022.
- *General COI Report on Syria*, Augustus 2023.
- *General COI Report on Syria*, December 2024.
- *General COI Report on Türkiye*, February 2025.

National Public Radio (NPR)

- *The Assad regime's fall has freed displaced Syrians stuck in a remote desert camp*, 24 December 2024.
- *Syria's U.S.-trained opposition fighters wait to learn of their role in a new Syria*, 31 December 2024.
- *After decades of surveillance, Syrians are cautiously testing out free expression*, 17 February 2025.
- *Clearing Syria of unexploded munitions from the civil war*, 25 February 2025.
- *What happened when Syria's conservative new leaders tried to shut 60 Damascus bars*, 31 March 2025.

New Lines Magazine

- *Syria's Druze have run out of patience with Assad*, 5 October 2023.
- *Revisiting the erasure of Kurdish identity in Syria*, 20 December 2023.
- *Assad was disengaging from Iran, but his next steps are unclear*, 3 December 2024.
- *Aleppo's Christians weigh an uncertain future*, 4 December 2024.
- *Amid chaos in Aleppo, there is a chance to discuss the future*, 4 December 2024.
- *The not-so-frivolous debate about alcohol in Syria*, 27 December 2024.

- *Joy and trepidation among Syria's Druze*, 2 January 2025.
- *Inside Syria's captagon industry*, 6 January 2025.
- *Syria is alive with possibility*, 10 January 2025.
- *The challenges facing Syria's Alawites*, 13 January 2025.
- *Life returns to a Syrian border town after Iranian militias flee*, 30 January 2025.
- *Israel's Syria gambit*, 20 February 2025.
- *Syria's new rulers are working to unify military power*, 25 February 2025.
- *The disintegration of Assad's army*, 6 March 2025.
- *Sectarian violence simmers in Homs*, 10 March 2025.
- *Islamism is still thriving in Idlib*, 12 March 2025.
- *How desperation sowed the seeds of rebellion in Syria's Latakia province*, 17 March 2025.
- *The fragile foundations of Arab-Kurdish coexistence*, 1 April 2025.
- *An unwelcome homecoming*, 6 May 2025.
- *Investigating the Alawite massacres*, 12 May 2025.
- *Postwar Syria is still suffering under US sanctions*, 13 May 2025.

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

- *Syria: Destruction, lack of services delay safe returns within country*, 13 February 2025.
- *Syria: Turbulence and lack of investments impede people's ability to recover*, 13 March 2025.
- *From ruins to renewal: How can Syria rebuild after 14 years of war?*, 26 March 2025.
- *Beyond return: Ensuring sustainable recovery & (re)-integration in Syria*, 15 May 2025.
- *Syria: Better conditions, infrastructure investments could pave the way for millions to return*, 15 May 2025.

Open Democracy

- *A murder in Syria reignites the debate about so-called 'honour killings'*, 13 July 2021.
- *Syrian women and children return to rebuild, leaving husbands behind*, 8 May 2025.

Open Doors

- *Misleading reports about 'slaughter of Christians' could endanger Syrians, says Open Doors expert*, 13 March 2025.
- *Dagelijks leven in Syrië: Juliette doet verslag*, 10 April 2025.

PAX

- *No return to Homs. A case study on demographic engineering in Syria*, 13 October 2017.

Protection Cluster/UNHCR

- *Protection landscape in Syria – A snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025.

Raseef22

- *When fathers turn into executioners: The dark reality of "honor crimes" in Syria's al-Suwayda*, 13 September 2024.

REACH

- *Movement intentions for internally displaced persons in camps*, 11 January 2025.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

- *Deadly clashes in Syria: authorities must ensure journalists' safety and the public's rights to reliable information*, 11 March 2025.
- *Seven journalists attacked in Syria: RSF calls on the authorities to protect reporters*, 6 May 2025.

SARD

- *The challenges facing Syria returnees*, 5 February 2025.

Save the Children

- *Syria: More than 180 children killed or injured by explosive remnants of war in three months as thousands return home*, 6 March 2025.

Syria Direct

- *Missing in Action: What happened to the once prominent Free Syrian Army?*, 24 March 2021.
- *HTS looks to Idlib's Christians and Druze to whitewash violations*, 11 December 2023.
- *Restrictions on local journalists in northeastern Syria multiply*, 4 July 2024.
- *Hezbollah and Iran-backed militias reposition in Syria*, 8 November 2024.
- *Afrin's displaced torn between another exile and danger in northern Aleppo*, 4 December 2024.
- *'Shades of gray': Aleppo's Christians between HTS promises and painful memories*, 5 December 2024.
- *HTS looks to Idlib's Christians and Druze to whitewash violations*, 11 December 2023.
- *Relatively few Syrians in Jordan risk one-way trip home*, 2 January 2025.
- *Tens of thousands return to Afrin while fear of abuses keeps others away*, 3 January 2025.
- *Protection or intervention? Focus on Syria's minorities sparks controversy, fuels hate speech*, 29 January 2025.
- *In Syria's 'barrel bomb capital' Darayya, housing crisis stalls return*, 31 January 2025.
- *Waning hopes: Will Damascus help Afrin's Kurds reclaim their homes?*, 12 February 2025.
- *Idlib faces new challenges as priorities shift to Damascus*, 19 February 2025.
- *Why the delay in merging Daraa's factions into a new Syrian army?*, 21 February 2025.
- *Israel in Syria: 'Permanent' fortifications and attempts to win over residents*, 26 February 2025.
- *Women delegates weigh in on Syria's national dialogue conference*, 27 February 2025.
- *As Jableh picks up the pieces, can residents overcome 'sectarian tensions'?*, 12 March 2025.
- *Thousands of Alawites seek refuge in Lebanon, where locals lead the response*, 14 March 2025.
- *Is Suwayda heading for a showdown with Damascus?*, 15 March 2025.
- *As Israel instrumentalizes Syria's Druze, some fear 'increased sectarianism'*, 21 March 2025.

- *Can the SDF-Damascus deal withstand internal divisions and geopolitical shifts?*, 31 March 2025.
- *SDF-Damascus agreement in Aleppo a litmus test, and a possible path forward*, 7 April 2025.
- *Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri's journey: From obedience to opposition?*, 11 April 2025.
- *Escalation and appeals for calm: Is civil peace crumbling in Syria's Druze communities?*, 1 May 2025.
- *As tensions run high, will Suwayda's security agreement hold?*, 7 May 2025.
- *Extrajudicial killings of Alawites plague Homs city*, 9 May 2025.
- *After years of revival, what is the Kurdish language's future in Syria?*, 16 May 2025.
- *University students latest pressure point in Damascus-Suwayda tensions*, 20 May 2025.

Syria in Figures

- *What does the composition of Syria's caretaker government tell us?*, March 2025.
- *External contribution: A panoramic view of the status quo in Syria and the emerging US position*, March 2025.

Syria in Transition

- *Swallowing the state: HTS is fashioning Syria in its own image*, 6 March 2025.
- *It's all about implementation. A conversation with Xerîb Hiso*, March 2025.
- *Tanks and cash. Israel's hearts and minds campaign in southern Syria*, March 2025.
- *Damascus re-born*, April 2025.
- *The new Umayyads. Syria's leaders is turning nostalgia into strategy*, April 2025.

Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC)

- *Human Rights Violations in Syria. December 2024-January 2025*, 22 January 2025.
- *Two months after Assad's fall, Assad-like violations are still being committed in Syria*, 13 February 2025.
- *SJAC's analysis of atrocities committed in Latakia and Tartous*, 13 March 2025.
- *The Syrian government must investigate the targeting of Alawite civilians in Homs*, 13 May 2025.

Syria Notes

- *'The grapes of our country'*, 3 May 2025.

Syria Revisited

- *The slow collapse of the Syrian army*, 4 December 2024.
- *"We need to know what comes next" – Voices from Tartous after Assad*, 21 December 2024.
- *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 7*, 28 January 2025.
- *An Alawite voice from Homs city*, 12 February 2025.
- *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 12*, 3 March 2025.
- *The Ismaili mediators of Qadmus*, 18 March 2025.
- *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 15*, 27 March 2025.
- *The new Syrian army: Structure and commanders*, 28 March 2025.

- *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 19*, 21 April 2025.
- *A Christian activist's hopes for the future*, 6 May 2025.
- *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 21*, 12 May 2025.
- *Masyaf's liberation through Ismaili eyes*, 13 May 2025.
- *Rebuilding security in new Syria: Week 22*, 15 May 2025.
- *Are Damascus' new security reforms a form of federalism?*, 18 May 2025.

Syria Weekly

- *Special: Syria. Nov 26-Dec 3, 2024*, 3 December 2024.
- *10 key takeaways from Syria*, 10 February 2025.
- *Feb 25-March 4, 2025*, 4 March 2025.
- *A turning point: Pro-Assad loyalists launch unprecedented escalation*, 6 March 2025.
- *March 4-11, 2025*, 11 March 2025.
- *March 11-18, 2025*, 18 March 2025.
- *March 18-25, 2025*, 25 March 2025.
- *Assessing Syria's transitional government*, 30 March 2025.
- *March 25-April 1, 2025*, 1 April 2025.
- *April 1-8, 2025*, 8 April 2025.
- *Weekly data update (April 1-8, 2025)*, 10 April 2025.
- *April 8-15, 2025*, 15 April 2025.
- *Weekly data update (April 8-15, 2025)*, 17 April 2025.
- *April 15-22, 2025*, 22 April 2025.
- *April 22-29, 2025*, 29 April 2025.
- *April 29-May 6, 2025*, 6 May 2025.
- *Weekly data update (April 29-May 6, 2025)*, 8 May 2025.
- *May 6-13, 2025*, 13 May 2025.
- *Weekly data update (May 6-13, 2025)*, 15 May 2025.
- *Weekly data update (May 13-20, 2025)*, 22 May 2025.

Syrian Democratic Council (SDC)

- *Statement on the formation of the new Syrian government*, 30 March 2025.

Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)

- *The laws introduced by the Syrian regime to control real estate ownership and lands before and since the beginning of the popular uprising in March 2011*, 25 May 2023.
- *Unidentified individuals attack a church in NW. Hama, December 11, 2024*, 12 December 2024.
- *Man named Mohammad al-Medad shot and killed by SDF in Hasaka, December 12, 2024*, 13 December 2024.
- *Unidentified gunmen attack a church in Hama city, December 18, 2024*, 19 December 2024.
- *Maps of the most prominent areas contaminated by landmines in Syria, and recommendations to address this issue*, 31 December 2024.
- *1,264 civilian deaths, including 242 children and 118 women, as well as 86 deaths due to torture, documented in Syria in 2024*, 2 January 2025.
- *SNHR's annual report on arrests/detentions in Syria*, 4 January 2025.
- *Accused of preparing malicious reports that led to arresting civilians. Elder of Dummar town executed and residents express their joy*, 10 January 2025.
- *Doctor Qusai al-Zeer abducted by unidentified gunmen in Damascus city, January 19, 2025*, 22 January 2025.

- *Dead body of man named Ibrahim Ajaj found on the outskirts of Hama city, January 22, 2025, 23 January 2025.*
- *Unidentified individuals desecrate a religious shrine in W. Homs, January 23, 2025, 25 January 2025.*
- *SDF arrests a media worker in Deir Ez-Zor, January 28, 2025, 30 January 2025.*
- *236 civilian deaths, including 32 children and 18 women, as well as one woman's death due to torture, documented in Syria in January 2025, 21 civilians were killed by SDF, 1 February 2025.*
- *SNHR condemns torture, death of three detainees at the hands of the transitional government's general security directorate, 3 February 2025.*
- *At least 229 arbitrary detentions documented in January 2025, 4 February 2025.*
- *Unidentified gunmen attack a church in W. Homs, February 20, 2025, 22 February 2025.*
- *SNHR condemns SDF's continued detentions of civilians since the beginning of 2025 over voicing their opinion, 22 February 2025.*
- *Unidentified individuals desecrate a religious shrine in W. Hama, February 27, 2025, 28 February 2025.*
- *Unidentified gunmen desecrate a religious shrine in W. Hama, February 28, 2025, 1 March 2025.*
- *222 civilian deaths, including 17 children and 37 women, as well as nine deaths due to torture, recorded in February 2025 in Syria, 1 March 2025.*
- *At least 216 arbitrary detentions recorded in Syria in February 2025, 3 March 2025.*
- *803 individuals extrajudicially killed between March 6-10, 2025, 11 March 2025.*
- *Daily update: Extrajudicial killings on the Syrian coast (March 6–March 15, 2025), 15 March 2025.*
- *Four civilians, including two women, injured in an Israeli occupation airstrike on Mashrou Dummar in Damascus, March 13, 2025, 15 March 2025.*
- *Rocket blast results in a massacre in Latakia, March 15, 2025, 17 March 2025.*
- *Civilians from one family killed by an airstrike suspected to be Turkish in a massacre in the vicinity of Barkh Butan village, Aleppo – March 16, 2025, 18 March 2025.*
- *Israeli occupation forces conduct three incursions in Quneitra governorate over three days, 24 March 2025.*
- *Girl named Malak Kawa Abdou abducted by SDF in Aleppo, March 24, 2025, 25 March 2025.*
- *Update for extrajudicial killings in the wake of events in the coastal region from March 6 to March 9, 26 March 2025.*
- *SNHR condemns Israeli occupation forces' arbitrary detention of three civilians following an incursion into Koya village, W. Daraa, 29 March 2025.*
- *Unidentified individuals desecrate George Church in Rural Damascus, April 6, 2025, 8 April 2025.*
- *1,562 deaths, including 102 children and 99 women, as well as 33 medical personnel, recorded in March 2025 in Syria, 9 April 2025.*
- *At least 117 arbitrary arrests recorded in Syria in March 2025, 10 April 2025.*
- *SDF abducts a girl named Sulava Qader in Aleppo, April 10, 2025, 12 April 2025.*
- *SDF abducts a girl named Rujin Ahmad in Hasaka, April 16, 2025, 21 April 2025.*

- *A woman and her two daughters shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Homs, April 18, 2025, 20 April 2025.*
- *SNHR condemns SFD's detention of elderly man Abdul Rahman Tayeh Dawoud & his death due to medical negligence in SDF detention centers on April 20, 2025, 26 April 2025.*
- *No home to return to: How Assad's property seizures in Daraa blocked refugee return, 28 April 2025.*
- *No fewer than 20 civilians extrajudicial killed in Homs city between April 23-28, 2025, 30 April 2025.*
- *The death of 174 civilian including 23 children and 13 women, and 5 deaths due to torture recorded in April 2025 in Syria, 2 May 2025.*
- *At least 89 arbitrary arrests recorded in Syria in April 2025, 3 May 2025.*
- *A woman and her daughter were killed, while another daughter was wounded after being shot by unknown gunmen in Wadi al-Thahab neighborhood in Homs city on May 4, 2025, 6 May 2025.*
- *Statement: Condemnation of the detention of the civilian Firas al Mohammad and his child Bashar by Israeli forces during the incursion on the village of Seyda al Hanout in Quneitra suburbs on May 10, 2025, 12 May 2025.*

Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR)

- *Deir Ezzor. Iranian militias seize properties of displaced people in Al-Bokamal city, 28 August 2024.*
- *For dealing with former Autonomous Administration. Civilians returning to their villages in Afrin arbitrary arrested, 27 November 2024.*
- *After capturing strategic positions around Hama city. HTS takes control of Salamiyah city without fighting, 5 December 2024.*
- *After paying 10,000 USDs for his release. Young man killed inside prison of "National Army" in Aleppo, 5 January 2025.*
- *New massacre. Gunmen kill five Shiite civilians in Homs countryside, 12 January 2025.*
- *Death toll update. 16 people executed including officers of former regime in Fahil massacre, 27 January 2025.*
- *Homs. Three detainees killed in prisons of Military Operations Administration, 28 January 2025.*
- *Arrested during security campaigns. Four civilians killed in prisons in Homs countryside, 29 January 2025.*
- *Arrested during security operation. Former engineer colonel dies and his body handed to hospital in Homs, 2 February 2025.*
- *Following his arrest. Young man dies in a prison in Homs, 4 February 2025.*
- *SOHR condemns. Former director of Syrian News Agency kidnapped in Damascus, 12 February 2025.*
- *A week after having been kidnapped. Former director of Syrian News Agency released in Damascus, 15 February 2025.*
- *Assaults on shrines of minorities. Security forces open fire to disperse protesters in Misyaf, 27 February 2025.*
- *Following clashes. Two people killed and ten injured in a village in Tartous, 28 February 2025.*
- *After death of two young men. Violent clashes erupt between gunmen and Internal Security Forces in Tartous, 28 February 2025.*
- *Surprise attack. ISIS cells attack SDF checkpoint in Al-Raqqah countryside, 10 March 2025.*
- *Efforts to obliterate evidence of mass genocide. SOHR condemns prevention of foreign journalists from entering Syrian coastline, 14 March 2025.*

- *As more massacres documented. The number of people killed during security operations in Syrian coastline exceeds 2,000, 17 March 2025.*
- *Disguised as "members of General Security". Unidentified gunmen storm Al-Ra'ay Prison and release some prisoners, 21 March 2025.*
- *Second patch after rebellion in Adra prison. Authorities in Damascus release 16 detainees at eve of Eid Al-Fitr, 30 March 2025.*
- *Endured torture, humiliation and sectarian discrimination. General security service releases 21 members of party operating in Al-Suweidaa, 6 April 2025.*
- *Ongoing violations. "Revolutionary Youth" continues to recruit children in north-eastern Syria and SOHR calls for "Autonomous Administration to intervene, 9 April 2025.*
- *Absence of law deterrence. 50 Alawite women missing since beginning of 2025, 18 April 2025.*
- *Including officers of different ranks. 28 former military officers released from Adra Prison in Rif Dimashq, 20 April 2025.*
- *Accused of "collaborating with former regime". 6 people executed by gunmen in Aleppo, 22 April 2025.*
- *Amid absence of accountability. 49 people executed in different areas across Syria in ten days, 11 May 2025.*

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ)

- *STJ submits report to Damascus governorate on cases of home seizures and arbitrary evictions of homeowners in Harasta, 27 February 2025.*
- *Syria: Alternative committees for property and personal status disputes: Response to power vacuum or judiciary marginalization?, 4 April 2025.*
- *Syria/Afrin: Promises by transitional authorities to restore rights and end violations against Kurds, 11 April 2025.*
- *STJ submits report on cases of home seizures and arbitrary evictions of homeowners in Muadamiyat al-Sham in Damascus countryside, 18 April 2025.*
- *"We will kill you wherever you go": Violations committed during SNA-led operation Dawn of Freedom, 9 May 2025.*
- *Mass dismissals in Syria after the regime's fall, 13 May 2025.*

Talhamy, Yvette

- *The Alevīs and 'Alawīs, in: Muhammad Afzal Upal & Carole M. Cusack (red.), Handbook of Islamic sects and movements, Leiden, Brill, 2021, pp. 279-304.*

The Atlantic

- *Can one man hold Syria together?, 24 March 2025.*

The Century Foundation

- *Will sectarian massacres derail Syria's transition?, 11 March 2025.*
- *Damascus dispatch: Fear and hope in a divided Syria, 17 March 2025.*
- *Cross-Border Shuffle: Refugee Movement between Lebanon and Syria after Assad, 31 March 2025.*

The Conversation

- *'Lebanon wanted us gone... it was a risk to leave' – Syrian refugees who fled Israeli bombs face hostility and uncertainty on return, 5 December 2024.*
- *Why Syria's reconstruction may depend on the fate of its minorities, 18 December 2024.*

- *Why Kurds face an uncertain future in Ahmed Al-Shara's rebel-led Syria*, 20 January 2025.
- *Who are Ismaili Muslims and how do their beliefs relate to the Aga Khan's work?*, 17 February 2025.
- *Syria: doubts increase over new regime's commitment to women's rights and inclusivity*, 20 February 2025.
- *Syria after Assad: why many Syrian refugees aren't returning home*, 24 March 2025.

The Economist

- *Everyone wants to meet Syria's new rulers*, 19 December 2024.
- *An interview with Ahmed al-Sharaa, Syria's president*, 3 February 2025.
- *Homs's troubles show the challenges facing Syria's leaders*, 13 February 2025.
- *Syria's economy, still strangled by sanctions, is on its knees*, 6 March 2025.
- *The warlords of Syria have a daunting to-do list*, 25 April 2025.

The Halo Trust

- *Syria landmine crisis spirals as millions begin to return home*, 3 February 2025.
- *One million returning Syrians at risk from unexploded bombs*, 7 March 2025.

The New Humanitarian

- *Syria faces huge humanitarian challenges as it begins post-Assad era*, 9 December 2024.
- *Syrians begin to return to destroyed homes. Will others follow?*, 19 December 2024.
- *US aid freezes escalate Syria's crisis*, 17 February 2025.
- *A cautious return to a Damascus neighbourhood marred by Syria's war*, 10 April 2025.

The Syria Report

- *Sectarian tensions force out some residents in government housing*, 14 January 2025.
- *Explained: Recovering extorted properties amid fraud and other challenges*, 20 January 2025.
- *Government suspends all transactions over real estate property*, 3 February 2025.
- *Military housing in Damascus after the fall of Assad: Violations and legal ambiguity*, 4 February 2025.
- *Destruction, poor services and lack of a reconstruction plan hinder the return to Darayya*, 11 February 2025.
- *Syrian business elite in the UAE meets Shibani to discuss Syria's future*, 18 February 2025.
- *Return of refugees and IDPs fraught with challenges*, 25 February 2025.
- *Uyghur armed faction seizes chalets in Ras Shamra in Lattakia*, 4 March 2025.
- *Contradictory legal measures push real estate market into gridlock*, 11 March 2025.
- *Systematic looting, burning and bulldozing of property on the Syrian coast*, 18 March 2025.
- *Properties of former regime officials seized in Rural Damascus*, 1 April 2025.
- *Explained: Preventing the execution of real estate sale judgements*, 8 April 2025.

- *Public sector workers reinstated amid government policy chaos*, 22 April 2025.
- *Real estate services in Daraa paralysed after fall of Assad*, 22 April 2025.
- *Tensions in Druze areas highlight challenges of Syrian political transition*, 6 May 2025.
- *Analysis: US sanctions lifting to change Syria's economic and political trajectory*, 14 May 2025.

The Syrian American Medical Society (SAMS)

- *Syria's health sector. Challenges and intervention priorities*, 3 April 2025.

The Washington Institute (TWI)

- *The status of Syria's transition after two months*, 12 February 2025.
- *Inside the new Syria: The first three months*, 7 March 2025.

This Week in Northern Syria

- *Update: Syrian caretaker government links*, 5 March 2025.
- *This Week in Northern Syria [10A.2025]*, 14 March 2025.
- *This Week in Northern Syria [10B.2025]*, 14 March 2025.
- *This Week in Northern Syria [15.2025]*, 17 April 2025.
- *This Week in Northern Syria [18.2025]*, 8 May 2025.
- *This Week in Northern Syria [20.2025]*, 22 May 2025.

UN News

- *Syria: UN health agency launches \$56.4 million appeal to meet critical needs*, 24 December 2024.
- *Deadly attacks in eastern Aleppo highlight Syria's vulnerability*, 4 February 2025.
- *Syria: Mine casualties persist as UN partners scale up clearance operations*, 17 February 2025.
- *Syria: Children among the dead amid reports of mass killings and looting*, 10 March 2025.
- *Funding shortages risk undermining a 'watershed moment' for Syria*, 17 March 2025.
- *Syria's humanitarian crisis: 16.5 million in need amid continuing conflict*, 20 March 2025.
- *Syria: UN envoy warns of escalating violence in Syria*, 30 April 2025.
- *Syrians heading home find few of the basics needed to survive*, 19 May 2025.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

- *Gender justice & the law in the Arab States region*, 10 December 2018.
- *The impact of the conflict in Syria*, 20 February 2025.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

- *Regional flash update #6. Syria situation crisis*, 24 December 2024.
- *Regional flash update #8. Syria situation crisis*, 2 January 2025.
- *UNHCR Jordan – Frequently asked questions on return to Syria. Update #4*, 9 January 2025.
- *Regional flash update #9. Syria situation crisis*, 10 January 2025.
- *Regional flash update #11. Syria situation crisis*, 23 January 2025.
- *Flash regional survey on Syrian refugees' perceptions and intentions on return to Syria*, 6 February 2025.
- *Regional flash update #14. Syria situation crisis*, 13 February 2025.

- *Regional flash update #17. Syria situation crisis, 7 March 2025.*
- *Repatriation explained: why Syrian refugees are voluntarily returning, 12 March 2025.*
- *Syrian Arab Republic. Syria governorates of return overview as of 13 March 2025, 16 March 2025.*
- *Statement by UNHCR's Filippo Grandi on the impact of global aid cuts on refugees, 20 March 2025.*
- *As displaced Syrians return home, others wait and hope for more aid, 21 March 2025.*
- *Syrian Arab Republic. Syria governorates of return overview as of 20 March 2025, 23 March 2025.*
- *Returning home to Syria: Four stories of hope for Syrian refugees, 26 March 2025.*
- *Türkiye operational updates, April 2025.*
- *Syrian Arab Republic. Syria governorates of return overview as of 27 March 2025, 3 April 2025.*
- *Voluntary returns of Syrian refugees and IDPs. Three-month impact report. January-March 2025, 11 April 2025.*
- *UNHCR: Needs intensify as 400,000 Syrians return, 11 April 2025.*
- *Lebanon flash update. New arrivals to North Lebanon, 16 April 2025.*
- *Rebuilding home: Salih's path back to Syria, 16 April 2025.*
- *Regional flash update #23. Syria situation crisis, 17 April 2025.*
- *Regional flash update #24. Syria situation crisis, 25 April 2025.*
- *Regional flash update #25. Syria situation crisis, 1 May 2025.*
- *Regional flash update #26. Syria situation crisis, 9 May 2025.*
- *Lebanon flash update. New arrivals to North Lebanon, 15 May 2025.*
- *Syrian Arab Republic. Syria governorates IDPs and IDP returnees overview (As of 15 May 2025), 15 May 2025.*
- *Regional flash update #27. Syria situation crisis, 16 May 2025.*

United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC)

- *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64), 9 February 2024.*
- *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86), 12 August 2024.*
- *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/58/66), 14 March 2025.*
- *Statement by Paulo Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic at the 58th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, 18 March 2025.*

United Nations International Children's Emergence Fund (UNICEF)

- *Every day counts. Children of Syria cannot wait any longer, May 2022.*
- *Syria flash update No.1 (Violence in the coastal areas), 21 March 2025.*
- *As Syria's children step out of the shadows of war, securing their future is more critical than ever, 25 March 2025.*

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA)

- *Syrian Arab Republic: Flash update No. 4 on the recent developments in Syria (As of 10 December 2024), 10 December 2024.*
- *Lebanon: Flash update #56. Escalation of hostilities in Lebanon as of 23 January 2025, 24 January 2025.*
- *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian response priorities - January to March 2025 (January 2025), 28 January 2025.*

- *Humanitarian situation report No. 1 (As of 12 February 2025)*, 12 February 2025.
- *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report No. 2. As of 27 February 2025*, 27 February 2025.
- *At Security Council, UN Relief Chief urges "decisive action" to support people of Syria*, 25 March 2025.
- *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report no. 4. As of 26 March 2025*, 27 March 2025.
- *Today's top news: Myanmar, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Ukraine, Colombia*, 4 April 2025.
- *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian situation report no. 5. As of 28 April 2025*, 8 May 2025.

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR)

- *Brutality of past years must not be repeated, or Syria will be driven onto a new trajectory of atrocities, warns UN Commission*, 3 December 2024.
- *Syria: Distressing scale of violence in coastal areas*, 11 March 2025.
- *UN Syria Commission: Fresh clashes and Israeli intervention threaten fragile peace*, 2 May 2025.

United Nations Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria (UN OSES)

- *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 March 2025.
- *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 25 April 2025.
- *Statement by the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr. Geir O. Pedersen*, 30 April 2025.
- *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 21 May 2025.

United Nations Office of the Spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General

- *Highlights of the noon briefing by Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesperson for Secretary-General António Guterres*, 19 December 2024.

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

- *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2025*, 9 December 2024.
- *Over 600,000 Palestine refugees in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan in need of humanitarian assistance*, 20 January 2025.
- *UNRWA in Syria: Factsheet*, 13 March 2025.
- *Statement: UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini at the Brussels Conference on Syria*, 18 March 2025.

United States Central Command (U.S. Central Command)

- *U.S. Central Command conducts dozens of airstrikes to eliminate ISIS camps in central Syria*, 8 December 2025.
- *CENTCOM and partner forces conduct operations in Iraq and Syria to defeat ISIS*, 6 January 2025.

Verify-sy

- *Is the Syrian Ministry of Information's official account still controlled by the former regime?*, 21 December 2024.

- *Updated: Statement from shrine leaders clarifies the incident at Al-Khasibi shrine in Aleppo, 25 December 2024.*

War on the Rocks

- *The patient efforts behind Hayat Tahrir al-Sham's success in Aleppo, 3 December 2024.*

World Bank Group

- *Fact Sheet: An adjustment to global poverty lines, September 2022.*
- *Syria. Joint damage assessment of selected cities, December 2022.*

Worldcrunch

- *As Syria faces new divides, LGBTQ+ hate remains the most reliable consensus, 22 February 2025.*
- *Regimes may change in Syria – The scourge of honor killings persists, 17 April 2025.*

10.3

Websites

- AJet, www.ajet.com
- Al-Akhbar English, www.en.al-akhbar.com
- Amnesty International, www.amnesty.org
- Anglican Aid, www.anglicanaid.org.au
- Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), www.acleddata.com
- Statistics Netherlands (CBS), www.cbs.nl
- Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), www.cia.gov
- CSW, www.csw.org.uk
- Repatriation and Departure Service (RDS), <https://english.dienstterugkeerenvertrek.nl/>
- Flightradar24, www.flightradar24.com
- Forbes, www.forbes.com
- Guardians of Equality Movement (GEM), www.guardiansgem.org
- Human Dignity Trust, www.humandignitytrust.org
- Instagram, www.instagram.com
- IOM in the Netherlands, www.iom-nederland.nl/en/
- Metro, www.metro.co.uk
- Minority Rights Group, www.minorityrights.org
- Open Doors, www.opendoors.org
- Orient XXI, www.orientxxi.info
- President of Migration Management (PMM), www.en.oc.gov.tr
- Simerg, www.simerg.com
- Solid Road, www.solidroad.nl
- Syria is Home, www.syriaishome.org
- Syria Times, www.syriatimes.sy
- Syrian Guides, www.syrianguides.com
- Tesa World, www.tesaaworld.com
- The Conversation, www.theconversation.com
- The White Helmets, www.whitehelmets.org
- This is Beirut, www.thisisbeirut.com.lb
- UN Habitat, www.unhabitat.org
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), www.unhcr.org
- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), www.unicef.org

- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), www.unocha.org
- United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), www.unrwa.org
- World Food Programme (WFP), www.wfp.org
- World Population Review, www.worldpopulationreview.com
- X.com, www.x.com
- YOUR EX, www.gayexpress.co.nz
- YouTube, www.youtube.com

10.4 News sources

- ABC News
- Agence France-Presse (AFP)
- Al Arabiya
- Al Jazeera
- Al-Jumhuriya
- Algemeen Dagblad (AD)
- Anadolu Agency (AA)
- Arab News
- Asharq al-Awsat
- Associated Press News (AP News)
- Baptist Standard
- Bianet
- British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News)
- British Broadcasting Corporation Monitoring (BBC Monitoring)
- Cable News Network (CNN)
- CTV News
- Daily Sabah
- De Standaard
- De Volkskrant
- Der Spiegel
- Deutsche Welle (DW)
- Die Tageszeitung (TAZ)
- Doha News
- Enab Baladi
- Euractiv
- Euronews
- France 24
- Gulf News
- Haaretz
- Het Laatste Nieuws (HLN)
- Het Parool
- Khaama Press
- Kurdistan24
- Le Monde
- Levant 24
- L'Orient Today
- Los Angeles Times
- Dutch Broadcasting Foundation (NOS)
- Newsweek
- Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant (NRC)
- PBS News

- Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)
- Radio Télévision Luxembourg (RTL)
- Reuters
- Rudaw
- Shafaq News
- Syriac Press
- Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA)
- The Armenian Mirror-Spectator
- The Catholic Herald
- The Financial Times (FT)
- The Guardian
- The Independent
- The Irish Times
- The Jordan Times
- The National
- The New Arab
- The New York Times
- The Syrian Observer
- The Times
- The Times of Israel
- The Wall Street Journal (WSJ)
- The Washington Post
- Trouw
- TRT World
- Vlaamse Radio- and Televisieomroeporganisatie (VRT)
- Voice of America (VOA)
- Zaman al-Wasl
- ZDF

10.5 Map of Syria with provinces and capitals



Source: Atlas Mapmakers

The boundaries and place names on this map and the designations used should not be construed as an endorsement or acceptance thereof by the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

10.6 Overview of violent incidents recorded by ACLED

The table below contains data collected by ACLED during the current and previous reporting periods. ACLED usually relies on public, secondary reporting. A 'battle' is an armed encounter between two warring parties. 'Explosions/remote violence' refers to incidents in which one of the parties uses a type of weapon that is deployed remotely and is highly destructive by nature. This could include the use of artillery and grenade shelling, missile and drone attacks, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). 'Violence against civilians' refers to the deliberate use of force by an armed group against unarmed civilians. Given that ACLED relies primarily on secondary reporting, there may be underreporting, particularly in less densely populated or less accessible areas. ACLED also records the number of fatalities recorded for the various types of incidents. Because ACLED does not distinguish between killed combatants and killed civilians in these counts, these data are not included here. With regard to registered civilian deaths, please refer to the table in 10.7. Furthermore, based on the data included below, no concrete distinction can be made between the number of incidents of random violence and the number of incidents of targeted violence. This is because incidents of violence are not recorded according to that distinction.

The data from ACLED are included here to show a trend over a longer period of time.

Figures provided by ACLED registered incidents of violence ¹⁴⁶⁹								
Province	2023		2024				2025	
	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2 ¹⁴⁷⁰
Aleppo	740	785	750	720	783	1,171	674	58
Battles	208	91	93	97	155	276	144	14
Explosions/Remote violence	380	590	524	477	501	749	447	15
Violence against civilians	152	104	133	146	127	146	83	29
Damascus	8	8	8	8	5	34	22	8
Battles	1	0	4	0	1	2	6	2
Explosions/Remote violence	4	4	4	5	3	22	2	1
Violence against civilians	3	4	0	3	1	10	14	5
Daraa	187	169	149	201	182	187	102	48
Battles	60	37	51	68	67	60	22	15
Explosions/Remote violence	44	49	48	42	27	67	40	16
Violence against civilians	83	83	50	91	88	60	40	17
Deir ez-Zor	495	560	607	437	477	501	285	99
Battles	320	279	309	240	252	183	111	29
Explosions/Remote violence	62	165	220	82	134	248	64	37
Violence against civilians	113	116	78	115	91	70	110	33
Hama	139	158	131	111	117	256	85	31
Battles	14	19	28	11	16	89	10	3
Explosions/Remote violence	121	136	101	98	99	144	8	13
Violence against civilians	4	3	2	2	2	23	67	15
Hasaka	274	401	206	173	145	251	278	33

¹⁴⁶⁹ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [url](#), consulted on 1 May 2025. Selected criteria: From: 01/07/2023; To: 31/03/2025 | *Event type*: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | *Country*: Syria.

¹⁴⁷⁰ This column includes data up to and including 30 April 2025: ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [url](#), consulted on 12 May 2025. Selected criteria: From: 01/04/2025; To: 30/04/2025 | *Event type*: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | *Country*: Syria.

Battles	70	42	36	44	35	52	37	5
Explosions/Remote violence	130	277	107	49	51	143	152	3
Violence against civilians	74	82	63	80	59	56	89	25
Homs	41	59	138	98	99	215	184	63
Battles	21	31	76	50	20	58	36	5
Explosions/Remote violence	16	17	44	37	57	124	33	13
Violence against civilians	4	11	18	11	22	33	115	45
Idlib	501	920	500	363	483	544	45	25
Battles	67	98	60	47	49	49	7	1
Explosions/Remote violence	394	807	418	282	408	478	27	19
Violence against civilians	40	15	22	34	26	17	11	5
Latakia	79	135	88	61	118	109	150	23
Battles	32	47	40	22	30	23	39	5
Explosions/Remote violence	46	88	47	39	88	79	18	3
Violence against civilians	1	0	1	0	0	7	93	15
Quneitra	5	93	179	224	234	139	16	7
Battles	1	3	5	7	3	2	1	1
Explosions/Remote violence	4	89	172	214	226	130	8	3
Violence against civilians	0	1	2	3	5	7	7	3
Raqqa	176	149	147	127	220	197	267	29
Battles	44	30	42	28	50	45	38	4
Explosions/Remote violence	97	88	85	67	82	98	143	8
Violence against civilians	35	31	20	32	88	54	86	17
Rural Damascus	50	81	53	38	59	78	79	18
Battles	13	11	11	12	12	9	22	3
Explosions/Remote violence	23	35	25	9	24	49	15	8
Violence against civilians	14	35	17	17	23	20	42	7
Suweida	41	31	27	27	25	44	30	13
Battles	15	6	6	12	12	12	7	2
Explosions/Remote violence	8	13	11	8	5	17	10	5
Violence against civilians	18	12	10	7	8	15	13	6
Tartous	5	0	2	1	6	20	94	7
Battles	0	0	1	0	0	3	17	1
Explosions/Remote violence	4	0	1	1	1	12	9	1
Violence against civilians	1	0	0	0	5	5	68	5
Total	2,741	3,549	2,985	2,589	2,953	3,746	2,311	462

10.7 Overview of civilian deaths recorded by the SNHR

The table below contains data collected by the SNHR during the current and previous reporting periods. The SNHR records civilian deaths resulting from actions committed by the warring parties in the context of the armed conflict. The organisation bases its work on both public sources and an extensive network in Syria. The SNHR notes that, given the exceptional difficulties and the scale of the violations in Syria, its reports reflect only the bare minimum of the violations that have actually taken place. The actual number of civilian deaths is therefore higher.¹⁴⁷¹ Furthermore, based on the data included below, no concrete distinction can be made between the number of deaths that occurred due to random violence or targeted violence. This is because victims are not registered according to that distinction.

Data from the SNHR are included here to show a trend over a longer period of time.

Province	Figures provided by the SNHR registered civilian deaths ¹⁴⁷²							
	2023		2024				2025	
	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2 ¹⁴⁷³
Aleppo	47	47	29	28	25	253	164	21
Damascus	0	4	0	3	1	16	3	2
Daraa	53	44	49	64	51	67	58	32
Deir ez-Zor	43	47	50	28	36	31	79	12
Hama	5	10	8	4	7	75	228	15
Hasaka	10	0	2	4	2	20	6	1
Homs	4	63	20	13	2	43	93	47
Idlib	22	85	15	22	20	108	58	21
Latakia	1	2	0	1	0	7	592	9
Quneitra	5	0	1	0	12	1	1	0
Raqqa	1	7	55	2	4	21	15	4
Rural Damascus	15	3	4	1	8	10	20	1
Suweida	1	12	19	7	4	11	15	1
Tartous	0	0	0	0	0	0	349	8
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	339 ¹⁴⁷⁴	0
Total	207	324	252	177	172	663	2,020	174

¹⁴⁷¹ SNHR, *1,264 civilian deaths, including 242 children and 118 women, as well as 86 deaths due to torture, documented in Syria in 2024*, 2 January 2025, [url](#); SNHR, *Syrian Network for Human Rights working methodology*, [url](#), consulted on 1 May 2025.

¹⁴⁷² Data obtained from the overviews by province, as published in the monthly reports of the SNHR: SNHR, *Monthly reports (civilian deaths)*, available on the SNHR website ([url](#)).

¹⁴⁷³ This column includes data up to and including 30 April 2025.

¹⁴⁷⁴ This concerns victims from the Syrian coastal provinces who were killed in unknown locations; SNHR, *Monthly report (civilian deaths)*, 9 April 2025, p. 9, [url](#).

