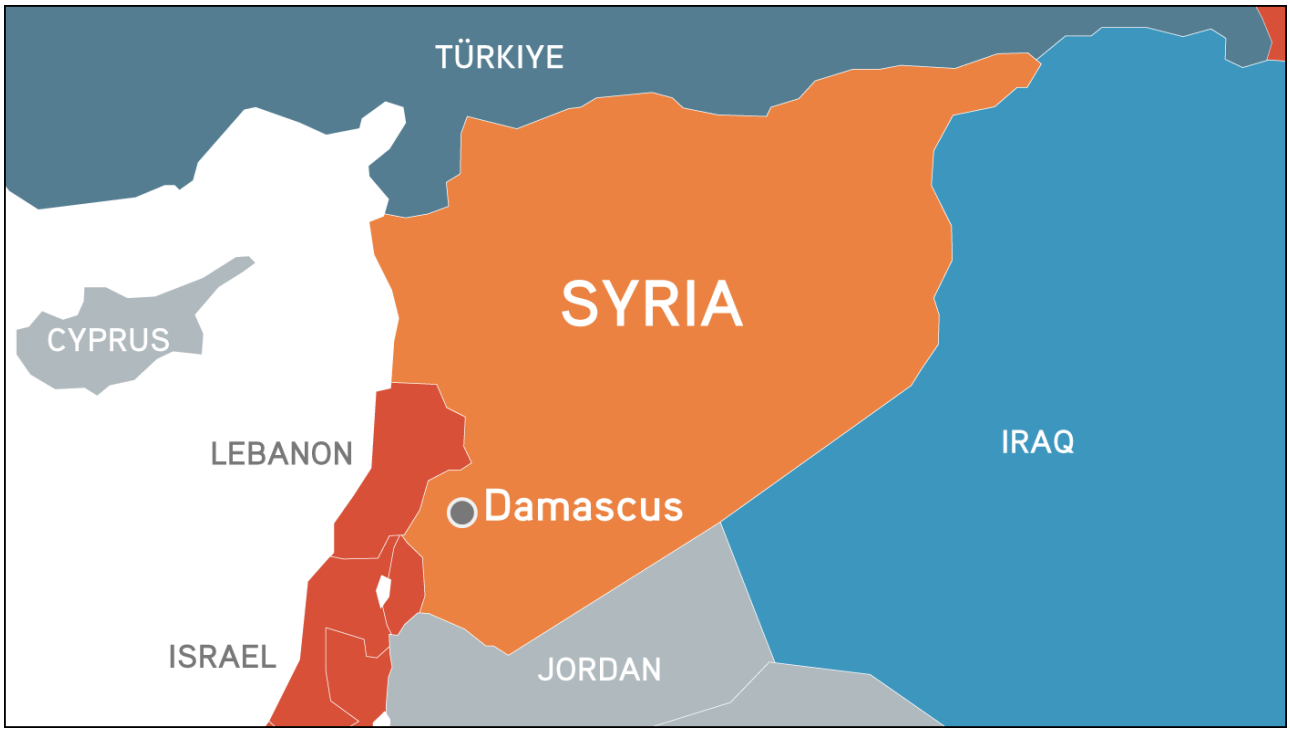
Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	**2281**
Land:	Syrien
Kilde:	Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P)
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International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect



Risk Level: Imminent Risk

Populations in Syria remain at risk of war crimes amid intermittent hostilities and a fragile political and security environment since the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's government.

BACKGROUND:

On 8 December 2024 the government of President Bashar al-Assad was overthrown by a coalition of armed opposition groups, led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), following a 12-day offensive. Assad's government collapsed after nearly 14 years of an internationalized country-wide armed conflict between the government and opposition groups, characterized by rampant atrocity crimes. More than 580,000 people were killed and 13 million Syrians forcibly displaced, according to the UN Human Rights Council-mandated Commission of Inquiry (CoI) on Syria. Over one million Syrian refugees have returned to the country since December 2024, according to the UN Refugee Agency.

The conflict has its origins in the Assad government's brutal suppression of pro-democracy protests in March 2011. Throughout the armed conflict, the Assad government systematically perpetrated extermination, murder, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, torture and ill-treatment and sexual violence, amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity, according to the CoI. Armed groups, including HTS, the Syrian

National Army, Turkish-backed groups and the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), were also implicated in atrocity crimes, such as torture, ill-treatment, systematic looting and arbitrary detention. Both the Assad government and ISIL used chemical weapons, though most attacks were attributed to the government.

The CoI reported over 130,000 arbitrary detentions, abductions or disappearances, with the majority attributable to the Assad government. Following the collapse of the Assad government, HTS and other groups forced open many state-run detention and prison facilities, including the notorious Sednaya prison. Dozens of mass graves have been discovered.

Despite the overthrow of Assad, intermittent hostilities have persisted between the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and transitional government security forces in northeast Syria, as well as between Druze, Bedouin and other armed groups in southern Syria. In early March 2025 clashes erupted after armed groups loyal to Assad ambushed transitional government forces during a so-called "security campaign." More than 1,000 people – mostly from the Alawite minority, to which the Assad family belonged – were killed. Sectarian violence continued, with dozens of members of the Druze community killed in southern Damascus in late April and scores of casualties following a suicide bombing at a church in Damascus in June 2025. A March 2026 report by the CoI documented widespread violations carried out by government forces, Assad loyalists and Druze armed groups, as well as private individuals, including executions, torture and gender-based violence, which may amount to war crimes.

Since December 2024 Syria's transitional authorities have taken steps to dissolve remnants of Assad's government. These include hosting a National Dialogue Conference, adopting a Constitutional Declaration to guide a five-year transition period, appointing a new transitional government led by interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa and conducting parliamentary elections. In May 2025 Syria's transitional authorities announced the establishment of a Transitional Justice Commission and a National Commission for the Missing.

Despite limited action by the UN Security Council (UNSC) to hold perpetrators accountable during the conflict, several processes were initiated to pursue truth, justice and accountability for Syrians. In December 2016 the UN General Assembly (UNGA) established an International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to assist in the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators of atrocities in Syria. Several countries have initiated proceedings or convicted suspected Syrian perpetrators under universal jurisdiction. In June 2023 the UNGA established the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria to clarify the fate and whereabouts of all missing persons and provide support to victims, survivors and their families. That same month, Canada and the Netherlands jointly initiated proceedings against Syria before the International Court of Justice concerning alleged violations of the Convention against Torture.

Since the fall of the Assad government, the United States (US) and European Union have lifted major sanctions on Syria, while the UNSC lifted terror-related sanctions on Syria's interim president and interior minister, as well as on HTS.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS:

In January 2026 clashes erupted in Aleppo between transitional government forces and the SDF, displacing over 1,200 people. The fighting followed stalled talks after a missed deadline to implement an agreement on a nationwide ceasefire and the integration of the SDF into Syria's army. After reaching a US-mediated ceasefire, interim President al-Sharaa issued a decree recognizing Kurdish rights and restoring citizenship. This was followed by a new nationwide ceasefire that transferred control of several Kurdish-held provinces to the interim authorities and reaffirmed plans for SDF integration. The ceasefire deal is holding between the interim Syrian government and SDF as the integration process progresses.

Syrian transitional government forces subsequently claimed control over key ISIL detention sites in the northeast, abruptly closing and evacuating al-Hol camp and other facilities by late February. Many detainees have received little support from Syrian authorities and their countries of citizenship, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Efforts to hold Assad-era officials accountable have progressed. On 26 April the first domestic criminal proceedings against former officials began, including on charges of torture, killing and extortion, as well as "crimes against the Syrian people" more broadly.

Interim President al-Sharaa appointed the final third of Syria's People's Assembly members on 1 July, with the inaugural session of the transitional body taking place on 12 July.

In the first week of July, two separate bomb attacks targeted Damascus, injuring dozens of people and killing over 10. Authorities have increased security amid an investigation into the perpetrators.

ANALYSIS:

While the closure of key ISIL detention sites has brought an end to the confinement of thousands of detainees – mainly women and children – previously held in conditions that the CoI said may amount to war crimes, the chaotic implementation process has raised serious protection concerns.

Although the government has made progress in the political transition, including institutional reform and establishing national bodies to search for the missing and advance transitional justice, concerns remain about the overall direction of the country. Sweeping presidential powers, limited political pluralism and ongoing sectarian violence could undermine an inclusive and durable transition and heighten the risk of renewed abuses.

The transitional justice authority's mandate has limited accountability for victims of the Assad government and has conducted limited consultations with Syrian civil society. Domestic trials mark an important step toward justice; however, core international crimes have yet to be codified in domestic legislation, limiting prosecutions to ordinary criminal offenses rather than large-scale atrocity crimes.

RISK ASSESSMENT:

- Legacy of war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by all parties to the conflict, particularly the former government.
- Entrenched impunity for perpetrators of atrocity crimes.
- Insecurity due to ongoing hostilities in northeast Syria and attacks against minorities.
- Weak institutions and economic devastation.
- Fragile political and security conditions following an abrupt change in political power.

NECESSARY ACTION:

The international community should support the transitional government in ensuring a transparent, diverse and inclusive political process, while also continuing to monitor the human rights situation. Syrian authorities must ensure due process for any detainees with alleged affiliations to ISIL and provide services and protections pending repatriation. Efforts to build national unity must be grounded in Syria's political, ethnic and religious diversity, including protective provisions in the drafting of the permanent constitution. Executive power afforded to the interim president must not be abused, nor exceed the transitional period.

All parties to hostilities must uphold their obligations under International Humanitarian Law and adhere to current ceasefire agreements. The authorities must take decisive measures to curtail hate speech and dis-/mis-information campaigns. They must also prioritize the protection of all Syrians and uphold guarantees of non-recurrence, including through ensuring that interim security forces receive training in international human rights standards and are held accountable for violations. The return of refugees and other displaced Syrians must be in accordance with the principle of non-refoulement.

Syria should ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, pursue justice and accountability, ensure the implementation of a comprehensive and holistic transitional justice process and maintain cooperation with all UN-mandated investigative mechanisms. The Transitional Justice Commission must ensure ongoing consultation with and inclusion of civil society organizations, while also expanding the scope of prosecutable crimes to include those committed by all perpetrators, not only the Assad government. Justice and accountability must be pursued for victims of serious crimes, regardless of the perpetrator. This includes holding HTS accountable for crimes committed during the conflict.

For more on the Global Centre's advocacy work on the situation in Syria, see our Syria country advocacy page.