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World Report 2025 - Syria

The government of Bashar al-Assad was overthrown on December 8, 2024, by a coalition of armed opposition groups, marking an end to over 50 years of Baath Party rule in Syria. As the opposition groups seized cities, they freed prisoners across Syrian prisons and detention centers, and local and international journalists visited former detentions sites and locations of mass graves and other atrocities, providing a new opportunity for accountability.

Non-state armed groups in Syria, including Hay'et Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and factions of the Syrian National Army (SNA), who initiated the offensive on November 27 that overthrew the Syrian government after a 12-day offensive, were also responsible for human rights abuses and war crimes.

Throughout 2024, Syrians endured abuses and hardship due to the ongoing conflict, worsened economic conditions, and general insecurity. Russia and Iran continued to provide military and financial support to the Syrian government until its collapse, while the United States back the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northeast Syria and Türkiye support the Syrian National Army (SNA). Israel conducted airstrikes on Syria throughout 2024, and after December 8, launched strikes that decimated Syrian military infrastructure across the country and extended its military occupation of Syrian territory along the southern slope of Mount Hermon.

Although conditions inside Syria remain unfit for safe and dignified returns of Syrian refugees living abroad, refugee hosting countries Türkiye and Lebanon summarily deported thousands of Syrians back to Syria, and the narrative of Syrian refugee returns intensified across European countries, many of whom paused processing Syrian asylum claims after December 8.

Prior to its collapse, the former Syrian government did not halt abuses or ensure accountability despite an order by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to prevent state-sponsored torture. Some accountability efforts continued outside Syria with war crimes and crimes against humanity convictions in European courts.

Government-Held Areas (Central, West, and Southern Syria) Prior to December 8

Before the Assad government was overthrown on December 8, Syrian security forces and government-affiliated armed groups continued to arbitrarily detain, disappear, and mistreat civilians. Abuses often targeted those perceived to oppose the government or linked to former opposition-held areas, with little regard for legal process. The former authorities also continued to [unlawfully confiscate property](#) and restrict access to areas of origin for returning Syrians. Since early 2024, the former Ministry of Finance imposed [unlawful asset freezes](#) on hundreds of people and their families from a previously opposition-held town south of Damascus, a measure that constituted collective punishment.

The September 2024 UN Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Syria report documented ongoing violations, with little accountability for perpetrators. Arbitrary arrests, particularly under the expanded cybercrime law of 2022, also remained a tool of repression, with at least two individuals arrested for social media posts and charged with “undermining the prestige of the State,” according to the COI.

Meanwhile, the [2023 abolition](#) of military field courts, long demanded by human rights advocates, did little to provide justice or transparency for the thousands sentenced without due process. Despite the dissolution of these courts, there was no concerted effort by the government to clarify the fate of the thousands of missing and disappeared.

In September, Bashar al-Assad issued [a general amnesty](#) for military deserters and those convicted of minor offenses, but the amnesty excluded detainees held for alleged political opposition. Previous amnesties similarly failed to address the ongoing detainee crisis, with tens of thousands still languishing in detention or missing.

In January 2024, Jordanian airstrikes on Sweida in southern Syria [killed 10 people](#), including two young girls, prompting calls for accountability and compensation for those harmed during these cross-border counter-smuggling operations.

Amid heightened regional tensions from hostilities in Gaza, [Israelescalated airstrikes](#) in Syria, including on fighters and military facilities of Iran and Hezbollah. Israeli strikes in Damascus, Homs, and Deir al-Zor hit densely populated residential areas, resulting in civilian casualties.

Northwest Syria

On November 27, the Islamist armed group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), alongside factions of the Türkiye-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), launched a new offensive in Syria from its base in Idlib province, overthrowing the Syrian government on December 8 after a 12-day military campaign.

In recent years northwest Syria has been home to more than 4.1 million people, at least half of whom were displaced at least once since the start of the conflict. Prior to the fall of the Assad government in December, people in these areas were effectively trapped, lacking resources to relocate, unable to seek asylum in Türkiye, and fearing government retaliation or persecution if they attempt to relocate to government-held areas.

In Idlib and western Aleppo, unlawful attacks by Syrian and Russian military forces [persisted](#) in 2024 and until the fall of the Assad government, killing civilians and damage critical civilian infrastructure.

In February, triggered by reports of torture by HTS, large protests erupted in Idlib demanding the release of detainees, governance and socioeconomic reforms, and the removal of HTS leader Abu Mohammad al-Joulani (also known as Ahmed al-Sharaa). The [COI's September report](#) documented the unlawful deprivation of liberty, torture and ill-treatment, executions, and death in detention by HTS.

Turkish-Occupied Northern Syria

In Turkish-occupied territories of northern Syria, factions of the SNA and the Military Police, a force established by the Türkiye-based Syrian Interim Government (SIG) to curb faction abuses, [subjected scores of people](#) to arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, torture and ill-treatment, sexual violence, and unfair military trials, all with impunity.

SNA factions [continued to violate](#) civilians' housing, land and property rights, including by forcefully seizing homes, lands, and businesses. And hundreds of thousands of Syrians who fled their homes during and after Türkiye's successive military operations into the region remained displaced and dispossessed.

In 2024, the SNA [signed](#) an action plan with the UN to prevent child recruitment.

Following the fall of the Assad government in December, the SNA with support from Türkiye launched a military campaign against the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northern Syria, expelling the SDF from areas of Aleppo governorate including Manbij, and at the time of writing, were threatening to seize additional territory. The fighting caused over 100,000 people, mostly Kurds, to flee to the northeast, where they faced [dire humanitarian conditions](#).

Northeast Syria

In 2024, [according to the COI's September report](#), the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) continued to detain political activists.

The SDF and affiliated groups [continued](#) recruiting children for military purposes, despite commitments to end the practice.

Unrest in eastern Deir al-Zor governorate [intensified](#), with the SDF conducting security raids that led to civilian casualties. [Turkish air strikes](#) targeted civilian facilities across the northwest, putting livelihoods at risk and severing communities from electricity, medical care, and other essential services.

The SDF and Asayish regional security forces continued to arbitrarily detain approximately 44,000 ISIS (Islamic State) suspects and their family members from Syria and nearly 60 other countries in degrading conditions in al-Hol and Roj camps. The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), the civil wing of the SDF, [passed a law](#) in July allowing for retrial of prisoners previously convicted under overly broad counterterrorism laws in flawed trials.

Israeli-Occupied Golan Heights

In 2024, Israel continued to violate the law of occupation in the Syrian Golan Heights, which it has occupied since 1967, blocking return of tens of thousands of Syrians who fled their homes to other parts of Syria at the time. A [2021 Israeli plan](#) to double the settler population in the Syrian Golan Heights by 2027 is ongoing. [According to the UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights in March](#), this expansion, coupled with [approved commercial activities to exploit natural resources](#), threatens to further restrict the Syrian population's access to land and water.

On July 27, amid regional tensions borne out of Israel's war on Gaza, a [rocket attack](#) on a football field in the village of Majdal Shams, the largest of four remaining Syrian Druze communities in the Golan Heights, killed 12 people, mostly children. Israel claimed that Hezbollah was responsible, but Hezbollah has denied that it conducted the attack.

In December 2024, Israeli forces seized additional territory along the southern slope of Mount Hermon with the stated goal of creating a "buffer zone." Israeli forces conducted numerous strikes targeting Syrian military equipment and infrastructure.

Economic Crisis and Obstacles to Humanitarian Aid

In 2024, over 90 percent of Syrians lived under the poverty line. Approximately [12.9 million people](#)—more than half of the population—struggled to access sufficient quality food, and at least [16.7 million Syrians](#) required humanitarian aid, marking a nine percent increase from the previous year. Yet, humanitarian funding for Syria plunged to its lowest levels in recent years.

More than 12 years of war have [decimated](#) Syria's civilian infrastructure and services, severely affecting access to shelter, health care, electricity, education, public transportation, water, and sanitation. People across the country faced hardship due to severe fuel shortages and rising food prices. The situation has been exacerbated in government-controlled areas by government [cuts to social security](#), often undertaken in an arbitrary manner.

Prior to its collapse in December, the Syrian government continued to impose severe restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid in government-held areas of Syria and elsewhere in the country and to divert aid to punish former opposition areas. A [lack of sufficient safeguards](#) in procurement practices by UN agencies providing aid in Syria has resulted in a serious risk of financing abusive entities.

[Complex and wide-ranging sanctions](#) imposed by the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and others on the Syrian government, officials, and related entities have hampered the principled and impartial delivery of humanitarian aid to communities in need and the rehabilitation of critical infrastructure, such as healthcare and sanitation facilities.

Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

Displacement remains one of the most dire and protracted consequences of the war. Since the start of the armed conflict in 2011, 12.3 million have been forced to flee the country, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), with 6.7 million currently internally displaced across the country.

After the fall of the Assad government in December 2024, many European countries announced that they were halting processing of Syrian asylum claims.

Against a backdrop of anti-refugee sentiment, Türkiye, which hosts nearly [3.3 million Syrian refugees](#), deported or otherwise pressured thousands to leave the country to northern Syria in 2024, including to Tel Abyad, a remote Turkish-occupied district where [lawlessness prevails](#) and humanitarian conditions are dire.

Syrian refugees trying to reach Europe from Lebanon have been [intercepted](#) and expelled back by the Lebanese and Cypriot authorities, with many forcibly returned to Syria by the Lebanese Army. Lebanon hosts over 1.5 million Syrian refugees.

[Iraqi](#) authorities in Baghdad and Erbil have also arbitrarily detained and [deported](#) Syrians to Damascus and to parts of northeast [Syria](#) under the control of Kurdish-led forces.

Women's and Girl's Rights

The conflict in Syria has exacerbated gender inequalities, exposing women and girls to increased violence, displacement, and discriminatory laws limiting their rights. Many women heads of households struggle to register their children's births, heightening the risk of statelessness and restricting access to education and health care.

International Accountability Efforts

Despite a 2023 ICJ [order](#) to stop state-sponsored torture, the Assad government showed no signs of halting its abusive practices or holding anyone accountable in 2024. The former government failed to notify families of detainee deaths, provide crucial information on the circumstances and causes of death, disclose burial sites, or return remains, with some families finding out years after the fact.

In May, French judges [convicted](#) three Syrian senior officials in absentia for crimes against humanity and war crimes of imprisonment, enforced disappearance, and torture of two dual Syrian-French citizens.

Universal jurisdiction efforts continued in 2024 with the indictment of [Rifaat al-Assad](#) in Switzerland for war crimes and crimes against humanity during the 1982 Hama massacre. In June, a French court [upheld](#) arrest warrants against Bashar al-Assad for his alleged complicity in war crimes and crimes against humanity in the 2013 Ghouta chemical weapons attack. The French Cassation Court has yet to rule on [their final validity](#), following a prosecutor's appeal relating to the application of the head of state immunity principle.

A new United Nations body tasked with investigating the fate of over one hundred thousand missing persons in Syria commenced its work in 2024.

