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|                                    |                                    |



# Syria

*Situation of Certain Groups*



Centre for Documentation  
and Counter Extremism

us.dk

This thematic COI report is not, and does not purport to be, a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed. It should thus be weighed against other country of origin information available on the topic.

The report at hand does not include any policy recommendations. The information does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

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The Danish Immigration Service  
Farimagsvej 51A  
4700 Næstved  
Denmark

Phone: +45 35 36 66 00  
us.dk

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## Executive summary

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Persons opposing or perceived as opposing the interim government include activists, human rights defenders, journalists, and citizens — including social media users — who criticise government actions or raise issues sensitive to the government. It also includes civil society actors working on human rights or governance. After the fall of the former government, freedom of expression in Syria briefly expanded but has since narrowed under the interim authorities. Criticism is tolerated to a degree, yet uncertainty about 'red lines' fuels fear and self-censorship, especially regarding political or religious issues. Arrests and harassment of activists, journalists, and online critics occur selectively, varying by region and background.

People linked to the former government — including soldiers, intelligence officers, and civil servants — have faced arrests, killings, kidnappings, and social exclusion, often driven by revenge or accusations of collaboration. The criteria for targeting remain unclear, with many detained on the basis of rumours or localised community disputes. Risk of persecution varies by rank, region, and background: high-ranking figures often avoid repercussions, while lower-level personnel are at increased risk of targeting. Despite formal reconciliation efforts, revenge attacks persist, especially in the coastal areas and Homs Governorate, while Aleppo Governorate remains relatively stable.

The Alawite community faces mistrust, violence, and marginalisation due to its association with the former government. Thousands have been killed, abducted, or displaced amid revenge attacks, property confiscations, and sectarian tensions since December 2024. Insecurity and discrimination persist, leaving many Alawites excluded from political and economic life, while growing fear, poverty, and violence continue to drive migration within and outside Syria.

The Druze have been subjected to severe violence, displacement, and discrimination. Clashes between the Druze and both government and tribal forces in 2025 resulted in thousands of deaths and an extensive siege, leaving Suweida in crisis. Although a ceasefire followed, violence and kidnappings against Druze civilians continue, and deep mistrust towards the authorities persists. The community remains fearful, marginalised, and largely unprotected.

Kurds in government-controlled areas generally do not face systematic discrimination or mistreatment. Long-established Kurdish communities in Damascus report no recent abuses. Kurds retain access to housing, services, and public employment. Authorities display increased tolerance towards Kurdish cultural expression. Isolated incidents — mainly affecting Kurds from northeast Syria travelling in government-controlled areas — include harassment at checkpoints, short-term detentions, and occasional mistreatment during periods of heightened tensions with the SDF.

Christians appear to face no barriers in accessing public services or public-sector employment. Although they continue to live openly as Christians, the Christian community experiences sporadic attacks. Conversion from Islam remains sensitive and often results in strong social stigma and, in some cases, threats or violence against converts. Expressing non-religious views is generally unsafe, and behaviour perceived as inappropriate or contrary to social norms can lead to harassment or violence.

Women in Syria still face discrimination, insecurity, and violence, though conditions differ by region and ethno-religious background. Alawite and Druze women are most at risk of abduction and sexual violence. Single, widowed, and divorced women struggle with housing, employment, and legal rights, making return and reintegration difficult.

Despite severe funding shortages, UNRWA continues to provide essential services to Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS), including primary healthcare and basic educations. Living conditions for PRS remain challenging, with most refugees living in acute poverty, and many camps remaining damaged. The Syrian authorities' generally supportive stance towards PRS has remained unchanged under the new government, and no discriminatory treatment has been reported. PRS can move and reside freely across the country, are treated similarly to Syrians at checkpoints, and face no restrictions when accessing UNRWA camps.

Following the political transition, the authorities pledged protection for all Syrians, but in practice, they lack the capacity, coordination, and accountability to ensure it. Security forces are fragmented, and abuses by armed groups and officials often go unpunished. Protection is stronger in major cities like Damascus and Aleppo but weak in rural areas. Christians reportedly receive better protection than other minorities, but impunity and weak political will continue to erode public trust.

# Table of contents

---

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Executive summary .....</b>   | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>Introduction .....</b>  | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Abbreviations.....</b>  | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>Maps .....</b>  | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>1. Persons opposing or perceived as opposing the interim authorities .....</b>    | <b>10</b> |
| 1.1. Limits on freedom of expression .....   | 10        |
| 1.2. Repercussions for critics of the authorities.....                               | 11        |
| 1.3. Pattern of targeting.....   | 11        |
| 1.4. Prevalence of monitoring and surveillance.....                                  | 12        |
| 1.5. Situation of family members and critics abroad.....                             | 12        |
| 1.6. Situation of journalists and media professionals.....                           | 13        |
| <b>2. Persons with real or perceived affiliation with the former government.....</b> | <b>15</b> |
| 2.1. Individuals who completed the reconciliation process.....                       | 16        |
| 2.2. Factors affecting targeting .....   | 16        |
| 2.3. Consequences for family members .....   | 19        |
| <b>3. Alawites.....</b>  | <b>20</b> |
| 3.1. Incidents involving Alawites .....  | 21        |
| 3.2. Forced displacement and property confiscations.....                             | 23        |
| 3.3. Discrimination and economic marginalisation .....                               | 24        |
| 3.4. Current situation of Alawites.....  | 24        |
| <b>4. Druze .....</b>  | <b>26</b> |
| 4.1. Incidents involving Druze .....   | 26        |
| 4.2. Current situation of Druze .....  | 29        |
| <b>5. Kurds .....</b>  | <b>31</b> |
| 5.1. Treatment of Kurds .....  | 31        |
| 5.2. Incidents involving Kurds in government-controlled areas.....                   | 32        |
| <b>6. Christians.....</b>  | <b>34</b> |
| 6.1. Incidents involving Christians .....  | 34        |

|  |   |            |
|--|---|------------|
| 6.2.                                     | Access to public services and employment.....                     | 37         |
| 6.3.                                     | Religious and social conditions .....                             | 38         |
| 6.4.                                     | Conversion to Christianity .....                                  | 39         |
| 6.5.                                     | Jehovah's Witnesses .....   | 39         |
| <b>7.</b>                                | <b>Atheists and individuals with non-religious behaviour.....</b> | <b>41</b>  |
| <b>8.</b>                                | <b>Women.....</b>   | <b>42</b>  |
| 8.1.                                     | Incidents involving women.....                                    | 42         |
| 8.2.                                     | Access to public services .....                                   | 45         |
| 8.3.                                     | Single, widowed and divorced women .....                          | 46         |
| <b>9.</b>                                | <b>Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS).....</b>                 | <b>48</b>  |
| 9.1.                                     | Current living conditions of PRS.....                             | 48         |
| 9.2.                                     | Access to UNRWA services in the camps .....                       | 49         |
| 9.3.                                     | Entry conditions for PRS into Syria .....                         | 52         |
| <b>10.</b>                               | <b>Government protection.....</b>                                 | <b>54</b>  |
| 10.1.                                    | Limitations in capacity and command and control.....              | 54         |
| 10.2.                                    | Lack of accountability and variations in protection .....         | 54         |
| <b>Bibliography.....</b>                 |   | <b>57</b>  |
| <b>Annex 1: Meeting minutes .....</b>    |   | <b>63</b>  |
| <b>Annex 2: Terms of Reference .....</b> |   | <b>132</b> |

## Introduction

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This thematic report examines the situation of certain groups in Syria since the fall of Assad's government in December 2024. The report covers the situation of individuals opposing or perceived to be opposing the current interim authorities; persons with real or perceived affiliation with the former government; women; and ethno-religious groups, including Alawites, Druze, Kurds, Christians (including Jehovah's Witnesses). The situation of atheists and Palestinians from Syria is also included.

The purpose of this report is to provide up-to-date information relevant to the processing of asylum cases. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the report were developed by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) in consultation with the Secretariat of the Danish Refugee Appeals Board. ToR are included in [Annex 2](#).

The report is written in accordance with the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) Country of Origin (COI) Report Methodology.<sup>1</sup>

The reporting period covers 8 December 2024 to 31 October 2025. However, relevant information that has emerged after 31 October 2025 is also included.

The information presented in this report is based on written sources as well as data collected through online and in-person meetings with interlocutors in Europe, Damascus (Syria), and Beirut (Lebanon). Meetings with sources in Damascus and Beirut were conducted during a visit to Lebanon and Syria from 21 to 26 September 2025. The information gathered from these meetings is used in two reports, which have been drafted simultaneously: the present report and another report – *Syria: Security, Return and Documents* – which is published together with this report.

Prior to and during the visit to Beirut and Damascus, meetings were held with a number of different types of sources, including international organisations, human rights organisations, security organisations, religious organisations, NGOs, legal sources, activists, journalists, and the Syrian authorities. The purpose of the meetings was explained to all interlocutors, and they were informed that their statements would be included in a public report. Most sources requested varying degrees of anonymity. In this context, it should be noted that, in the event that two or more sources have requested to be referred to by the same anonymous title, for instance 'an international organisation', a number is used to distinguish between sources with the same title, e.g. 'an international organisation (1)', 'an international organisation (2)', etc.

Draft meeting minutes were forwarded to the sources for approval, giving them the opportunity to amend, comment on, or correct their statements to ensure that the minutes accurately reflected the information they had provided. Most sources approved their

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<sup>1</sup> EUAA, *Country of Origin (COI) Report Methodology*, February 2022, [url](#)

statements. Those who did not reply to DIS' follow-ups were informed that, unless they submitted their feedback or approval within the specified deadline, their statements would be considered approved and included in the report. The meeting minutes can be found in [Annex 1](#).

The report is a synthesis of information obtained from oral and written sources and does not include all details and nuances provided by the sources. In the report, care has been taken to present the views of the sources as accurately and transparently as possible. The individual sources should not be held accountable for the content of the report.

For transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the meeting minutes have been numbered consecutively and referenced in the report's footnotes. In instances where sources have provided information beyond the ToR, yet relevant to asylum cases, this information has been incorporated in the minutes, but not addressed in the report.

Additionally, it should be noted that as some consulted sources provided information relevant for both reports mentioned above, some meeting minutes contain information pertinent to both reports. To preserve the context of the information and to avoid fragmenting the minutes, these have been included in full, even when parts of them are not directly relevant to the present report or quoted extensively in the report at hand.

The information presented in this report is not exhaustive and should be read in conjunction with other publicly available and relevant COI on Syria. This includes, among other sources, reports published by the EUAA and other other national and international institutions involved in collecting COI.

Attention should be paid to the evolving situation in Syria which may in time render some information outdated. Therefore, it is important to update the issues addressed in this report regularly. DIS will continue to monitor developments and conduct in-depth research to ensure that reliable and up-to-date information is made available when appropriate.

Finally, DIS wishes to express its sincere gratitude to the Embassy of Denmark in Beirut for facilitating the delegation's visit to Lebanon and Syria.

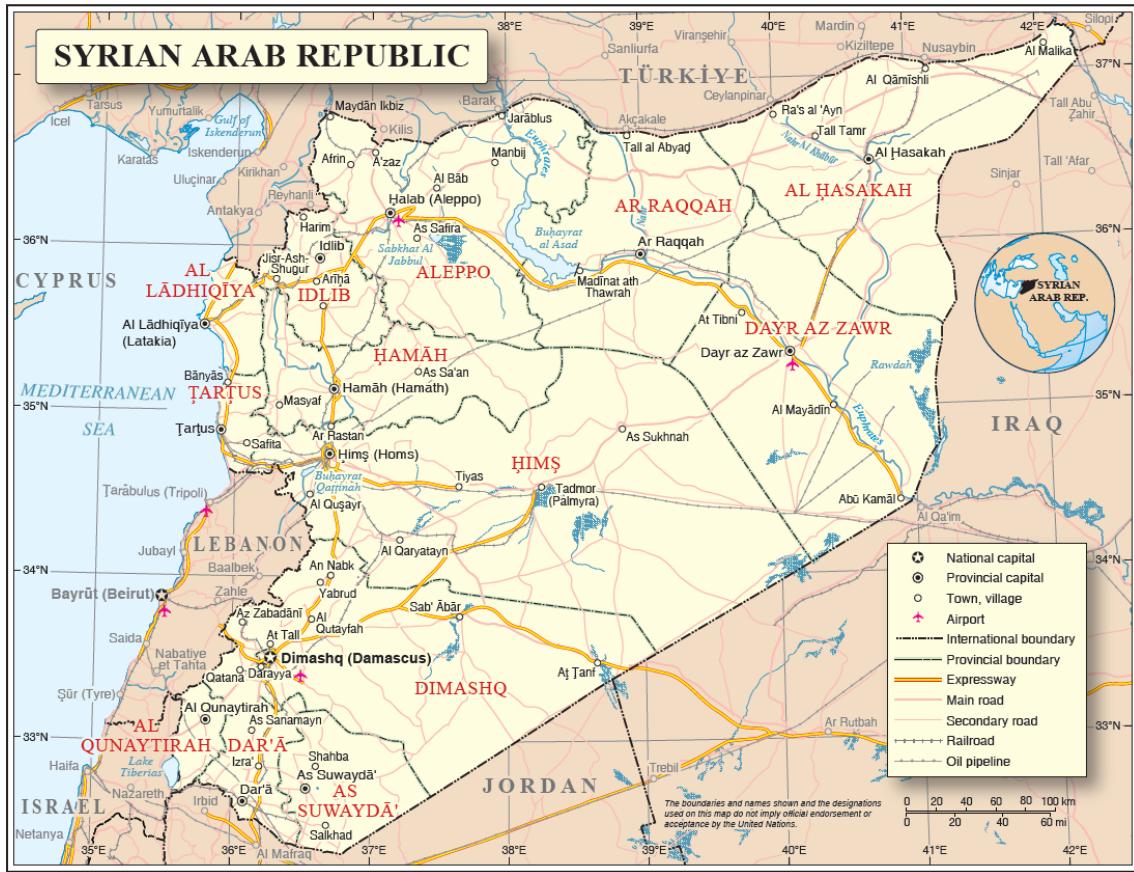
Research and editing were finalised on 30 November 2025. The report is publicly available on the website of DIS, [www.us.dk](http://www.us.dk), and may be consulted by all stakeholders involved in refugee status determination, as well as by the general public.

## Abbreviations

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|      |                                  |
|------|----------------------------------|
| COI  | Country of Origin Information    |
| DIS  | Danish Immigration Service       |
| ERW  | Explosive Remnants of War        |
| EUAA | European Union Agency for Asylum |
| GBV  | Gender-Based Violence            |
| HTS  | Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham            |
| IDP  | Internally Displaced Person      |
| PYD  | Democratic Union Party           |
| SDF  | Syrian Democratic Forces         |
| SNA  | Syrian National Army             |
| ToR  | Terms of Reference               |
| UXO  | Unexploded Ordnance              |

# Maps

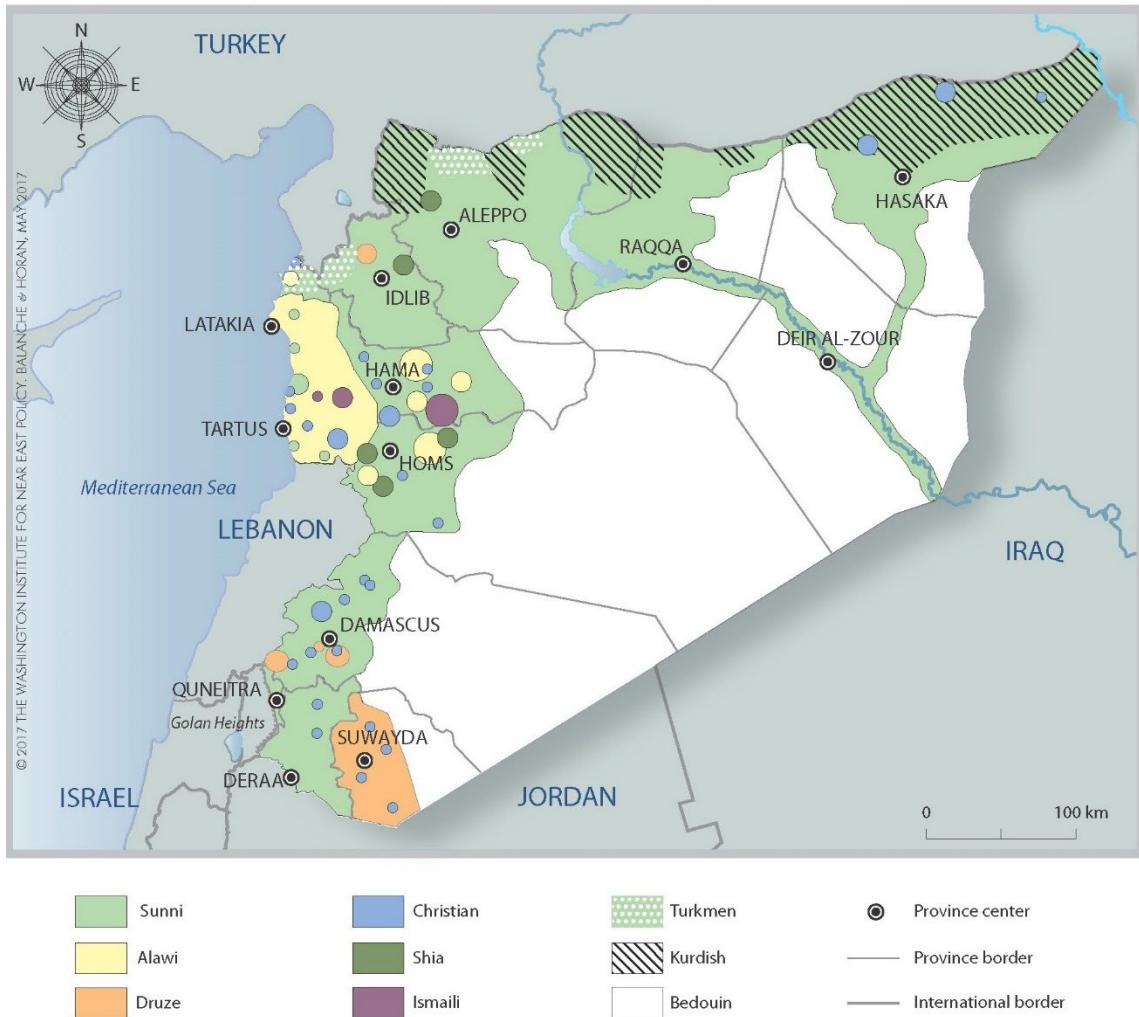


Map 1: Syrian Arab Republic, © United Nations<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> UN Geospatial, *Syrian Arab Republic*, Map No. 4204 Rev. 4, August 2022, [url](#)

## SYRIA – SITUATION OF CERTAIN GROUPS

### SECTARIAN AND ETHNIC DISTRIBUTION IN SYRIA 2011



<sup>3</sup> Fabrice Balanche, *Sectarianism in Syria's civil war*, 2018, [url](#)

# 1. Persons opposing or perceived as opposing the interim authorities

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Persons opposing or perceived as opposing the interim government include activists, human rights defenders, journalists, and citizens who criticise government actions or raise issues sensitive, including social media users. It also includes civil society actors working on human rights or governance.<sup>4</sup>

After the fall of the former government, freedom of expression in Syria initially expanded, with people openly criticising the new authorities. However, this openness has gradually declined.<sup>5</sup> Generally, criticising the interim government is possible, and many complaints or concerns can be expressed in the public domain without direct repercussions. However, the overall space for free expression has become increasingly constrained, though it remains less restricted than under the former government.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.1. Limits on freedom of expression

A Syrian human rights organisation stated that the lack of clear boundaries on freedom of speech has created uncertainty, fear, and self-censorship. Individuals often remain silent out of fear of arrest, torture, or disappearance.<sup>7</sup> Syrians have gradually discovered which issues are ‘red lines’ for the interim authorities, especially those related to the Defence, Interior, or Foreign Affairs ministries.<sup>8</sup>

Under the interim government, which is influenced by Salafist ideology, public criticism of leaders is regarded as divisive (*fitna*).<sup>9</sup> In cultural fields, censorship has been applied; for example, the Ministry of Culture has edited translated works by foreign authors in philosophy and political science, removing content that contradicts Islamic principles.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to limits on freedom of expression, civil liberties — such as forming associations and organising events — also remain restricted in Syria. Civil society organisations are formally permitted to operate, but their work takes place under strict supervision. Local authorities act as gatekeepers, deciding which topics can be discussed, which events can be held, and who may participate. Almost every public activity, such as meetings and cultural events, requires

<sup>4</sup> International organisation (1): 4-7; Syrian human rights organisation (1): 6-10; Aswad: 12-13; Lawyer: 23-24; SNHR: 16-20, 22; TDA: 1-6; Representatives of an international organisation: 10

<sup>5</sup> International organisation (1): 4; Syrian human rights organisation (2): 11; TDA: 3

<sup>6</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (1): 6; SNHR: 17, 21

<sup>7</sup> Representatives of an international organisation: 10; International organisation (1): 4; Syrian human rights organisation (2): 11; TDA: 2-3

<sup>8</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (1): 7; Center for Strategic and International Studies, *Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)*, accessed 24 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>9</sup> International organisation (1): 5

<sup>10</sup> Kurdish activist: 8

prior approval. Topics related to transitional justice, accountability, or human rights are considered politically sensitive and may only be addressed if approved by the authorities. One human rights NGO interviewed for this report stated that it had experienced such restrictions and interference.<sup>11</sup>

## 1.2. Repercussions for critics of the authorities

Individuals who voice criticism of the authorities may face repercussions.<sup>12</sup> Arrests have been reported, including arrests by entities linked to the Ministry of Interior and the Internal Security Command, especially in Hama. In some cases, individuals — especially activists — have been temporarily detained at security checkpoints in Homs Governorate and released after brief questioning.<sup>13</sup>

Certain sensitive issues may lead to repercussions if addressed publicly. People who raise concerns about abuses against Alawites or Druze risk arrest, abduction, torture, or even death.<sup>14</sup> A Syrian human rights organisation stated that it has become dangerous to describe events on the coast or in Suweida as 'massacres'; such incidents are expected to be referred to as crimes by 'unidentified actors', while praising government efforts to find those responsible.<sup>15</sup> However, according to activist Nada Aswad, there have been cases of individuals inside Syria who have criticised the authorities without being arrested, and some well-known Syrians have described coastal events as massacres without facing repercussions.<sup>16</sup>

Individuals who voice strong criticism of the new Syrian authorities are often subjected to online harassment or publicly accused of treason by those seen as supporters of the interim government. Influential people may use their connections to pressure or intimidate critics. In some cases, coordinated smear campaigns have been directed against individuals, human rights organisations and activists who have expressed criticism.<sup>17</sup>

## 1.3. Pattern of targeting

According to sources, no systematic policy exists to target critics;<sup>18</sup> instead targeting appears selective and inconsistent, depending on local conditions and the discretion of individual officials.<sup>19</sup> As a result, tolerance towards criticism varies by region. In Damascus, people may discuss social issues as long as they avoid political questions, whereas in Idlib, restrictions on

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<sup>11</sup> TDA: 1

<sup>12</sup> SNHR: 18; Representatives of an international organisation: 9

<sup>13</sup> SNHR, *At least 658 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention Recorded in Syria in the First Half of 2025 including 72 in June, 4 July 2025, url*, p. 10

<sup>14</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (1): 8; TDA: 3

<sup>15</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (1): 8

<sup>16</sup> Aswad: 12–13

<sup>17</sup> TDA: 5–6; SNHR: 16

<sup>18</sup> TDA: 4; Enab Baladi: 6–8; SNHR: 18–19

<sup>19</sup> SNHR: 17–19; Enab Baladi: 8

free speech are significantly tighter and criticism is more likely to lead to arrest or intimidation. In Aleppo and Damascus, officials operate under stronger oversight, while Rural Damascus remains marked by arbitrary behaviour and weak control by the authorities.<sup>20</sup>

An international organisation stated that the degree of tolerance shown by the authorities also varies depending on the identity and background of the critics — it is not applied equally across groups. Sunni Arabs generally enjoy greater tolerance and may express limited criticism without facing consequences. In contrast, minorities — such as Druze, Kurds and Alawites face — harsher risks and may be accused of disloyalty or of acting on behalf of foreign actors. For example, a Druze individual criticising the government may be labelled an Israeli collaborator.<sup>21</sup>

## 1.4. Prevalence of monitoring and surveillance

Some sources stated that the authorities do not appear to have the capacity for systematic monitoring and instead tend to follow broad trends or react to high-profile cases.<sup>22</sup> However, according to other sources, monitoring of online activity continues in a manner similar to practices under the former government. Security bodies still track social media posts both inside and outside the country and make use of informal networks of informants.<sup>23</sup>

This environment of surveillance reinforces ongoing fear and contributes to widespread self-censorship.<sup>24</sup> Several individuals have been arrested after criticising government actions online, including journalists and activists who commented on the coastal military operation earlier in the year.<sup>25</sup>

## 1.5. Situation of family members and critics abroad

Security forces have reportedly exerted pressure on citizens by arresting relatives of individuals wanted for criticising the government, particularly in Hama Governorate.<sup>26</sup> However, according to SNHR, relatives of critics have not been targeted in a systematic or consistent manner.<sup>27</sup>

Individuals living abroad generally have greater space to criticise the authorities.<sup>28</sup> However, the situation of such critics remains unclear. While prominent commentators and activists outside Syria continue to speak openly without apparent repercussions, this may be largely

<sup>20</sup> TDA: 4; Enab Baladi: 5

<sup>21</sup> International organisation (1): 6

<sup>22</sup> SNHR: 22; Enab Baladi: 6

<sup>23</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 25; Lawyer: 25; Representatives of an international organisation: 9-10

<sup>24</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 25; Lawyer: 25; Representatives of an international organisation: 9-10

<sup>25</sup> Representatives of an international organisation: 9

<sup>26</sup> SNHR, *At least 658 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention Recorded in Syria in the First Half of 2025 including 72 in June, 4 July 2025, [url](#)*, p. 10

<sup>27</sup> SNHR: 20

<sup>28</sup> TDA: 2; Aswad: 12–13

because they are physically beyond the government's reach. Sources interviewed by the DIS were not aware of any case of such Syrians returning to Syria. Therefore, it remains uncertain what consequences public criticism from abroad may have for those who eventually choose to return.<sup>29</sup>

## 1.6. Situation of journalists and media professionals

As mentioned, some journalists and activists have been arrested after criticising the government.<sup>30</sup> According to sources, incidents of detention or harassment have occurred but appear to be isolated rather than systematic.<sup>31</sup> Some detentions of journalists are attributed to the low professional standards of local security actors rather than to a coordinated policy. For instance, two Kurdish journalists were briefly detained, questioned, and released without being subjected to violence. The incident was reportedly linked to their Kurdish background and the officers' lack of awareness that individuals from Kobane are Syrian citizens.<sup>32</sup>

Syria Direct stated that there are no confirmed cases of journalists killed or kidnapped because of their profession. For example, in Rural Damascus, a media worker who had returned from displacement in northern Syria was found killed after being kidnapped; the crime was determined to have personal or financial motives rather than political ones.<sup>33</sup>

Likewise, those who previously worked for the former government's state media have not faced kidnappings or targeted killings. At most, there have been verbal confrontations — such as heated exchanges between journalists who worked for the former government and those who opposed it — during a media workshop in Damascus.<sup>34</sup>

### 1.6.1. Media freedom and self-censorship

Journalists face restricted access to official sources; they are not allowed to contact public officials directly and must submit questions through the Ministry of Information, which may decide what information can be released.<sup>35</sup>

There is no formal censorship or direct restrictions on journalists. According to Enab Baladi, in practice, there is some space to report and even to criticise senior officials, including the head of state. Moreover, media outlets continue to operate and maintain their editorial lines, focusing particularly on infrastructure, economic, and service-delivery issues.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (1): 9–10; TDA: 2

<sup>30</sup> Representatives of an international organisation: 9

<sup>31</sup> Kurdish activist: 6; Enab Baladi: 4 SNHR: 18–19

<sup>32</sup> Enab Baladi: 4; Kurdish activist: 6

<sup>33</sup> Syria Direct: 16

<sup>34</sup> Syria Direct: 9

<sup>35</sup> Enab Baladi: 3

<sup>36</sup> Enab Baladi: 1; Kurdish activist: 7

However, uncertainty about what may be tolerated has led journalists to exercise self-censorship, avoiding language that could be perceived as provocative by the authorities or by extremist actors, particularly among those from minority communities who often refrain from expressing views that might expose them to reprisals.<sup>37</sup>

In response to this environment, some outlets employ strategies that allow for more cautious reporting. According to Enab Baladi, sensitive topics are typically contextualised through analytical writing, and direct accusations are avoided. For example, when Enab Baladi reported on the waves of violence in the coastal region in March 2025, descriptions such as 'massacre' were attributed to eyewitnesses or experts rather than the media outlet itself.<sup>38</sup>

According to Enab Baladi, although a degree of media freedom exists, its future remains uncertain. It is unclear whether this current media environment reflects a deliberate policy of tolerance or rather stems from the interim authorities' limited capacity to control information, as their institutions and security apparatus are still weak and fragmented. It is uncertain whether greater governmental capacity would result in increased restrictions or a more structured approach to limiting media freedom.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Enab Baladi: 1; Kurdish activist: 7

<sup>38</sup> Enab Baladi: 2

<sup>39</sup> Enab Baladi:1, 3

## 2. Persons with real or perceived affiliation with the former government

Following the change of government, individuals associated with, or perceived to be associated with, the former Assad-government have continued to face arrests, killings, disappearances, harassment, mistreatment, kidnappings, and social exclusion. Targeting has been carried out by state authorities, non-state armed groups, local actors, and unidentified armed groups, including extremist factions, with incidents often reportedly motivated by accusations of collaboration or acts of revenge. Those affected have included former soldiers, intelligence personnel, civilian collaborators, local administrators and people who are perceived to be affiliated with the former government.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the apparent identification of affected groups, sources interviewed for this report indicated that the criteria for determining who is considered affiliated with the former government — and on what basis they are targeted — remain unclear.<sup>41</sup> In some cases, individuals accused of ties to former state security agencies or militias were arrested on the basis of military records and corroborating witness testimony. However, in other cases, individuals were arrested following community accusations, unresolved local or personal disputes, rumours, or unverified claims circulated on social media.<sup>42</sup>

In some cases, targeted individuals have in fact been affiliated with the former government and involved in abuses against civilians. In other cases, there is no proof of involvement in abuses, and individuals have been targeted solely on the basis of their political or security position in the former government, or perceived association.<sup>43</sup>

A Syrian human rights organisation stated that, in many cases, it is difficult to distinguish whether individuals were targeted for political reasons — due to association with the former government — or for sectarian reasons, particularly when Alawites were targeted.<sup>44</sup>

According to Syria Direct, while sectarian-based incidents do occur, the primary driver of targeting is (real or perceived) affiliation with the former government rather than sectarian identity itself. An international organisation noted, however, that sectarian identity does matter in some cases. Former SAA personnel who were Sunni Arabs (who constitute around 60% of former SAA personnel) are generally not targeted solely on the basis of prior military service,

<sup>40</sup> SNHR: 24; Syria Direct: 1-2; Representatives of an international organisation: 8; Syrian Human Right organisation (1): 11; EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025, [url](#), pp. 32-36; Netherlands, MFA, *Ambtsbericht Syrië [Official Report Syria]*, May 2025, [url](#), p. 105

<sup>41</sup> Syrian Human Right organisation (1): 12; SNHR: 23-24

<sup>42</sup> Syrian Human Right organisation (1): 12; SNHR: 23-24

<sup>43</sup> Syria Direct: 2

<sup>44</sup> Syrian Human Right organisation (1): 13

particularly in tribal areas such as Deir ez-Zor, where the possibility of tribal retaliation may discourage attacks or reprisals against individuals from these communities.<sup>45</sup>

As it is often unclear whether individuals are targeted because of their affiliation with the former government or because they belong to the Alawite community, this section on ‘persons affiliated or perceived to be affiliated with the former government’ and the section on Alawites are likely to overlap to some extent ([3. Alawites](#)).

## 2.1. Individuals who completed the reconciliation process

Following the transition of power in December 2024, the new authorities required thousands of former police, security, and military personnel to undergo a ‘reconciliation process’, involving the surrender of weapons and identity documents.<sup>46</sup>

A significant number of senior military and intelligence figures either fled, avoided reconciliation, or became involved in insurgent activities, particularly in coastal governorates of Tartous and Latakia. An estimated 50,000 to 70,000 former soldiers underwent reconciliation, surrendering weapons and identity documents.<sup>47</sup> Ordinary SAA soldiers have generally not been targeted unless there are specific accusations of involvement in abuses against civilians.<sup>48</sup> Individuals assessed as not having been involved in mass atrocities were issued settlement cards as proof of their status, which in principle allowed for freedom of movement.<sup>49</sup>

However, despite having completed the reconciliation process, reports indicate that former SAA personnel, including some high-ranking officers, have been detained without formal charges by the authorities. Other former personnel have reportedly been killed or targeted in revenge attacks carried out by unidentified armed groups and militant factions — including Ansar al-Sunna and the Special Accountability Force — in coastal areas as well as in Homs, Hama, and Aleppo, where individuals have been labelled *Folul* (remnants of the Assad government).<sup>50</sup>

## 2.2. Factors affecting targeting

An international organisation stated that the risk of being targeted due to previous service in the SAA varies significantly depending on military rank, actions undertaken during service, location, and ethno-religious background. Former SAA soldiers and high-ranking officers, individuals who served in intelligence services, and persons perceived to have participated in

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<sup>45</sup> International organisation (1): 11

<sup>46</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 26; Syrian Human Right organisation (1): 11

<sup>47</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025, [url](#), pp. 31–32

<sup>48</sup> International organisation (1): 10

<sup>49</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025, [url](#), pp. 31–32; Syrian Human Right organisation (1): 11

<sup>50</sup> International organisation (1): 10; Syrian Human Right organisation (1): 11; EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025, [url](#), pp. 32–36

abuses face a considerably higher risk of arrest or attack.<sup>51</sup> These dynamics likewise apply to former members of pro-government militias and local defence formations, including the National Defence Forces (NDF), Local Defence Forces, Liwa al-Quds, and the Tiger Forces.<sup>52</sup>

Individuals associated with these former government entities have been targeted in assassinations and revenge attacks across multiple governorates, including the coastal governorates, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, and Daraa. Perpetrators include unidentified armed groups, Salafi-jihadi factions, and local actors, with targeting sometimes linked to accusations of involvement in killings, detentions, or military operations.<sup>53</sup>

### 2.2.1. *Impact of rank, position and actions*

Reported patterns indicate that high-ranking individuals associated with serious abuses are more likely to remain in detention for extended periods, while lower-ranking officials and former informants are frequently released shortly after arrest.<sup>54</sup>

However, reprisals by communities and groups affiliated with the interim government have primarily affected lower-ranking former officials and militia members who remain embedded in local communities, while high-ranking figures — many of whom have relocated or benefit from protection — have largely avoided repercussions.<sup>55</sup> For example, some senior individuals implicated in serious abuses have, at times, benefited from protection by the authorities, personal networks, or local negotiations, generating local resentment. Some have reportedly retained influence or continued to hold positions.<sup>56</sup> One cited case is Fadi Saqr, who has been associated with the Tadamon massacre and is reported to hold a position in a local peace or reconciliation committee despite these allegations.<sup>57</sup>

At the same time, power structures from the former government continue to shape political, economic, and administrative decisions, as the broader system has largely remained intact despite formal restructuring. According to the Day After (TDA), whom DIS consulted, there are cases of wealthy businessmen and public figures previously active under the former government who have retained or regained influence, while lower-ranking individuals accused of loyalty to the previous government have faced arrest or harassment without consistent standards.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> International organisation (1): 9, 12

<sup>52</sup> Many of these militias reportedly disbanded without formally surrendering, and numerous members are believed to have retained their weapons and avoided disarmament. EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025, [url](#), pp. 31–32

<sup>53</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025, [url](#), pp. 34–36

<sup>54</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>55</sup> Syria Direct: 5

<sup>56</sup> Syria Direct: 7; Netherlands, MFA, *Ambtsbericht Syrië [Official Report Syria]*, May 2025, [url](#), p. 107

<sup>57</sup> Syria Direct: 7; EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>58</sup> TDA: 7-8

The targeting of individuals involved in past abuses has varied significantly, depending on their role and the circumstances of their actions; individuals implicated in abuses have at times been arrested and prosecuted by the new authorities, while others — particularly informants or local collaborators previously involved in killings or arrests — have faced direct retaliation by communities seeking revenge.<sup>59</sup>

Mere membership of the Ba'ath Party has not been a targeting trigger, as most Syrians had to join the party to obtain employment in the state (e.g. teachers, doctors, administrative employees etc.); it was mandatory and mostly symbolic.<sup>60</sup> Senior Ba'ath officials, however, underwent reconciliation procedures similar to those applied to former police, security, and military personnel.<sup>61</sup>

To date, reprisals against public employees who worked under the former government have not been documented.<sup>62</sup> Those who previously held public positions have generally not been targeted in the post-transition period; incidents, which have been reported, relate to former military activities rather than administrative roles.<sup>63</sup>

The new government has required public employees who left their positions between March 2011 and the fall of the former government to apply for reinstatement. It remains unclear whether these individuals can be reinstated directly.<sup>64</sup>

### 2.2.2. *Regional variation in targeting*

Targeting practices vary significantly by region. Aleppo Governorate has experienced comparatively low levels of targeting of local residents affiliated or perceived to be affiliated with the former government. The governorate benefits from well-established cooperation between civil society structures and the security services, which now operate according to clearer institutional procedures. As a result, Aleppo's post-conflict recovery is progressing more rapidly than in other parts of the country.<sup>65</sup>

By contrast, targeting remains more prevalent in Tartous, Latakia, Homs, Damascus, Rural Damascus, and Suweida governorates.<sup>66</sup> For example, thousands of former soldiers who underwent the reconciliation process in Latakia, and Tartous were subsequently killed, and no final investigations or sentencing outcomes were made public.<sup>67</sup> Local authorities

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<sup>59</sup> SNHR: 26

<sup>60</sup> Syria Direct: 8; EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 26

<sup>61</sup> Netherlands, MFA, *Ambtsbericht Syrië*, May 2025, [url](#), p. 107

<sup>62</sup> SNHR: 28

<sup>63</sup> Syria Direct: 6

<sup>64</sup> SNHR: 28

<sup>65</sup> Syria Direct: 4

<sup>66</sup> Syria Direct: 4

<sup>67</sup> Syrian Human Right organisation (1): 11; EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025, [url](#), pp. 34–36

acknowledged that the killings involved large numbers of participants and were not isolated acts, yet responsibility was not publicly assigned.<sup>68</sup>

### 2.3. Consequences for family members

Family members of persons affiliated with the former government are sometimes also targeted, particularly male relatives aged 20 to 40. In some cases, families of former military officers have experienced job loss, exclusion from community networks, or displacement.<sup>69</sup> According to Syria Direct, an ongoing pattern of social exclusion targeting relatives of individuals linked to the former government is hindering long-term social cohesion and reconciliation.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Syria Direct: 11

<sup>69</sup> Netherlands, MFA, *Ambtsbericht Syrië [Official Report Syria]*, May 2025, [url](#), p. 106

<sup>70</sup> Syria Direct: 10

### 3. Alawites

The Alawite community, a branch of Islam primarily concentrated along Syria's coastal areas — Latakia, Tartous and parts of Homs and Hama governorates — constitutes between 10 and 13% of the population (around 2.1 million persons).<sup>71</sup>

Under the Assad family's rule, beginning with Hafez al-Assad's rise to power in 1970, Alawites gained disproportionate influence within Syria's military, intelligence, and political institutions.<sup>72</sup> Despite this prominence, large segments of the rural Alawite population remained poor and economically marginalised, as the Assad government's patronage largely benefited loyalist elites within the community.<sup>73</sup>

The Alawite community has long been closely associated with the Assad government, a connection that continues to shape its current situation under the post-2024 authorities. Following the change of government in December 2024, Alawites have reportedly faced widespread mistrust and resentment from both the new authorities and other communities, particularly from Sunni Muslims.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, the government's ideological orientation has been described as primarily Sunni Arab, which has contributed to fear and distrust among religious minorities, including the Alawite community.<sup>75</sup> This sectarian outlook, combined with the community's association with the former government, has made Alawites vulnerable to both political and social marginalisation.<sup>76</sup>

After the fall of the Assad government, the new authorities publicly expressed an intention to include Alawites in future state-building efforts. The new government led by HTS reportedly initiated dialogue with local Alawite representatives and stated that accountability for crimes committed under the Assad government would be pursued through formal judicial processes.<sup>77</sup> Despite such statements, available information indicates that Alawites have largely been excluded from newly established political and military structures.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>71</sup> New Arab, *The Alawis' Legacy of Exploitation under the Assad Dynasty*, 25 February 2025, [url](#); EUAA, *Syria: Country Guidance: Syria*, February 2024, [url](#), p. 82

<sup>72</sup> Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Regime Change and Minority Risks: Syrian Alawites After Assad*, 21 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>73</sup> New Arab, *The Alawis' Legacy of Exploitation under the Assad Dynasty*, 25 February 2025, [url](#)

<sup>74</sup> International organisation (1): 13

<sup>75</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (1): 15

<sup>76</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>77</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>78</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 29

### 3.1. Incidents involving Alawites

The military offensive by HTS and affiliated groups in late 2024 caused large-scale displacement of Alawites. Tens of thousands of Alawites reportedly fled their homes and sought refuge in the governorates of Latakia and Tartous, or crossed the border into Lebanon.<sup>79</sup>

#### 3.1.1. Incidents in early 2025

Since the change of power in December 2024, tensions have increased between Alawites — including civilians and armed groups loyal to the former government — and the current authorities. Tensions have also risen between Alawite and Sunni communities.<sup>80</sup> These incidents often occurred during combing operations by interim security forces, aimed at disarming or arresting former security personnel who refused to surrender their weapons at settlement centres, or at detaining individuals suspected of crimes committed under the previous government. In these incidents, remnants of Assad forces led by former senior commanders mounted coordinated attacks on interim forces.<sup>81</sup>

Alawites were subjected to targeted violence, including killings, disappearances, abductions, and revenge attacks by government forces, unidentified armed groups, and factions such as Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah and the Special Accountability Force.<sup>82</sup> For instance, unverified reports indicate that within one month of the former government's fall, 150 Alawites were killed by unidentified perpetrators.<sup>83</sup>

In some areas, HTS imposed security measures such as house raids and checkpoints, leading to forced evacuations and further abuses.<sup>84</sup> According to SNHR, many Alawites detained by the interim government were accused of having committed abuses under the former government, while others were reportedly killed by citizens seeking revenge for crimes committed against them or their relatives. A significant number of those held for alleged violations were later released due to lack of evidence, which in turn triggered anger within victims' communities and provoked retaliation against uninvolved members of the Alawite community.<sup>85</sup>

In early 2025, Alawite religious and cultural sites were also targeted. On 25 December 2024, demonstrations erupted in several Alawite-populated cities, including Homs, Latakia, Jableh,

<sup>79</sup> Netherlands, MFA, *Ambtsbericht Syrië*, May 2025, [url](#), p. 92; EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 29, 34-36

<sup>80</sup> Syria Direct: 12; EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>81</sup> OHCHR, *Violations against civilians in the coastal and westerncentral regions of the Syrian Arab Republic (January–March 2025)*, 11 August 2025, [url](#), pp. 7-9

<sup>82</sup> Netherlands, MFA, *Ambtsbericht Syrië [Official Report Syria]*, May 2025, [url](#), p. 92; EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 29, 34-36; Human Rights Watch, "Are you Alawi?": *Identity-Based Killings During Syria's Transition*, 23 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>83</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 29–30

<sup>84</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, March 2025, [url](#), pp. 30-31

<sup>85</sup> SNHR: 29-30

Qardaha, and Tartous, following the circulation of a video allegedly showing the burning of an Alawite shrine in Aleppo. Additional attacks on shrines and religious buildings were reported in western Hama and Homs during the same period. Reports also documented the spread of hostile rhetoric towards Alawites, including the use of derogatory terms such as ‘infidels’ and ‘apostates’. In some cases, Sunni clerics reportedly called for jihad or reprisals against Alawites.<sup>86</sup>

### 3.1.2. *Incidents in March 2025*

Between 6 and 10 March 2025, attacks by armed groups loyal to the former government on security forces in Latakia triggered widespread clashes across Latakia, Tartous, Homs, and Hama. Armed groups killed and ambushed security personnel, besieged towns and military sites, used heavy weapons, and disrupted hospitals. Dozens of security officers were captured, and some were executed, while journalists were also attacked. The interim authorities launched combing operations against the remnants, while many civilians volunteered to join the interim security forces in combating Assad remnants, despite government warnings. The government also deployed large reinforcements, imposed curfews, and closed major roads as armed groups from across Syria mobilised. Sectarian incitement on social media, including threats against Alawites, further escalated tensions.<sup>87</sup>

The perpetrators included both unidentified armed individuals and members of known armed groups. Witnesses described armed men speaking dialects from Idlib, Homs, Hama, Daraa, and Sunni-majority neighbourhoods of Latakia, as well as individuals believed to be foreign fighters. In addition, fighters from former Syrian National Army (SNA) factions alongside other groups affiliated with the Ministry of Defence were reportedly involved, often wearing unmarked military uniforms. These actors were implicated in serious violations, including executions, severe beatings, sectarian targeting of Alawites, house-to-house raids, looting, and destruction of property.<sup>88</sup>

The violence reportedly resulted in hundreds of civilian deaths, including approximately 1,500 Alawites — among them men, women, children, and elderly persons — while dozens remain missing.<sup>89</sup>

There were reports of Alawites being identified and killed solely on the basis of their sectarian identity, including Alawites who had previously opposed Bashar al-Assad and his government.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Netherlands, MFA, *Amtsbericht Syrië [Official Report Syria]*, May 2025, [url](#), p. 94

<sup>87</sup> OHCHR, *Violations against civilians in the coastal and westerncentral regions of the Syrian Arab Republic (January–March 2025)*, 11 August 2025, [url](#), pp. 11-13

<sup>88</sup> OHCHR, *Violations against civilians in the coastal and westerncentral regions of the Syrian Arab Republic (January–March 2025)*, 11 August 2025, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>89</sup> Reuters, *Syrian forces massacred 1,500 Alawites. The chain of command led to Damascus*, 30 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>90</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (1): 15; Human Rights Watch, “Are you Alawi?": Identity-Based Killings During Syria's Transition, 23 September 2025, [url](#)

According to sources, these attacks were often framed as acts of revenge for crimes attributed to the former government.<sup>91</sup>

In the aftermath of the March sporadic violence in Syria's coastal areas, targeted killings of Alawites continued, reportedly carried out by unidentified armed actors. Incidents were recorded in the governorates of Latakia, Tartous, and Homs. Between 23 and 25 April 2025, SNHR documented the killing of at least 20 civilians in predominantly Alawite-populated neighbourhoods of Homs city. According to available information, these attacks were perpetrated by unidentified groups operating outside state control, following security operations conducted by the general security forces against individuals linked to the former Assad government.<sup>92</sup>

It was reported that during the escalation of violence against the Alawite community between January and April 2025, dozens of Alawite men and women were abducted near their homes or workplaces, some of whom were later found dead.<sup>93</sup> SOHR documented the abduction of at least 50 Alawite individuals by unidentified actors between January and April 2025, in mainly Homs and Idlib governorates. Some victims were reportedly subjected to physical or sexual violence, and there were allegations of Alawite women being forced to marry members of armed Islamist groups and foreign fighters based in Idlib.<sup>94</sup>

### 3.2. Forced displacement and property confiscations

Tensions between Alawites and the Sunni community have also manifested in localised disputes. On 27 August 2025, an armed faction aligned with the interim authorities issued an ultimatum ordering residents to vacate the Soumariyya area in Damascus. The Soumariyya dispute is a longstanding issue dating back more than four decades, when land was expropriated from Muadamiya and redistributed to Alawite government employees.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, residents of nearby Muadamiya staged protests against the Alawite presence in Soumariyya, alleging that the neighbourhood was being occupied illegally.<sup>96</sup>

The authorities subsequently intervened, issuing a decision prohibiting the expulsion of the Alawite residents and announcing that the dispute would be addressed through the courts.<sup>97</sup> However, Ministry of Defence forces, together with affiliated militias, reportedly conducted operations that resulted in the forced eviction of Alawite residents; residents reported that official security forces carried out daytime inspections, but that armed groups returned at night

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<sup>91</sup> International organisation (1): 13; Human Rights Watch, “Are you Alawi?”: Identity-Based Killings During Syria's Transition, 23 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>92</sup> EUAA, Syria: Country Focus, July 2025, [url](#), pp. 45–46

<sup>93</sup> EUAA, Syria: Country Focus, July 2025, [url](#), pp. 45–46

<sup>94</sup> EUAA, Syria: Country Focus, July 2025, [url](#), p. 46

<sup>95</sup> Syria Direct: 12; Representatives of an international organisation: 11

<sup>96</sup> Syria Direct: 12

<sup>97</sup> Syria Direct: 12

to threaten remaining families. Hundreds of men were detained and later released after signing pledges to leave their homes. Houses were looted, several women were reportedly beaten, and evicted families were denied access to other Alawite-majority neighbourhoods in Damascus.<sup>98</sup>

Similar incidents were reported across central Syria and along the coast, where Alawite families were displaced due to property confiscations and targeted violence. In Hama Governorate alone, up to 2,000 Alawite families reportedly lost their homes as a result of these confiscations.<sup>99</sup> According to Syria Direct, many local residents perceived the recent actions as politically or sectarian-motivated measures targeting Alawite inhabitants in a Sunni-majority area rather than neutral law enforcement. Government actions of this nature have fuelled perceptions of collective punishment and deepened mutual mistrust.<sup>100</sup>

### 3.3. Discrimination and economic marginalisation

Following the restructuring of state institutions by the new government, tens of thousands of Syrians, including Alawites, were dismissed from their positions in the public sector.<sup>101</sup> The Assad government had historically integrated this group into the state institutions, and therefore Alawites were overrepresented among those who lost their jobs, leaving their families without income.<sup>102</sup>

Many families reportedly lost access to government-subsidised housing, which left them unable to afford housing and led them to vacate their homes.<sup>103</sup> In Damascus, an unspecified number of Alawite public-sector employees — mainly women working in education — were reportedly dismissed because they were married to individuals affiliated with the former government's security services.<sup>104</sup>

### 3.4. Current situation of Alawites

The authorities implemented several measures intended to protect civilians, including Alawites, during the March 2025 violence. These measures included issuing instructions on the protection of civilians, imposing curfews, and establishing checkpoints — such as in Tartous, where checkpoints prevented armed individuals from entering the city, which helped spare it

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<sup>98</sup> Representatives of an international organisation: 11–12

<sup>99</sup> Netherlands, MFA, *Ambtsbericht Syrië [Official Report Syria]*, May 2025, [url](#), pp. 93–94

<sup>100</sup> Syria Direct: 13

<sup>101</sup> International organisation (1): 14; EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>102</sup> International organisation (1): 14; EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>103</sup> Netherlands, MFA, *Ambtsbericht Syrië [Official Report Syria]*, May 2025, [url](#), p. 93

<sup>104</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025, [url](#), p. 46

from the violence seen elsewhere.<sup>105</sup> In Homs, for instance, roadblocks and checkpoints were set up around Alawite-majority districts in response to rising sectarian tensions.<sup>106</sup>

Although protective measures have been implemented in certain regions, they have not restored a sense of security among the Alawite population. Widespread mistrust between communities persists, and many Alawites continue to perceive themselves as targets based solely on their sectarian identity,<sup>107</sup> as incidents of killings, torture, ill-treatment, and forced displacement involving Alawite civilians in Damascus and the western governorates continue.<sup>108</sup> Among the incidents reported in the past three months were several cases of kidnappings and arrests of Alawites in different parts of Syria.<sup>109</sup>

According to an international organisation, the new authorities did not implement a transitional justice process to hold perpetrators accountable.<sup>110</sup> At the same time, Alawite community members have increasingly reported being excluded from the country's political, security, and economic structures, and they continue to experience discrimination, poverty, and insecurity.<sup>111</sup> Many Alawite families have retreated from public life and avoided inter-communal gatherings because of fear of sectarian harassment, while residents in Latakia expressed growing distrust in the new authorities' capacity to guarantee security.<sup>112</sup>

Facing security risks and economic collapse, many Alawites have left for Lebanon and Cyprus or moved to safer areas within Syria, including Northeast Syria.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> OHCHR, *Violations against civilians in the coastal and western central regions of the Syrian Arab Republic (January–March 2025)*, 11 August 2025, [url](#), pp. 15–16; More about protection by the government in [section 10](#), in this report.

<sup>106</sup> Aswad: 11

<sup>107</sup> SNHR: 30; Syrian human rights organisation (1): 15

<sup>108</sup> OHCHR, “*The future of Syria is in the balance: UN Commission sounds alarm on renewed violence amid hopes for justice and peace*”, 30 October 2025 [url](#); Representatives of an international organisation: 8

<sup>109</sup> SOHR, *Asking for large ransom / Gunmen kidnap Alawite civilian in Homs countryside*, 23 September 2025, [url](#); SOHR, *A few days after kidnapping child “Mohamed Hayder” / Girl survives kidnapping attempt in Latakia - The Syrian Observatory For Human Rights*, 12 October 2025, [url](#); SOHR, *Sectarian campaign / General Security arrests ten Alawite civilians in Homs*, 4 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>110</sup> International organisation (1): 13

<sup>111</sup> Netherlands, MFA, *Ambtsbericht Syrië [Official Report Syria]*, May 2025, [url](#), pp. 92–94; International organisation (1): 14

<sup>112</sup> Al Jazeera, *Don’t trust anyone: Have Syria’s Alawites Lost Faith in the new government*, 20 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>113</sup> International organisation (1): 14

## 4. Druze

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The Druze are an Arabic-speaking religious minority primarily living in Suweida and in some suburbs of Damascus, notably Jaramana and Ashrafiyat Sahnaya.<sup>114</sup> Before the Syrian conflict in 2011, Druze made up about 3% of Syria's population and maintained strong community structures and local self-defence traditions.<sup>115</sup>

Before the former government's fall, Druze areas — especially Suweida — had limited autonomy but also faced economic hardship and growing dissatisfaction. The former government maintained nominal control through intelligence branches and by relying on Druze community leaders and Druze militias such as the 'Men of Dignity Movement' to keep order.<sup>116</sup>

### 4.1. Incidents involving Druze

After the new government came to power, many abuses — including killings, arrests, lootings, sexual violence, kidnappings, and attacks — have been reported against Druze communities.<sup>117</sup> Sources indicate that multiple actors were involved in the documented incidents, including state-affiliated security forces, armed tribal factions, and locally organised Druze armed groups.<sup>118</sup>

#### 4.1.1. Incidents in early 2025

At the end of February 2025, clashes were reported between Druze militias and government forces in Jaramana near Damascus after the killing of a security officer at a checkpoint. The government deployed additional forces and announced plans to arrest those responsible and remove unauthorised checkpoints.<sup>119</sup> The government also tried to ease tensions by appointing Druze representatives to local councils,<sup>120</sup> and by appointing a Druze representative — Agriculture Minister Amjad Badr — in the 23-member cabinet announced in Syria in late March

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<sup>114</sup> AP News, *Syria: Who the Druze are and why they're clashing with government forces*, 16 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>115</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025, [url](#), pp. 48-49

<sup>116</sup> New Arab, *Syria Insight: Suweida's autonomy threatened by new economic uncertainties*, 21 June 2020, [url](#); Middle East Forum, *The Syrian Druze: Between the Hammer of Integration and the Anvil of Separation*, Fall 2025, [url](#)

<sup>117</sup> Al, *Syria: New investigation reveals evidence government and affiliated forces extrajudicially executed dozens of Druze people in Suwayda*, 2 September 2025, [url](#); OHCHR, *Syria: UN experts alarmed by attacks on Druze communities, including sexual violence against women and girls*, 21 August 2025, [url](#); HRW, "Syria: Abuses, Humanitarian Emergency Amid Suweida Clashes", 22 July 2025, [url](#), pp. 12–14; Representatives of an international organisation: 8

<sup>118</sup> Al, *Syria: New investigation reveals evidence government and affiliated forces extrajudicially executed dozens of Druze people in Suwayda*, 2 September 2025, [url](#); OHCHR, *Syria: UN experts alarmed by attacks on Druze communities, including sexual violence against women and girls*, 21 August 2025, [url](#); HRW, "Syria: Abuses, Humanitarian Emergency Amid Suweida Clashes", 22 July 2025, [url](#), pp. 12–14; Representatives of an international organisation: 8

<sup>119</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country focus*, July 2025, [url](#), pp. 49-50

<sup>120</sup> International organisation (1): 17

2025.<sup>121</sup> On 29 April 2025, renewed clashes occurred in Jaramana and Sahnaya on the outskirts of Damascus between Druze fighters, government forces, and Islamist armed groups, reportedly triggered by a social media recording allegedly featuring a Druze cleric insulting the Prophet Muhammad — an allegation later denied by both the cleric and the Ministry of Interior. The violence spread to surrounding areas, including Suweida Governorate. Some reports attributed attacks on Druze civilians to a Salafi-jihadi group, while Druze militia leaders accused elements of the security forces of facilitating or participating in the violence.<sup>122</sup>

On 30 April and in early May 2025, Israel carried out airstrikes in Sahnaya and the Damascus area, stating that the operations were intended to protect Druze civilians. These strikes took place despite a ceasefire that had already been reached between the new government and local leaders in Jaramana and Sahnaya. Druze representatives in Jaramana agreed to hand over heavy weapons and permit the deployment of Syrian security forces. Both government forces and Druze militias deployed personnel to Jaramana and Sahnaya.<sup>123</sup>

The clashes resulted in an estimated 134 deaths, including fighters, civilians, and government personnel. Hundreds of residents were displaced from the affected suburbs and several arrests were reported.<sup>124</sup> Reports indicated a rise in anti-Druze sentiment in various parts of the country, including increased online hate speech and protests on university campuses, which led to the evacuation of students.<sup>125</sup>

### 4.1.2. *Incidents in May 2025*

Suweida Governorate is predominantly inhabited by Druze communities, but also includes Sunni Bedouin tribal populations, and relations between these groups have involved long-standing disputes over land use and access to local resources.<sup>126</sup>

There have been several clashes involving government-aligned forces, Sunni Bedouin groups, and Druze fighters since the change of the government in early December 2024.<sup>127</sup> The incidents in Jaramana and Sahnaya, as well as ongoing insecurity, combined with perceptions of

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<sup>121</sup> AP News, *Syria: Who the Druze are and why they're clashing with government forces*, 16 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>122</sup> International organisation (1): 17; EUAA, *Syria: Country focus*, July 2025, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>123</sup> DIS, *Syria - Security, military service and the situation of certain profiles*, September 2025, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>124</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country focus*, July 2025, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>125</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country focus*, July 2025, [url](#), p. 51; Ultra Syria, *الطباطب الدرزيون يغادرون السكن الجامعي* [Due to sectarian incitement, dozens of Druze students have left the university dormitory], 8 May 2025, [url](#); Syrian human rights organisation (1): 16

<sup>126</sup> Al Jazeera, *Tensions high as new violence spirals in Syria's Suwayda despite ceasefire*, 3 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>127</sup> AP News, *Syria: Who the Druze are and why they're clashing with government forces*, 16 July, [url](#); BBC, *Bedouins tell BBC they could return to fighting Druze in Syria*, 20 July 2025, [url](#); 7 BBC, *Almost 600 killed in south Syria violence, monitoring group says*, 17 July 2025, [url](#); SOHR, *Escalation in Al Suwaidaa reaches an end | Military and security forces withdraw after having committed blatant violations and massacres*, 17 July 2025, [url](#)

limited government protection, led many Druze communities to rely more heavily on local militias and to maintain a heightened state of readiness.<sup>128</sup>

In early May 2025, clashes between Druze and Bedouin groups were recorded in the western countryside of Suweida and in neighbouring Daraa Governorate. Mortar strikes on several villages were reported to have resulted in one civilian killed, eight injured, and the displacement of families, primarily women and children.<sup>129</sup>

Tensions escalated in July 2025, culminating in deadly sectarian fighting and armed clashes on 13 July after the abduction of a Druze merchant on the Damascus highway. Government forces, together with allied Bedouin tribes, subsequently imposed a siege on Suweida.<sup>130</sup>

However, on 16 July 2025, government forces withdrew from parts of Suweida after Israeli airstrikes reportedly targeted their positions. Israel framed its attack as an effort to protect Druze civilians. The parties entered into a ceasefire on 18 July, which was largely held as of November 2025.<sup>131</sup> However, the siege imposed by government forces remained in place.<sup>132</sup>

The clashes resulted in the displacement of approximately 192,000 individuals and the killing of 2,052 people — mainly Druze civilians and fighters, but also government personnel, and Bedouin fighters and civilians.<sup>133</sup> Human Rights Watch documented sectarian summary executions — including women and children — carried out by government-affiliated forces in Suweida.<sup>134</sup> In addition, acts of sexual violence were committed, including rape of Druze women.<sup>135</sup> According to the OHCHR, at least 105 Druze women and girls were abducted, and as

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<sup>128</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country focus*, July 2025, [url](#), pp. 51-52

<sup>129</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country focus*, July 2025, [url](#), p. 51

<sup>130</sup> AP News, *Syria: Who the Druze are and why they're clashing with government forces*, 16 July, [url](#); BBC, *Bedouins tell BBC they could return to fighting Druze in Syria*, 20 July 2025, [url](#); 7 BBC, *Almost 600 killed in south Syria violence, monitoring group says*, 17 July 2025, [url](#); SOHR, *Escalation in Al Suwaiddaa reaches an end | Military and security forces withdraw after having committed blatant violations and massacres*, 17 July 2025, [url](#); SOHR, *Demand to lift siege and open crossings - Widespread demonstrations across Al-Suwaiddaa*, 28 July 2025, [url](#); International organisation (1): 16

<sup>131</sup> Security Council Report, *Syria, November 2025 Monthly Forecast*, 2 November 2025, [url](#)

Examples of incidents of sporadic violence, kidnapping and killing of civilians can be found in the following: Reuters, *Armed groups attack security force personnel in Syria's Suweida, killing one, state TV reports*, 3 August 2025, [url](#); SOHR, *Al-Suwaiddaa | Sporadic clashes erupt between Druze factions and governmental forces*, 26 September 2025, [url](#); SOHR, *Armed attack - Seven Druze people kil\*led and injured in Idlib countryside*, 21 October 2025, [url](#); SOHR, *Armed attack | Young man from the Druze community killed while herding sheep in Rif Dimashq*, 16 September 2025, [url](#); SOHR, *Kidnapped a few days ago - Doctor of the Druze community died under torture in Rif Dimashq*, 6 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>132</sup> BBC, *Almost 600 killed in south Syria violence, monitoring group says*, 17 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>133</sup> SOHR, *The Syrian Observatory's detailed accounting recorded 2,052 people killed in the mid-July Suweida fighting and subsequent executions*, updated 4 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>134</sup> HRW, *"Syria: Abuses, Humanitarian Emergency Amid Suweida Clashes"*, 22 July 2025, [url](#), pp. 12-14

<sup>135</sup> OHCHR, *Syria: UN experts alarmed by attacks on Druze communities, including sexual violence against women and girls*, 21 August 2025, [url](#) AP News, *Syria: Who the Druze are and why they're clashing with government forces*, 16 July, [url](#); BBC, *Bedouins tell BBC they could return to fighting Druze in Syria*, 20 July 2025, [url](#); International organisation (1): 16

of August 2025, hundreds of people were still missing.<sup>136</sup> Video recordings and field reports indicated that forces affiliated with the interim government burned and looted civilian homes and publicly shaved Druze men's moustaches as a form of humiliation. Druze armed groups also kidnapped individuals from the Bedouin tribes.<sup>137</sup>

In connection with the clashes, armed individuals attacked peaceful Druze demonstrators, while police officers and officials from the governor's office reportedly did not intervene. Victims stated that they provided identifying information on the attackers, including names and social media accounts, but no follow-up action was taken by the authorities. Individuals who attempted to assist the injured were at times prevented from doing so. In some cases, perpetrators filmed the attacks and posted the footage online. Some suspects were briefly detained and taken to closed hearings, but were subsequently released without further proceedings.<sup>138</sup>

## 4.2. Current situation of Druze

In October 2025, the parties exchanged prisoners and the government released dozens of Druze detainees.<sup>139</sup> Even though the ceasefire has largely been upheld, sporadic violence, kidnappings and killings of Druze civilians in Suweida Governorate and in other areas in Syria have continued to occur.<sup>140</sup> Meanwhile, weekly demonstrations in Suweida have persisted, with community leaders and activists demanding greater self-rule and justice for those killed in earlier incidents.<sup>141</sup>

The siege imposed on Suweida Governorate in July 2025 led to shortages of food, medicine, and other basic goods.<sup>142</sup> As of 8 October 2025, essential services in Suweida were under severe strain, with disruptions affecting food supplies, healthcare, agriculture, and education.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> OHCHR, *Syria: UN experts alarmed by attacks on Druze communities, including sexual violence against women and girls*, 21 August 2025, [url](#)

<sup>137</sup> AP News, *Syria: Who the Druze are and why they're clashing with government forces*, 16 July, [url](#); Human Rights Watch, "Syria: Abuses, Humanitarian Emergency Amid Suweida Clashes", 22 July 2025, [url](#), pp. 12–14

<sup>138</sup> TDA: 12

<sup>139</sup> Al Jazeera, *The release of detained Druze opens a channel of communication between Damascus and Suweida*. 13 October 2025, [url](#)

<sup>140</sup> Security Council Report, *Syria, November 2025 Monthly Forecast*, 2 November 2025, [url](#)

Examples of incidents of sporadic violence, kidnapping and killing of civilians can be found in the following: Reuters, *Armed groups attack security force personnel in Syria's Suweida, killing one*, state TV reports, 3 August 2025, [url](#); SOHR, *Al-Suwaiddaa / Sporadic clashes erupt between Druze factions and governmental forces*, 26 September 2025, [url](#); SOHR, *Armed attack - Seven Druze people killed and injured in Idlib countryside*, 21 October 2025, [url](#); SOHR, *Armed attack / Young man from the Druze community killed while herding sheep in Rif Dimashq*, 16 September 2025, [url](#); SOHR, *Kidnapped a few days ago - Doctor of the Druze community died under torture in Rif Dimashq*, 6 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>141</sup> International organisation (1): 16; Representatives of an international organisation: 13

<sup>142</sup> SOHR, *Demand to lift siege and open crossings - Widespread demonstrations across Al-Suwaiddaa*, 28 July 2025, [url](#); International organisation (1): 16

<sup>143</sup> Security Council Report, *Syria, November 2025 Monthly Forecast*, 2 November 2025, [url](#)

## SYRIA – SITUATION OF CERTAIN GROUPS

As of November 2025, humanitarian convoys continued to enter Suweida city.<sup>144</sup> However, according to the UN, humanitarian conditions continue to deteriorate.<sup>145</sup>

The clashes in Suweida — alongside Israel's involvement and support for the Druze — have created deep mistrust between the Druze community and the Syrian government, and, to some extent, between Druze and the conservative Sunni community. Suspicion towards the Druze has increased, with the community portrayed as supporters or collaborators of Israel acting against Syria's national interests.<sup>146</sup> At the same time, many within the Druze community continue to fear for their safety and feel politically marginalised.<sup>147</sup>

The prevailing mistrust towards state authorities also influences how members of the Druze community perceive the prospect of seeking protection from the government. An international organisation noted that, in principle, Druze individuals can request protection from the authorities against violence like any other Syrian citizen. However, sources indicate that Druze — similar to Syrians from other backgrounds — generally lack confidence in the authorities' ability or willingness to provide effective protection, due to widespread impunity and the absence of accountability.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Representatives of an international organisation: 14

<sup>145</sup> Security Council Report, *Syria, November 2025 Monthly Forecast*, 2 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>146</sup> International organisation (1): 15

<sup>147</sup> International organisation (1): 17; Syrian human rights organisation (1): 17; Representatives of an international organisation: 14

<sup>148</sup> International organisation (1): 21

## 5. Kurds

Estimated at 2 to 2.5 million individuals, the Kurdish population forms Syria's largest ethnic minority, comprising up to 10% of the country's pre-war total of 23 million. The Kurdish population is concentrated in Northeast Syria — particularly in the regions of Afrin, Kobani, and Jazira, with smaller concentrations in districts of Raqqa city — as well as in neighbourhoods of Aleppo and Damascus.<sup>149</sup>

This report focuses on the situation of Kurds living in government-held areas and therefore does not cover the situation of Kurds in Northeast Syria, which remains under the de facto control of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).<sup>150</sup>

### 5.1. Treatment of Kurds

Apart from isolated incidents,<sup>151</sup> ordinary Kurds residing in government-controlled areas generally continue their daily lives without major restrictions, harassment, mistreatment, discriminatory treatment, or attacks based on their ethnicity,<sup>152</sup> provided they do not engage in political activity.<sup>153</sup> According to a Syrian lawyer DIS consulted, individuals perceived as politically active or critical of the authorities may face reprisals comparable to those experienced by government critics of any background.<sup>154</sup>

In Damascus, where an estimated one-third of the population is of Kurdish origin and where Kurdish communities have been established for centuries, Kurds are described as an integrated part of society.<sup>155</sup> In long-established Kurdish-dominated Damascus neighbourhoods such as Rukn al-Din and Wadi al-Mashari, Kurds reportedly resemble other residents and are therefore difficult to identify ethnically; no changes or abuses affecting this particular group have been reported since the fall of the former government.<sup>156</sup>

According to a Kurdish civil society activist, Kurds are not prevented from accessing housing or public services, nor have they faced ethnically motivated dismissals from public employment. The activist highlighted the presence of several high-ranking Kurdish officials within government institutions, including the Minister of Education. The source emphasised, however, that the current broader economic crisis affects Kurds in the same way as all other Syrians.<sup>157</sup>

<sup>149</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025, [url](#), p. 40

<sup>150</sup> Security Council Report, *November 2025 Monthly Forecast: Middle East: Syria*, 2 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>151</sup> SNHR: 32; Kurdish civil society activist: 12; Syrian human rights organisation (2): 10

<sup>152</sup> International organisation (1): 22; Enab Baladi: 11; Representatives of an international organisation: 16; Kurdish civil society activist: 12; Syria Direct: 15

<sup>153</sup> International organisation (1): 22; lawyer: 29

<sup>154</sup> Lawyer: 29

<sup>155</sup> International organisation (1): 22; Enab Baladi: 11

<sup>156</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (1): 19

<sup>157</sup> Kurdish civil society activist: 13-14

The same source stated that Kurds residing abroad are reportedly able to return without facing administrative or security obstacles, and the source personally knows of several such cases.<sup>158</sup>

The current authorities demonstrate a greater degree of tolerance towards Kurdish flags and symbols compared with the previous government. For instance, during a recent Kurdish cultural festival in Damascus, participants openly displayed Kurdish flags without any intervention from the authorities. A Kurdish activist interviewed by DIS stated that this would have been inconceivable under the former government.<sup>159</sup>

As regards the status of stateless and naturalised Kurds, a source stated that the current authorities have not revoked the Syrian citizenship of the Ajanib — Kurds from Hasakah who were naturalized in 2011 by the former government. However, the situation of the Maktoomeen remains unresolved. According to a Kurdish activist, members of this group continue to be denied basic rights, including the ability to complete secondary education.<sup>160</sup>

## 5.2. Incidents involving Kurds in government-controlled areas

One concern noted among Kurds in Damascus is a persistent sense of fear regarding potential repercussions if tensions between the authorities and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) escalate, according to a Kurdish activist.<sup>161</sup>

Reported isolated incidents involving Kurds primarily relate to individuals originating from outside Damascus. For example, Kurdish travellers from Northeast Syria were reportedly stopped for questioning or were delayed for extended periods at checkpoints and subjected to harassment, although they were ultimately permitted to continue their journey.<sup>162</sup> In other instances, Kurds from Northeast Syria have been arrested in Damascus without a clear justification for their detention; they were, however, released following a negotiated agreement.<sup>163</sup>

Moreover, there were reports of Kurdish visitors from Qamishli and Aleppo being arrested in the Sha'lan area of Damascus for speaking Kurdish, and some were reportedly tortured in detention. Those detained were interrogated on suspicion of links to the SDF's intelligence apparatus but were released after a short period. These arrests coincided with the PYD's (*Democratic Union Party*) attempts to open offices in government-controlled areas, which apparently increased scrutiny of Kurdish-speaking individuals. During this period, both

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<sup>158</sup> Kurdish civil society activist: 15

<sup>159</sup> Kurdish civil society activist: 12, 16

<sup>160</sup> Kurdish civil society activist: 17-18.

<sup>161</sup> Kurdish civil society activist: 12

<sup>162</sup> Lawyer: 28

<sup>163</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (2): 10

## SYRIA – SITUATION OF CERTAIN GROUPS

politically active and apolitical Kurds from Northeast Syria were detained on suspicion of links to the SDF, but all were released shortly thereafter.<sup>164</sup>

Isolated revenge attacks or kidnappings by unidentified groups targeting Kurds originating from the areas controlled by the interim government have also been recorded, but according to SNHR, these do not constitute a systematic pattern.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Kurdish civil society activist: 9-11

<sup>165</sup> SNHR: 32

## 6. Christians

There are no official statistics on the current number of Christians in Syria; estimates indicate, however, that approximately 300,000 remain in the country. Christians therefore account for around 2% of the population, compared to an estimated 10% prior to the outbreak of the conflict in 2011.<sup>166</sup>

When the former government fell in December 2024, widespread fear emerged among Christian communities due to the Islamist orientation of the new authorities, about whom many people knew little, and the perceived growing influence of extremist Islamic ideology. When HTS took control of Damascus in December 2024, many initially thought they were the Islamic State (IS). This perception among Christians has created a persistent atmosphere of fear, unease, and distrust towards the authorities, marked by concern for the future.<sup>167</sup>

### 6.1. Incidents involving Christians

A December 2024 incident in which a foreign fighter linked to the government burned a Christmas tree in a Christian town in Hama sparked protests and concern among local Christians. The leader of the transitional government, Ahmad Al-Sharaa, met with church leaders to offer reassurance, and authorities arrested those responsible, labelled the events isolated, closed government offices over Christmas as a symbolic gesture, and later appointed Hind Kabawat, a Christian woman, as Minister of Social Affairs and Labour.<sup>168</sup>

In Damascus, government forces provided security for Christian celebrations, though it was unclear whether Christians enjoyed similar freedoms elsewhere. Some accounts suggested the government was trying to signal tolerance, and many Christians in Damascus reportedly kept a low profile due to ongoing fear and uncertainty.<sup>169</sup>

#### 6.1.1. Incidents since December 2024

Between December 2024 and June 2025, Christian communities across several Syrian regions faced a series of security incidents and harassment:

- Multiple churches were vandalised or attacked by unidentified perpetrators, including destroyed crosses, shelling, and attempted arson in Hama, Homs, and Rural Damascus governorates. In Damascus, SUVs blasting jihadist songs passed through Christian districts, an armoured vehicle displayed threats, and an armed group entered a Christian neighbourhood distributing extremist rules on dress and behaviour. Government forces

<sup>166</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025, [url](#), p. 52

<sup>167</sup> Church organisation: 3; High-profile Christian church leader: 1; International organisation (1): 24; TDA: 9

<sup>168</sup> DIS, *Syria - Security, military service and the situation of certain profiles*, September 2025, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>169</sup> DIS, *Syria - Security, military service and the situation of certain profiles*, September 2025, [url](#), p. 27

denied involvement but deployed patrols.<sup>170</sup>

- Several Christians were killed after being caught in crossfire during attacks on Alawites in the coastal region, though they did not appear to have been targeted for their faith. In response to ongoing tensions, Christian neighbourhoods in Damascus organised volunteer groups to protect churches and residents.<sup>171</sup>
- Late March 2025 saw an uptick in public religious proselytisation in Damascus, with preaching, posters, and vehicles broadcasting religious messages in Christian-majority areas; authorities called these incidents isolated, but similar activity resurfaced days later.<sup>172</sup>
- Further incidents included the killing of a Christian man in Dweila, near Damascus, during a confrontation with Salafist preachers; the assault and looting of an alcohol shop in a Christian town; threats and property damage, such as the burning of a family's car; and armed groups marching through Christian-majority areas in ways residents perceived as intimidating.<sup>173</sup>
- On 22 May 2025, an attack was allegedly carried out by an IS-affiliated individual during a Sunday service at a Greek Orthodox church in Damascus, killing 25 and injuring 60. On 22 June 2025, an explosion at the Mar Elias Church in Damascus — carried out by a suicide bomber allegedly affiliated with IS — killed 25 people and injured 60.<sup>174</sup> After this incident, emigration became a top priority for many Christians.<sup>175</sup>

Apart from the two attacks on churches in Damascus, attacks on churches have been very limited.<sup>176</sup> In addition, individual revenge attacks and kidnappings by unidentified groups have been recorded, and some Christians have been accused of being affiliated with the former government.<sup>177</sup>

According to a high-profile church leader, the authorities continue to refer to the incidents as 'individual, isolated incidents' and have not taken measures to prevent future incidents; for example, the government has not taken any measures to secure areas in which Christians live

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<sup>170</sup> DIS, *Syria - Security, military service and the situation of certain profiles*, September 2025, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>171</sup> DIS, *Syria - Security, military service and the situation of certain profiles*, September 2025, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>172</sup> DIS, *Syria - Security, military service and the situation of certain profiles*, September 2025, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>173</sup> DIS, *Syria - Security, military service and the situation of certain profiles*, September 2025, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>174</sup> BBC News, 'We're not safe here anymore' - Syria's Christians fear for future after devastating church attack, 30 June 2025, [url](#)

<sup>175</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 4; International organisation (2): 14

<sup>176</sup> Syria Direct: 14

<sup>177</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 2, 7; SNHR: 32

and where there are churches since the explosion, except for heightening security around that specific church.<sup>178</sup>

### 6.1.2. *Incidents after July 2025*

Furthermore, in September 2025, Christians were attacked in al-Qusayr in Homs Governorate by armed factions. The perpetrators attacked houses of Christians, accusing them of being remnants of the former government, burning their houses. According to a high-profile church leader, this example illustrates that individuals affiliated with the interim authorities — but beyond central government control — exploit their authority to carry out attacks against Christian communities and other civilians.<sup>179</sup>

Moreover, Christians are still being kidnapped on a daily basis in Wadi al-Nasara in rural Homs. A high-profile Christian church leader assumed, however, that they are not being kidnapped because they are Christians but because they have money, as it is not only Christians who are being kidnapped.<sup>180</sup>

In Wadi al-Nasara, efforts by the local church to secure government protection for the area have failed. Despite the government's approval to recruit 200 local volunteers into the government forces, the authorities never followed through on the agreement. According to a high-profile Christian leader, as a result, this predominantly Christian region remains without effective government protection.<sup>181</sup>

There have also been occasional attacks on bars, shops and restaurants in Christian neighbourhoods. However, it should be noted that such incidents have also taken place in Muslim neighbourhoods where there have been attacks on places where people were singing and dancing; these incidents are thus not only directed at Christians. The public campaigns by the radical religious groups likewise do not only increase fear among minorities but also among moderate Sunni Muslims.<sup>182</sup>

According to a Church organisation, Christians are currently not exposed to significant security threats in their daily lives. The confrontations that Christians encounter are mainly verbal in nature.<sup>183</sup> For example, Christians have faced varying degrees of provocation, including posters, slogans, and street-level campaigns organised by armed radical religious groups. These groups, which do not always operate under government control, have at times entered Christian

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<sup>178</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 5-6

<sup>179</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 7

<sup>180</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 10; International organisation (1): 21, 26; Representatives of an international organisation: 15; Church organisation: 2; Syria Direct: 14

<sup>181</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 11

<sup>182</sup> International organisation (1): 24; Church organisation: 2

<sup>183</sup> Church organisation: 2

neighbourhoods — such as in Damascus — carrying Qurans and calling on residents to convert to Islam and for women to wear the hijab.<sup>184</sup>

### 6.1.3. *Regional variations*

Security conditions also vary by region and are influenced by both local and external actors. Aleppo is considered relatively safe by Christians, which is — according to a high-profile church leader — due to the stabilising role of Türkiye and the presence of Turkish intelligence forces. Damascus, affected by Gulf influence, is viewed as less safe by Christians than Aleppo but more secure than Homs. Homs — both city and rural areas — records the highest number of kidnappings, reportedly linked to its mixed population of Alawites, Ismailis, and Christians.<sup>185</sup>

A high-profile Christian church leader pointed out that relocation from Damascus to Aleppo is not realistic. Although Aleppo is safer than much of the country, it is not a major Christian centre, hosting around 3,000 Christian families compared with about 20,000 families in Wadi al-Nasara in Homs Governorate. The majority of Syria's roughly 300,000 Christians is concentrated in Damascus and its surrounding areas.<sup>186</sup>

In addition, in major cities such as Damascus and Aleppo, Christians can generally express their faith more openly and have better access to employment, whereas in rural areas living openly as Christians is more difficult and livelihood opportunities are limited.<sup>187</sup>

The high-profile Christian church leader had not heard of cases where Christians have been targeted at checkpoints, travelling from one governorate to another, except for Christians being subject to harassment. According to the high-profile Christian church leader, it is therefore not safe for Christians to travel and pass through checkpoints across Syria. In general, not many Christians travel from one governorate to another. The church leader personally feels safe because he has very good connections with the authorities and because his respected, religious position grants him a degree of protection. For ordinary Christians without such status, however, travel from one governorate to another across Syria is not safe.<sup>188</sup>

## 6.2. Access to public services and employment

In terms of access to public services and employment, sources consulted by DIS have not reported any discrimination against Christians by the authorities in areas such as access to education, healthcare, civil documentation, or public-sector employment.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> International organisation (1): 24; Church organisation: 2; Syrian human rights organisation (1): 21; EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025, [url](#), p. 53

<sup>185</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 14

<sup>186</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 15

<sup>187</sup> Church organisation: 8

<sup>188</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 16-17

<sup>189</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (1): 20; International organisation (1): 26; Church organisation: 7

Following the political transition, a large part of the former state administration was dismantled, leading to widespread dismissals across the public sector, including among Christians.<sup>190</sup> According to a church organisation, these dismissals formed part of a broader restructuring effort rather than being based on religious affiliation.<sup>191</sup>

In general, the authorities have taken a more accommodating approach to integrating Christians into the public sector compared to other minorities, although progress in this area remains limited.<sup>192</sup>

### 6.3. Religious and social conditions

According to a church organisation, Christians throughout Syria generally live openly as Christians without having to conceal their faith.<sup>193</sup> The authorities publicly affirm freedom of religion, and large church gatherings remain permitted.<sup>194</sup> However, members of Christian and other minority communities reportedly exercise caution in public, adjusting their appearance and behaviour due to uncertainty about the new authorities' policies on personal freedom. While there is no official requirement concerning how to dress in public, occasional remarks from security officers have reportedly prompted individuals to be more careful about their clothing.<sup>195</sup> Priests in some areas have also been advised to limit public celebrations and avoid drawing attention.<sup>196</sup>

The authorities have maintained restrictions on the sale of alcohol in Muslim-majority areas, but Christians continue to sell alcohol in their own areas through shops previously licensed by the former government. No new licences have reportedly been issued despite numerous applications.<sup>197</sup>

The church organisation observed that the current government is largely composed of pragmatic actors whose main objective is to preserve power and maintain stability rather than pursue a religious or ideological agenda. Religion is generally regarded as a personal matter, and the authorities are not reported to govern on the basis of faith. At the same time, however, the government faces internal and societal pressure from more ideological elements within its ranks and from segments of society influenced by extremist narratives. Social media have reportedly contributed to rising tensions: while some users engage in hate speech against minorities, others amplify or sensationalise incidents of violence, both of which negatively affect minority communities. As a result, the authorities are described as continually balancing

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<sup>190</sup> Church organisation: 10

<sup>191</sup> Church organisation: 10-11

<sup>192</sup> Church organisation: 12

<sup>193</sup> Church organisation: 9

<sup>194</sup> TDA: 9

<sup>195</sup> International organisation (1): 25

<sup>196</sup> TDA: 9

<sup>197</sup> International organisation (1): 26

their pragmatic approach with the expectations of their more radical supporters, while addressing ongoing security challenges.<sup>198</sup>

## 6.4. Conversion to Christianity

Conversion from Islam to Christianity remains a sensitive issue,<sup>199</sup> and it is officially not permitted in Syria, as was also the case under the former government. Muslims who do convert in government-controlled areas reportedly avoid disclosing their new faith, as doing so could provoke hostility from their communities and even from their relatives.<sup>200</sup>

According to a high-profile church leader, a Syrian Muslim who converted abroad and publicly announced it on social media before returning to Syria would likely face similar hostile reactions from his/her relatives or society.<sup>201</sup>

The high-profile Christian church leader knew many Muslims who had converted to Christianity. They are baptised but they do not change their religious status in their documents; they remain registered Muslims.<sup>202</sup> In Kurdish-held areas in Northeast Syria, however, there have been many cases of conversion from Islam to Christianity, without such conversions leading to any repercussions from the authorities in these areas. Very conservative American evangelical churches are active in the region and openly convert Muslim Kurds to Christianity.<sup>203</sup>

Christians are not allowed to openly promote or proselytise their beliefs in Syria, even though no law or official policy explicitly prohibits it.<sup>204</sup> Similarly, an international organisation found it unlikely that a Christian would attempt to convert others, as the authorities cannot control the radical elements with extremist religious views within their ranks and in society, which puts anyone engaged in proselytising at risk of being attacked.<sup>205</sup> The evangelical church therefore does not engage in proselytising activities in government-controlled areas.<sup>206</sup>

## 6.5. Jehovah's Witnesses

Although less active today than in the past, Jehovah's Witnesses are still present in Syria, particularly in Wadi al-Nasara in the Homs Governorate. They focus exclusively on converting

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<sup>198</sup> Church organisation: 13

<sup>199</sup> Church organisation: 14; International organisation (1): 27

<sup>200</sup> Church organisation: 14, 15; International organisation (1): 27

<sup>201</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 23

<sup>202</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 24

<sup>203</sup> In contrast, in Kurdish-held areas in Northeast Syria, however, there have been many cases of conversion from Islam to Christianity, without such conversions leading to any repercussions from the authorities in these areas. Very conservative American evangelical churches are active in the region and openly convert Muslim Kurds to Christianity (International organisation (1): 28; Church organisation: 15)

<sup>204</sup> Church organisation: 14; High-profile Christian church leader: 19

<sup>205</sup> International organisation (1): 27

<sup>206</sup> Church organisation: 16

## SYRIA – SITUATION OF CERTAIN GROUPS

Christians to their faith. The government shows no concern about Jehovah's Witnesses' activities, taking no action to restrict or monitor their efforts.<sup>207</sup>

Jehovah's Witnesses do not have houses of worship but maintain an active presence through low-profile activities such as distributing literature, sharing gospel material, and occasional door-to-door visits within Christian communities.<sup>208</sup> They have been reported to offer financial or material incentives to vulnerable individuals in an effort to convert them, allegedly taking advantage of widespread poverty and food insecurity.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Church organisation: 17-18; High-profile Christian church leader: 26

<sup>208</sup> Church organisation: 18

<sup>209</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 26

## 7. Atheists and individuals with non-religious behaviour

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In Syria, every citizen's religion is listed on their ID card, regardless of their personal beliefs or non-religious sentiments. The high-profile Christian church leader stated that non-religious individuals do not under any circumstances dare to reveal or spread their atheism publicly. While rare, there have been instances of harassment against individuals whose clothing indicated they were not religious.<sup>210</sup>

As regards other types of non-Islamic behaviour, there have been many and regularly occurring incidents at two particular checkpoints in Damascus, in Zabadani and on Baghdad Street. In one case, a woman was stopped while sitting in a car with her fiancé and accused of violating norms of gender mixing (by being alone with a man with whom she has no formal relationship to). She was reportedly returned to her family, while the man was beaten by checkpoint personnel.<sup>211</sup>

Punishment for perceived non-religious behaviour varies depending on who controls the checkpoint. For example, the checkpoints on the road from Damascus to the coast vary greatly in who controls them and therefore in what they perceive as proper behaviour.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 20

<sup>211</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 21

<sup>212</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 22

## 8. Women

In March 2025, President Ahmed al-Sharaa signed a constitutional declaration that includes Article 21 on women's rights.<sup>213</sup> Article 21 states that the Syrian state shall uphold women's social status, protect their dignity, and support their role within both the family and society. It guarantees their rights to education and employment, as well as the protection of their social, economic, and political rights. The article also commits to safeguarding women from all forms of oppression, injustice, and violence.<sup>214</sup>

Despite these legal guarantees by the interim government, Syrian women continue to face major barriers to equality due to discriminatory laws, conservative social norms, and limited protection.<sup>215</sup> A Syrian human rights organisation expressed concern that the new authorities hold restrictive views on women's role in society.<sup>216</sup> At the same time, isolated cases of women being appointed to prominent positions have been reported, including a feminist Christian woman who was a member of the Syrian National Dialogue Committee, serving as Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, and several women as university deans.<sup>217</sup>

In general, women's rights and livelihood opportunities remain a critical concern, as women are frequently not economically independent.<sup>218</sup>

### 8.1. Incidents involving women

Reports issued earlier in 2025 describe cases of sexual violence and harassment against women, especially at checkpoints and during return journeys through unsafe areas. These incidents occurred across different parts of the country, including in zones previously controlled by the SDF, SNA, and the former government.<sup>219</sup> Violence and abuse against women are perpetrated by a mix of state actors, groups linked to them, and non-state or criminal actors.<sup>220</sup>

SNHR had not documented cases of government-perpetrated abuses specifically targeting women, but there had been reports of kidnappings by unidentified armed groups, particularly in Homs, where the bodies of several abducted women were later found. The perpetrators and motives remain unknown.<sup>221</sup>

<sup>213</sup> Netherlands, MFA, *Ambtsbericht Syrië [Official Report Syria]*, May 2025, [url](#), p. 107

<sup>214</sup> Safhat Syriya, 2025-مفاوضات وتحليلات-تحديث 21 آذار [Constitutional Declaration of Syria 2025 – Articles and Analysis – updated March 21, 2025], 21 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>215</sup> Representatives of an international organisation: 17; SWPM: 1

<sup>216</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (1): 23

<sup>217</sup> Aswad: 1; New Arab, *What to know about Syria's new cabinet and its top ministers*, 30 March 2025, [url](#)

<sup>218</sup> Humanitarian organisation (1): 18

<sup>219</sup> Representatives of an international organisation: 17

<sup>220</sup> SWPM: 5

<sup>221</sup> SNHR: 34

In general, the situation of women with regard to freedom of movement varies across Syria. In Damascus, many women move around independently but take precautions, while in smaller towns and rural areas stricter cultural norms limit their mobility.<sup>222</sup> In the coastal region, fears of kidnapping by armed groups have led some women to leave university and kept girls from attending school. In Aleppo, some women covered their hair to avoid harassment. According to an international organisation, women's main concerns relate to harassment at checkpoints or by armed men rather than by regular police.<sup>223</sup>

### 8.1.1. Sectarian variations

The situation of women in Syria — including their safety and treatment — reportedly varies widely, largely depending on their sectarian background and the region in which they live.<sup>224</sup>

For example, many Alawite women no longer feel safe moving around freely, using public transportation, or working outside their communities, as some have been subjected to kidnapping and sexual violence.<sup>225</sup> One source, however, had met with Alawite females from the coast who had expressed that they did not face restrictions or difficulties regarding their freedom of movement. The activist was not aware of specific incidents of women facing any difficulties (e.g. harassment, including sexual harassment) when using public transportation in Syria, including during long-distance bus travel.<sup>226</sup>

In addition to kidnappings and rape of Alawite women along the coast, there have been reports of abductions and rape of women in Suweida, a governorate primarily inhabited by Druze.<sup>227</sup>

A Syrian human rights organisation observed that Sunni women, especially if they are wearing the hijab (such as women from Idlib, Aleppo, and Homs), face fewer challenges than Alawite, Christian and Druze women. Non-Sunni women appear more vulnerable, especially when their identity is visible through appearance or behaviour. Most cases of discrimination, harassment and abuse of women are reported from minority areas, while such cases are rarely reported from Hama, Aleppo, or Daraa.<sup>228</sup>

In addition to a woman's religious background and appearance, the way she is treated depends on her social class, income, and family background; wealthier or well-connected women are usually treated more fairly and respectfully than poorer women without influence.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> TDA: 10

<sup>223</sup> International organisation (2): 15

<sup>224</sup> SWPM: 2, 8-9; TDA: 10; SWPM: 6; Syrian human rights organisation (1): 23, 27; Syrian human rights organisation (2): 6; International organisation (2): 15

<sup>225</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (2): 6; Syrian human rights organisation (1): 26; Aswad: 7; SWPM: 6; International organisation (2): 15

<sup>226</sup> Aswad: 7-8

<sup>227</sup> SWPM: 6; Syrian human rights organisation (1): 24; Syrian human rights organisation (2): 6

<sup>228</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (1): 23, 27

<sup>229</sup> SWPM: 9

### 8.1.2. *Regional variations*

The situation of women also varies significantly between regions.<sup>230</sup> Women in smaller towns and rural communities often live under stricter cultural norms and depend on family networks for protection; their main concern is harassment at checkpoints or by armed men, rather than actions by the regular police. In Damascus, on the other hand, many women go out alone and participate in daily life, but they take precautions.<sup>231</sup>

Government protection for women against violence or harassment is generally insufficient — for example, in cases of abduction in the coastal areas, Suweida, and parts of Homs, and Damascus.<sup>232</sup> Many women do not even report incidents to the police, presumably because they do not trust the authorities. A Syrian human rights organisation was aware of only one case, involving a woman from the coastal area who filed a rape complaint.<sup>233</sup>

In regions dominated by armed groups or conservative factions, individuals targeting women are not being held accountable.<sup>234</sup> In cases of kidnapping and rape of Alawite or Druze women, the authorities failed to protect them and only reacted superficially after the cases received widespread publicity, according to a Syrian human rights organisation. In a recent case in Hama, the identities of the men who raped an Alawite woman were widely known; however, the perpetrators had not been arrested.<sup>235</sup>

The Syrian Women's Political Movement interviewed by DIS noted, however, that — after an increase in kidnappings in the coastal areas — the authorities began to intervene more actively, following pressure from civil society and women's groups. Yet the lack of a neutral investigation of subsequent abductions of several women in Suweida means that it is still not possible to determine which actors were behind the kidnappings or to hold anyone accountable.<sup>236</sup>

### 8.1.3. *Precautionary measures and dress code*

In order to minimise the risk of harassment or abuse, some women reportedly adjust their behaviour. For example, women avoid staying out late, unfamiliar areas, and taking taxis driven by unknown men, and they coordinate transport with friends or relatives to ensure safety.<sup>237</sup>

Some women have reportedly adopted the headscarf out of fear of harassment, as reported in Aleppo or among Alawite women in Homs, despite there being no official directive regulating women's attire.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> TDA: 10; SWPM: 6

<sup>231</sup> TDA: 10

<sup>232</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (1): 24; Syrian human rights organisation (2): 6; SWPM: 6

<sup>233</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (1): 28

<sup>234</sup> SWPM: 2

<sup>235</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (2): 6

<sup>236</sup> SWPM: 6

<sup>237</sup> SWPM: 7; TDA: 10

<sup>238</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (2): 8; International organisation (2): 15

In areas controlled by the interim government, women have at times been informally warned by individual local authorities, religious leaders, or security actors with extremist ideological views for not wearing the Islamic veil.<sup>239</sup> On the coast in Tartous and Latakia, and in Suweida, as well as in parts of Homs and Damascus, local actors — some of whom are connected to the authorities — have reportedly imposed the hijab and carried out campaigns promoting stricter religious dress codes for women.<sup>240</sup>

However, a female activist said she had neither witnessed nor heard of any cases in which Syrian women were assaulted for not wearing the Islamic veil anywhere in the country. She added that when meeting female Alawites at civil society activities, they told her they faced no restrictions on their freedom to dress as they wished. Still, isolated local incidents may occur where women are asked to cover their hair.<sup>241</sup>

### 8.2. Access to public services

The government's overall position on women's rights and representation remains uncertain. Some members of the new administration have openly opposed women's participation in specific roles and have criticised previous efforts to advance gender equality.<sup>242</sup>

According to SNHR, daily life, including access to public services, reportedly remains largely unchanged, with no notable improvement or deterioration in women's rights or protection.<sup>243</sup> However, according to the Syrian Women's Political Movement, public services have improved in some areas, while in others they have deteriorated. Administrative services have improved in some urban and government-controlled areas and public officials there act professionally. In contrast, women still experience discrimination and insecurity in regions dominated by armed groups or conservative factions.<sup>244</sup>

In some areas, such as a 'one-stop window' office in Damascus, administrative processes are efficient and staff treat women respectfully. In contrast, in more conservative or conflict-affected areas such as Douma, women often face discriminatory treatment when dealing with local authorities. Officials may question their presence, ask for a male relative to accompany them, or delay their paperwork, which makes administrative procedures longer and more difficult for women than for men.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (2): 8

<sup>240</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (1): 24; Church organisation: 2; Syrian human rights organisation (1): 21; EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, July 2025, [url](#), p. 53

<sup>241</sup> Aswad: 8-9

<sup>242</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Country Focus*, March 2025, [url](#), p. 35

<sup>243</sup> SNHR: 35

<sup>244</sup> SWPM: 2, 8

<sup>245</sup> SWPM: 8

## 8.3. Single, widowed and divorced women

In addition to their individual sectarian background and specific region, women face different challenges depending on their civil status.<sup>246</sup> The situation of single, widowed, or divorced women has not changed or improved under the new government; they continue to face the same difficulties regarding employment, transport, housing, protection, and access to official documents.<sup>247</sup>

With regard to housing, single women and widows face social restrictions; although they are legally allowed to rent housing and complete official procedures independently, social norms often obstruct their access. Landlords and local officials may question or discourage women from living alone.<sup>248</sup>

Women whose husbands are missing or deceased and those married to foreign nationals face severe administrative problems. The problem is most acute in the northwest where foreign fighters were present. During the conflict, some of these fighters married Syrian women in religious or informal ceremonies that were never officially registered and sometimes had children. When the men were later killed, disappeared, or returned to their home countries, the women were left without legal proof of marriage and therefore could not register their children.<sup>249</sup>

Although Syrian law states that a child of an unknown father can be registered as a Syrian citizen, this is rarely implemented in practice. Social stigma and bureaucratic reluctance prevent families from talking publicly about this issue. Some women register children under the name of a male relative instead in order to obtain papers. The restriction in the nationality law for women to pass on citizenship to their children remains a key barrier.<sup>250</sup>

### 8.3.1. *Return of single, widowed, and divorced women*

An international NGO found it very difficult to generalise about the situation of single women returning, as it depends on a number of factors, including conditions in the area of return, the individual woman's economic situation etc. However, single women and female-headed households constitute a particularly vulnerable group upon return. They are generally highly dependent on family members, as they are rarely economically independent. If a single mother returns, it is usually expected that her family will host her, which often entails living restrictions, including limited freedom of movement, imposed by the family. Local security conditions in the area of return can further limit women's movement.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (1): 23

<sup>247</sup> SNHR: 35; Syrian human rights organisation (2): 9

<sup>248</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (1): 23; SWPM: 11; Aswad: 6

<sup>249</sup> SWPM: 12

<sup>250</sup> SWPM: 13

<sup>251</sup> International NGO: 7

Women returning to Syria without a husband will generally not be able to support themselves in Syria due to the deteriorated economic situation with very high rental costs and very limited job opportunities.<sup>252</sup> For many single women, the high cost of housing combined with prevailing social attitudes toward women living alone makes it difficult to secure accommodation. As a result, many choose to remain abroad or in refugee camps.<sup>253</sup>

Women attempting to return to Damascus encounter significant obstacles in securing both housing and employment. Some women who previously resided in refugee camps in Idlib and sought to resettle in Damascus following the fall of the former government ultimately had to return to the camps due to the prohibitively high rental costs. Female public-sector employees seeking to reclaim their former positions have been unable to do so, as personnel from the previous administration continue to occupy these posts despite the establishment of the new government.<sup>254</sup>

For single women and elderly people, reintegration heavily depends on access to a supportive family network. Many women returning to Syria without a husband or a male head of household rely heavily on their extended families and often move in with them, especially when they do not have access to their immediate families (e.g. due to displacement abroad). Returnees from neighbouring countries, particularly those who have lived in camps, often need to re-establish contact with family members who stayed behind in Syria upon arrival.<sup>255</sup>

Women whose husbands are missing (e.g. due to forced disappearance) face particularly complex situations, as they must rebuild their lives from scratch. This includes reconnecting with relatives to clarify potential inheritance rights while coping with the emotional challenge of deciding whether to declare their husband deceased or continue searching for him.<sup>256</sup>

There are also cases of female-headed households returning to Syria while the husband remains abroad, for instance in Lebanon or Türkiye, to secure an income for the family. According to a humanitarian organisation interviewed by DIS, these cases illustrate a distinct return experience where economic survival depends on family support across borders.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Humanitarian organisation (1): 18; TDA: 11; Aswad: 2, 6; International organisation (2): 15

<sup>253</sup> Aswad: 6

<sup>254</sup> Aswad: 2

<sup>255</sup> Humanitarian organisation (1): 16, 18

<sup>256</sup> Humanitarian organisation (1): 17

<sup>257</sup> Humanitarian organisation (1): 19

## 9. Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS)

Around 438,000 Palestinian Refugees of Syria (PRS) are estimated to remain in Syria, living primarily in 12 camps across Syria as well as in large informal settlements in rural areas.<sup>258</sup>

An estimated 85% of the total PRS are registered with the governmental agency GAPAR (General Administration for Palestinian Arab Refugees), and include Palestinians who fled to Syria before or in 1956 and their descendants. They are entitled to the same rights as Syrian citizens in terms of public services and employment, among other things. The rest of the PRS are not registered with GAPAR, which includes Palestinians who arrived in Syria after 1956 and their descendants.<sup>259</sup>

In addition to registration with GAPAR, some PRS are registered with UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), which makes it possible to further divide Palestinians in Syria into these four groups: 1) PRS registered with both GAPAR and UNRWA; 2) PRS registered only with GAPAR; 3) PRS registered only with UNRWA; and 4) PRS who are not registered at all.<sup>260</sup>

Palestinians who are not registered with GAPAR can face a number of difficulties due to a lack of valid ID documents. For example, they may experience problems related to freedom of movement, access to public services, and employment.<sup>261</sup>

In late September 2025, however, GAPAR issued a new circular, allowing unregistered PRS to obtain official Syrian-Palestinian documents. Registration, however, requires a valid residency card issued by the Ministry of Interior, which will disqualify most people, according to a Palestinian lawyer interviewed by *The New Arab*.<sup>262</sup> No information regarding the implementation of this new circular was found within the time constraints of this report.

### 9.1. Current living conditions of PRS

#### 9.1.1. Socioeconomic situation

More than 91% of PRS were living below the poverty line in 2019 and were in need of UNRWA emergency assistance without which they would actually be in abject poverty. A humanitarian

<sup>258</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 8, 14

<sup>259</sup> Netherlands, MFA, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2022, [url](#), p. 51; EUAA, *Syria: Targeting of individuals*, September 2022, [url](#), pp. 99-100; UNRWA, *Information on UNRWA services available to Palestine Refugees from Syria returning from displacement due to the Syria crisis*, July 2025, [url](#), p. 3; EUAA, *Syria: Targeting of individuals*, September 2022, [url](#), p. 99

<sup>260</sup> EUAA, *Syria: Targeting of individuals*, September 2022, [url](#), p. 100

<sup>261</sup> Netherlands, MFA, *Country of origin information report Syria*, May 2022, [url](#), p. 51; New Arab, *Syria invites undocumented Palestinian refugees to legalise for first time in decades*, 29 September 2025, [url](#)

<sup>262</sup> New Arab, *Syria invites undocumented Palestinian refugees to legalise for first time in decades*, 29 September 2025, [url](#)

organisation assumed that the number today is higher than 91%. However, the situation is similar for Syrians where around 90% are living below the poverty line.<sup>263</sup>

There is a difference between PRS and Syrian citizens with regard to access to land. PRS can only own a residential place but not agricultural, industrial or commercial real estate; they have to make some arrangement with a trusted Syrian and put everything in that person's name.<sup>264</sup>

### 9.1.2. *Treatment of PRS by the government*

A humanitarian organisation interviewed by DIS in September 2025 had not observed any change in how the Syrian authorities perceive PRS since the fall of the Assad government in December 2024; the previous government held a supportive stance towards PRS and this position has been maintained by the current government.<sup>265</sup>

According to the consulted sources, there were no reports of PRS being treated in a discriminatory way when dealing with the new authorities.<sup>266</sup>

According to a humanitarian organisation interviewed by DIS, PRS can move freely and reside anywhere in Syria, and no restrictions on their freedom of movement based on their background or status have been observed so far. However, certain areas remain sensitive for all residents, including both Syrians and PRS, such as locations near military camps and airports.<sup>267</sup>

Likewise, there have been no reports of PRS being treated differently from Syrians at checkpoints. PRS — like Syrians — are not required to show any documents to access UNRWA camps. In some of the camps, there are government checkpoints, but no problems have been reported there either.<sup>268</sup>

## 9.2. Access to UNRWA services in the camps

UNRWA services are available to PRS registered with UNRWA and PRS eligible for registration with UNRWA.<sup>269</sup>

There are 12 PRS camps in the country. Over the years, however, some PRS have moved out of the camps to large informal settlements in rural areas, including in Sasa, Dummar, Mezze, Husseiniyeh, Alliance, Rukn Eddin, Al Zahira, Mashrou Dummar, Ramadan, Jdeidat Artouz, Sahnaya, Shahba, Khirbet al-Shayyab, Qudsaya town, Qudsaya suburb, Massakin Barzeh, and

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<sup>263</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 16

<sup>264</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 17

<sup>265</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 1

<sup>266</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 2; Action Group For Palestinians of Syria, *The Syrian government announces the correction of an error in the registration of Palestinian refugee data*, 11 July 2025, [url](#)

<sup>267</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 4, 6

<sup>268</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 4-6

<sup>269</sup> UNRWA, *Information on UNRWA services available to Palestine Refugees from Syria returning from displacement due to the Syria crisis*, July 2025, [url](#), p. 1

Adra. UNRWA services are provided in the camps, whereas in informal settlements, UNRWA provides a limited range of services tailored to each specific gathering. As a result, PRS living outside the camps or in informal settlements where UNRWA does not deliver its full range of services must either travel to the camps to access these services or rely on public services provided by the Syrian authorities.<sup>270</sup>

### *9.2.1. Security provision inside the camps*

The Syrian authorities are in charge of security inside the camps, as this has never been part of UNRWA's mandate. In some camps, such as Neirab and Yarmouk, there are police stations and General Security Forces which constitute the police force. However, police services and protection in the camps are not at the same level as in well-off areas such as Mezze in Damascus. In principle, PRS in the camps may report crimes to the police and request protection; however, the capacity of these services remains limited. This situation is not related to whether a person is PRS or to the fact that it is a Palestinian camp; police services in poorer areas are generally the same throughout the country.<sup>271</sup>

PRS have begun returning to camps that remain contaminated by explosive remnants of war (ERW) and affected by rubble and widespread destruction of housing. These returns are driven by necessity rather than choice, as many PRS can no longer afford to live outside the camps.<sup>272</sup>

Of the 12 UNRWA camps, three have been severely destroyed: Yarmouk in Damascus, Daraa in the south and Ein el-Tal in the north. Living conditions in these camps are harsh. Many families reside in housing without doors or windows, with only plastic coverings providing minimal protection from the elements. Sanitary facilities often lack doors, resulting in a complete absence of privacy. These conditions persist because the affected families are unable to afford rented accommodation elsewhere.<sup>273</sup>

### *9.2.2. Services provided by UNRWA*

UNRWA services provided at the camps include a primary healthcare programme operating nationwide; a basic education programme covering grades 1 to 9; a camp improvement programme (sanitation, hygiene and solid waste management); and a protection programme addressing multiple areas, including gender-based violence (GBV), child protection, international protection and risks related to explosive remnants of war (ERW), which remain a major challenge in the country.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 14

<sup>271</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 7

<sup>272</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 18

<sup>273</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 19

<sup>274</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 8

It is the Syrian government's responsibility to provide infrastructure, electricity, sewage and other public services. Those basic services are generally poor, not only in the camps but across Syria.<sup>275</sup>

PRS returning from abroad or from internal displacement are eligible for the same services provided by UNRWA as PRS already living in Syria, dependent on the availability of funding. Returning PRS must contact UNRWA to reactivate their registration or transfer their file from the country they are returning from in order to access UNRWA services and assistance.<sup>276</sup>

Yarmouk Camp, near Damascus, to which access had been restricted during the conflict, is now accessible.<sup>277</sup> PRS have begun returning to the camp, where schools, health facilities, and other critical infrastructure were previously destroyed.<sup>278</sup> Despite the extensive damage to the area, many families are planning to return to their homes, primarily due to the high rental costs in the capital, where they had sought refuge during the conflict.<sup>279</sup> Before the Syrian conflict began in 2011, around 160,000 PRS lived in the Yarmouk camp.<sup>280</sup> Currently, approximately 9,000 people are residing in the camp.<sup>281</sup>

Over the past two to three years, UNRWA has rehabilitated one school operating on a shift system, as well as one health centre and one community centre. At the end of last academic year, UNRWA schools in the camp had approximately 1,600 students enrolled; by the start of the current school year, approximately 2,700 students had registered, indicating an increase in returns.<sup>282</sup>

To manage the growing number of students in the camp, UNRWA plans to expand classroom capacity — which currently stands at 51 students per class — by relocating prefabricated units from other schools, cooperating with other schools, and converting a science laboratory and other activity rooms into several additional classrooms. However, this will also require the recruitment of additional teachers.<sup>283</sup>

### 9.2.3. *Lack of funding*

A lack of funding currently poses a significant challenge to UNRWA's ability to deliver services, with staff salaries and operational costs sometimes covered only on a month-to-month basis. The emergency response programme is particularly affected, resulting in emergency

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<sup>275</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 15

<sup>276</sup> UNRWA, *Information on UNRWA services available to Palestine refugees from Syria returning from displacement due to the Syria crisis*, July 2025, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>277</sup> International security organisation: 8; Humanitarian organisation (2): 5

<sup>278</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 20

<sup>279</sup> International security organisation: 8

<sup>280</sup> UNRWA, *Yarmouk Camp (Unofficial camp)*, accessed 18 November 2025, [url](#)

<sup>281</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 20

<sup>282</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 20

<sup>283</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 20

interventions — such as cash assistance, food or non-food items — being only partially implemented or, in some cases, not implemented at all.<sup>284</sup>

The funding shortfall has had a wide impact on UNRWA's services. In general, reduced funding has resulted in cuts to some core services, including hospitalisation. While UNRWA is still able to provide primary healthcare — such as maternal and child health services and basic obstetric care — this now requires strict prioritisation. However, UNRWA is no longer able to support secondary healthcare, including cancer treatment, which it previously subsidised by up to 75%. In addition, the programme through which vulnerable cases were referred to hospitals and received partial cost coverage has now been reduced by half or more.<sup>285</sup>

Another example is that this year, UNRWA has only been able to procure around 60% of the required textbooks and workbooks. The remaining 40% are being reused, although workbooks in particular are difficult to reuse. Furthermore, UNRWA's free legal assistance programme — covering issues such as civil documentation and gender-based violence cases — was suspended for several months over the past year and a half, as the agency lacked funding to pay volunteer lawyers to cover transportation costs and court fees, *inter alia*.<sup>286</sup>

In addition to its impact on service delivery, the funding shortfall also affects approximately 2,500 local UNRWA staff, many of whom experience stress and uncertainty about their future employment and financial security. These employees are expected to remain on the frontline, engaging with communities and providing services, yet they do not know whether they will receive their salaries or if their contracts will be renewed. Furthermore, UNRWA is widely criticised by PRS at community meetings and on social media for not fulfilling its mandate, including the provision of cash assistance and food.<sup>287</sup>

### 9.3. Entry conditions for PRS into Syria

PRS typically possess documents issued by GAPAR that allow them to enter Syria.<sup>288</sup> PRS would even be allowed to enter Syria on an expired travel document for PRS.<sup>289</sup> Both GAPAR-registered PRS and unregistered PRS (who were born and have *de facto* been residing in Syria as a habitual place of residence before leaving the country), however, are permitted entry. Even those who do not have the required official documents can enter, provided they can document that they were born in Syria and have previously resided there.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 9

<sup>285</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 10

<sup>286</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 11

<sup>287</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 12-13

<sup>288</sup> Humanitarian organisation (1): 10

<sup>289</sup> International organisation (2): 3

<sup>290</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 21

Officially, GAPAR-registered PRS are required to present a document proving their residency in order to enter Syria. Unregistered PRS rely on the Palestinian embassy to issue documentation confirming their status as Palestinian refugees but such documents are not fully recognised by the new Syrian government, and different state bodies apply varying approaches to documents issued by the Palestinian authorities. In practice, however, the authorities generally apply these entry requirements leniently and allow both categories to enter Syria in one way or another.<sup>291</sup>

A humanitarian organisation interviewed by DIS noted that there are no formal legal provisions or official regulations governing this matter; the information provided by the source above is thus primarily based on observations, accounts, and secondary reporting from refugees and other non-official sources.<sup>292</sup>

The humanitarian organisation gave an example of the lenient approach of the Syrian authorities regarding PRS entry. A PRS man and his Syrian spouse, who initially had two children registered in their family booklet, fled to Lebanon where three additional children were born but not registered. Following the change of government, the family returned to Syria. At the border, the authorities accepted the parents' account and allowed all five children to enter, despite the lack of registration for the three youngest children, aged 8, 10 and 13, none of whom had attended school.<sup>293</sup>

It is thus generally possible for PRS who fled Syria during the conflict to return to Syria and there are no reports of PRS being denied access to Syria.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 22

<sup>292</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 22

<sup>293</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 23

<sup>294</sup> Humanitarian organisation (2): 21

## 10. Government protection

Following the political transition, the authorities publicly stated that protection applied to all Syrians and reaffirmed this commitment in March 2025.<sup>295</sup> Despite these assurances, sources describe the authorities' inability to provide such protection, to investigate, or prosecute perpetrators, and there is currently no functioning mechanism to protect individuals facing immediate threats.<sup>296</sup>

Implementing legislation specifying offenses and penalties has not yet been adopted, creating legal uncertainty for judicial officials and the public.<sup>297</sup> According to government statements, efforts are underway to restore security and prosecute perpetrators, but the widespread availability of weapons and the persistence of independent armed groups continue to undermine these efforts.<sup>298</sup>

### 10.1. Limitations in capacity and command and control

Structural and institutional limitations have further affected the authorities' ability to implement their commitments to protection in practice. The absence of a unified command structure within security institutions and the army, combined with the presence of locally autonomous armed groups, has significantly undermined the authorities' capacity to maintain control and prevent abuses. In several areas, security forces operate without a clearly defined chain of command, and personnel at checkpoints often lack uniforms or identification, blurring the distinction between state actors and affiliated armed groups.<sup>299</sup>

When individuals report incidents committed by persons dressed as official security forces, the authorities consistently respond that these incidents are individual cases carried out by persons impersonating official security forces.<sup>300</sup>

### 10.2. Lack of accountability and variations in protection

Efforts to restrain undisciplined elements of the security forces have been limited, contributing to continued incidents of violence and harassment against especially minorities.<sup>301</sup> Overlapping responsibilities between the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defence regarding arrests and detentions have further contributed to inconsistent enforcement.<sup>302</sup>

<sup>295</sup> Syria Direct: 17; SNHR: 31

<sup>296</sup> Representatives of an international organisation: 18; SNHR: 31; Syria Direct: 18; Syrian human rights organisation (1): 22; High-profile Christian church leader: 3, 5-8, 11, 13

<sup>297</sup> Enab Baladi: 10

<sup>298</sup> SNHR: 32

<sup>299</sup> Representatives of an international organisation: 18-19; Syria Direct: 18; TDA: 13; SWPM: 4

<sup>300</sup> High-profile Christian church leader: 3

<sup>301</sup> SNHR: 31

<sup>302</sup> Representatives of an international organisation: 20

This has also contributed to regional variations in the level of protection provided. Appointments to senior security positions, including influential militia leaders, have often been made on the basis of political considerations, leaving the security apparatus fragmented and poorly coordinated, with limited oversight or accountability.<sup>303</sup>

The level of training and discipline of the police and internal security forces varies significantly. In some cities, police handle complaints seriously, while in other places, reports of abduction or violence are ignored. The authorities sometimes announce that they have punished or arrested individuals involved in abuses but these actions are rare and perpetrators are not consistently prosecuted. It is unclear whether the main issue is limited capacity or lack of genuine political will.<sup>304</sup>

Government protection has been more consistent in major urban centres such as Damascus, Homs, Aleppo, and Latakia, where security forces maintain a stronger presence. In contrast, rural and peripheral areas remain difficult to police due to the widespread availability of weapons and the limited presence of state institutions, enabling armed groups and influential local actors to exercise significant autonomy.<sup>305</sup>

Within this uneven security environment, the level of protection also differs between communities. A source stated, however, that the protection of minorities varies depending on which minority group is involved. According to the source, the current authorities are keen on protecting the Christian community in Syria, providing them with protection when they need it; for example, churches are being protected on Sundays by members of the security forces. Christians are reportedly viewed as a less problematic minority than Alawites or Druze, partly because they were less associated with the former government.<sup>306</sup>

Local authorities have exercised broad autonomy, while accountability mechanisms have remained weak. When abuses have been made public, investigation committees have occasionally been announced, but their findings have rarely been disclosed.<sup>307</sup> The absence of transparent oversight mechanisms and independent bodies has made it difficult to determine whether abuses are investigated or punished.<sup>308</sup>

There have been reports of individuals being killed under torture while in custody, including members of minority groups. These incidents have been addressed by human rights organisations and the Ministry of Interior has been criticised in this regard. The Ministry has

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<sup>303</sup> Representatives of an international organisation: 18;

<sup>304</sup> SWPM: 3

<sup>305</sup> Syria Direct: 18

<sup>306</sup> Syrian human rights organisation (1): 13, 25

<sup>307</sup> Representatives of an international organisation: 5; Syria Direct: 11

<sup>308</sup> Syria Direct: 11; SNHR: 27

## SYRIA – SITUATION OF CERTAIN GROUPS

announced that investigations are being conducted.<sup>309</sup> Although an anti-torture law has been enacted, there have been no recorded prosecutions under this law, and complaints have not resulted in official action.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Church organisation: 5

<sup>310</sup> TDA: 14

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## Annex 1: Meeting minutes

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### Online meeting with Syria Direct, 11 September 2025

#### *About the source*

Syria Direct is a nonprofit journalism organisation that provides in-depth coverage of Syria's war, politics, and society, and also runs training programs for Syrian journalists. The organisation delivers bilingual (Arabic and English) reporting with detailed, fact-checked information for both Syrian and international audiences.

#### *Situation of certain groups*

##### *Persons with real or perceived affiliation with the former government*

1. Since the change of government in Syria, there have been cases of killings, arrests, kidnappings, attempted assassinations, and harassment targeting individuals associated with—or perceived to be associated with—the former state apparatus. Those responsible include both state authorities and non-state actors.
2. Some of the persons targeted have actually been affiliated with the former government and have been involved in abuses. Sometimes, however, there is no proof of the targeted persons' involvement in human abuses; they are being targeted solely based on their former position in e.g. the security services. In addition, family members of persons affiliated with the former government are sometimes targeted, especially male family members in the age 20 to 40, i.e. sons or brothers. Family members of persons affiliated with the former government are regarded by the communities as complicit and therefore become vulnerable.
3. While sectarian-based incidents do take place (e.g. against Alawites or Druze), the primary driver of targeting is (real or perceived) affiliation with the former government rather than sectarian background per se. Western media tends to over-emphasize the sectarian frame. As an illustration, in Douma, which is a predominantly Sunni city with few residents originating from outside the city, there have been incidents targeting locals with perceived affiliation with the former government, such as people associated with the former municipal council, state employees, and figures in religious institutions that had links to the former government.
4. Aleppo Governorate currently experiences the lowest level of targeting of local residents. The governorate benefits from strong cooperation between civil society and the security services, which now function according to clearer rules and established

institutional practices. As a result, Aleppo is recovering faster than other parts of the country. By contrast, targeting remains much more prevalent along the coast, in Homs, Damascus, Rural Damascus, and Suweida.

5. Killings, arrests, harassment or other reprisals against persons with real or perceived affiliation with the former government are usually not targeting senior figures of the former government but rather lower-ranking former government officials and their relatives or extended family members, as these continue to live in local communities, whereas former higher-ranking figures live in areas that are better.
6. Individuals who were public employees under the former government have not been targeted. In the few incidents reported, the cause was the individuals past military involvement, not their administrative function.
7. The interim government has, in certain cases, protected individuals implicated in abuses under the former government. This protection has taken different forms, including shielding them from investigation or arrest. Openly protecting these individuals fuel resentment among communities that suffered under the former government, especially when victims see perpetrators walking around freely or even holding positions of local power. For example, Fadi Sukkar who was complicit in the Tadamon massacre has not been arrested and is said to hold a position in a local peace committee.
8. Mere membership of the Baath Party has not been a targeting trigger because most Syrians were forced to join the party to get a job in the state (e.g. teachers, doctors, administrative employees etc); it was mandatory and mostly symbolic.
9. Journalists who had previously worked with the former government's official state media have not faced kidnappings or targeted killings. At most, there have been incidents of verbal confrontations. For example, at a training workshop organised by the Al Jazeera Media Institute in Damascus after the change of government where both opposition journalists and pro-Assad journalists participated It came to heated verbal disputes, especially about past loyalties, but no physical assaults took place.
10. There is an ongoing pattern of social exclusion targeting relatives of people linked with the former government. Although these incidents rarely involve physical violence, affected families were often deliberately excluded or avoided by their community as a form of social punishment. This kind of social isolation of relatives of people linked with

the former government poses a serious obstacle to long-term social cohesion and reconciliation in Syrian society.

11. In Latakia, Tartous, and Baniyas, settlement centres were set up in order for former SAA soldiers to settle their status and have cards issued as proof of settlement. Despite this, several card-holders were later killed; this has been a documented pattern in those coastal areas. There has been no public naming of perpetrators, no published sentences, and no final investigations made public. Authorities have admitted that the abuses were committed by a large number of people who were acting collectively - rather than they being isolated acts - but the authorities did not name who was responsible. Two individuals were reportedly placed on a U.S. sanctions list for these abuses; on the sanctions list, these persons are described as being part of the current government forces. The lack of a transparent and independent body to monitor the actions of the authorities means that there is no reliable way to assess whether accountability measures are actually being implemented. Without such oversight, it remains unclear how decisions are made, whether abuses are investigated, and if those responsible are ever held to account.

### *Alawites*

12. Tensions between Alawite and Sunni communities, as well as between Alawites and the government, have intensified. On 27 August 2025, an armed faction aligned with the current authorities gave residents a deadline to vacate the Soumariyya area — a predominantly Alawite neighbourhood. Around the same time, residents of Muadamiya protested against the Alawite presence in Soumariyya, claiming the area was being occupied illegally. The Damascus Governorate subsequently intervened, issuing a decision prohibiting the expulsion of the Alawite residents and announcing that the dispute would be addressed through the courts. The Soumariyya issue is longstanding and dates back more than forty years, when the state expropriated land from Muadamiya and redistributed it to government employees.
13. However, many locals interpreted the actions as politically or sectarian-motivated - targeting Alawite residents in a Sunni-majority area - rather than as neutral law enforcement. Government acts like these have fuelled mistrust and strengthened the sense of discrimination and collective punishment.

### *Christians*

14. In the period immediately following the fall of the former government, several incidents were reported in Christian localities of the Hama countryside (such as Maharda), as well as in June 2025 in Rural Damascus (Mar Elias Church). These incidents targeted religious sites and gatherings rather than individual Christians and

did not form part of a wider, systematic campaign. Attacks on churches have been very limited, and the security services have responded to them promptly and decisively.

### *Kurds*

15. There have not been reported attacks on Kurds living in the areas under the control of the interim government.

### *Journalists*

16. There have not been any reports on journalists killed or kidnapped because of their profession. Criminality levels, notably kidnapping for ransom - especially in Homs - and robberies, are high because of a weak state. For example, in Rural Damascus, a media worker who had returned from displacement in northern Syria was kidnapped and later found killed. This was a crime committed because of personal/financial reasons.

### *Government protection*

17. Officially, the current government wants to protect all Syrians, regardless of affiliation. Practically, it cannot always do so, which allow such incidents and abuses to continue. For example, in Suweida, the authorities were unwilling or unable to restrain abuses against civilians by local tribes.
18. Government protection is generally better in major cities, such as Damascus, Homs, Aleppo, and Latakia, where security forces are more present. Rural areas remain harder to police due to the continued availability of arms and the limited presence of state institutions. Inadequate law enforcement and fragile local administration allow armed groups and influential individuals to operate with considerable autonomy, making it difficult for the authorities to maintain order.

## Online meeting with a Syrian human rights organisation (2), 15 September 2025

### *Return*

1. All Syrians are allowed to return to and enter Syria by presenting any document proving that they are Syrians.

### *Public employees who left their position without notice*

2. People whose names appeared on wanted lists under the former government - including former public employees who left their post or the country without notice - remain registered in the authorities' database as individuals with outstanding issues.

However, they are allowed to re-enter Syria without problem and will not be arrested upon return. In order to have their names removed from the list, they must report to the relevant authority inside Syria. Until their status is cleared and their names removed, they cannot obtain official documents such as passports, nor will they be allowed to leave Syria again.

3. For former lower-ranking public employees, the removal of their names from the lists is generally a bureaucratic formality. It may, however, entail practical difficulties, particularly if the individual resides in a different part of Syria than the authority in question. By contrast, former high-profile officials, including those affiliated with the Assad government's security services, often face challenges in having their names removed. Former high-ranking officials are typically required to attend a meeting with the authorities regarding their case.
4. A further distinction should be made between senior officials or security personnel who left Syria before, and those who left after the change of government. Individuals who departed after the fall of the Assad government may, upon return, be subjected to interrogation or investigation regarding potential criminal offences.

### *Former draft evaders and deserters*

5. Like other returnees whose names appear on wanted lists, former draft evaders and deserters must report to the authorities and have their names removed upon return. The treatment of returning draft evaders and deserters may vary depending on the local officer in charge and the individual's sectarian affiliation. Alawites face some level of suspicion and risk of interrogation or arrest, whereas Sunnis generally do not encounter such problems. However, the number of draft evaders and deserters among Alawites remains limited.

### *Situation of certain groups*

#### *Women*

6. Alawite women have been subjected to kidnapping and sexual violence. Recently, three armed Sunni men raped an Alawite woman in Sarhad in Hama countryside. Although the identities of the perpetrators are widely known, they have not been arrested. Both Alawite and Druze women live in fear, as Druze women have also been targeted; during the clashes in Suweida, 18 Druze girls were reportedly raped. The authorities fail to protect these women and only respond superficially when cases become widely publicized.
7. Officials have denied reports of kidnapping and rape of Alawite women during the coastal clashes in March 2025, despite documentation provided by the Syrian

Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the international investigation committee, and Reuters.

8. There is no official directive regulating women's attire. However, in areas controlled by the interim government, women have at times been informally warned by individual local authorities, religious leaders, or security actors with extremist ideological views for not wearing the Islamic veil. In some locations, women have adopted the headscarf out of fear of harassment, such as reported among Alawite women in Homs.
9. Single women (unmarried or widowed) have not experienced any change in their situation since the fall of the previous government.

*Kurds*

10. Syrian Kurds living in government-controlled areas do usually not face any issue with the authorities. There have been cases where Kurds coming from the Northeast Syria were arrested in Damascus. They were, however, released after a deal. The reason for these arrests was not clear.

*Persons opposing or perceived to be opposing the interim authorities*

11. People inside Syria usually refrain from expressing views in opposition to the new authorities for fear of possible consequences.
12. Public discussion of the violent events in the coastal area and in Suweida, particularly when described as 'massacres' of Alawites and Druze, is generally considered a sensitive topic that may be viewed as crossing political red lines. There have been individual cases of Syrians living abroad who have faced intimidation or threats for speaking out on these issues. There are indications that the authorities monitor social media.

*Christians*

13. The current authorities are keen on protecting the Christian community in Syria, providing them with protection when they need it. For example, churches are being protected on Sundays by members of the security forces.

**Online meeting with a Syrian human rights organisation (1), 17 September 2025**

*Return*

*Former draft evaders and deserters*

1. Former draft evaders and deserters can reportedly enter Syria without formal settlement procedures, though they may later need to regularise their status. At the border, officials inform individuals if they are still listed as wanted; some are asked to report later to the relevant offices to have their names removed from the lists.
2. The source has not heard of any particular difficulties faced by former draft evaders or deserters while seeking to have their names removed from wanted lists.

*Public employees who left their position without notice*

3. Public employees from all sectarian backgrounds, including Alawites, who return from abroad must reportedly complete an administrative procedure to clear their name. However, they are not prevented from entering at border crossings or airports.
4. The source had not heard of any problems for public employees who left their job without notice in getting their name cleared from wanted lists.
5. There are no known cases of sentences issued in absentia during the Assad period being implemented by the new authorities.

*Situation of certain groups*

*Persons opposing or perceived to be opposing the interim authorities*

6. Although there is still some room for constructive criticism of the government, there is less and less space for criticism and less freedom of speech compared to the first months after the fall of the Assad government. However, it is not as restricted as it was under the former government.
7. Constructive criticism of government performance is tolerated to some extent, but the boundaries of acceptable speech remain uncertain. People are discovering day by day what are the red lines of criticism. Criticism of key ministries—Defence, Interior, and Foreign Affairs—are controlled by HTS figures and are considered 'red lines'. Ministers from outside HTS can be criticised more openly.
8. Individuals who address sensitive issues risk arrest, abduction, torture, or even killing. Criticism related to abuses against Alawites or Druze is especially risky. For example, it has become too sensitive to describe what happened on the coast as massacres and that the new government has committed abuses against Alawites or Druze. One should rather frame such incidents as crimes committed by 'unidentified actors' and praise the government's efforts to hold the perpetrators accountable for their actions.

9. The source does not know of individuals living abroad who have publicly criticised the new authorities and later returned to Syria. For that reason, it is unclear what consequences such criticism might have for those who decide to go back. People wanting to return to Syria probably know that they should not criticise the government. The source himself - who has posted extensively online about the what he described as coastal 'massacres' - doubts he could return without facing consequences and plans to remain abroad or move to northeastern Syria.
10. Whether the authorities monitor or react to criticism from individuals living abroad depends on the person's background, the content of their statements, and the level of public attention they receive. The authorities would not necessarily be aware of, nor would it necessarily have consequences, if an ordinary person abroad criticised the government.

*Persons with real or perceived affiliation with the former government*

11. Thousands of individuals have reportedly been targeted due to their real or perceived links with the former government, particularly those who served in the army or the intelligence services. In Aleppo, executions were reported, while in other regions people were arrested or disappeared under unclear circumstances.
12. The criteria used to determine who is considered affiliated with the former government remain unclear. In some cases, the authorities appear to rely on lists of wanted people, while in other cases, individuals are detained after being reported by neighbours or local community members. Some former officials have been detained, others released, while a number of individuals linked to the former government have reportedly been integrated into the new administration.
13. In many cases, it is difficult to separate whether individuals were targeted for political reasons - due to association with the former government - or for sectarian reasons, particularly because they were Alawite.
14. Protection by the new authorities appears inconsistent. For instance, during the incidents in the coastal areas, some individuals received protection, while others were left unprotected for reasons that remain unclear.

*Alawites*

15. The government's ideological outlook is described as primarily Sunni Arab, which has created fear and distrust among minority groups. Along the coast, there have been reports of Alawites being identified and killed solely on the basis of their sectarian identity, even when they had previously opposed Bashar al-Assad and his government.

*Druze*

16. During times of tension, extremist Sunni students reportedly tried to provoke and harass Druze students, for example by creating WhatsApp groups to spread hate messages and coordinate attacks at universities. There is no indication that the authorities encouraged these actions; however, they failed to stop them.
17. In Suweida, extremist Sunni groups and Arab tribal fighters reportedly carried out attacks on Druze communities, reciting Quranic verses that refer to non-Muslims. These incidents created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity among Druze residents.

*Kurds*

18. There are fewer reported abuses against Kurds than against Alawites. At times, however, cases have been reported. For example, Kurds travelling from northeastern Syria towards Damascus have been stopped at several checkpoints, had their phones searched, and been questioned about possible links to the Kurdish self-administration. Some were detained. Their treatment appears to depend on the political tensions between Damascus and the self-administration at a given time.
19. No changes or abuses have been reported since 2025 for Kurds originally from Damascus, such as those in Rukn al-Din or Wadi al-Mashari. They are difficult to identify ethnically, as they largely resemble other residents of Damascus.

*Christians*

20. The source has not heard of any discrimination against Christians by the authorities, e.g. in terms of access to public services or employment.
21. Groups of men, reportedly including individuals who had fought in Afghanistan, entered Christian neighbourhoods in Damascus carrying Qurans and calling on residents to convert to Islam and for women to wear the hijab. These incidents were unprecedented in the city and reminded many of the period of the Islamic State.
22. There is no indication that the campaigns were organised by the authorities. However, they appear to have taken place because the perpetrators felt confident that they would not face punishment. The incidents created tension between Christians and the authorities who later intervened to prevent similar actions, particularly in cases where organisers had announced their plans online beforehand.

*Women*

23. The situation of women after the fall of the Assad government is a matter of concern, as the new authorities hold conservative views regarding women's role in society. Women face various challenges depending on the area, their ethno-religious

background and civil status. Non-Sunni women appear more vulnerable than Sunni women, especially when their identity is visible through appearance or behaviour. Most cases of discrimination, harassment and abuse of women are reported from minority areas, while such cases are rarely reported from Hama, Aleppo, or Daraa. Single women also face social restrictions as illustrated in one reported case where a woman in Damascus was not allowed to live alone.

24. In the coast, in Suweida, as well as in parts of Homs and Damascus, local actors - of which some are connected to the authorities - have reportedly imposed the hijab and carried out campaigns promoting stricter religious dress codes on women. In these same areas, abductions of women - mainly as an act of criminality - have also occurred because the government does not provide sufficient security.
25. The government's response to such incidents differs from one area to another. Authorities rarely intervene in Alawite-majority areas but have occasionally acted in Christian neighbourhoods to stop extremist groups from promoting Islam or enforcing the hijab. Christians are reportedly viewed as a less problematic minority than Alawites, Druze, or Kurds in Northeast Syria, partly because they were less associated with the former government.
26. As regards whether the daily life of a normal woman in Syria has changed after the change of government (including questions of freedom of movement, job opportunities, education etc.), life has changed for some women, including Alawite women along the coast, as they no longer feel safe moving around freely or working outside their communities.
27. It is the general observation of the source that Sunni women, especially if they are wearing the hijab, such as the women from Idlib, Aleppo, and Homs, face less challenges than Alawite, Christian and Druze women.
28. As regards the availability of government protection, the source assumes that women do not report to the police because they do not trust the authorities. The source is only familiar with one case; it involved a woman in the coastal area who filed a rape complaint.

*Prevalence of forced recruitment into the new army*

29. Recruitment to the new army is voluntary and there is no forced recruitment or pressure to join. Many join primarily for financial reasons, as the salary in the army is relatively high.

30. The new armed forces reportedly have a Sunni Arab and religiously conservative profile. According to the source, al-Sharaa stated that Alawites will not be accepted into the army.

## Meeting with an international organisation (1) in Damascus, 21 September 2025

### *About the source*

The source works for an international organisation dealing with conflict resolution, dialogue facilitation, and peacebuilding. The organisation has been active in Syria since 2012, initially in opposition-held areas and, since 8 December 2024, in Damascus, from where it is working on expanding its activities to other areas of Syria. The source has around 15 years of experience in the humanitarian field and stabilisation programming. Since December 2024, shortly after the political transition, the source has travelled across the country, visiting multiple governorates, helping to establish operational teams in several Syrian regions.

### *Return*

1. Thousands of Syrians have returned from abroad, particularly from Lebanon and Türkiye, but many do not stay permanently; many return to check on their home or recover property and then leave again. The deteriorating economy, lack of services and job opportunities, insecurity and political instability discourage people from permanent return. There are still many families trying to reach Beirut or Europe, especially Alawites and Druze, through irregular paths.
2. The economic situation is dire. Although many contracts and memoranda of understanding have been signed with foreign companies, no actual investments or funds have entered the country, as investors are waiting for greater security, political and economic stability. The Syrian pound has lost much of its value, liquidity is scarce, and state institutions are suffering from a lack of resources and expertise.
3. Previous 'wanted lists' from the Assad era have been largely annulled and political-, military- and security-related wanted cases have mostly been cleared after the government change. Bureaucratic hurdles remain for some former state employees in sensitive sectors. The source was previously on wanted lists for illegal exit, military service, and for leaving the country while employed in the oil sector, which is considered sensitive and where employees must formally resign or settle their employment records before departure — something he had not done before leaving

Syria. Upon his return, he was informed that all his issues had been cleared except the employment matter in the oil sector, which had to be settled in order for him to be able to leave the country again. Resolving this took him four months due to ineffective, chaotic bureaucracy and the new authorities' lack of capacity and know-how.

### *The situation of certain groups*

#### *Persons opposing or perceived to be opposing the interim authorities*

4. During the first three months after the transition, freedom of speech appeared to improve, with people openly criticizing the new government. However, this openness has gradually declined. Although there are no known cases of imprisonment for online criticism, fear of possible repercussions persists.
5. Public criticism is discouraged by religious interpretations. Under the Salafist-influenced ideology of the new authorities, public criticism of leaders is seen as divisive ('*fitna*'). Advice can be given to the authorities but not in public. This logic shapes the atmosphere and discourages public dissent.
6. Sunni Arabs have more space to criticise the government. A Sunni Arab might openly write something on Facebook against the government and often get away with it. Minorities (Druze, Kurds, Alawites, Christians etc.) face harsher risks if they criticise because they can be accused of disloyalty or being 'agents' of outside forces or "separatists". For instance, a Druze criticizing the government risks being labelled as an Israeli collaborator.
7. Some radical Islamist elements even criticise the government for not implementing Sharia fast enough. For example, when the education minister recently reduced Islamic classes from four to two lessons per week and added music and art lessons throughout Syria, strong protests erupted in Idlib, forcing the authorities to reverse the decision in Idlib.
8. The constitutional declaration issued by the new authorities criminalises expressing positive views about the former Assad government. To date, however, the source has not observed anyone expressing such views in public or heard of anyone being targeted by the authorities for this reason.

#### *Persons with real or perceived affiliation with the former government*

9. The risk of a person being targeted because of having served in the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) under Assad's rule depends on the area, the person's ethno-religious background, their rank in the army, and their actions during service.

10. Ordinary SAA soldiers are usually not singled out for persecution unless there are clear accusations that they have committed crimes. However, vigilante attacks against them are increasing, mostly in the Sunni-majority Hama, Homs, and Aleppo provinces, accusing them of being *Folul* (Arabic word for “former government remnants”).
11. About 60 % of SAA were Sunni Arabs; they are usually not being targeted today because of their service in the SAA, particularly in tribal communities (e.g. Deir ez-Zor) where targeting these individuals would provoke violent retaliation from the person’s family and tribe.
12. Members of minority communities (e.g. Alawites) who served in the SAA are more at risk of being targeted, especially if they held higher ranks or were involved in abuses.

*Alawites*

13. The Alawite community is heavily associated with the Assad government and faces mistrust and resentment from both the authorities and other communities, particularly Sunni Muslims. Since the change of government in December 2024, many Alawites have been targeted in vigilante killings, particularly in Homs and Latakia. This is often framed as revenge for crimes committed by the Assad government against Sunni communities, as the new authorities never initiated an official transitional justice process in Syria, holding perpetrators of crimes committed under the Assad government accountable for their acts.
14. Many Alawites have fled abroad (e.g. to Lebanon or Cyprus) through illegal routes or relocated within Syria (e.g. Northeast Syria) to escape threats and economic collapse. Following the change of power, large-scale dismissals of public employees left tens of thousands of Alawites, particularly in the military and security sector, without jobs and their families without income. The Assad government had historically tied the Alawite community closely to the state apparatus, leaving them dependent on government jobs. As a result, many Alawites live in poverty today.

*Druze*

15. The clashes in Suweida and Israel’s involvement and support to the Druze have largely impacted on the situation of Druze in Syria in a negative way; these events have created deep mistrust between the Druze and the Syrian government and to some extent also between Druze and conservative Sunni communities. Since the clashes in Suweida, there has been some suspicion towards the Druze who are being portrayed as supporters or collaborators of Israel against Syria’s national interests.

16. The situation in Suweida is extremely fragile. Although the government officially denies imposing a siege on Suweida, the governorate is currently practically encircled by government forces and allied tribal groups, resulting in shortages of food, medicine, and essential goods. The Druze leadership, led by Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, has refused dialogue with Damascus since the outbreak of recent clashes, maintaining direct contacts with Israeli intermediaries. By putting pressure on the Druze leadership in Suweida, the government aims to persuade them to enter into dialogue with Damascus. Many people have fled Suweida to other areas or even to Lebanon due to fear of renewed conflict.
17. Druze in other areas, such as Damascus, also fear what the future may bring. In May 2025, security forces clashed with Druze armed groups in Jaramana and Sahnaya—two areas in Damascus with large Druze communities that were controlled by the Druze authorities in Suweida. The clashes led to deaths and arrests, causing widespread fear within the Druze community. The government has tried to ease tensions by appointing Druze representatives to local councils but many still feel politically marginalised and distrustful of Damascus. Hundreds of Druze students at universities in Damascus and Aleppo faced harassment from Sunni peers after the 18 July 2025 incidents, forcing them to drop out and return to their communities.<sup>311</sup>
18. The government's pressure on the Druze community in Suweida, Jaramana, and Sahnaya should not be seen as stemming from a sectarian policy; rather, they are driven by the authorities' broader political objective of reasserting control over areas outside government authority, which some communities, including the Druze, continue to resist. However, such clashes have contributed to sectarian tensions within society.
19. The source is not aware of any cases of Druze losing their jobs or access to public services such as health care or education because of their ethnic background, although it cannot be ruled out that an individual public official with a negative attitude towards the Druze may display sectarian bias and cause difficulties for a member of the Druze community seeking services from him.
20. There are radical elements among the authorities and within HTS who consider only Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, whose followers are called 'the People of the Book' in the Qur'an, as legitimate religions, while Druze and Alawites, Ismailies, and Murshidiz

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<sup>311</sup> [بسبب التحبيش الطائفي.. عشرات الطلاب الدروز يغادرون السكن الجامعي Syria, Ultra Druze students have left the university dormitory], 8 May 2025, [url](#)

are not recognized as having legitimate beliefs. This “legitimizes” attacks against them from radical groups linked to HTS.

21. A Druze can, in principle, seek protection from the authorities against violence, like any other Syrian citizen. However, the source assumes that, considering the current situation, a Druze would likely not receive the same treatment when seeking protection from the authorities as, for example, a Sunni Muslim. Nevertheless, it should be noted that people in general do not trust the authorities due to the lack of accountability and they do not expect them to be able to provide protection either; this applies to all Syrians, not just the Druze.

### *Kurds*

22. Ordinary Kurds living in government-controlled areas continue their daily life without major changes and they do not face targeting or discrimination because of their Kurdish background as long as they are not politically active. In Damascus, 30 % of the population are Kurds, many of whom have lived there for centuries, even since the time of Salah al-Din Ayubi in the 12th century.
23. Persons who are involved in political activity, for instance political parties, are facing restrictions, as the government has suspended all political activities. Political parties are disbanded or their activities frozen until a new political party law has been issued. The government is restricting movements sometimes within Kurdish-majority neighbourhoods due to fear of SDF's SDF-linked activities in the capital.

### *Christians*

24. Christian communities live with anxiety after the political changes in December 2024. Many fear the influence of extremist Islamic ideology. Occasional incidents such as attacks on churches and bars, restrictions on alcohol sales in non-Christian areas, and public calling for Islam by radical religious elements (who do not always act under government control) in Christian neighbourhoods all contribute to this climate of fear. In addition, many people – both Christians and non-Christians – know little about the new authorities, which makes them anxious about the future. For instance, when HTS took control of Damascus in December 2024, many initially thought that they were the Islamic State (IS). Posters by HTS linked radical groups, in public places, which are calling for a decent niqab as the only legitimate dress code for women, are also increasing fear among minorities, but also the moderate Sunni Muslims.
25. The feeling of fear and uncertainty about the new authorities' policy on personal freedom has caused some people – particularly among ethno-religious minorities such as Druze, Kurds, Alawites, and Christians – to be more cautious about their appearance

and behaviour in public, for instance with women wearing veils, men growing beards, or avoiding wearing shorts. This is despite the fact that there is no official government policy or practice imposing a certain appearance in public for either men or women. Once in a while, it happens that a member of the security forces asks a man wearing shorts or a woman without a veil to be more attentive to their clothing and appearance in public but nothing further happens from the authorities' side. Nevertheless, people remain cautious and pay more attention to what they wear.

26. Apart from the occasional incidents of attacks on churches, there are no reports of Christians being subjected to targeting because of being Christians. Neither has the source heard of cases of Christians losing their jobs or access to public services such as education and health care due to their religious background. While the government has restricted the sale of alcohol in Muslim-majority areas, Christians still enjoy the right to sell alcohol in their areas, however, limited to only licensed shops by the former government. No new licenses have been granted by the new government despite many having applied for after their shops were closed by authorities.
27. The source has not heard of any cases of Muslims converting to Christianity in government-controlled areas. He assumes that if such cases exist, they would remain unknown, as it is improbable that a convert would reveal his conversion to anyone in his community due to the sensitive nature of conversion and the potential consequences for the individual. In addition, the source considers it unlikely that a Christian would attempt to convert others, as the authorities cannot control radical elements with extremist religious views within their ranks and in society, putting anyone engaged in proselytising at risk of attack.
28. On the other hand, the source has heard of several cases of conversion to Christianity in the Kurdish-controlled areas in the northeast of Syria, without such conversions leading to any consequences for the converts.

### *Recruitment to the new army*

29. Mandatory conscription has been abolished and the new authorities have instead created a voluntary army. There are no reports of forced recruitment or social pressure to join the new army. Hundreds have joined voluntarily, primarily Sunni Arabs who regard the new government as a preferable alternative to the previous one. There is thus no need to force or pressure people to join.
30. Minorities such as Alawites are generally not recruited, despite there being no official policy or written rules about this. This is because the government fears internal distrust

within the predominantly Sunni army, particularly towards Alawites, who are not trusted.

31. Many also fear the Islamist ideology of the new government and its core HTS group, which is a Salafist Islamist one, which is considered extremists and alien to the Sufi moderate Sunni Islam that the majority of Syrian Sunni Arab Muslims are. Thus, they remain reluctant to join.

## Meeting with representatives of an international organisation in Damascus, 21 September 2025

### *Return*

1. Many displaced Syrians who try to return face serious dangers and bureaucratic barriers. A large number of displaced people go back to areas still contaminated by landmines and unexploded ordnance, which caused a sharp increase in child deaths and injuries in early 2025. Demining work remains slow and incomplete, and people often return before clearance is done.
2. Housing is another major problem for returnees. Much of the housing stock has been destroyed, reconstruction is moving slowly, and many families cannot afford to rebuild.
3. Housing, land, and property conflicts are widespread across Syria — especially in Idlib, Homs and Damascus — and stem from years of state confiscations, unimplemented court rulings, and competing ownership claims after displacement. In many places, land-registry offices are still closed, making it impossible for people to verify or reclaim property rights.
4. Lack of valid documents makes reintegration even harder. Birth, marriage and education certificates issued in areas once controlled by the SDF, SNA or other groups are not recognised by the authorities. An agreement from March 2025 between the SDF and the government was meant to solve this issue and standardise school curricula, but progress has stopped.

### *Judicial system*

5. Following various waves of violence, the authorities announced arrests or created investigation committees, but reports or progress in investigations have not been made public and recommendations remain to be implemented.

6. The justice system remains weak and inconsistent. Judges have been dismissed and reinstated in confusing ways, and courts lack staff and resources, despite recent efforts by the Ministry of Justice to address current issues.
7. The March 2025 Constitutional Declaration made several important changes: the status of Islamic Jurisprudence was elevated from 'a primary source' of legislation as per the 2012 Constitution to 'the primary source' of legislation, and various past legislation contrary to human rights are supposed to be abolished, including housing, land and property laws, but it is unclear which laws are still in force, creating uncertainty for judges and the people affected.

*Situation of certain groups*

8. Arbitrary arrests, summary executions, acts of torture, and deaths in custody continue to be reported in areas controlled by the government, such as in Damascus and Homs, including allegedly by interim authorities' security forces and factions affiliated with them. These also highlight the lack of a proper integration process of various armed groups into a unified security apparatus under a central command. Many of these arrests take place at checkpoints or during house raids that are part of ongoing security operations by the security forces. Many of those who have been detained or killed come from minority groups such as the Alawite and Druze communities, or are people thought to have links to the former government. In most cases, families are not officially informed, have no access to lawyers, and receive no information about why their relatives were arrested or where they are being held, leaving them with no way to file a complaint or ask for help.

*Persons opposing or perceived to be opposing the interim authorities*

9. Authorities are closely watching social-media activity. Several people have been arrested after criticising government actions online, including journalists and activists who commented on the security operation in the coastal region earlier in the year.
10. There are no clear legal rules defining what kind of speech can lead to punishment. Enforcement seems uneven and at times targets both well-known public figures and ordinary citizens who post critical opinions. This uncertainty encourages fear and self-censorship.

*Alawites*

11. At the end of August 2025, residents, a majority of whom are Alawites, in the Al-Soumariyyeh area of Damascus have suffered a wave of forced evictions, carried out by a faction that is allegedly linked to the Ministry of Defence forces. These were reportedly accompanied by scores of other abuses such as beatings, looting, and

arbitrary arrests. It is an emblematic case of housing, land and property related disputes in Syria.

12. Hundreds of men were detained during these operations and later released only after signing documents promising to leave their homes. Many houses were looted or vandalised, and several women said they were beaten. Evicted families have been refused entry into other Alawite-majority neighbourhoods in Damascus such as al-Mazzeh 86 and Al-Wurud, and were told to “go back” to their places of origin in Homs or Latakia — even when they had lived in Damascus for years.

### *Druze*

13. Demonstrations continue in Suweida, where Druze community leaders and activists call for greater self-rule and justice for those killed in earlier clashes. An internationally mediated roadmap was drafted to calm tensions. It included inviting the UN Commission of Inquiry to investigate reported abuses, deploying regular police and army units, ensuring aid access, and exchanging prisoners under ICRC supervision.
14. The Druze religious leadership rejected the Roadmap on 17 September 2025 through its legal committee, saying they did not trust the authorities’ intentions. Even so, humanitarian convoys have continued entering the city, suggesting that parts of the Roadmap are being implemented by the authorities, though not by local armed actors.

### *Christians*

15. Among Christian communities, only a few isolated crimes have been recorded, such as a robbery in which a woman was killed; the perpetrators were reportedly arrested. Broader risks come mainly from extremist groups that continue to spread hate speech and threats against Christians both online and offline.

### *Kurds*

16. Kurds from Damascus have not faced a systematic pattern of discrimination or abuse in government-controlled areas.

### *Women*

17. Women — whether married, divorced or widowed — can currently move freely and are allowed to rent or buy homes in areas under government control. No new formal restrictions have been introduced since the change of government. However, reports issued earlier this year describe cases of sexual violence and harassment, especially at checkpoints and during return journeys through unsafe areas. These incidents occurred across different parts of the country, including zones previously controlled by the SDF, SNA and former government. While laws grant women basic freedoms, social attitudes, particularly in rural areas, and lack of protection remain major barriers to full equality.

*Government protection*

18. There is still no functioning system to protect people who face immediate threats. The post-2024 security situation remains highly fragmented and fragile. Appointments to key command positions reportedly made as political rewards to influential militia leaders rather than through a structured reform process, leaving the security apparatus fragmented and poorly coordinated, with limited oversight or accountability.
19. Many personnel at checkpoints do not wear uniforms or other visible identification, which makes it extremely difficult for civilians to identify which authority they represent or to hold them accountable for abuses.
20. Tensions persist between units under the Ministry of Defence, and the lack of centralized and unified command chain have created confusion over responsibility for arrests, detentions, and local law enforcement.

*Freedom of movement*

21. Movement within the country remains affected by informal restrictions and arbitrary decisions from local security actors.
22. In As-Suwayda, Bedouin families displaced during the July violence remain unable to return to their villages and continue to protest for that right.

## Meeting with a church organisation in Damascus, 21 September 2025

*About the source*

The Damascus-based source is a theologian working for a church organisation, which is engaged in facilitating dialogue, supporting Christian communities, and monitoring developments affecting minorities.

*The situation of Christians*

1. In the first months after the change of government in December 2024, the situation for Christians was relatively calm. Apart from some minor incidents in Aleppo, Hama, and Homs – sometimes amplified on social media (e.g. the burning of a Christmas tree in Aleppo) – Christians were not targeted as such and continued to live without being subjected to threats or harassment.

2. Since then, there have been varying degrees of provocation against Christians in the form of posters, slogans, and street-level campaigns by armed radical groups calling for women to adopt stricter dress codes, as well as occasional attacks on bars, shops and restaurants in Christian neighborhoods etc. However, it should be noted that such attacks and provocations have also taken place in Muslim neighborhoods where there were attacks on places where people were singing and dancing; these incidents are thus not only directed at Christians. At present, however, Christians are not targeted or exposed to significant security threats in their daily lives and the confrontations they encounter are mainly verbal in nature.
3. Nevertheless, in addition to the mentioned provocations, several factors have created an atmosphere of fear, uneasiness, and uncertainty about the future, as well as increasing anger and distrust towards the authorities among Christians:
  - the sectarian killings in the coastal area in March 2025,
  - the suicide attack on the Greek Orthodox Mar Elias Church in Damascus in June 2025,
  - the summer events in Suweida,
  - the stereotypical perception of HTS and the current authorities as Islamist terrorists – a perception, which was reinforced by the Assad government during the 13 years of conflict.
4. The authorities have undertaken several symbolic gestures aimed at easing intercommunal tensions. These included high-level outreach from state representatives to prominent religious leaders, followed by reciprocal visits between senior figures from different faith communities. Such gestures were generally viewed as positive steps that contributed to improving the atmosphere of trust and coexistence.
5. There have been reports of individuals being killed under torture while in custody, including members of minority groups such as Christians. These incidents have been addressed by human rights organisations and the Ministry of Interior has been criticised in this regard. The Ministry has announced that investigations are being conducted.
6. Christians who are subjected to violence, will not go to the authorities to receive protection, as they do not believe that the authorities will provide protection. The source knows of a case that has been documented by a Lebanese online newspaper, where the individual who had been threatened had to flee to Lebanon because they

could not rely on protection by the authorities. The documented<sup>312</sup> case the documented case concerns a young Christian man from the Nassif family in Damascus who was detained at a checkpoint for carrying alcohol and subsequently transferred to the al-Khatib (Branch 251) intelligence facility. While in detention, he was reportedly subjected to torture, sectarian insults, and forced under threat of death to memorize Qur'anic verses and recite the Islamic creed. After approximately 15 days, his family—reportedly with assistance from the church—paid a ransom of around USD 10,000 to secure his release. The man later travelled to Beirut for medical treatment and subsequently sought asylum in Europe. What began as a minor incident evolved into a case of sectarian persecution and extortion by security forces, illustrating the persistence of abuse and impunity within Syria's intelligence apparatus.

7. Christians do not experience discriminatory treatment by the authorities with regard to access to public services (health care, education, documents etc.) or employment opportunities.
8. The situation of Christians varies between cities and rural areas. In large cities like Damascus and Aleppo, they can more openly express their faith and access better job opportunities, while in rural areas it is more difficult to live openly as Christians and there are fewer livelihood opportunities. Overall, conditions are generally better in the cities for all Syrians due to better socio-economic conditions, including job opportunities.
9. Christian communities exist throughout Syria and Christians live openly as Christians everywhere, without having to conceal their faith.
10. Following the political transition, much of the old state administration was dismantled and a significant number of public employees, including Christians, were dismissed. The source underlines that the dismissal of those Christians was not due to their Christian background but was part of a general reduction of the public sector.
11. The day before the meeting with the Danish delegation, the source learned of the case of a female Christian doctor working at a military hospital who had been dismissed from her job. She claimed that the dismissal was due to her Christian faith; however, the source was not able to confirm the reason for her dismissal.

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<sup>312</sup> سوريا: فرع الخطيب يتعذب شاباً مسيحيّاً ويجبره على حفظ القرآن [Syria: The Khatib Branch tortures a Christian young man and forces him to memorize the Qur'an], 12 August 2025,

[url](#)

12. The authorities are currently in an accommodating mode with regard to the integration of Christians into the public sector and are making a genuine effort in this respect, although there is still a long way to go.
13. The present government is largely composed of pragmatists whose primary objective is to stay in power and maintain stability rather than promote a religious or ideological agenda. They view religion as a personal matter, believing that ultimate judgment belongs to God; therefore, they do not govern on the basis of faith. At the same time, the authorities must navigate internal pressure both from elements within their ranks who are more ideological or radical and from segments of society influenced by extremist discourse. Moreover, social media contribute to rising tensions: while some actors engage in verbal abuse against minorities, others exaggerate or sensationalise violent incidents against minorities, both of which negatively affect minority communities. As a result, the government constantly balances its pragmatic approach with the expectations of its radical base, while at the same time addressing the security threats hanging over the country.

#### *Conversion to Christianity*

14. Conversion to Christianity remains a sensitive subject and would likely provoke hostility in the government-controlled areas of Syria. Christians are not allowed to proselytise openly, even though there is no law or official policy prohibiting it.
15. Unlike in government-held areas of Syria, there have been many cases of conversion from Islam to Christianity in Kurdish-controlled Northeast Syria. Very conservative American evangelical churches are active in the region and openly convert Muslim Kurds to Christianity. Converts do not face repercussions from the authorities in that area; however, the source does not rule out the possibility that individuals from conservative Muslim families may face consequences from their relatives.
16. The evangelical church does not engage in proselytising activities in government-controlled area.

#### *Jehovah's Witnesses*

17. Jehovah's Witnesses are present in Syria, but are less active today than in the past. In the 1980s, they were very active in Christian areas in both Syria and Lebanon.
18. Jehovah's Witnesses in Syria focus exclusively on converting Christians to their faith and not Muslims. They do not have temples but maintain an open but limited and discreet presence through low-profile activities such as distributing leaflets, sharing gospel material, and occasional door-to-door visits in the Christian communities.

## Meeting with a lawyer in Damascus, 22 September 2025

### *Return*

#### *Former draft evaders and deserters*

1. Individuals who were wanted for political reasons, or who had evaded compulsory military service or reserve duty under the former government can enter Syria without any restrictions or requirements. After entering the country, they can undergo a “status settlement”, and have their names removed from wanted lists. Those with criminal charges, financial claims, or civil court verdicts, however, remain subject to arrest when entering the country and are referred to the competent courts for processing.

#### *Public employees who left their positions without notice*

2. Under the former government, public employees who left their positions without notice were detained upon arrival, taken to court, and usually released after signing a pledge to resign or complete the necessary administrative settlement. Under the current government, those employees will not be arrested upon return but are allowed to re-enter the country. However, legally, leaving a public job without permission remains considered a violation, and returning employees must go through formal settlement procedures with their previous institutions after they re-enter Syria. They will have to resign and afterwards their names will be removed from wanted lists.

### *Documents*

3. Despite official statements about modernisation, government offices remain overcrowded and slow. People must still queue in person for hours to obtain documents. The administrative process is widely regarded as inefficient.

#### *Birth and marriage certificates*

4. After the political change in 2024, there have been a number of adjustments in the way Syrian authorities issue and handle civil documents. Previously, registering a birth that took place outside Syria involved several bureaucratic steps. Families had to take the foreign birth certificate, translate it into Arabic, present it to the Civil Registry (al-Nufus), which would then refer it to the local mukhtar. The mukhtar would issue a new Syrian birth certificate in Arabic, based on the foreign document, usually in the presence of witnesses and after a police report was made. Under the new system, these extra steps have been removed. The translated foreign birth certificate can now be presented directly to the Civil Registry, which registers the birth without involving the mukhtar or the police.

5. In case of late birth registration, the following applies: If the child is younger than two years old, the Civil Registry can register the birth immediately. When the child is older than two years, however, the case must first go through a court. The court issues a judgment confirming who the child's parents are. Only after this court judgment can a child above two years be registered in the Civil Registry.
6. If the parents are not yet recorded as married in Syria, or if their marriage took place abroad in a form that Syrian law does not recognise, the marriage must first be registered or regularised in Syria. If the marriage is not formally registered, the authorities will not register the child's parentage in the official records.
7. Marriages concluded and certified in Muslim-majority countries such as the United Arab Emirates or Qatar are usually accepted once they have been properly legalised and translated. Civil marriages from non-Muslim-majority countries such as Germany, Denmark, or the United States, however, are not automatically recognised under Syrian law because they are civil rather than religious. In these cases, couples must formally regularise the marriage inside Syria through a Sharia court before it can be entered into the Civil Registry.
8. When a Syrian citizen marries a foreign national, the marriage must be approved by the Ministry of Interior. Under the former government, such approval was handled by Political or State Security. Now it is under the authority of Public Security within the Ministry of Interior. Officials examine both spouses' backgrounds and circumstances before granting approval. While in theory the ministry can reject the marriage, in practice the source had not encountered cases of rejection.

*Civil-status extracts and ID cards*

9. As for civil-status extracts (*ikhraj qayd*) and ID cards, there have been some superficial and procedural changes. The design of the civil status extract has been altered; it now appears as a long, rectangular document rather than the previous compact version, which some consider less professional in appearance. National ID cards have not been reissued since the change of government — reportedly for about nine or ten months — because the authorities are developing a new format. Until that is completed, replacement IDs are not being issued, and people continue to use their old cards.
10. Digital services remain very limited. There is no system allowing citizens to request or receive official documents entirely online. However, individuals can obtain scanned or printed copies of some civil-status extracts within about 24 hours, even when they are abroad, usually for a small fee. Passports, however, still require in-person submission through embassies or by a power of attorney representative in Syria.

*Passports*

11. The main change with regard to the new passports is that they are now valid for six years. Under the former government, men who had not completed their military service were usually issued passports valid for only two years. Now that compulsory military service has officially been abolished, all applicants receive passports with a six-year validity regardless of their previous conscription status.
12. Passport fees have also changed. Under the former government, applicants abroad paid around 800 US dollars for an urgent passport and around 300 dollars for a regular one, which took about one month to issue. Today, the urgent service reportedly costs about 400 dollars and the regular one about 200 dollars. The processing times remain roughly the same: urgent passports are issued the next day, while regular ones take about a month.
13. Inside Syria, the fees for issuing passports have also been reduced. Previously, a new passport costed around 2.1 million Syrian pounds (about 162 US dollars); now it costs about 1.6 million [about 123 US dollars]. The processing time remain the same — one day for urgent issuance and about a month for regular. A person who lives abroad can have a passport issued in Syria by using a local lawyer or a relative with a power of attorney in Syria as the processing time will be faster than applying through an embassy abroad.
14. For Syrians living abroad, passports are renewed through the nearest Syrian embassy, as there is still no online application system. The embassy collects the required documents and forwards them to Damascus. The new passport is then printed in Syria and sent back to the embassy for collection. If the applicant gives a power of attorney to a lawyer or relative in Syria, that representative can handle the renewal directly inside the country, which is often quicker.

*Powers of attorney*

15. Powers of attorney that are issued abroad must still be legalised. Normally, this means the powers of attorney must be signed at a Syrian consulate and then certified by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. If the power of attorney concerns property transactions, it often also needs a separate security clearance of the person with the power of attorney. Powers of attorney that relate only to personal-status matters such as marriage registration do not require this additional clearance.
16. In the past, close relatives — such as parents, siblings, uncles, or cousins — could sometimes complete procedures on behalf of others without a formal power of attorney, and brokers (known locally as “*samasira*”) often acted as intermediaries. The

new authorities now emphasise that all such work must be carried out strictly under the law and require an official power of attorney. However, brokers are still active in some cases, even though their role is said to have decreased.

### *Documents in SDF-controlled areas*

17. Some regional offices that existed under the former government have been closed. For example, the civil-status offices in the “security square” that used to operate in Hasakah no longer exist. Residents of Hasakah, Qamishli, or Raqqa must now travel to major cities such as Damascus or Aleppo to complete their paperwork. The country continues to use a single centralised computer system, known as “Syria One Window” (*al-shubbāk al-wāhid*), so any Civil Registry office connected to the national system can theoretically issue civil registry document for any Syrian citizen.
18. Documents such as passports, IDs, or property registration, are only fully valid if issued by the Syrian government.

### *Judicial system*

19. The judiciary itself has not been replaced; most judges from the former government remain in their posts. Their behaviour is described as more polite and service-oriented than before, possibly to improve the image of the new authorities. Nonetheless, corruption and bribery remain widespread. Officials reportedly accept bribes because their salaries are extremely low and insufficient to cover living costs.
20. Official legal publications still exist. The Bar Association continues to issue the *Majallat al-Muhāmīn* (Lawyers’ Journal), and the Ministry of Justice publishes the *Majallat al-Qānūn* (Law Journal). Both are distributed in printed form to judges and lawyers. Legal professionals also use informal Facebook groups, sometimes called “legal clinics,” to discuss cases and share questions, but without naming individuals. To verify whether a court decision is genuine, lawyers must consult the issuing court’s registry by checking the case number, the date, and the relevant file. Forged court verdicts do appear, but they can be detected because the original court has no record of the rulings.
21. Forged documents were reportedly widespread during the years of conflict, especially in the final period of the former government. Fake passports, court verdicts, and even property ownership documents were issued, often with the complicity of officials both inside and outside Syria. The headquarters of the General Passport Directorate were burned on the night the former government fell, destroying computer databases and covering up past irregularities. Since then, the authorities have tightened administrative and technical controls on document issuance — for example by introducing electronic registration systems, verification databases, and stricter

oversight within civil registry and passport offices. Due to these new electronic systems, it has become harder for individuals to falsify documents (like passports, birth certificates, or court papers) and more difficult for informal intermediaries or brokers to manipulate the process or obtain documents illegally on behalf of others.

22. Property issues remain a major problem – especially usurpation (in Arabic *ghash al-aqar* and refers to the illegal seizure or occupation of someone else's property, often during the war when the rightful owners had fled or were displaced). During the Syrian war, many people who fled their homes had their property taken over by others. Some of these cases involved forged powers of attorney or cooperation with corrupt employees in the land registry. Others were simple cases of occupation by neighbours or opportunists. The current government allows two possible methods to recover property: first, through a criminal complaint if the act is recent enough to prosecute, or second, through a civil lawsuit such as a claim for recovery of possession or confirmation of ownership. However, if the usurpation happened ten or more years ago, criminal courts usually refuse to pursue the case, citing the statute of limitations, and refer it to the civil courts.
23. In areas such as the Ghouta region near Damascus, where civil registries and land records were burned, citizens can apply for restoration by presenting any surviving documents or photos proving ownership. Once the authorities verify these materials, they issue a new official record, which then becomes the valid original. This process, called 'record restoration', is said to be fairly efficient when sufficient evidence is available.
24. The new authorities have also reviewed certain property cases linked to individuals who were granted Syrian nationality during the war for political or military reasons – for example, members of Hezbollah or Iranian nationals. Some of these people have been stripped of the Syrian nationality they obtained, and their property has been returned to its original owners.

### *Situation of certain groups*

#### *Persons opposing or perceived to be opposing the interim authorities*

25. The monitoring of social media continues as the case was under the former government. Security bodies reportedly track online activity both inside and outside the country. They also rely on informal networks of informants, including shopkeepers or local residents who are pressured to report on others. This monitoring covers all groups in society, although the level of scrutiny may vary depending on an individual's background, location, or influence.

26. Security-force behaviour on the ground appears largely unchanged. Checkpoints, street patrols, and sudden security actions still occur, and in some cases have become more aggressive than before. Arbitrary treatment by security persists.

*Kurds*

27. In Afrin, after the entry of the new government, abuses by Turkish-aligned armed factions reportedly decreased only slightly. Some detainees were released and certain properties were returned to their original owners, but these actions are viewed as symbolic gestures meant to improve the government's image rather than genuine human-rights reforms. Factions such as the Hamzat and Amshat groups remain powerful and active in the area.
28. Freedom of movement across the country has not been formally restricted, but Kurdish citizens in particular continue to experience harassment at checkpoints. Travellers from the Jazira or Qamishli regions are often stopped for questioning or delayed for long periods, though they are ultimately allowed to continue their journey.
29. In Damascus, Kurds who do not engage in political activity are generally treated like other Syrians, but those perceived as political or outspoken face the same kinds of reprisals that government critics of any background might experience.

## Meeting with the Syrian Women's Political Movement in Damascus, 22 September 2025

*About the source*

The Syrian Women's Political Movement (SWPM) is a feminist political organisation founded in 2017 by a group of Syrian women activists, politicians, and academics seeking to advance women's participation in Syria's political life and peacebuilding processes.

*Situation of certain groups*

*Women*

1. Discrimination against women in Syria remains deeply rooted in law and social norms.
2. Conditions for women since the fall of the former government in December 2024 differ widely across Syria. In some urban and government-controlled areas, administrative services have improved and public officials act professionally. In contrast, in regions dominated by armed groups or conservative factions, women still experience discrimination, insecurity, and individuals targeting women are not being held accountable.

3. The level of training and discipline of the police and internal security forces vary significantly. In some cities, police handle complaints seriously, while in other places, reports of abduction or violence are ignored. Government protection thus vary by region, branch, and the individual official. The authorities sometimes announce that they have punished or arrested individuals involved in abuses but these actions are rare and perpetrators are not consistently prosecuted. It is unclear whether the main issue is limited capacity or lack of genuine political will.
4. Security institutions and the army do not constitute a unified structure with competing factions and varied leadership backgrounds. Some actors advocate reform and protection of women, including discussion of a draft law on violence against women, while others resist change, such as the government-affiliated armed groups al-Amshat and al-Hamzat.
5. Violence and abuse against women are perpetrated by a mix of state actors, groups linked to them, and non-state or criminal actors.
6. Patterns of abduction and harassment differ by region. In coastal areas, kidnappings increased after certain incidents; the authorities later began to intervene more actively, however, following pressure from civil society and women's groups. In Suweida, several women have reportedly been abducted, yet the lack of a neutral investigation means that it is still not possible to determine which actors were behind the kidnappings or to hold anyone accountable.
7. Women have adjusted their behaviour to minimise risk. They avoid staying out late, social events end earlier, and friends or relatives coordinate transport to ensure safety. Night checkpoints are common in and around Damascus due to thefts and abductions.
8. Access to public services varies greatly by region. In some areas, such as a 'one-stop window' office in Damascus, administrative processes are efficient and staff treat women respectfully. In contrast, in more conservative or conflict-affected areas such as Douma, women often face discriminatory treatment when dealing with local authorities. Officials may question their presence, ask for a male relative to accompany them, or delay their paperwork, which makes administrative procedures longer and more difficult for women than for men.

9. Treatment of a woman often depends on her social class, income, family background, religion, and appearance. Wealthier or well-connected women are usually treated more fairly and respectfully than poorer women without influence.
10. In Homs, an oral directive reportedly instructed schools to separate boys and girls from grades one to four, though no formal decree was issued and some schools refused to comply. Implementation depends on the local authorities in each area.
11. Single women and widows are legally allowed to rent housing and complete official procedures independently but social norms often obstruct their access. Landlords and local officials may question or discourage women from living alone.
12. Women whose husbands are missing or deceased and those married to foreign nationals face severe administrative problems. The problem is most acute in the northwest where foreign fighters were present. During the war, some of these fighters married Syrian women in religious or informal ceremonies that were never officially registered and sometimes had children. When the men were later killed, disappeared, or returned to their home countries, the women were left without legal proof of marriage and therefore could not register their children.
13. Although Syrian law states that a child of an unknown father can be registered as a Syrian citizen, this is rarely implemented in practice. Social stigma and bureaucratic reluctance prevent families from talking publicly about this issue. Some women register children under the name of a male relative instead in order to obtain papers. The restriction in the nationality law for women to pass on citizenship to their children remains a key barrier.

**Online meeting with the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), 22 September 2025, including written information provided by SNHR**

*About the source*

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) is an organisation focused on monitoring, documenting, and reporting human rights violations in Syria, especially since the outbreak of conflict in 2011.

*Return*

1. Returnees tend to be individuals with financial resources, but they primarily originate from countries with weak service provision, such as Lebanon. By contrast, there are relatively few returns from Europe, where refugees typically enjoy access to more comprehensive services and are less inclined to give them up.
2. Public services in Syria remain very limited, leaving many citizens without adequate support. Returnees from Western countries find this especially difficult, as the quality of services is far below what they are used to.
3. Finding housing is a major challenge. Demand far exceeds supply, and rents have increased dramatically—from around USD 200–300 before the fall of the former government to between USD 800–1500 today—making accommodation unaffordable for many.
4. At present prices for essential goods like transport, rice, sugar, and fruit have fallen by about 30%, but the prices of other items, especially imported or non-essential goods, have risen sharply. As a result, households face both relief and strain depending on what they need to buy.
5. Public sector wages have increased, but salaries vary widely between regions. In example, employees in Idlib earn more than the other areas controlled by the Syrian Interim Government, creating unequal living conditions across the country.
6. Economic activity has picked up, particularly in the field of construction. Demand for foreign labour is expected to rise, as years of war and large-scale emigration have left the country without enough skilled workers or young professionals.
7. The education sector is in critical condition. There are too few schools, and teaching quality is poor. This is one of the main reasons families hesitate to return to Syria, as many parents fear their children will not receive an adequate level of education.
8. Syrians can re-enter the country using a valid passport. In cases where no passport is available, individuals can present any document proving Syrian nationality to a Syrian embassy or consulate abroad, which may issue a travel paper (*waraqat 'ubur*). Children without Syrian documents are permitted entry if accompanied by a father with valid Syrian documents; in such cases, foreign-issued documents confirming the parent-child relationship are accepted as sufficient proof for entry.

9. Upon arrival in Syria, individuals who appear on wanted lists or have unresolved issues with the authorities are informed of their status. If they fail to resolve these issues, they will face restrictions by the authorities, including difficulties in issuing new documents or leaving the country again.
10. Individuals who left Syria illegally before the fall of the former government are generally not required to report to the Immigration and Passport Center or other government departments. At the border, they were only requested to prove their Syrian identity and present documents confirming their residence abroad, after which they were issued a transit document. This document is sealed and can be used as an official document inside Syria if needed. While there may be isolated cases where individuals were instructed to report to specific government departments or security centers, the source stated that there is no general policy or law issued by the new Syrian authorities requiring such procedures.
11. Individuals with unresolved civilian issues, such as unpaid fines, outstanding bills, or other non-political and non-military matters, are required to address these through the *Amn Jina'i* (Criminal Security). Authorities direct such individuals to this channel in order to settle their cases.

*Former draft evaders and deserters*

12. The authorities have not announced an official policy regarding former draft evaders and deserters. Such individuals are generally free to move as long as they can present documents proving that they left Syria or defected before the fall of the former government.
13. Military deserters returning to Syria after the fall of the former government are not required to undergo a status settlement process. Drawing on a personal experience reported by a member of the SNHR team, the source explained that a conscripted soldier who defected from military service under the former government only needs to visit the civil registry in his home governorate or the district mayor's office to retrieve the national identity card that was issued to him when he joined the army under the previous government.
14. The government has formally abolished compulsory military service, and joining the armed forces is now voluntary. There have been no reports of forced recruitment into the new army.

*Judicial system*

15. According to the source, military courts were suspended in the period prior to the fall of the former government, and there is no available information on whether they have been transferred to the Ministry of Justice. The judicial system is described as relatively stable, although some cases have reportedly been delayed due to the replacement of corrupt judges found to have engaged in violations under the former government.

*Situation of certain groups*

*Persons opposing or perceived to be opposing the interim authorities*

16. Not all citizens who are perceived as supporters of the new authorities engage in attacks against individuals criticizing the government. Reportedly, such reactions are mainly directed at those who express particularly harsh criticism of the new Syrian authorities or are perceived as linked to remnants of the former government. One example was a campaign against SNHR after it criticized the government's handling of incidents in the coastal areas and in Suwayda. SNHR was verbally attacked both online and by people in public. SNHR has, however, also faced criticism and verbal attacks from various sides, including both supporters and opponents of the new authorities, as well as from supporters of the Syrian Democratic Forces and other factions still present in Syria.
17. Generally, criticising the interim government is possible, and many complaints or concerns can be expressed without direct repercussions. Nevertheless, the tolerance for criticism varies by region. In some provinces, authorities or local forces react more harshly and have detained individuals who expressed criticism.
18. SNHR has not found evidence of a systematic policy by the new authorities to target their critics. There have, however, been arrests of individuals who expressed opposition, particularly through social media posts or public criticism of government decisions. The profiles of those targeted include civilians, activists, and in some cases loyalists of the former government. These individuals were later released, and no consistent pattern of reprisals has been established
19. In other cases, the reasons for arresting individuals remain unclear—whether due to perceived political affiliations or criticism of the government. Local officials across regions act inconsistently, often driven by differing motives behind arrests.
20. Relatives of opponents have not been systematically targeted, and SNHR has not recorded cases of non-state groups engaging in reprisals against individuals for their opposition to the new government.

21. The government has reportedly annulled emergency laws, including anti-terrorism legislation. While this is formally a significant development, the practical impact of such legal changes remains to be fully assessed.
22. Authorities reportedly lack the capacity to systematically monitor individual social media accounts. Instead, they track broader trends and react to high-profile cases. For example, when reports of torture committed by members of the newly formed security forces began to circulate widely online and attract public attention, the authorities responded by holding those responsible accountable.

*Persons with real or perceived affiliation with the former government*

23. SNHR has documented a number of individuals have been arrested since the fall of the former government on the basis of alleged ties to the former state security agencies or allied militias. In some cases, these accusations were supported by solid evidence, such as official military records or corroborated witness testimonies.
24. In other cases, however, arrests of individuals allegedly linked to the former government were based on rumours, local rivalries, or unverified claims circulated on social media. For example, some individuals were accused of collaborating with the former government based only on anonymous posts on social media or community gossip, without any evidence or independent verification. In certain cases, such accusations arose from ongoing disputes over land, property, or business, where rivals labelled each other as former government collaborators to legitimise violence or seize assets. In other situations, acts of personal or tribal revenge were framed in political terms, with claims of affiliation serving as a pretext for targeting.
25. Motives behind such reprisals are complex and cannot be reduced to sectarian identity alone. While some incidents were clearly rooted in local or tribal disputes, others targeted individuals with documented records of involvement in abuses under former government. In response, the interim authorities launched a temporary settlement campaign aimed at disarming former government affiliates and placing them under surveillance until their cases could be reviewed. According to SNHR's monitoring, only three individuals holding temporary settlement papers were later attacked, leaving it uncertain whether this mechanism offers lasting protection.
26. High-profile figures previously implicated in abuses have been arrested and prosecuted by the Syrian authorities, while others—particularly informants or local collaborators with documented involvement in killings or arrests under the former government—have faced direct targeting by communities seeking revenge.

27. The number of arrests by the authorities has decreased recently, particularly among individuals from coastal regions and Suwayda. However, the reasons for arrest are often unclear, and the places of detention are rarely disclosed. The lack of transparency from the security forces makes it difficult to establish patterns or legal grounds for detention.
28. The new government has issued directives requiring employees who left between March 2011 and the date of the fall of the former government to report to government-designated centres in order to apply for reinstatement. It remains unclear whether such persons can resume their previous positions directly or whether individual review and settlement is necessary. To date, SNHR has not documented reprisals against this group.

*Alawites*

29. Among Alawites detained since the fall of the former government, most have been accused of committing abuses under the former government. In certain cases, Alawites were killed by citizens seeking revenge for crimes committed against them or their relatives.
30. A considerable number of Alawites accused of abuses have been released due to lack of evidence. This has generated anger among the victims and their communities, fuelling incidents of extrajudicial retaliation, including against other Alawites uninvolved in abuses. As a result, the authorities have moved to protect Alawites under threat. Some members of the community express fear for their safety, perceiving themselves as targets solely on the basis of their identity.
31. Despite official pledges of equality and protection for all communities since March 2011, the government continues to face significant challenges in controlling undisciplined elements within the security apparatus, especially in the south and in coastal regions. This has resulted in isolated incidents of violence and harassment against Alawite and Druze communities in particular.

*Christians and Kurds*

32. By contrast to Alawites and Druze, Christians and Kurds have not faced systematic patterns of discrimination, although isolated revenge attacks and kidnappings by unidentified groups have been recorded. According to government statements, efforts are underway to restore security and prosecute perpetrators, but the widespread availability of weapons and the persistence of independent armed groups continue to undermine these efforts.

*Women*

33. According to monitoring by SNHR, there has been no change in the situation of women since the change of government in December 2024. Their daily lives remain largely the same, with no significant improvement or deterioration in their rights or protection.
34. SNHR has not documented cases of government-perpetrated abuses specifically targeting women. However, there have been reports of kidnappings by unidentified armed groups, particularly in Homs, where the bodies of several abducted women were later found. The perpetrators and motives remain unknown.
35. SNHR has not documented discriminatory treatment of women by the Syrian authorities, and access to public services, including education, appears unchanged. The situation of single, widowed, or divorced women has also not undergone any substantial improvement under the new government, and they continue to face the same difficulties regarding employment, transport, housing, protection, and access to official documents.

## Meeting with an international organisation (2) in Damascus, 22 September 2025

### *About the source*

The source regularly and directly engages with Syrians who have returned and with members of the communities that have received them. The organisation is involved in supporting the voluntary return of Syrians from abroad and providing services to help their reintegration in areas of return.

### *Return*

#### *Procedures for return*

1. In terms of procedural and documental requirements, the situation is very different now compared to under the previous government; there are some documental requirements but the authorities are generally very lenient and accept even expired documents or missing documents for children etc. For example, a birth notification from the hospital abroad where a child was born is sufficient documentation for entry when the child is accompanied by his or her Syrian parent. The authorities accept any kind of document that links a person to Syria, e.g. expired ID cards or passports. In

addition, Syrians abroad can progressively acquire and renew their documents through Syrian representations (consulates/embassies/consular delegations) abroad.

2. Currently, if someone shows up at the border without documents, the authorities will do everything within their powers to facilitate the person's entry into Syria, including accepting alternative proofs of identity such as photos of documents or papers issued by a mukhtar. Previously, at the border, access to the civil registry database was possible if extracts were needed through the Ministry of Interior. Under the new authorities, this has not been reinstated as yet, and a lenient approach is instead applied for the time being.
3. A Palestinian Refugee from Syria (PRS) would be allowed to enter Syria on an expired travel document for PRS.
4. In case a person has unsettled issues with the authorities, he/she will generally be informed at the border about this and will be requested to settle them after returning to Syria. The source has not monitored any cases where a person was not allowed to enter Syria due to issues flagged at the border.
5. The main obstacles that Syrians abroad face when trying to obtain civil documentation include the limited number of functioning embassies and consulates, as well as the fact that services are restricted and vary between different missions. Syrian returnees holding documents from abroad that were not certified by the embassy in their previous country of asylum are now required to pay consular fee of 50 USD per document. This means, for instance, that a person who got married in Lebanon and had four children would have to pay 50 USD for the marriage and 50 USD per child to register these in Syria. This fee, which is high for Syrians living in neighbouring countries, constitutes one of the main barriers for obtaining civil documentation.
6. In the case of Syrian children born abroad who are not registered in Syria, these children will be allowed to enter if they have documentation showing their link to their Syrian parents or even just one of their parents is Syrian.

### *Entry routes and border crossings*

7. Currently, 11 official border crossings are open for returning refugees and additional border crossings will open soon for returnees: previously some border crossings were designated for commercial traffic but have now been open for returnees as well. All official border crossings are controlled by the Government of Syria (GoS). The GoS is working on creating a centralized system to standardise procedures at all border crossings. The current active border crossings available for return are as follows:

1. Joussieh
2. Nassib
3. Jdeidet Yabous
4. Ar Ra'ee
5. Al Aridah
6. Kassabrabulus
7. Bab al Hawa
8. Al Salama
9. Albokamal
10. Al-Hamam

8. The source has not heard of cases of extortion of returnees by border guards as happened under the former government and the new authorities have established a complaint and feedback mechanism at the borders to address corruption.
9. Since the change of government, the source has not received reports of detention, interrogation or harassment of returnees, although isolated cases may occur. Some returnees, however, choose to cross the border through unofficial routes for a range of reasons, including cost and convenience (i.e. no fees to pay, shorter travel distances and thus lower cost of transportation). Returnees may not always be aware of the risks associated with such routes, including the presence of landmines, or it does not deter them.

*Trends and challenges in return*

10. More than one million Syrians have now returned to Syria since 8 December 2024. The number of people returning increased significantly after 8 December 2024. Overall, the rates of return have been trending upwards throughout the year; however, return rates fluctuate from week to week and appear to respond to certain triggers such as security events in the country, the school calendar, weather conditions, conditions in host countries, and the removal of administrative barriers such as fees or overstay fines in countries of asylum. The rate has reduced approaching the end of the year as expected, although people are still returning. According to a recent survey conducted in the region, the intention to return has slightly decreased compared to the previous survey conducted at the beginning of the year. Nevertheless, a considerable number of respondents still intend to return within the next 12 months, and the majority of refugees continue to harbour hopes of returning to Syria one day. Many of those who have already returned did so out of hope or for personal reasons, while others appear to be adopting a more planned or wait-and-see approach to observe how the situation in Syria develops.

11. The main challenges faced by returnees are access to housing as well as the low level of services available in areas of return.
12. The level of criminality – e.g. kidnappings, theft, armed robbery – has increased in some areas of the country and arms are widely available in some communities. The criminal perpetrators appear to consist of armed elements operating in areas where state forces do not exercise full control over security.
13. One of the main motivations for return is for people to be able to unite with their families. In addition, people want their children to receive a Syrian education. The majority of returnees are heading to the cities of Aleppo, Homs and Damascus, which currently experience relatively few security incidents and there are more services and livelihood opportunities available. Urban areas in Syria are attracting the highest number of returnees.
14. While all Syrians are technically able to return, the majority of those currently returning are observed to be Sunni Arabs, which may add strain to the social fabric in some communities. Recent security incidents affecting minorities, along with the perceived lack of representation in the Interim Government, have fostered a sense of mistrust among some minority groups towards the interim authorities. Some Syrians, including Alawites and Christians, have left or are considering leaving the country since the fall of the former government, although not in significant numbers.
15. As regards the situation of female returnees, many experience restrictions on their freedom of movement inside Syria, depending on where they reside. For example, in the coastal areas, there are reports of women dropping out of university and of girls not being sent to school due to fears of being kidnapped by armed groups. In Aleppo, women have reportedly started covering their hair to avoid harassment. A single woman returning to Syria would generally be highly reliant on family support to re-establish herself; however, access to such support largely depends on the individual woman and the presence of such support in the area of return.

Meeting with a humanitarian organisation (1) working in Syria,  
Damascus, 23 September 2025

*About the source*

The source operates across all regions of Syria, providing humanitarian assistance to people affected by the conflict, displacement, and natural disasters. Its programs include among others legal and civil documentation support to displaced persons and returnees.

### *Return*

#### *Procedures for return*

1. At present, the Syrian authorities generally do not require specific documents such as IDs or passports for returnees to enter the country; any paper proving Syrian identity is accepted at all borders. Although border procedures have continued to change in recent months, it remains relatively easy for most returnees to enter Syria.
2. The Syrian authorities generally facilitate Syrians' entry into the country as much as they can, especially in cases involving children who are not registered. Children born during the conflict who are not registered with the Syrian authorities and thus lack documents can enter Syria with a birth notification. The birth notification does not need to be Syrian; it can be Lebanese or European, for example. A birth notification can be from a midwife, a nurse, a hospital or a doctor without being officially stamped and certified by the authorities. In some cases, the child is allowed to enter the country without a birth notification just by presenting documents proving that the parents are married (e.g. presenting a family booklet) or the parents' Syrian identity (e.g. copy of a passport).
3. The Syrian authorities have been accepting expired Syrian passports to enter the country, particularly for families wishing to return.
4. It should, however, be noted that there is a lack of standardised, unified procedures for return at the borders. Border practices can sometimes be ad hoc and depend on the individual police officer, leading to different instructions and inconsistent entry procedures across different border points, or even from day to day at the same location. The source has experienced that officers at the border sometimes require different documents in similar cases. Despite this lack of unified procedures, returns remain largely facilitated.
5. Whether Syrians without passports can enter Lebanon (via the Beirut Rafiq Hariri International Airport) from e.g. Europe in order to return to Syria depends on a number of factors, including the country of departure, proof of residency permit in the country of departure etc. Such cases are investigated and processed on a case-by-case basis by the Lebanese General Security. The source has not heard of cases of such returnees facing problems with regard to entering Lebanon.

6. The main challenges for families with unregistered children who have not completed the process of registering their children at a Syrian embassy abroad prior to their return occur after their return when they are in Syria, as they must complete the registration process and obtain the formal documents for their children. This process involves paying a fee of USD 50, which represents a significant financial burden for most returning families. In addition, required documents must have an official translation and they must be certified.
7. A lack of knowledge among returnees about legal procedures poses an additional challenge for registration. In some cases, humanitarian organisations assist vulnerable families in this regard — both financially, by covering the required fees, and practically, by providing guidance on the procedures or even contacting the authorities in the country of departure if the returnees have lost a document issued there (e.g. a birth notification). Such assistance is particularly provided to families with children who need to be enrolled in school.
8. The source has not observed or received any reports of individuals experiencing discriminatory treatments at the border based on their political, ethnic, or religious background.
9. The previous requirement of security clearance and status settlement prior to return was reportedly removed in the spring of 2025. As a result, anyone can now return. This change has led to a significant increase in returns, including individuals previously on wanted lists, such as those who left the country illegally or were wanted for political reasons, e.g. terrorism-related charges. The source has not received any report of returnees being detained or asked to remain at the border due to being wanted.
10. Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS) typically possess documents from the Syrian authorities (i.e. the General Authority for Palestine Arab Refugees (GAPAR)) by which they can enter Syria.
11. A specific problem exists for former military officers who have lost both their military and civil ID cards and therefore have no documents to prove their identity. These individuals were required to hand in their civil ID cards in exchange for their military IDs when they were enlisted, and many of them have since lost their military ID cards and can no longer prove their Syrian identity. The government has not yet addressed this problem yet and issued any formal decision to regularize the status of this group, leaving their return situation uncertain.

*Trends and challenges in return*

12. Return trends are highly localised and community-driven. A clear trend has been observed where people who had returned either move back to their previous host country or the IDP camp they came from once the school year begins. This movement is mainly driven by the lack of basic services, such as education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities, in their area of return. Consequently, many families choose to leave again in search of more stable access to schooling and essential services for their children and household in the places they had previously lived. As a result, a decrease in the intention to return is observed in Lebanon, Jordan and even in the IDP camps in Syria.
13. Return experiences of returnees vary greatly, depending on the area of return, the community, the individual returnee's conditions etc.
14. Return to rural and semi-rural areas often involve entire communities returning together. Returns tend to be more successful where basic needs can be met. However, some are returning to entirely destroyed houses without any services (water, education), which makes it difficult for people to remain in their area of origin (to which they had recently returned).
15. Despite better livelihood opportunities and services in the major cities, urban returns are characterised by higher communal tension and greater competition for limited resources. Access to services, such as water trucking, is often significantly more expensive in major cities than in rural areas. In addition, access to housing is limited in urban areas relative to the number of people returning; a situation further exacerbated by the fact that families who fled years ago have often grown substantially (e.g. a family of five becoming a family of fifteen), leading to overcrowding and limited rental capacity in many neighborhoods.
16. The return and reintegration of single women and elderly people are highly dependent on the presence of a strong family network. Returnees from neighbouring countries, particularly those who have lived in camps, often need to re-establish contact with family members who stayed behind in Syria upon arrival.
17. Women whose husbands are missing (e.g. due to forced disappearance) face particularly complex situations, as they must rebuild their lives from scratch. This includes reconnecting with relatives to clarify potential inheritance rights while coping with the emotional challenge of deciding whether to declare their husband deceased or continue searching for him.

18. Many female returnees rely heavily on their extended families and often move in with them, especially when they do not have access to their immediate families (e.g. due to displacement abroad). Limited women's rights and livelihood opportunities remains a critical concern, as women are frequently not economically independent.
19. There are also cases of female-headed households returning to Syria while the husband remains abroad, for instance in Lebanon or Türkiye, to secure an income for the family. These cases illustrate a distinct return experience where economic survival depends on family support across borders.

#### *Freedom of movement*

20. Travel between the Kurdish-controlled Northeast Syria (NES) and government-controlled areas is generally possible and people do usually not encounter any problem crossing the checkpoints between these areas. Except when there is road closure due to security incidents.
21. Individuals residing in NES must travel to cities like Aleppo or Homs to complete civil registration of life events (e.g. personal documentation) and obtain civil documents because government offices were shut down in NES after the fall of the previous government.

### **Meeting with an international security organisation in Damascus, 23 September 2025**

#### *About the source*

The organisation provides security support for international staff and operations. Its work includes assessing threats, monitoring security conditions, and issuing advisories to ensure the safety of personnel and facilities. It develops risk management strategies, coordinates crisis response, and offers training on safety and security procedures. In addition, it works closely with other international actors to facilitate safe access in challenging environments and to maintain operational continuity during emergencies.

#### *The general security situation*

1. An overall increase in crime incidents is observed. Crime is categorised broadly, including targeted killings, sectarian retaliation, and economically motivated crime.
2. After the political change in December 2024, the country witnessed a sharp rise in targeted killings and sectarian retaliations, particularly in the coastal and central

regions. The targets of these attacks were individuals affiliated with the former government perceived as complicit in abuses against the local population in these areas during the Assad rule. The violence was thus driven by deep-seated local grievances and a desire for retribution. However, the trend has since declined, possibly due to the government's increased effectiveness in apprehending the former government's perpetrators prosecution of these perpetrators in the legal system.

3. Since the fall of the former government, the country has witnessed an increase in the number of economically related crimes, even in Damascus. Examples of such crimes in Damascus are the killing of a jeweller in the middle of the day and a lady killed by her assistant who stole her gold in a well-known, high-profile neighbourhood.
4. The governorates of Aleppo and Homs experience crime, weapons proliferation, and hazard incidents. However, the number of hazard incidents is higher in Aleppo. By "hazards," the source refers to incidents caused by natural phenomena, such as earthquakes or floods, as well as other relevant incidents like car accidents or explosions caused by remnants of war, such as IEDs. In this specific context, the source meant that there has been an increase in the car accidents and explosion caused by war remnants.
5. There is a huge increase in traffic incidents, potentially related to the large number of vehicles that entered the country after the former government's fall.
6. Ongoing confrontations between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Ministry of Defense (MoD) continue in the North, which indicate that the March 10th agreement remains fragile.

### *Security situation in major cities*

7. The security situation in Damascus is generally more stable than in Aleppo and Homs.
8. Yarmouk Camp is now accessible and UNRWA has many activities there. Despite extensive damage to the area, many people are planning to return to their homes, primarily motivated by the high rental costs in the capital, where they had fled during the conflict.
9. The city of Aleppo itself is calm and considered stable for the time being, although minor retaliations against individuals affiliated with the former government (known as former *Shabiha*) still occur. Ongoing tension between government forces and the SDF also remains in the Sheikh Maqsoud neighbourhood, which is still under SDF control.
10. The city of Homs initially saw a sharp increase in sectarian crime but is now calmer, though reports of financially motivated crime and retaliation against minority

neighbourhoods continue. It should be noted that the central region of Syria, including Homs, remains a sensitive area due to its proximity to Lebanon and ongoing illegal cross-border activities. Historically, these routes were used by the former government for drug and weapons trafficking linked to Hezbollah. Although the current government regularly carries out search operations that have led to multiple seizures of weapons and drugs, the area continues to be a hotspot for smuggling.

#### *Explosive Remnants of War (ERW)*

11. There are reports of a high increase in hazard incidents caused by Explosive Remnants of War (ERW), including Unexploded Ordnance (UXO). The entire country is contaminated, particularly the Central, Coastal, and Eastern regions.
12. Landmines and UXOs were reportedly planted in the coastal area during the rebellion against the transitional government in March 2025. The former Syrian army also planted them in November 2024 confronted with operation 'Deterrence of Aggression', the large-scale military offensive launched by Syrian opposition forces on 27 November 2024, which led to the fall of Assad's government in December 2024. Rural and semi-urban areas (such as Rural Damascus) are highly affected by ERW.
13. Returnees are often surprised by the number of remnants left behind, particularly in rural areas and semi-urban areas such as Rural Damascus, e.g. in Harasta. The war remnants are often colourful, not in standard shape, and attract children; the majority of casualties are among children. On 15 September 2025, the Syrian Minister of Emergency and Disaster Management called for international cooperation on clearance of ERW.

#### *Islamic State activities*

14. Islamic State (IS) was calm initially after the fall of Assad's rule, but has recently been observed adapting its structure, and sleeper cells have been observed in the South since May 2025, particularly within the last month (September 2025).
15. IS' targets in the South are the General Security forces and individuals affiliated with the interim government. An IED incident in May 2025 caused multiple casualties among General Security forces. In Daraa, the body of a member of General Security forces was found. An unverified, viral IS video circulated, warning that this would be the fate for anyone who fights against them.
16. IS maintains a limited presence in the eastern desert area (i.e. Badiya) of Homs governorate, primarily targeting the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). However, its operations have declined in both scope and effectiveness compared to previous years. No attacks on civilians engaged in truffle collection have been reported this year.

*Freedom of movement*

17. The number of checkpoints on the major roads has decreased significantly since the fall of the former government.
18. Unlike under Assad's rule, the General Security Forces no longer routinely check IDs, vehicles, or conduct searches.
19. There may still be a lack of manpower, as well as command gaps within the government structure, which cause the occasional incidents reported at checkpoints.
20. Major roads, including the M5 and M6 highways (connecting Damascus with Homs and the coastal areas), are open and there are generally no security issues or threats on these roads when travelling during daytime. A returnee arriving in Damascus from abroad can travel to other government-controlled areas by private car or bus without difficulty, unless unforeseen incidents occur. An example of such incidents are attacks on civilian vehicles along the road between Damascus and Suweida by armed Bedouin groups operating in the area amid broader sectarian and tribal conflict in summer 2025. A number of national travel agencies now offer trips from Damascus to other areas in Syria, for instance to the coastal area.
21. Currently, international aid and humanitarian organisations have access to Suweida and Daraa and the General Security forces are generally cooperative and accommodating regarding these organisations' movements into and out of these areas.
22. Damascus International Airport is accessible and the road from Damascus to the airport is generally regarded as secure. UN has started using the airport for its personnel.
23. Many border crossing points have been damaged by IDF attacks. The government is currently working on rebuilding these border crossings.

**Meeting with The Day After in Damascus, 23 September 2025**

*About the source*

The Day After (TDA) is a Syrian non-governmental group founded in 2013 in Brussels. It operated for several years out of Türkiye and, earlier this year, established an office in Damascus, where most staff are now based.

The NGO's purpose is to encourage gradual democratic change in Syria and to help ordinary citizens participate in public life. Its activities focus especially on human rights education, civic engagement, and giving people safe ways to contribute to local decision-making.

*Situation of certain groups*

*Persons opposing or perceived to be opposing the interim authorities*

1. Civil freedom, as for instance forming associations, expressing opinions, and organising events, in Syria remains limited. Civil society organisations are formally permitted to operate, but their work takes place under strict supervision. Local authorities act as gatekeepers, deciding which topics can be discussed, which events can be held, and who may participate. Almost every public activity, as for instance meetings, cultural events and workshops, requires prior approval. Subjects related to justice, accountability, or human rights are considered politically sensitive and can only be addressed if the authorities approve. TDA has itself experienced this kind of restrictions and interference in the organisations work.
2. Public criticism of the government is possible to some extent, but the limits of what can be said remain unclear. Well-known critics and commentators who live abroad, such as Syrian YouTubers and journalists, continue to speak openly against the authorities without facing consequences, largely because they are outside the authorities' reach. Inside Syria, however, people cannot easily predict which statements might be tolerated and which could provoke retaliation. As a result, many choose to avoid political topics altogether to protect themselves and their families.
3. Arrests and disappearances continue to take place across Syria, although they are less frequent than during the former government. Other accounts describe people dying under torture while in detention, without any investigation or accountability. Prisons continue to hold detainees whose relatives have no knowledge of their condition or location. This situation has created a general atmosphere of fear and caution. People who have seen others being punished or threatened for expressing opinions prefer to stay silent and avoid sensitive topics. Many people are still afraid that the authorities might monitor what they say or take action against them later.
4. The level of freedom of speech differs a lot between regions. In Damascus, civil society can operate as long as people are careful and avoid political issues. In Idlib, the situation is more limited, since the Salvation Government, which is linked to HTS, requires its own permits and keeps close control over local organisations. In areas where people from different religious or sectarian groups live together — for example, Sunnis, Alawites, Christians, or Druze — people must be more careful about what they say in public, since some topics are seen as too sensitive or could lead to sectarian tensions.

5. Critics of the authorities are often attacked on social media, called traitors, or accused of working for foreign governments. In other cases, criticism of the government and its performance simply ignored. The reaction depends largely on who is being criticised and which political or security figure feels personally threatened.
6. Powerful people in the media or politics can use their connections to have others punished. In one case, a journalist who had close ties to the authorities filed a complaint against a woman who questioned his political role. As a result, the police summoned her for questioning. After public pressure, the case was dropped, but she became target of an online defamation campaign.

### *Persons with real or perceived affiliation with the former government*

7. Power structures from the former government continue to dominate despite the formal appearance of reform. Although many institutions have been renamed and new councils established, the same networks and influential figures from the previous system still control access to decision-making in politics, business, and the media.
8. Wealthy businessmen and public figures who were active under the former government have largely retained or regained their influence—some reportedly by exploiting the chaos of war to seize property, which they later legalised through the new authorities. By contrast, lower-ranking officials or civilians accused of loyalty to the former government have faced arrest or harassment. There is no clear or consistent pattern determining who is prosecuted and who is protected, suggesting that such decisions are often driven by personal interests and political calculations rather than by clear legal standards.

### *Christians*

9. Religious minorities, including Christian communities, continue to live with a mix of formal freedom and social pressure. The authorities publicly affirm freedom of religion, and large church gatherings are still permitted. At the same time, Christian priests in some areas have quietly been advised to reduce public celebrations and to avoid drawing attention. This reflects a general atmosphere of fear and caution rather than an official policy of repression.

### *Women*

10. Women's safety and freedom of movement vary significantly between regions. In Damascus, many women go out alone and participate in daily life, but they take precautions—avoiding late hours, taxis driven by unknown men, and unfamiliar areas. In smaller towns and rural communities, cultural norms are stricter, and women often depend on family networks for protection. Their main concerns are harassment at checkpoints or by armed men, rather than actions by regular police.

11. Single women with or without children will not be able to support themselves in Syria if there is no other person who provides for the expenses – this is due to the deteriorated economic situation. As an example, the cost of housing has risen noticeably and the renting prices have doubled or tripled since the change of government.

#### *Government protection*

12. Protection and accountability remain absent. For instance, in Suweida, armed men attacked peaceful demonstrators while police officers and the governor's office officials stood by without intervening. Even when victims presented evidence identifying the attackers — including names and social media accounts — no action was taken. At times, authorities even stopped bystanders who tried to help. Some detainees were briefly taken to closed hearings and then released. The attackers filmed themselves and posted the footage on Instagram, yet even after victims provided names and account links to the police, no action was taken.
13. Across Syria, it is often difficult to identify who is part of the security forces. Men carrying weapons appear in different types of clothing—some in plain civilian clothes, others in partial or mixed uniforms—making it unclear whether they belong to the Ministry of Interior, Defence, Intelligence, or to armed groups affiliated with the authorities. The only clearly recognisable officers are the uniformed traffic police. This confusion contributes to a general sense of insecurity, since people do not know who has real authority or who can be trusted.
14. An anti-torture law has been passed, but so far there are no signs that it is being implemented in practice. No officials have been prosecuted or punished under this law, and there are no known cases where complaints have led to any action by the authorities. The legislation exists mostly on paper and has not yet translated into actual protection for detainees.
15. Crime and extortion are also part of daily life in many areas in Syria. One case from Salamiyah illustrates this: two armed men on a motorcycle stopped a man who was driving with his wife and children, interrogated him about his background, and demanded 800 US dollars to let him continue. He paid the money because he feared for his family's safety. There was no safe way to report the incident, and no expectation that the police would intervene.

*Freedom of movement*

16. Movement within Syria is now somewhat easier than during the former government. People can generally travel between cities such as Damascus, Aleppo, Raqqa, and Hasakah without needing the old security clearances.

**Meeting with an international NGO, Damascus, 24 September 2025**

*About the source*

The source is among others working with Syrians who are voluntarily returning to Syria across seven governorates: Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, Homs, Rural Damascus, and Daraa.

*Return to Syria*

*Trends and challenges in returns*

1. The main barriers preventing people from returning are the lack of shelter, fragile security situation, lack of access to basic services and lack of livelihood opportunities.
2. The source's experience from working with Syrian refugees in Türkiye, Lebanon and Jordan indicates a decreasing willingness to return among Syrians in these countries as people become aware of the reality on the ground. Moreover, some of those who do return decide to go back to the IDP camps or the country where they lived before. Some Syrians who returned to Syria from Lebanon subsequently went back to Lebanon using smugglers because they did not find the conditions in Syria conducive for return.
3. The experience of return is diverse: some return to more ethno-religiously homogenous communities with less communal tensions where there are shelters and basic services, whilst others face harsh conditions upon return. The experience of return varies by region. Rural areas are often underserved, characterised by higher levels of destruction, and are sometimes heavily contaminated with land mines, especially in Idlib and Aleppo governorates.
4. Many returnees regret their decision to return, considering their early return to be premature. Many of these lacked accurate information about the situation in their home area before returning; they relied on relatives who did not share the full reality of the destruction and lack of services. These persons have been shocked by the contrast between the reality and what they had heard. These returnees are now acting as messengers, warning families outside that it is too early to return.

5. Access to basic services is severely limited. For instance, in Rural Damascus, classrooms designed for 30 students now hold around 50 due to the influx of returnees, and the school system cannot cope with these high numbers. In some areas, the situation is so critical that people have returned to the IDP camps they previously left, just to enrol their children in schools, as the camps—despite poor living conditions—offer at least a minimum level of services, such as access to education. The limited livelihood opportunities are another challenge for return.
6. While the large-scale conflict is largely over, localised conflicts persist in some areas. Examples of these are the March incidents in coastal areas, and recent clashes in Jaramana, Sahnaya and Suweida as well as in Daraa where violence was committed against civilians. Such local incidents and tensions remain a factor discouraging return. The government is still new and has a limited capacity to ensure safety everywhere, particularly since the government does not have full control over all military factions who have joined the General Security Forces as well as other factions who did not join. Targeted attacks persist based on perceived affiliation of the targeted individuals with the former government in addition to attacks against individuals with perceived affiliation with the present government.
7. It is very difficult to generalise about the situation of single women returning, as it depends on a number of factors, including conditions in the area of return, the individual woman's economic situation etc. However, single women and female-headed households constitute a particularly vulnerable group upon return. They are generally highly dependent on family members, as they are rarely economically independent. If a single mother returns, it is usually expected that her family will host her, which often entails living restrictions, including limited freedom of movement, imposed by the family. In addition, the security situation in the area may also affect women's freedom of movement.
8. Recent localised conflicts, such as those that caused displacement from Suweida, have led people to seek refuge in collective shelters in Daraa. Displaced people, particularly children, express fear due to the violence they witnessed. These people arrived with nothing—no clothes or shoes—in urgent need of shelter, hygiene kits, and protection services. They fear this will be a long-term situation and worry about being displaced again when schools start, especially since the areas in which they are displaced already suffer from poor access to basic services.

9. The process to obtain legal documents remains dysfunctional and slow. This is a crucial problem for returnees, especially those whose children were born in displacement and lack registration. Without documentation, families struggle to access basic services and to address housing, land, and property issues which is also a driver of conflict.
10. Children who adapted to life and education outside Syria (e.g. in Türkiye or Lebanon) face integration challenges upon return. They may have adapted to a different culture and curriculum and often do not know their families' original home but rather the place where they were born in displacement. They suffer from the loss of their community and friends and they may struggle to integrate with extended family members who stayed behind in Syria.

## Meeting with Enab Baladi in Damascus, 24 September 2025

### *About the source*

Enab Baladi is an independent Syrian media organisation founded in 2011 in the city of Darayya by a group of citizen journalists and activists in response to the Syrian uprising. Its mission is to promote freedom of expression, accountability, and human rights by providing reliable news and analysis on Syria's political, social, and humanitarian developments.

Enab Baladi previously worked in exile but decided to return to Syria after the fall of the Assad government.

### *Situation of certain groups*

#### *Journalists*

1. There is no formal censorship or direct restrictions on journalists. In practise, there is space to report and even to criticise senior officials, including the head of state. The source's news outlet as well as other media outlets in Syria enjoy this space for expression. For instance, the outlet maintains its former editorial line, with increased attention to infrastructure, economic and service-delivery issues. However, in the current context of political instability, a sensitive security environment, and uncertainty about the future, journalists generally avoid language that could be perceived as provocative by the authorities or social actors with extremist views in order to safeguard their own security.
2. A method used by the source's media outlet to avoid such self-censorship is to contextualise sensitive subjects through analytical reporting. On highly sensitive topics – e.g. describing waves of violence in the Syrian coastal areas in March 2025 as a

‘massacre’ - the outlet attributed such characterisations to eyewitness testimonies and expert assessments.

3. The source is concerned about whether the current space for free speech is a temporary form of tolerance that may change in the future. It is unclear whether the current level of freedom of expression is the result of an actual policy of the interim government or merely a consequence of its limited capacity to restrict speech.

One of the main challenges faced by journalists is the limited access to official information. For example, journalists are not permitted to contact public officials directly. Instead, they must submit their inquiries to the Ministry of Information, which decides whether the request will be forwarded and subsequently provides a filtered response.

4. There have only been a few cases of journalists being briefly detained by the authorities, rather than a broader campaign of arrests. In one case, two Kurdish journalists were detained for several hours by the General Security Forces while travelling in a car with a visible camera and Kurdish writing on the vehicle. According to the source, the detention was likely linked to their Kurdish background and origin from Kobane. The source assessed that such incidents stem from low professional standards within the General Security Forces. In this case, limited training and awareness may have contributed to the security personnel’s failure to recognise that individuals from Kobane are Syrian citizens. The incident was described by the source as isolated rather than systematic. The two journalists were not subjected to physical violence, but they were reportedly treated disrespectfully and experienced humiliating behavior during their detention.
5. The source assesses that the conduct of authorities and their treatment of citizens vary by province. For instance, Aleppo has shown the most progress, with an effective functioning chain of command and a clear internal discipline. The security forces in Damascus are also disciplined, whilst the security forces in Rural Damascus, however, lack discipline. Overall, the level of discipline depends heavily on the individual commander, and local conditions can change rapidly when leadership changes.

*Persons opposing or perceived to be opposing the interim authorities*

6. The interim government does not have the capacity to monitor social media, but the source assumes that intelligence services likely do so. Their monitoring is, however, limited and not systematic.

7. There is no legislation in Syria that specifically criminalises social-media postings. However, there have been some cases of individuals being arrested under the former government's electronic-crimes law due to social-media content. For example, a while ago a woman was arrested after verbally insulting a police officer because he was an Alawite.
8. Arrests often occur without proper legal procedure – police or security branches may detain individuals even without an arrest warrant issued by the courts. Arrests appear to be carried out on a selective basis, with no clear criteria as to why some individuals are detained while others who have committed similar acts are not.

*Persons with real or perceived affiliation with the former government*

9. Asked about the new legislation in Syria making it illegal to deny the crimes committed by the Assad-government, the source explains that there is currently a legislative vacuum in Syria. Several norms exist as constitutional declarations but there is no actual legislation. This further means that no other piece of legislation interprets which statements may be in violation of the declaration. For instance, there are no clear offences or penalties specifically punishing denial of the former government's crimes.
10. There is currently a legislative vacuum in Syria, meaning that although new constitutional declarations exist, there is no accompanying legislation to define offences or procedures. An example is the new declaration on denying crimes committed by the former Assad government. There are no legal provisions specifying what statements would constitute a violation, and no penalties or sanctions are outlined for denying crimes attributed to the former government.

*Kurds*

11. A Kurd living in an area controlled by the government does not risk being harassed or attacked due to being Kurd. A third of the population in Damascus has Kurdish roots and they are an integrated part of the Syrian community. Many high-ranking positions within the government are also held by Kurds.
12. Authorities in North East Syria (NES) may view visiting Kurds from other parts of Syria with suspicion and treat them as potential spies.

**Meeting with a humanitarian organisation (2) in Damascus, 24 September 2025**

*Situation of certain groups*

### *Palestinians*

1. There has been no observed change in the Syrian authorities' perception of PRS. The previous government held a supportive stance toward Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS), and this position has been maintained by the current government.
2. The civil registry was closed for nine months, from December 2024 until September 2025, during which documents could only be issued on an emergency basis. During this period, the new authorities worked to merge the Idlib registration system with the national system. At that time, an error was reported in the registration status of PRS, who were being listed as 'foreign nationals' instead of their correct category, 'Palestinian/Syrian', which applies to PRS registered with GAPAR. The issue was officially acknowledged as a mistake and subsequently resolved, although it initially caused significant concern. In addition, there were some initial apprehensions after the interim government came to power, as PRS had previously been required to perform military service. However, this concern was alleviated when compulsory military service was abolished.
3. Two trends have been observed by the source regarding PRS' access to services provided by actors other than UNRWA. Firstly, when PRS seek access to public services - primarily healthcare and, in some cases, education - they are increasingly being referred by the authorities to UNRWA. The current government, like the previous one, expects UNRWA to assume its share of the burden; if UNRWA does not fulfil its mandate, the responsibility falls back on the Syrian authorities. Secondly, the same pattern is seen when PRS approach NGOs for assistance, as these organisations are also increasingly directing PRS to UNRWA due to limited resources.

### *Freedom of movement*

4. PRS can move freely and reside anywhere in Syria, and no restrictions on their freedom of movement based on their background or status have been observed so far. However, certain areas remain sensitive for all residents, including both Syrians and PRS, such as locations near military camps and airports.
5. PRS - like Syrians - are not required to show any documents to access UNRWA camps. There is also free access to areas such as Yarmouk, which had been restricted during the conflict.
6. There have been no reports of PRS being treated differently from Syrians at checkpoints. In some of the camps, there are government checkpoints, but no problems have been reported there either.

7. The Syrian authorities are in charge of security inside the camps, as this has never been part of UNRWA's mandate. In some camps, such as Neirab and Yarmouk, there are police stations and police force now called 'General Security Forces'. However, police services and protection in the camps are not at the same level as in well-off areas such as Mezze in Damascus. In principle, PRS in the camps may report crimes to the police and request protection; however, the capacity of these services remains limited. This situation is not related to whether a person is PRS or to the fact that it is a Palestinian camp; police services in poorer areas are generally the same throughout the country.

#### Access to UNRWA services in the camps

8. In Syria, UNRWA is currently providing services to approximately 438 000 PRS who are estimated to remain in the country. These services include a primary healthcare programme operating nationwide; a basic education programme covering grades 1 to 9; a camp improvement programme (sanitation, hygiene and solid waste management); and a protection programme addressing multiple areas, including gender-based violence (GBV), child protection, international protection and risks related to explosive remnants of war (ERW), which remain a major challenge in the country.
9. A lack of funding currently poses a significant challenge to UNRWA's ability to deliver services, with staff salaries and operational costs sometimes covered only on a month-to-month basis. The emergency response programme is particularly affected, resulting in emergency interventions - such as cash assistance, food or non-food items - being only partially implemented or, in some cases, not implemented at all.
10. The funding shortfall has had a wide impact on UNRWA's services. In general, reduced funding has resulted in cuts to some core services, including hospitalisation. While UNRWA is still able to provide primary healthcare - such as maternal and child health services and basic obstetric care - this now requires strict prioritisation. However, UNRWA is no longer able to support secondary healthcare, including cancer treatment, which it previously subsidised by up to 75 %. In addition, the programme through which vulnerable cases were referred to hospitals and received partial cost coverage has now been reduced by half or more.
11. Another example is that this year UNRWA has only been able to procure around 60 % of the required textbooks and workbooks. The remaining 40 % are being reused, although workbooks in particular are difficult to reuse. Furthermore, UNRWA's free legal assistance programme - covering issues such as civil documentation and GBV cases - was suspended for several months over the past year and a half, as the agency

lacked funding to pay volunteer lawyers against transportation cost and cover related court fees, *inter alia*.

12. In addition to its impact on service delivery, the funding shortfall also affects approximately 2 500 local UNRWA staff, many of whom experience stress and uncertainty about their future employment and financial security. These employees are expected to remain on the frontline, engaging with communities and providing services, yet they do not know whether they will receive their salaries or if their contracts will be renewed.
13. Furthermore, UNRWA is widely criticised by PRS at community meetings and on social media for not fulfilling its mandate, including the provision of cash assistance and food.
14. There are 12 PRS camps in the country. Over the years, however, some PRS have moved out of the camps to large informal settlements in rural areas, including in Sasa, Dummar, Mezzeh, Husseiniyeh, Alliance, Ruhkn Eddin, Al Zahira, Mashrou Dummar, Ramadan, Jdeidat Artouz, Sahnaya, Shahba, Khirbet al-Shayyab, Qudsaya town, Qudsaya suburb, Massakin Barzeh, Adra. UNRWA services are provided in the camps but in informal settlements UNRWA provides a limited range of services tailored to each specific gathering. As a result, PRS living outside the camps or in informal settlements where UNRWA does not deliver its full range of services must either travel to the camps to access these services or rely on public services provided by the authorities.
15. The camps are not run by UNRWA but by the Syrian government. UNRWA only provides services such as health, education, sanitation, whereas infrastructure, electricity, sewage and other public services are the responsibility of the Syrian government. Those basic services are generally poor, not only in the camps but across Syria.
16. In UNRWA's last assessment from 2019, more than 91 % of PRS were living below the poverty line and were in need of UNRWA emergency assistance without which they would actually be in abject poverty. The source assumes that the number today is higher than 91 %. However, the situation is similar for Syrians, where around 90 % are living below the poverty line.
17. It is thus not only PRS who are suffering in Syria, as the overall situation in the country has been worsening for all the population but there is a difference between PRS and Syrians with regard to access to land. PRS can only own a residential place but not

agricultural, industrial or commercial real estate; they have to do some arrangement with a trusted Syrian and put everything in that person's name.

18. PRS have begun returning to camps that remain contaminated by explosive remnants of war and affected by rubble and widespread destruction of housing. These returns are driven by necessity rather than choice, as many PRS can no longer afford to live outside the camps.
19. Of the 12 UNRWA camps, three have been severely destroyed: Yarmouk in Damascus, Deraa in the south and Ein el-Tal in the north. Living conditions in these camps are harsh. Many families reside in housing without doors or windows, with only plastic coverings providing minimal protection from the elements. Sanitary facilities often lack doors, resulting in a complete absence of privacy. These conditions persist because the affected families are unable to afford rented accommodation elsewhere.
20. People have begun returning to Yarmouk where schools, health facilities and other infrastructure were previously destroyed. Over the past two to three years, UNRWA has rehabilitated one school operating on a shift system, as well as one health centre and one community centre. At the end of last academic year, UNRWA schools in the camp had 1 600 students enrolled; by the start of the current school year, 2 700 students had registered, indicating an increase in returns. Approximately 9,000 people are now residing in the camp. To manage the growing number of students, UNRWA plans to expand classroom capacity - which currently stands at 51 students per class - by relocating prefabricated units from other schools, cooperating with other schools, and converting a science laboratory and other activity rooms into several additional classrooms. However, this will also require the recruitment of additional teachers.

#### Entry conditions for PRS

21. In general, it is possible for PRS who fled Syria during the conflict to return to Syria and there are no reports of PRS being denied access to Syria. Both GAPAR-registered PRS and unregistered PRS (who were born and de facto residing in Syria as a habitual residential place before leaving the country) are permitted entry. Even those who do not have required official documents can enter, provided that they were born in Syria and have previously lived there.
22. Officially, GAPAR-registered PRS are required to present a document proving their residency in order to enter Syria. Unregistered PRS rely on the Palestinian embassy to issue documentation confirming their status as Palestine refugees but such documents are not fully recognised by the new Syrian government, and different state bodies apply varying approaches to documents issued by the Palestinian authorities. In practice,

however, the authorities generally apply these entry requirements leniently and allow both categories to enter Syria in one way or another. There are no formal legal provisions or official regulations governing this matter. The information presented by the source in this section is therefore based primarily on observations, accounts, and secondary reporting from refugees and other non-official sources.

23. The source gave an example of the lenient approach of the Syrian authorities regarding PRS entry. A PRS man and his Syrian spouse, who initially had two children registered in their family booklet, fled to Lebanon, where three additional children were born but not registered. Following the change of government, the family returned to Syria. At the border, the authorities accepted the parents' account and allowed all five children to enter, despite the lack of registration for the three youngest children, aged 8, 10 and 13, none of whom had attended school.

## Meeting with Nada Aswad, political activist, in Damascus, 24 September 2025

### *About the source*

The source has been a political activist for 14 years and is currently engaged in work related to women, family, and housing. For several years, the source has also been involved in facilitating dialogue both among Syrians inside the country and within the Syrian diaspora.

### *Situation of certain groups*

#### *Women*

1. Despite the initial fear that women would be excluded from participation in the social life of the country under the new government, some improvements have taken place with regard to the social position of women. For example, a feminist and Christian woman has been appointed as a minister in the cabinet, and women have been appointed as deans of faculties at Aleppo University and other universities.
2. Women attempting to return to Damascus encounter significant obstacles in securing both housing and employment. Reconstruction efforts in Syria have yet to commence, and job opportunities remain extremely limited. Rental costs are prohibitively high, prompting many women who had previously resided in refugee camps in Idlib—and sought to resettle in Damascus following the fall of the former government—to ultimately return to the camps. Female public-sector employees seeking to reclaim their former positions have also been unable to do

so, as personnel from the previous administration continue to occupy these posts despite the establishment of the new government.

3. The economic situation has deteriorated compared to previous years. Funding for humanitarian aid in Syria has declined sharply, forcing aid organisations to scale back their activities and lay off many staff members. This reduction has had a severe impact on refugee camps, where the majority of residents are women.
4. The majority of the Syrians depend on the remittances that Syrian abroad send back home.
5. Social challenges also hinder the return of Syrians to their places of origin. Tensions have emerged between those who remained under the previous government and those who were displaced during the war and have now returned. Many of the returnees have lost their homes and they often express resentment toward those who did not leave, a sentiment that is compounded by the high cost of securing rental housing.
6. The majority of returnees in Syria are young men. Single women, by contrast, tend to remain abroad or in refugee camps, as the high cost of housing and prevailing social attitudes toward single women living alone make it extremely difficult for them to secure suitable accommodation.
7. The source has not personally encountered or become aware of specific incidents of women facing any difficulties (e.g. harassments, including sexual harassments) when using public transportation in Syria, including during long-distance bus travel. However, it has been reported that some Alawite women are reluctant to use public transportation because they fear kidnapping and assault.
8. The source has recently been in Lattakia engaging with several civil society activities, where the source met with the Alawite female participants from several coastal cities. The participants expressed that they did not face restrictions or difficulties regarding their freedom of movement or their freedom of wearing any outfit they like.
9. The source has neither witnessed nor heard of any cases in which Syrian women were assaulted for not wearing the Islamic veil in any part of the country. However, there may be isolated local incidents in which women are asked to cover their hair.

10. Although the Syrian society is gradually returning to a normal daily life, rebuilding trust and stability remains a long-term process.

*Alawites*

11. The authorities have set up roadblocks and checkpoints in Homs to secure Alawite districts, a measure taken in response to the heightened sectarian tensions in the city.

*Persons opposing or perceived to be opposing the interim authorities*

12. Criticism of the current authorities in Syria is more prevalent abroad than within the country. Nonetheless, some individuals inside Syria also express criticism, and to date they have not faced arrest or physical reprisals.
13. There are also cases of well-known Syrians who have spoken publicly on social media about the incidents on the coast, describing them as 'massacres against the Alawites', and they too have not faced any restrictions.

## Meeting with a high-profile Christian church leader in Damascus, 25 September 2025

*Situation of certain groups*

*Christians*

1. Initially after the fall of the former government, widespread fear emerged among Christians due to the Islamist orientation of the new government.
2. There have been individual incidents targeting Christians - as well as others - including kidnappings and killings as well accusations against Christians for being affiliated with the former government.
3. When individuals report incidents committed by persons dressed as General Security (GS), the authorities consistently respond that these incidents are individual cases carried out by persons impersonating GS, not official GS. The authorities do not have the capacity to investigate or provide protection, even in case of kidnappings - no action is taken against these abuses. This recurring inaction indicates that these incidents are no longer individual, isolated incidents but have become institutionalised because if the perpetrators did not have the accept of the authorities, they would not commit these acts.

4. The explosion of the Mar Elias Church in June 2025 was a turning point for Christians. In the beginning, many people including Christians gave the Government of Syria (GoS) the benefit of the doubt believing that while its capacity was limited, it was making efforts to improve the situation. However, after the explosion, emigration became a top priority for many Christians.
5. The GoS has not taken responsibility for the broader lack of security in the country, including its failure to prevent the church attack. The authorities continue to refer to such incidents as individual, isolated incidents and have not taken measures to prevent future incidents. This applies across all governorates. The GoS instead accused the Islamic State (IS) or remnants of the former government within half an hour of the attack. 48 hours later, however, the group Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah claimed responsibility for the attack. Before the explosion, the perpetrator was walking around in the street carrying his gun and no one talked to him and told him not to carry a weapon, as it has become a common sight with armed men in the street. The incident, which resulted in 22 deaths inside the church, illustrates the authorities' lack of will to protect civilians.
6. As regards what the GoS has done to secure the areas in which Christians live and where there are churches since the explosion, the GoS has not taken any measures except for heightening security around this specific church, which now has two guards.
7. In another case, Christians were attacked in al-Qusayr in Homs Governorate three days ago. Armed factions (not GS) attacked houses of Christians, accusing them of being remnants of the former government, burning their houses. Factions affiliated with the interim authorities but beyond central government control reportedly exploit their authority to carry out attacks against Christian communities and other civilians.
8. Since the change of government, the 'red lines', which once signalled what was safe to say or do have been unclear. Armed factions exploit this uncertainty, using their authority to target individuals - often over personal disputes - by accusing them of affiliation with the former government and detaining them with impunity.
9. The current tensions (where factions exploit their authority to target individuals) are not primarily religious but reflect deep social and regional divisions. A growing rift has emerged between Muslims from Idlib and those from other parts of Syria, with Idlib-origin officials and groups often viewing others as remnants of the former government.

This rhetoric, now present even within government institutions, undermines national cohesion and fuels mistrust among communities.

10. In addition to the attacks on Christian houses, Christians are still being kidnapped on a daily basis in Wadi al-Nasara in rural Homs; some of them were returned to their family after a ransom was paid, whereas others disappeared. The source assumes, however, that these individuals are not being kidnapped because they are Christians but because they have money, as it is not only Christians who are being kidnapped.
11. Efforts by the local church in Wadi al-Nasara to secure government protection for the area have failed. Despite the GoS' approval to recruit 200 local volunteers into the GS forces, the authorities never followed through on the agreement. As a result, this predominantly Christian region of over 250 000 residents remains without effective government protection.
12. In addition to the case of Wadi al-Nasara where the GoS refused to recruit Christians to provide security in the area, GoS has not recruited any Christian to GS in general or to the new Syrian army. Recruits to GS have to take a sharia course. Christians in Wadi al-Nasara, however, expressed willingness to take the course if it allowed them to protect their families but their request for recruitment was nevertheless rejected.
13. Another incident took place in Wadi al-Nasara, which likewise illustrates the lack of security in this area. Days after unidentified outsiders attempted to attack a local church and threatened to return, a wildfire broke out under weather conditions that made a natural fire unlikely, suggesting it was a deliberate act. While not seen as specifically anti-Christian, such incidents reflect the broader risks faced by all minority groups.
14. Safety for Christians in Syria varies by region and is strongly influenced by external and local actors. Aleppo city is considered relatively safe, which the source attributes to the stabilising influence of Türkiye and the presence of Turkish intelligence. Damascus, which is more shaped by Gulf influence, is not as safe or civilised as Aleppo city; however, the situation in Damascus is much better than in Homs. Homs, both city and rural areas, records the highest number of kidnappings, which the source attributes to its mixed social composition, which includes Alawites, Ismailis, and Christians.
15. According to the source, it is not realistic for Christians from Damascus to relocate to Aleppo for safety. Although Aleppo is relatively safer, it is not an important Christian centre, hosting only around 3 000 Christian families compared to approximately 20 000

Christian families in Wadi al-Nasara and about 300 000 Christians in Damascus and its surrounding areas.

16. The security advisor of the church does not consider it safe to travel and pass by checkpoints across Syria for Christians. The source personally feels safe because he has very good connections with the GoS and because his respected, religious position grants him a degree of protection. For ordinary Christians without such status though, travel from one governorate to another across Syria is not safe.
17. The source has not heard of cases where Christians have been targeted at checkpoints, travelling from one governorate to another, except for Christians being subject to harassment and some misbehaviour. In general, however, not many Christians travel from one governorate to another.
18. The source is not aware of any cases of Christians returning to Syria, including from the neighbouring countries. Christian Syrians would in principle, however, be allowed to enter Syria.
19. Proselytising is not permitted in Syria. When the orthodox church opened centres in Idlib, it was not considered proselytising. However, before granting permission for church activities and humanitarian support, the GoS conducted a thorough background check on both the source and the church.

*Atheists, non-religious individuals and Christian converts*

20. The situation in Europe is very different from Syria. In Syria, every citizen's religion is listed in the ID, regardless of his/her potential non-religious sentiment. Non-religious persons do not dare under any circumstances reveal or spread their atheism publicly; there have been isolated cases though where people have been subject to mistreatment because of their clothes.
21. As regards other non-Islamic behaviour, there have been many incidents at two checkpoints in Damascus. In one case, a female staff member of the church was sitting in a car with her fiancé and the couple were accused of illegal seclusion for being alone in the car. The woman was forcibly taken to her family and the checkpoint authorities whipped the man. Such incidents occur regularly at two specific checkpoints in Damascus, in Zabadani and Baghdad Street.
22. Punishment for perceived non-religious behaviour varies depending on who controls the checkpoint. For example, the checkpoints on the road from Damascus to the coast are completely different. In the coastal areas, checkpoints are staffed by foreign fighters

and movement there is considered particularly dangerous. For example, a lot of kidnapping of Alawite females is happening, including at checkpoints and in their communities.

23. It is not possible to convert from Islam to Christianity in Syria; this was neither possible under the former government. In case a Syrian Muslim abroad announced on social media that he had converted to Christianity and returned to Syria, he would be protected by law but his family or society might take revenge. Whoever would commit the crime would only be imprisoned for around three months.
24. The source knows many Muslims who have converted to Christianity. They are baptised but they do not change their religious status in their documents; they remain registered Muslims. A Christian man married a woman who was born Muslim but baptised as a child and identifies as Christian. Officially, however, her ID still lists her as Muslim, while her husband is registered as Christian. Their marriage is not legally recognised, as they did not obtain official documents and only their neighbours are aware of their marriage. They now have a one-and-a-half-year-old daughter who cannot be registered due to her parents' differing official religions. This leaves her without legal identity and uncertain access to schooling or future civil documentation.
25. Monitoring of social media by the current authorities continues in much the same manner as under the former government. The source knows of cases of people who have been monitored online. Most of those monitored are inside Syria rather than abroad.

*Jehova's Witnesses*

26. There are many Jehovah's Witnesses in Syria, especially in Wadi al-Nasara in rural Homs. Jehovah's Witnesses reportedly offer financial or material incentives to vulnerable Christians in an effort to convert them, taking advantage of widespread poverty and food insecurity. The government reportedly shows no concern about Jehovah's Witnesses converting Christians, taking no action to restrict or monitor such activities.

## Meeting with a Kurdish civil society activist in Damascus, 25 September 2025

### *About the source*

The source is a Kurdish civil society activist affiliated with an organisation that engages in initiatives promoting coexistence and dialogue among Syria's diverse ethnic and religious communities.

### *Freedom of expression*

1. The source has not experienced any harassment from the current Syrian authorities in relation to freedom of expression.
2. The current authorities make efforts to present themselves as open and respectful towards Syria's various ethnic and religious groups and their cultural rights. As an example, following the fall of the previous government, a cultural festival was held under the patronage of the Ministry of Culture, celebrating the music and dance traditions of different communities. According to sources, such initiatives are largely performative and primarily intended to project an image to the international community that the cultural rights of ethnic groups are respected and well preserved.
3. According to the source, the current authorities' prioritization of Syria's Islamic identity, and their unwillingness to make concessions to the country's diverse ethnic and religious groups, is contributing to the fragmentation of Syria.
4. Within the lower ranks of the security apparatus in Damascus, there remain elements influenced by strong jihadist ideology. These individuals have not undergone sufficient training or ideological re-education to counter or move beyond such views.
5. The Damascene public is currently resentful toward the present authorities. In the immediate aftermath of the fall of the previous government, there were incidents of individuals with Islamist ideological views confronting unveiled women and questioning their attire. Additionally, some individuals reportedly entered Christian neighbourhoods in Damascus, attempting to pressure residents to convert to Islam. Such incidents have since now mostly stopped and are rarely reported anymore.
6. The source knew of one incident involving journalists affiliated with foreign Kurdish media outlets who have been subjected to arrest or harassment by the interim authorities. These journalists were detained briefly and subsequently released with apologies from the authorities. The journalists were not subjected to any inhuman or degrading treatment during their detention.

7. There is a significant degree of self-censorship among journalists, particularly those who do not belong to the Sunni Muslim community. Such journalists often refrain from expressing views that could potentially expose them to reprisal from the authorities.
8. Authorities also impose censorship. For example, works by foreign authors - particularly in the fields of philosophy and political science - have been edited by the Ministry of Culture, which has removed several paragraphs from the translated editions before publication, because these writings are contrary to the Islamic principles.

*Situation of Kurds in the government-controlled areas*

9. There have been several incidents in the Sha'lan area of Damascus where Kurdish individuals were arrested for speaking the Kurdish language. Those detained were not residents of the capital but visitors from Qamishli and Aleppo. Some of the men were reportedly subjected to torture while in detention.
10. These arrests coincided with the Kurdish Democratic Union Party's (PYD) attempt to establish new offices in government-controlled areas of Syria, which may have heightened the authorities' vigilance toward Kurdish-speaking individuals. During this period, the authorities detained both politically active persons and several apolitical individuals from North-East Syria who were inadvertently caught up in the operation.
11. All the detained Kurds were interrogated under suspicion of maintaining connections with the intelligence apparatus of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Nevertheless, all those arrested were released after a brief period of detention.
12. Apart from the aforementioned incidents, the source is not aware of any cases in which Kurds have been subjected to mistreatment by the authorities. However, there remains a high sense of fear among the Kurdish population in Damascus regarding potential repercussions should tensions between the authorities and the SDF escalate.
13. Neither Syrian Kurds nor members of other ethnic groups currently face discrimination or institutional barriers when seeking housing. The primary obstacle, according to the source, is the severe economic crisis, which constrains the ability of all Syrians to secure adequate accommodation.
14. When asked whether Kurds have been dismissed from public employment or denied access to public services on the basis of their ethnicity, the source refuted such claims. The source provided several examples of high-ranking Kurdish officials currently serving within the administration, including the Minister of Education.

15. Kurds who attempt to re-enter Syria after having left the country are not being prevented by the authorities from returning. The source has direct knowledge of several cases in which Syrian Kurds were able to return to Syria without encountering any administrative or security obstacles.
16. The current authorities demonstrate a higher degree of tolerance toward Kurdish flags and symbols compared to the previous government. During a recent Kurdish cultural festival in Damascus, participants openly displayed Kurdish flags without any intervention from the authorities—an occurrence that would have been inconceivable under the former government.
17. The current authorities have not revoked Syrian citizenship of Ajanib—Kurds from Hasakah who were naturalised in 2011 by the former government
18. However, the situation of the Maktoomeen remains unresolved. According to the source, members of this group continue to be denied basic rights, including the ability to complete secondary education.

## Annex 2: Terms of Reference

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### Situation of certain groups

1. Persons with real or perceived affiliation with the former government
2. Ethno-religious minorities
  - 2.1. Alawites
  - 2.2. Kurds
  - 2.3. Christians
  - 2.4. Druze
3. Palestinians from Syria (PRS)
4. Women
5. Persons opposing or perceived to be opposing the interim authorities