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Syria

Situation of LGBT+ persons



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Syria — Situation of LGBT+ persons

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1. Legal framework

The Syrian government's treatment of LGBT+ individuals is governed by the Syrian Penal Code of 1949 and its subsequent amendments. Eight provisions of this code have been used to criminalise members of the LGBT+ community, including Articles 507, 517, and 520, which address alleged violations of public decency and morality.¹

Article 520 of the 1949 Syrian Penal Code criminalises “*any sexual act against the order of nature*” and allows for prison sentences of up to three years.² Both men and women are subject to criminal penalties under this provision.³ According to the digital media platform Daraj, the vague wording of Article 520 enables its use as a legal basis for the arrest and detention of LGBT+ individuals.⁴

Article 517 prescribes imprisonment ranging from three months to three years for acts considered to violate “*public moral values*” when committed in public. Although Article 517 does not explicitly criminalise transgender individuals, it has been used in practice to punish them by characterising their appearance or conduct as a breach of public decency.⁵

Article 507 criminalises “*any man who disguises himself in women’s clothing and enters a place reserved for women*” and imposes one and a half years of imprisonment.⁶

In addition, the Anti-Prostitution Law (Law No. 10 of 1961), that criminalises the practice of prostitution, is frequently invoked to prosecute LGBT+ individuals.⁷

It should be noted that all amnesty decrees that were issued by the former Syrian governments since 1963 have consistently excluded legal provisions that criminalize members of the LGBT+ community.⁸

¹ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Out of the shades*, 2023, [url](#) p. 19

² UN-Habitat, *Syria - General Penal Code No. 148 of 1949 Amended by Legislative Decree No. 1 of 2011*, [url](#)

³ Human Dignity Trust, *Syria*, 7 January 2025, [url](#); Human Rights Watch, “*They Treated Us in Monstrous Ways*”: *Sexual Violence Against Men, Boys, and Transgender Women in the Syrian Conflict*, July 2020, [url](#), p. 24

⁴ Daraj, [مجتمع الميم في سوريا: انتهاك الكرامة الإنسانية وترسيخ الإفلات من العقاب], *The LGBTQ+ Community in Syria: Violations of Human Dignity and the Entrenchment of Impunity*, 7 February 2025, [url](#)

⁵ Cairo 52, *Syria*, [url](#). Cairo 52 is an NGO focusing on advocating for LGBTQ+ individuals.

⁶ UN-Habitat, *Syria - General Penal Code No. 148 of 1949 Amended by Legislative Decree No. 1 of 2011*, [url](#)

⁷ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Out of the shades*, 2023, [url](#) p. 19

⁸ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Out of the shades*, 2023, [url](#) p. 15

2. Treatment by the interim authorities, family and society

Before the Syrian conflict and the fall of the Assad government, in December 2024, strong homophobia, transphobia, and social stigma in Syria made it challenging for LGBT+ Syrians to live safely, forcing many to keep their sexual orientation hidden.⁹

After the fall of the Assad government a new government led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), took power. HTS was formed in 2017 and evolved from Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's former affiliate in Syria — conservative Islamist groups that were known to target LGBT+ individuals. In an article by *Queer Majority* — a magazine focusing on LGBT+ issues published in January 2025 — a researcher in jihadist movements found it unlikely that the new government would support LGBT+ rights or provide protection for this group.¹⁰ The legal provisions used to criminalise the LGBT+ individuals remain in force in Syria as of December 2025.¹¹

2.1. Incidents involving LGBT+ persons

The Guardians of Equality Movement (GEM), the first Syrian LGBT+ organisation, and the international NGO, Global Protection Cluster, report that since the end of Assad's rule, attacks on LGBT+ people have increased significantly, including documented abuses by the government, government-affiliated and non-governmental armed groups such as entrapment through dating applications, raids, kidnapping, arbitrary detention, torture, humiliation, and defamation.¹² According to GEM, family and relatives themselves have increasingly become a major source of violence.¹³ Meanwhile the wider population and religious community show hostility toward LGBT+ people — forcing many into hiding or to migrate.¹⁴

Among the incidents during 2025 involving LGBT+ individuals are the following:

- In early 2025, videos circulating online showed a campaign by Syrian authorities in Jaramana, Rural Damascus governorate, involving the arrest of transgender persons, who were photographed and released the following day. Another video showed armed groups with no official affiliation raiding a residence in Jaramana that housed several

⁹ Journal of Homosexuality, Diab, J. L., *Who Syria was Never Safe For: Displacement, Return and Queer Syrian Futures Beyond Assad*, 5 November 2025, [url](#)

¹⁰ Queer Majority, *LGBT Syrians Hang in the Balance*, 22 January 2025, [url](#)

¹¹ Human Dignity Trust, *Syria*, 7 January 2025, [url](#)

¹² Global Protection Cluster, *Protection landscape in Syria – a snapchat*, March 2025 [url](#) p. 5; Guardians of Equality Movement (GEM), *LGBTQIA+ individuals in Syria after the fall of the Assad regime*, 19 April 2025, [url](#) pp. 6-7

¹³ GEM, *LGBTQIA+ individuals in Syria after the fall of the Assad regime*, 19 April 2025, [url](#)

¹⁴ EUAA, *Syria: Country focus*, March 2025, [url](#) p. 42; Daraj, *Should Queer Syrians Take Up Arms For Self-Defense*, 10 March 2025, [url](#)

Syrian transgender women.¹⁵ According to a security source within the Damascus government interviewed by the Jerusalem Post, the aim of the operation was to discourage transgender and queer individuals from appearing publicly or engaging visibly in the community.¹⁶

- Additionally, documented incidents described waves of violence during the first two months of 2025 targeting several Syrian transgender women in multiple cities such as Damascus, Latakia, and Aleppo, supported by videos showing armed individuals arresting them, beating them, and threatening them with death and mutilation.¹⁷
- In August 2025, a video widely circulated on social media showed tens of young men in Damascus chasing and surrounding a transgender woman, subjecting her to verbal harassment.¹⁸

2.2. Current situation of LGBT+ persons

GEM reports that LGBT+ individuals in Syria face numerous risks, particularly those whose sexual orientation or gender identity is apparent to others through their appearance, behaviour, or gender expression.¹⁹ Many live in hiding, struggling with fear, isolation, and the absence of any legal or social protection.²⁰

According to a study conducted by the Journal of Homosexuality published in November 2025 and based on interviews with 50 LGBT+ Syrian refugees, Lebanon is seen as the best regional option for LGBT+ individuals because it has active LGBT+ organisations, a shared language, and more support services. However, while LGBT+ groups in Lebanon offer important help, LGBT+ Syrian refugees still face legal uncertainty, financial problems, and discrimination in Lebanon.²¹

¹⁵ GEM, *LGBTIQA+ individuals in Syria after the fall of the Assad regime*, 19 April 2025, [url](#) p. 7

¹⁶ EUAA, *Syria: Country focus*, March 2025, [url](#) p. 42

¹⁷ GEM, *LGBTIQA+ individuals in Syria after the fall of the Assad regime*, 19 April 2025, [url](#) p. 7

¹⁸ GEM, *Mob Bullying: Tens of Young Men Harass a Transgender Woman in Damascus*, August 2025, [url](#)

¹⁹ GEM, *LGBTIQA+ individuals in Syria after the fall of the Assad regime*, 19 April 2025, [url](#) p. 13

²⁰ Queer Majority, *LGBT Syrians Are Being Hunted by Their Neighbors*, 16 May 2025, [url](#)

²¹ Journal of Homosexuality, Diab, J. L., *Who Syria was Never Safe For: Displacement, Return and Queer Syrian Futures Beyond Assad*, 5 November 2025, [url](#)

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