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International Protection Considerations with Regard to Asylum-Seekers from **the Syrian Arab Republic**

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List of Abbreviations

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
AFP	Agence France-Presse
AP	Associated Press
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BICC	Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies
CCCM	Camp Coordination and Camp Management
CIHRS	Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
CMI	Chr. Michelsen Institute
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CTP/ISW	Critical Threats Project – Institute for the Study of War
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
DW	Deutsche Welle
ECFR	European Council on Foreign Relations
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
DAANES	Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
ERPIS	Enhanced Refugee Perceptions and Intentions Survey
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HLP	Housing, Land and Property
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HTS	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IFA/IRA	Internal flight or relocation alternative
IICI	Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic
IIMP	Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic
IIIM	UN Office of the International Impartial and Independent Mechanism on Syria
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration

ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham (Da'esh)
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh)
ISPI	Italian Institute for International Political Studies
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer
MEI	Middle East Institute
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPA	North Press Agency
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PYD	Democratic Union Party
RSF	<i>Reporters Sans Frontières</i> (Reporters Without Borders)
SAA	Syrian Arab Army
SANA	Syrian Arab News Agency
SAS	Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah
SCM	Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SJAC	Syria Justice and Accountability Centre
SNHR	Syrian Network for Human Rights
SNA	Syrian National Army
STJ	Syrians for Truth and Justice
TFGBV	Technology-Facilitated GBV
TIMEP	Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy
UN DPPA	UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
YPG	People's Protection Units
YPJ	Women's Protection Units



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I. Executive Summary

These International Protection Considerations supersede UNHCR's Position on Returns to the Syrian Arab Republic of December 2024.¹ This document is based on information available up to 26 February 2026, unless otherwise indicated. All assessments of international protection needs of people fleeing Syria must be based on reliable, relevant and up-to-date information about the situation in the country.

A. Refugee Status Under the 1951 Refugee Convention

UNHCR considers that asylum-seekers from Syria falling within one or more of the following risk profiles may be in need of international refugee protection under Article 1A of the 1951 Refugee Convention, depending on the circumstances of the individual case:

¹ UNHCR, *Position on Returns to the Syrian Arab Republic*, December 2024, www.refworld.org/policy/countryspos/unhcr/2024/en/149254.

- 1) Members of minority religious and ethnic groups;
- 2) Individuals opposing, or perceived to be opposing, the SDF in areas under its de facto control;
- 3) Individuals opposing, or perceived to be opposing, anti-government Druze factions in areas under their de facto control;
- 4) Individuals opposing, or perceived to be opposing, Da'esh in areas with continued Da'esh presence;
- 5) Individuals perceived to be associated with the former government;
- 6) Women and girls;
- 7) Children;
- 8) Individuals (perceived to be) of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expression and/or sex characteristics (SOGIESC).

Not all persons falling within the risk profiles outlined in this Section will necessarily be found to be a refugee under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Conversely, the risk profiles listed here are not exhaustive. Hence, a claim should not automatically be considered as without merit simply because it does not fall within any of the profiles identified here.

Depending on the specific circumstances of the case, family members or other members of the households of individuals with these profiles may also be in need of international protection on the basis of their association with individuals at risk.

In light of the available information regarding continued human rights violations and abuses committed by various actors, including members of the government security forces, persistent gaps in the judiciary, as well as shortcomings in establishing law and order and enforcing discipline among groups formally integrated into the security forces, UNHCR does not consider the Government capable of providing protection to Syrians and former habitual residents at risk of persecution by non-State actors, including societal forms of persecution at the hands of family members and other community actors.

B. Considerations Relating to the Application of an Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative

In view of ongoing concerns about human rights violations and abuses, the volatile security situation, protracted and new internal displacement, community tensions, and the severe economic and humanitarian crisis, UNHCR does not consider it appropriate to deny international protection to Syrians and former habitual residents of Syria on the basis of an internal flight or relocation alternative.

C. Exclusion from International Refugee Protection

Among Syrian nationals and former habitual residents of Syria seeking asylum, there may be individuals who have been associated with acts that bring them within the scope of the exclusion clauses contained in Article 1F of the 1951 Refugee Convention. In such cases, it is necessary to conduct a careful examination of any issues of individual responsibility for crimes which may give rise to exclusion from international refugee protection.

D. Cessation

UNHCR does not consider that the human rights and security situation in Syria has changed in a manner that is durable and fundamental so as to allow for a declaration of a general cessation of refugee status under Article 1C(5) and 1C(6) for all Syrians and former habitual residents of Syria who were recognized as refugees based on events prior to December 2024. Given the fragile state of Syria's reconstruction and recovery and the real risk that precipitous large-scale returns to Syria may have a destabilizing effect, UNHCR calls on States to refrain from implementing cessation exercises until such time as the situation in Syria has seen significant improvements in overall stability.

E. Comprehensive Solutions

With a view to laying the groundwork for the eventual resolution of the Syrian refugee situation if conditions in Syria continue to improve, and in line with the Global Compact on Refugees (2018), UNHCR calls on asylum States to prioritize solutions for Syrian beneficiaries of international protection, or temporary protection as the case may be, by taking a comprehensive solutions approach. Such an approach comprises 1) voluntary return of Syrian refugees in dignity and based on a free and informed choice, while according due weight to the need to prepare for orderly returns given the humanitarian crisis in the country and the serious constraints on Syria's current absorption capacity; 2) naturalization of Syrian refugees who have been in countries of asylum for a considerable period of time; 3) an alternative residence status in countries of asylum, which retains previously acquired rights, for Syrian refugees who have strong family, social and economic ties to their country of asylum but who are not yet eligible for naturalization; and 4) resettlement opportunities for the most vulnerable Syrian refugees and access to complementary pathways for Syrian refugees for whom neither return nor local integration in the first country of asylum is a viable option.

F. Returns to Syria

In view of the many challenges facing Syria's population, including a large-scale humanitarian crisis, continued high levels of internal displacement and widespread destruction and damage of homes and critical infrastructure, for the time being UNHCR is not promoting large-scale voluntary repatriation to Syria. Instead, UNHCR underscores the need for orderly and phased returns so as not to overwhelm the absorption capacity of the receiving communities in Syria, with the attendant risk of destabilization and renewed conflict. Recognizing individuals' fundamental human right to return to their country of origin, UNHCR stands ready to support Syrian refugees who, being fully informed of the situation in their places of origin or an alternative area of their choice, choose voluntarily to return.

UNHCR calls on States to exercise caution when considering forced returns to Syria of those determined not to be in need of international protection, taking into account the sustained and large-scale humanitarian crisis in the country and the potentially destabilizing impact of large-scale returns on the fragile situation in Syria.

II. Overview of the Situation in Syria

Since the fall of the former government on 8 December 2024, Syria has undergone significant developments across its political, security, human rights, and humanitarian situations. This evolving context has created renewed hopes and opportunities for Syrians and former habitual residents seeking to end years of displacement and return home.

However, the situation remains fragile and highly unpredictable. The Syrian Government continues to face persistent security challenges, fragmented territorial control, weak rule of law, severe socioeconomic and humanitarian pressures, extensive destruction of housing and infrastructure, and continued large-scale displacement inside and outside the country.² Civilians remain acutely affected by the security, human rights and humanitarian situation in the country.³

As the situation in Syria remains fluid and uncertain, UNHCR continues to call on all countries to allow civilians fleeing Syria access to their territories, to guarantee the right to seek asylum, and to ensure respect for the principle of non-refoulement at all times.

While the risk of persecution by the former government has ended, for Syrians of certain profiles the evolving context has not resulted in meaningful improvements in their situation, or the risks they face may have increased.

A. Main Political Developments

Following the fall of the former government, the new authorities initiated a formal political transition. They have since undertaken significant steps, including the adoption of a five-year Constitutional Declaration on 13 March 2025,⁴ the formation of

² “Political shifts have sparked hope for peace and eased some sanctions, but conditions inside Syria remain fragile, with widespread destruction, damaged infrastructure, unexploded ordnance, poor public services, and fragmented governance.” UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Global Humanitarian Overview 2026*, 8 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/32dvz2wh>. “Syria’s transition is fragile. While many across the country will celebrate this anniversary, others are fearing for their present security, and many will sleep in tents again this winter.” Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Statement by the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic on the Anniversary of the Fall of the Previous Government*, 7 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mr7u8ce9>.

³ “Ongoing violence, displacement, and harassment continue to create an unstable and unsafe environment for civilians, making it difficult for families to rebuild or even survive.” Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), *What Does Syria Look like a Year Since the Fall of Assad?*, 11 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4taMhs9>. “Syrians face threats from conflict, unexploded ordnance, housing, land and property related disputes, lack of access to civil documentation (including birth certificates for children), forced labor, kidnappings, ethnic and sectarian related violence, gender-based violence, grave child rights violations and exploitation, among others.” Protection Cluster / UNHCR, *Protection Landscape in Syria: A Snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2123726.html, p. 1.

⁴ The Constitutional Declaration is intended to govern the country for a five-year transitional period, pending the drafting of a permanent constitution and the holding of parliamentary elections. A key criticism concerns the broad presidential powers, including authority over judicial and legislative appointments, in the absence of effective oversight mechanisms. Human Rights Watch (HRW), *World Report 2026: Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136267.html; Legal Action Worldwide (LAW), *A Call for Transformative Justice*, December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4qfAgPh>, p. 15; The Syria Report, *Temporary Constitution Grants Broad Presidential Powers*, 18 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y5jezf7e>. The Constitutional Declaration is available in English at: The Syria Report, *The Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic*, 14 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3n2574ma>.

a new cabinet under transitional President Al-Sharaa on 29 March 2025,⁵ and the holding of indirect parliamentary elections in October 2025.⁶

The Government has sought to reposition Syria regionally and globally by building relations with the United States, the European Union, Türkiye, member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and other actors, contributing to the suspension and lifting of sanctions and the delisting of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)⁷ as a terrorist organization,⁸ clearing the way for Syria to embark on the long road to economic recovery and reconstruction.⁹ The World Bank estimates Syria's reconstruction needs at approximately USD 216 billion.¹⁰ At the time of writing, however, investments¹¹ and reconstruction remain limited and no comprehensive reconstruction plan has been developed.¹²

The former government left State institutions weak, underfunded, plagued by corruption, and largely unable to provide basic services to the population.¹³ Within the

⁵ While Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) figures retain the key portfolios of foreign affairs, defence, and interior, the new cabinet also includes independent technocrats, representatives of religious and ethnic minorities, and ministers who served under the previous regime. Foreign Affairs, *Trouble Is Brewing in Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.foreignaffairs.com/syria/trouble-brewing-syria; The Syria Report, *HTS Retains Major Ministries and Includes Technocrats and Minorities in Syria's New Government*, 1 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3use6j77>.

⁶ UN News, *Syria's Humanitarian Needs Remain High Despite Reduced Violence, UN Warns*, 18 December 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/12/1166629>. The indirect elections held on 5 October 2025 for two-thirds of the 210 parliamentary seats were described as "largely peaceful", but drew criticism for the underrepresentation of women and minorities, as well as reports of opaque procedures. Although a presidential decree mandated that women comprise 20 per cent of the electoral college, women account for only 3 per cent of those elected to parliament. At the time of writing, the President had yet to appoint the remaining one-third of parliamentary seats, while seats allocated to areas [previously] under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and to Suweida remained vacant. UN Office of the Special Envoy for Syria, *United Nations Deputy Special Envoy for Syria Najat Rochdi: Briefing to the Security Council*, 22 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/38u5vrca>; BBC, *Syria Acknowledges 'Shortcomings' in Number of Seats Won by Women at Election*, 7 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2131033.html; International Crisis Group (ICG), *Parliamentary Elections in Post-Assad Syria*, 6 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132305.html.

⁷ HTS is the faction led by Ahmed al-Sharaa, which was formally dissolved after the fall of the former government on 8 December 2025. Former HTS members form the backbone of the new Government.

⁸ UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 3 February 2026 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) Concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, S/2026/44, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2136535/n2600041.pdf (hereafter: UNSC, *Letter Dated 3 February 2026*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2136535/n2600041.pdf), para. 51.

⁹ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), *Sectarian Violence Threatens Syria's Chance at Stability*, 11 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134139.html; Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP), *Economy at a Crossroads: The Social Protection Challenge in Syria*, 1 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mwufmpah>. See also, HRW, *World Report 2026: Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136267.html; UN News, *Security Council Lifts Terror-Related Sanctions on Syrian President*, 6 November 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/11/1166303>.

¹⁰ Reconstruction costs were projected to range from USD 140 billion to USD 345 billion, with the "best estimate" placed at USD 215.6 billion. This estimate includes approximately USD 74.5 billion for residential buildings, USD 59.3 billion for non-residential assets such as hospitals, schools, public buildings, and commercial structures, and USD 81.7 billion for infrastructure reconstruction. World Bank, *Syria's Post-Conflict Reconstruction Costs Estimated at \$216 Billion*, 21 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4pe5ya5a>. "The reconstruction cost estimates are roughly ten times Syria's nominal GDP in 2024, underscoring the enormity of the reconstruction challenge relative to the country's current economic capacity." The Syria Report, *World Bank Estimates Syria's Reconstruction Costs at USD 216 Billion*, 28 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ykr3zhfy>.

¹¹ UN Development Programme (UNDP), *Syria's Economy After the 2024 Transition: Jobs, Enterprise, and a Path Forward*, 25 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/cvvnv57>; Syria in Transition, *Young, Motivated, Struggling*, Issue 30, December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yyw23kp3>; Syria in Transition, *Public Relations Capitalism*, Issue 29, November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yyynynxn>.

¹² The Syria Report, *Transition Year: Despite Positive Developments, Many Challenges Remain Across Syria's Economic and Political Scenes*, 10 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4tauhOx>; Carnegie Middle East Center, *Syria Needs a Reconstruction Plan*, 31 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5xvwvrzq>; Enab Baladi, *Obstacles on the Path Syria's Reconstruction: A Deferred Dream*, 23 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ybbs43m3>.

¹³ Enab Baladi, *Al-Shibani Expects Launch of Economic Development Process to Rebuild Syria*, 15 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2jjyfen2>; Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), *Syria's Promise and Challenges One Year After Assad's Fall*, 4 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/m8w3p7bh>; Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Institutions and Governance in the New Syria*, Policy Notes No. 163, December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/366nnk5b>, p. 3.

first year of taking over, the new authorities have begun rebuilding these institutions,¹⁴ a process that has included the reinstatement of a significant number of civil servants who had been arbitrarily dismissed or defected under the former government,¹⁵ or who were removed from their positions during the early months of the transition.¹⁶ As a result, there have been improvements in the provision of basic services, although many remain inadequate.¹⁷

Key questions remain regarding the State's governance model and the extent to which security and administrative authority may be devolved, including in Kurdish-majority areas in northern and northeastern Syria, as well as in the Druze-majority area of Suweida in southern Syria, where de facto authorities continued to exercise local control following the fall of the former government.¹⁸ At the time of writing, Suweida remains largely outside Government authority.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the Government's advances in late January 2026 into most areas previously under the de facto control of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)²⁰ have initiated a political and military transition process to integrate these areas under State control.²¹

On 16 January 2026, Presidential Decree No. 13 of 2026 was issued, affirming the cultural and linguistic rights of Kurdish citizens and providing for the reinstatement of Syrian nationality to stateless (unregistered) Kurds (*maktoumeen*).²² While the decree represents an important symbolic and legal step toward addressing longstanding

¹⁴ Atlantic Council, *Why Syria's Government Must Turn Inward in 2026*, 29 January 2026, <https://bit.ly/4a8WgVZ>.

¹⁵ This includes teachers, judges, and other public sector employees. Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), *Ministry of Education Reinstates Nearly 17,000 Arbitrarily Dismissed Teachers*, 8 September 2025, <https://sana.sy/en/education/2266190>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: June 3-10, 2025*, 10 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2p76t6fn>; The New Arab, *Syrian Judges Who Defected During Assad Era Reinstated in Anti-Crime Push*, 6 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2z66t5un>; The Syria Report, *Public Sector Workers Reinstated amid Government Policy Chaos*, 22 April, 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ycynwynw>.

¹⁶ "Another positive development is the reinstatement of many civil servants previously dismissed by authorities, reflecting recognition of the importance of their institutional knowledge and experience. Nevertheless, state institutions remain weak and underfunded." The Syria Report, *Transition Year: Despite Positive Developments, Many Challenges Remain Across Syria's Economic and Political Scenes*, 10 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4tauhOx>. See also, Atlantic Council, *Why Syria's Government Must Turn Inward in 2026*, 29 January 2026, <https://bit.ly/4a8WgVZ>; Karam Shaar Advisory, *The Syrian Public Sector: Restructuring the State After Assad*, 28 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bdh38r4b>.

¹⁷ "These core state-building steps have begun to bear fruit in recent months. Governorate-level institutions have now expanded into the countryside, and basic services like electricity have improved across both cities and the countryside (though to a lesser extent in the latter)." Atlantic Council, *Why Syria's Government Must Turn Inward in 2026*, 29 January 2026, <https://bit.ly/4a8WgVZ>. See also Section II.D.1.b ("Socioeconomic and Humanitarian Situation: Infrastructure, basic services, and pressure on systems").

¹⁸ Italian Institute for International and Political Studies (ISPI), *Country to Watch in 2026: Syria*, 24 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/42ctu4sw>. For a map illustrating territories controlled by Government forces in contrast to those under the de facto control of Druze militias, see Etana, *Brief: Suwayda Roadmap Agreement Faces Pushback*, 23 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bd4j4c87>.

¹⁹ See Section II.B.2 ("Main Security Developments: Situation in Suweida and Druze-Populated Areas near Damascus").

²⁰ "Established in 2015 with strong US backing, the SDF emerged as a coalition dominated by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and closely linked to the Democratic Union Party (PYD). Although Arab groups were incorporated, leadership and decision-making remained overwhelmingly Kurdish." Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, *Developments in Northeastern Syria: The End of the SDF?*, 28 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4rdmjurf>. See also, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), *Syrian Democratic Forces (Syria)*, accessed 23 April 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2r5dadwj>; Associated Press (AP), *What to Know about Syria's Main Kurdish-Led Force and its Deal with Damascus*, 19 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/52pdx9af>.

²¹ For more information on security developments in north and northeast Syria, see Section II.B.1 ("Integration of the DAANES/SDF").

²² The Syria Report, *Presidential Decree No. 13 of 2026 Reaffirming Rights of Kurdish Citizens*, 16 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yd9a9mfc>. On 21 February 2026, the Ministry of Interior published the procedures and documentary requirements for submitting citizenship applications. Applications may be filed at any of the nine designated centres in Hassakeh, Damascus, Aleppo, Raqqa, and Deir ez-Zour Governorates; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: February 17-24, 2026*, 24 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/294a9pky>; Enab Baladi, *The Syrian Interior Ministry Sets Procedures for Syrian Citizenship Applications for Kurdish Residents*, 21 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mwr77z94>.

grievances, its practical impact will depend on implementation and broader political and security developments in northeast Syria.²³ The decree was issued amid ongoing hostilities between the SDF and Government forces over areas previously under de facto SDF control, as well as heightened concerns among Kurdish communities, especially in northeast Syria, regarding their future role within the State.

Syria's transition remains "extremely fragile"²⁴ and uneven, and its success depends on sustained security improvements, economic recovery,²⁵ reconstruction and restoration of essential services,²⁶ inclusive governance, accountability, and reconciliation.²⁷

B. Security Developments

The security situation has improved since the fall of the former government, with overall violence in 2025 declining by 44 per cent compared to 2024, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED).²⁸ However, these gains were uneven, with parts of the country – especially minority areas – experiencing worsening

²³ UN News, *Syria: Renewed Clashes Risk Derailing Fragile Transition*, 22 January 2026, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/01/1166811>. On 26 January 2026, the Minister of Education issued Decision No. 943, mandating the inclusion of the Kurdish language in official school curricula "in areas where Kurdish citizens constitute a significant proportion of the population"; The Syria Report, *Decision No. 943 (2026) by the Ministry of Education on the Teaching of the Kurdish Language*, 26 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yu26awha>.

²⁴ UN News, *Syria: Renewed Clashes Risk Derailing Fragile Transition*, 22 January 2026, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/01/1166811>. See also, TIMEP, *MENA in 2026: Policy Priorities for the Year Ahead*, 26 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3rszkrhs>; UN News, *One Year After Assad's Fall, Syria's Future Must Be 'Free, Sovereign and United'*, 7 December 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/12/1166528>.

²⁵ Institute for Diplomacy and Economy, *Syria's Way Ahead: Prospects for a Ruined Economy*, 5 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/kxmajn2p>. "Restoring social and economic stability will be a complex and resource-intensive process, requiring substantial investment. The recovery effort is further complicated by the need to address not only economic and physical reconstruction but also critical issues of social cohesion and governance." UNDP, *The Impact of the Conflict in Syria: A Devastated Economy, Pervasive Poverty and a Challenging Road Ahead to Social and Economic Recovery*, 19 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yc2hrjne>, p. 27.

²⁶ "Much of Syria lies in ruins, and public services are lacking in large parts of the country, particularly rural areas. (...) The fall of Assad coincided with a collapse of international aid, meaning reconstruction activities are woefully inadequate." CSIS, *Syria's Promise and Challenges One Year After Assad's Fall*, 4 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/m8w3p7bh>.

²⁷ "Periodic outbreaks of intense sectarian violence have revealed deep security vulnerabilities and the limited capacity of the new authorities to rein in all militia that are nominally affiliated with them or to protect all groups of society equally." Fadel Abdulghany and Kenneth Roth, "Assessing Syria's Progress Since Assad", *Opinio Juris*, 20 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4jnxaxur>. "The transition remains fragile and unevenly legitimised: One year into the transition, public confidence in the authorities is highly uneven across regions, identities and socioeconomic groups, with trust narrowly concentrated in a limited set of governorates and social groups rather than being widely shared across regions, sects, and education levels." Etana, *Survey Results: Public Opinion in Transitional Syria: One Year into the Transition*, 4 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/c8zj7f6j>. See also, UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UN DPPA), *USG DiCarlo Briefs Security Council on Syria's Transition, Security Challenges, and Path Toward Reconciliation*, 18 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mth95rw9>; Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies (BICC), *Observations from a Visit to Syria: Reconstruction, Social Fragmentation, and the Limits of Return Discussions*, 8 December 2025, <https://bicc.de/Cosmos/Peacebits/Syria>; ICG, *Comfort Ero on Syria: A Year of Hope and Hardship*, 5 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2w52y27p>.

²⁸ ACLED, *Sectarian Violence Threatens Syria's Chance at Stability*, 11 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134139.html. According to Charles Lister of Syria Weekly, "the overall level of violence across the country has been on an increasingly sharp decline, (...) with an average of 134 violent deaths recorded per week in the first third of 2025, an average of 94 in the second third of 2025, and an average of 25 in the final third of the year. In fact, five of the last eight weeks of 2025 saw fewer than 20 killed nationwide. Notwithstanding the recent and temporary uptick in January [2026, in north and northeast Syria], violence has declined further since, with a weekly average of 11 deaths across the country." Middle East Institute (MEI), *Syria Is Stabilizing, but US Help Remains Vital*, 13 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mrzx8raa>. See also, UN DPPA, *USG DiCarlo Briefs Security Council on Syria's Transition, Security Challenges, and Path Toward Reconciliation*, 18 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mth95rw9>.

conditions and intermittent violence during the first eight months of 2025.²⁹ In the latter part of 2025 and into 2026, security saw further improvements, aside from hostilities in northeast Syria in January 2026.³⁰

Throughout 2025, territorial control remained fragmented, with areas in the north and northeast and in Suweida largely outside Government authority. By early 2026, the Government had expanded its control into formerly DAANES/SDF-held areas, with Suweida remaining outside Government authority.³¹

Key security threats include societal divisions and sectarian tensions, the slow progress of transitional justice amid ongoing vigilante violence, armed opposition to the new political order, continued Da'esh activity, and foreign interference.³² The widespread availability of arms after years of conflict poses an additional security

²⁹ "However, this [44 per cent] decrease was not spread evenly (...), and a combination of political competition, sectarian violence, and foreign meddling (...) collectively resulted in at least 7,692 conflict-related deaths". And further: "Five provinces home to violent clashes with, and killings of, Druze and Alawite communities – Latakia, al-Suwayda, Tartous, Hama, and Homs – account for over 4,600 reported fatalities, 60% of those recorded nationwide." ACLED, *Sectarian Violence Threatens Syria's Chance at Stability*, 11 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134139.html. "Across the country, many areas remain insecure, particularly at night and in rural regions." The Syria Report, *Transition Year: Despite Positive Developments, Many Challenges Remain Across Syria's Economic and Political Scenes*, 10 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4tauhOx>.

³⁰ "(...) the overall level of violence, as well as specifically non-UXO violence, across Syria has been on a steady trend of decline since August 2025, with metrics on vigilantism, ISIS attacks, sectarianism, UXO incidence and more all declining month on month. While occasional peaks have occurred, most notably with nearly 3-weeks of conflict between government forces and the SDF in January 2026, violence levels have repeatedly declined back to their low and declining levels." Syria Weekly, *Syria Data Update (Feb 10-17, 2026)*, 18 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4866w6jv>. See also, MEI, *Syria Is Stabilizing, but US Help Remains Vital*, 13 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mrzx8raa>. On developments in the north and northeast, see Section II.B.1 ("Integration of the DAANES/SDF").

³¹ See Section II.B.2 ("Situation in Suweida and Druze-Populated Areas near Damascus").

³² "UN officials warned that continued incursions by Israel in southern Syria undermine the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and risk further destabilizing an already volatile environment." UN News, *Syria: Renewed Clashes Risk Derailing Fragile Transition*, 22 January 2026, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/01/1166811>. "In al-Suwayda and the coastal region, Druze and Alawite factions rejected the transitional security and administrative order." If their grievances remain unaddressed, they "may turn toward self-defense groups, foreign support, or increased calls for autonomous governance." ACLED, *Sectarian Violence Threatens Syria's Chance at Stability*, 11 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134139.html. "Incomplete security sector reforms and intercommunal and identity-based violence and killings by government forces, government-aligned armed groups, and armed volunteers in Syria's coastal region and Sweida in 2025, show the risk of cycles of impunity followed by more violence." HRW, *Collective Efforts Essential for Justice in Syria*, 8 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/efnjvkkn>. The Jordanian Air Force has intermittently conducted airstrikes in southern Syria to disrupt drug-smuggling networks. In late December 2025, for instance, it targeted alleged Captagon production facilities, weapons depots, and smuggler positions operated by Bedouin tribes and members of the Suweida National Guard. Critical Threat Project/Institute for the Study of War (CTP/ISW), *Iran Update, January 2, 2026*, 2 January 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2135493.html.

concern,³³ as does the rise in criminality.³⁴ There is also a need for comprehensive security sector reform, including the vetting of personnel and the establishment of effective disciplinary mechanisms.

1) Integration of the DAANES/SDF

The 10 March 2025 Agreement between the Government and the SDF – which envisaged the administrative and security integration of the DAANES/SDF into State institutions³⁵ – remained unimplemented throughout 2025 amid disagreements over the SDF's role within the Ministry of Defence and responsibility for security in northeastern Syria.³⁶ During this period, the DAANES/SDF³⁷ exercised de facto administrative and security control over parts of Aleppo, Deir ez-Zour, Raqqa, and Hassakeh Governorates.³⁸ It maintained independent operations, retaining full authority over command, recruitment, training, and military activity.³⁹ US-facilitated talks continued amid intermittent hostilities along dividing lines in Aleppo and Raqqa Governorates.⁴⁰

Following the breakdown of political negotiations in early 2026, fighting escalated on 6 January 2026 in Aleppo City's Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh neighbourhoods,

³³ "Syria's transitional authorities inherited one of the worst weapons-proliferation crises in the Middle East. Before President Bashar al-Assad was toppled, Syria had more than 1.5 million small arms – some 8.2 firearms per 100 people. The regime's collapse, followed by mass looting of military depots and unchecked trafficking, expanded this arsenal even further." Middle East Council on Global Affairs, *Syria's Patchwork DDR: Holding a Transition Together with Loose Threads*, February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3a32ej5r>. See also, Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS), *Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) in Syria: The Final Step on the Road to Normalisation?*, 13 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4bmqkars>. An Arab Barometer survey conducted in October and November 2025 found that "[m]ost Syrians want the government to collect weapons from armed nonstate groups (74 percent) and unauthorized individuals (78 percent). They view such arms as critical threats. Kidnapping is seen as a critical threat by 63 percent of citizens." Foreign Affairs, *What Syrians Want: New Survey Data Shows the Promises and Perils Facing the Country's New Government*, 5 December 2025, www.foreignaffairs.com/syria/what-syrians-want.

³⁴ "Specific areas across Syria have experienced an increase in criminal activity. For instance, [UNHCR protection] monitoring indicates incidents of violence, killings, kidnappings, armed robberies, and property theft in Damascus, Rural Damascus, the southern region, and coastal areas." UNHCR, *Coming Home: One Year into Syria's Transition*, 11 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134205.html, p. 14. "The Captagon trade and other Assad-era criminal enterprises are almost certainly driving some – but not all – of the violence in Syria. Some of the violence along the Syria-Lebanon border and in western Syria in early 2025 appeared to be part of efforts by smuggling networks to defend their ratlines." CTP/ISW, *Iran Update, August 21, 2025*, 22 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/m3pdu9az>. "A worrying consequence of the surge in poverty has been the rise in crime, as many individuals resort to illegal activities for survival." UNDP, *The Impact of the Conflict in Syria: A Devastated Economy, Pervasive Poverty and a Challenging Road Ahead to Social and Economic Recovery*, 19 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ae8abm7m>, p. 31. Regarding the rise in abductions for ransom, see also: Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), *Abduction in Syria: Alawite Women Most Targeted Amidst Transitional Government Inaction*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5x48derf>.

³⁵ Reuters, *Syria's Interim President Signs Deal with Kurdish-Led SDF to Merge Forces*, 11 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/4pezMJs>; Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, *A Seismic Shift: Toward the Integration of the SDF in Syrian Institutions*, 20 March 2025, <http://bit.ly/44YSsFk>. A separate 4 April 2025 agreement addressed security roles in SDF-controlled Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh neighbourhoods in Aleppo City. Syria Direct, *SDF-Damascus Agreement in Aleppo a Litmus Test, and a Possible Path Forward*, 7 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2uvtwuwu>.

³⁶ MEI, *Integration or Conflict in Northeastern Syria? Ten Key Points to Consider*, 29 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdnyyswr>; Enab Baladi, *Syria's New Army: Challenges of Uniting Opposites*, 30 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3ubvte8b>.

³⁷ Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, *Developments in Northeastern Syria: The End of the SDF?*, 28 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4rdmjurf>. See also, ECFR, *Syrian Democratic Forces (Syria)*, accessed 23 April 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2r5dadwj>; AP, *What to Know about Syria's Main Kurdish-Led Force and its Deal with Damascus*, 19 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/52pdx9af>.

³⁸ For a control map as of 1 December 2025, see CTP/ISW, *Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria, December 1, 2025 at 2:00 PM ET*, 1 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/52scknrc>.

³⁹ HRW, *World Report 2026: Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136267.html.

⁴⁰ Following relative calm between March and August 2025, in September 2025, ACLED recorded 40 security incidents including clashes, air and artillery strikes, causing more than 25 casualties, including eight civilians. ACLED, *Middle East Overview: October 2025*, 3 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3wj7wypv>.

leading to civilian casualties, large-scale displacement,⁴¹ damage to homes and public infrastructure, and disruption of essential services.⁴² An internationally mediated ceasefire on 9 January 2026 led to Government forces assuming control of both neighbourhoods,⁴³ and the evacuation of several hundred SDF fighters to SDF-held areas in northeastern Syria.⁴⁴ The situation in these neighbourhoods has since stabilized.⁴⁵

Government-led military operations supported by Arab tribal groups and local communities expanded into Arab-majority areas of eastern Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zour and southern Hassakeh Governorates, leading to the rapid disintegration of the SDF by mid-January 2026.⁴⁶ Fighting remained limited as the SDF withdrew into areas with Kurdish populations in Hassakeh Governorate and in Ayn al-Arab/Kobane (Aleppo Governorate).⁴⁷ The Government subsequently assumed administrative and security control over previously SDF-held areas.⁴⁸ Arab-majority communities largely welcomed the withdrawal, while thousands of Kurdish residents fled to areas that were still under SDF control.⁴⁹

Though an initial ceasefire and integration agreement was reached on 18 January 2026, subsequent breaches of the ceasefire led to further negotiations which culminated in the Government and the SDF reaching a comprehensive ceasefire and phased integration agreement on 30 January 2026, establishing, *inter alia*: the

⁴¹ The government opened evacuation corridors to allow civilians to leave the neighbourhoods, displacing nearly 150,000 persons. Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), *SARC Situation Report: North Emergency Response in Syria: 6 January 2026 to 13 January 2026*, 16 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/dxjmybr7>, p. 2. By 12 January 2026, most had returned to their homes following the restoration of security and public services. AP, *Displaced Aleppo Residents Return Home After Days of Intense Clashes*, 12 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/47562d4b>. According to the Directorate of Health, fighting resulted in 23 deaths. OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 4: Clashes in Aleppo*, 12 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/33hd8cxd>.

⁴² UN, *Daily Press Briefing by the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General*, 2 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2kmyek6p>.

⁴³ "Rather than relying on indiscriminate or overwhelming firepower, government forces conducted targeted strikes against designated military positions, advancing in stages with announced ceasefires in between." Al Majalla, *What Next for Syria After Tenuous Aleppo Ceasefire?*, 10 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5n6nczm6>.

⁴⁴ Reuters, *Last Kurdish Fighters Leave Syria's Aleppo City After Days of Clashes*, 11 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/fvaym44n>.

⁴⁵ "Teams from the ministries of energy, health, transport, public works and housing, social affairs, and communications and information technology have all being permanently deployed into both districts to work on repairs and rehabilitating decrepit infrastructure." MEI, *Integration or Conflict in Northeastern Syria? Ten Key Points to Consider*, 29 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdnyyswr>.

⁴⁶ "In the space of 24 hours over January 17-18, the SDF lost approximately 80% of its territory, as the 65-70% of its fighting force composed of Arab fighters defected and turned to the government in Damascus." MEI, *Integration or Conflict in Northeastern Syria? Ten Key Points to Consider*, 29 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdnyyswr>. "A decisive factor in this [the SDF's] collapse was the position of Arab tribal fighters who had long constituted a significant portion of the SDF's manpower. As government forces advanced, many of these fighters defected, abandoned their posts, or openly aligned with Damascus." Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, *Developments in Northeastern Syria: The End of the SDF?*, 28 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4rdmjurf>. For a timeline of events since early January 2026, see UN DPPA, *ASG Khiari Appealed for Swift Implementation of Understanding Between the Government and SDF to Ensure a Peaceful Integration of Northeast*, 22 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4ketzemn>.

⁴⁷ "Its offensive so far has led to relatively few casualties, as the SDF has opted to withdraw from Arab-majority areas such as Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor rather than confront the Syrian government." The Guardian, *Syrian and Kurdish Forces Agree to Extend Ceasefire as Threat of War Looms*, 24 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mr8jb9fa>. See also, Al Majalla, *What Next for Syria After Tenuous Aleppo Ceasefire?*, 10 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5n6nczm6>.

⁴⁸ "(...) in the areas that have fallen under the control of Damascus in recent days – the eastern flank of the governorates of Raqqa and Deir-ez-Zor, and the southern countryside of Hassakeh – state officials have accelerated the handover in the civilian, judicial, industrial, energy, health and financial sectors." The Syria Report, *Civilian Administration Handover Underway in Parts of Northeast*, 27 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/34y3r3fa>. See also, ISW, *Assessed Control of Terrain in Syria, February 16, 2026 at 2:00 PM ET*, 16 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4xxvhhz4>; Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, *Developments in Northeastern Syria: The End of the SDF?*, 28 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4rdmjurf>.

⁴⁹ "Thousands of Kurds from Aleppo fled to Afrin and the Kurdish areas east of the Euphrates." Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, *Kurdish Autonomy in Northern and Eastern Syria Is Under Threat*, 23 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4x4fj724>. See also, ACAPS, *Syria: Displacement Resulting from Conflict Escalation in Aleppo*, 15 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/saanmw7x>.

withdrawal of SDF forces to the far north-eastern border area of Hassakeh Governorate; the deployment of Ministry of Interior units into Hassakeh and Qamishli; the formation of a new military division comprising three brigades made up of SDF fighters along with a separate Kobane brigade within the Aleppo division; the administrative absorption of DAANES institutions into State structures while retaining current civil employees; provisions on civil and educational rights for Kurds; and guarantees for the return of displaced persons.⁵⁰ On 16 February 2026, the Syrian Ministry of the Interior gave former SDF members until the end of February 2026 to hand in their weapons and undergo a vetting process to regularize their status.⁵¹

Despite concerns about potential communal violence, there were no reports of systematic violations by Government security forces or of intercommunal clashes during these military operations,⁵² although isolated incidents involving both Government forces⁵³ and the SDF were documented.⁵⁴

At the time of writing, implementation of the agreement is underway: Government security contingents have entered Hassakeh and Qamishli, and a Kurdish Governor

⁵⁰ Anadolu Agency, *Factbox: Full Terms of Ceasefire Integration Agreement Between Syrian Government, SDF*, 18 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yc4dydsj>. "All [SDF] military forces will be withdrawn from Kobane/Ain al-Arab, Hassakeh and Qamishli, to be replaced by Internal Security units (under the Ministry of Interior); The SDF will withdraw its forces to Al-Malikiyeh, as well as the towns of Al-Darbasiyeh and Rumeilan (...)." Etana, *Brief: SDF Handover of North-East Enclaves Begins*, 5 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/49fa2nnp>. "In addition to establishing a permanent ceasefire, this second agreement established protocols for integrating Kurdish units into government institutions that reflect a compromise, with a military division consisting of three brigades of SDF fighters, plus a Kobani-specific brigade in the Aleppo division. While less than what the SDF wanted originally, it was better from their perspective than the 18 January [2026] version." Chatham House, *What Recent Developments in Syria Mean for the Kurds*, 10 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4n7ewmyh>. "The accord serves as the executive framework for the 18 January understanding (...). The agreement supersedes earlier drafts that had envisaged three full divisions and two independent brigades drawn from the SDF, coupled with a decentralised administrative model for the Autonomous Administration. According to an official closely acquainted with the talks, the integration process will commence in early February [2026] and proceed in stages not exceeding two months." Al Majalla, *How the US Got the SDF to Capitulate to Damascus*, 2 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/kcyrfpfb>. See also, ICG, *An Opportunity for Calm in North-Eastern Syria*, 30 January 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136855.html.

⁵¹ For this purpose, settlement centres have been opened in the Aleppo, Idlib, Deir ez-Zour and Raqqah Governorates. The New Arab, *Syrian Government Gives SDF Members Until February to Return to Civilian Life*, 16 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/jn2m5pv8>. "Former members of the SDF, Internal Security Forces (Asayish) or Autonomous Administration who complete the settlement process – which involves bringing any identification documents and equipment received from the former authorities – receive a document that allows them to move around the city without being stopped at checkpoints." Syria Direct, *After the SDF: How Can Raqqah Mend Its Social Fabric?*, 3 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4fmkhhcu>. See also, ISW, *Iran Update, January 27, 2026*, 27 January 2026, www.ecoi.net/de/dokument/2136083.html; Enab Baladi, *Limited Turnout at Deir Ezzor Settlement Center for Former SDF Members*, 27 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/frkdtz6w>.

⁵² AP, *A Kurdish-Majority Neighborhood in Syria Recovers from Clashes with Hope for the Future*, 15 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yc5u76k5>; MEI, *Integration or Conflict in Northeastern Syria? Ten Key Points to Consider*, 29 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdnyyswr>; Atlantic Council, *Eight Questions (and Expert Answers) on the SDF's Withdrawal from Syria's Aleppo*, 13 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3m5nn2jy>.

⁵³ "Isolated incidents of criminal acts by government forces have been confirmed – including several incidents of desecrating SDF corpses (male and female), vandalism of an SDF graveyard, and use of unguided munitions into civilian areas." MEI, *Integration or Conflict in Northeastern Syria? Ten Key Points to Consider*, 29 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdnyyswr>. In a statement, the Defense Ministry admitted that its forces committed "a number of violations of established laws and disciplinary regulations" during military operations against the SDF and said those responsible were facing legal action. AP, *A Ceasefire Holds in Syria but Civilians Live with Fear and Resentment*, 27 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mrttbxec>. See also, The Syria Report, *Fighting in Aleppo Deepens Damascus-SDF Divide and Threatens Broader Escalation*, 13 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2j6hv3zd>; Atlantic Council, *Eight Questions (and Expert Answers) on the SDF's Withdrawal from Syria's Aleppo*, 13 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3m5nn2jy>.

⁵⁴ "Kurdish militiamen (...) stand accused of causing nearly 20 civilian deaths by sniper fire and carrying out several video-recorded extrajudicial executions, including of 21 men south of Kobani late on January 21." MEI, *Integration or Conflict in Northeastern Syria? Ten Key Points to Consider*, 29 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdnyyswr>. See also, Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), *Documentation of the Killing of 21 Prisoners by the Syrian Democratic Forces in the Ain al-Arab/Kobani Region Between January 19-22, 2026*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mrpns3fy>; SNHR, *Documentation of the Killing of at least 22 Civilians, Mostly by Snipers, at the Hands of the SDF in Raqqah Governorate on January 18*, 23 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yckb3pjx>; SNHR, *The Syrian Network Condemns the Syrian Democratic Forces' Demolition of Bridges in Raqqah, Considering It a Flagrant Violation of International Humanitarian Law*, 19 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4j35chca>.

has been appointed for Hassakeh.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the Government has taken control over oil fields and Qamishli airport, and is in the process of assuming control over border crossings.⁵⁶ Key political and security questions remain under negotiation, including the scope of Kurdish participation in central institutions, the governance model for Kurdish-majority areas, and the extent of local security autonomy.⁵⁷

2) Situation in Suweida and Druze-Populated Areas near Damascus

In the Druze-majority Governorate of Suweida, which had maintained a degree of autonomy during the final year of Assad's rule, several Druze armed factions resisted integration under the new Government despite initial openings.⁵⁸ Tensions escalated in late April and early May 2025 after a leaked voice message insulting the Prophet Muhammad – wrongly attributed to a Druze religious figure – provoked confrontations between pro-Government groups and Druze factions in Druze-inhabited areas near Damascus, resulting in approximately 100 deaths, including civilians, and deepening political and sectarian divisions.⁵⁹

In mid-July 2025, localized confrontations between Druze factions and Bedouin tribes in Suweida Governorate⁶⁰ – initially triggered by kidnappings and retaliatory attacks

⁵⁵ The National, *Syria Appoints Kurdish Official as Governor of Hasakah After SDF Deal*, 14 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5726bwzn>; Agence France-Presse (AFP), *Syria Govt Forces Enter Qamishli Under Agreement with Kurds*, 3 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5c4a3erz>. On 23 February 2026, the Minister of Health decreed “that all health facilities and employees who previously worked under the SDF in Deir ez Zour, Raqqa and Hasakeh governorates were to be integrated into the Ministry of Health network (...)” Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: February 17-24, 2026*, 24 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/294a9pky>.

⁵⁶ “Syria’s government is now in control of almost all oil and gas resources. After 10 days of hostilities, the SDF has lost control of 10 of the 13 large-scale oil and gas facilities that had been under its control for as much as the past decade.” MEI, *Integration or Conflict in Northeastern Syria? Ten Key Points to Consider*, 29 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdnyyswr>. See also, Xinhua, *Syrian Interim Gov’t Takes Security Control of Qamishli Airport Under Deal with Kurdish Forces*, 22 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/tak3um5c>; Enab Baladi, *Iraq Prepares to Open Al-Waleed and Rabia Border Crossings with Syria*, 16 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mwj73da7>.

⁵⁷ Etana, *Analysis: Opportunities & Challenges in Integrating North-East Syria*, 12 March 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/jjrsjzm6>; Chatham House, *What Recent Developments in Syria Mean for the Kurds*, 10 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4n7ewmyh>; ICG, *An Opportunity for Calm in North-Eastern Syria*, 30 January 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136855.html.

⁵⁸ “After Assad’s fall, the Druze factions signaled a willingness to work with the new authorities, despite concerns about their Islamist tendencies.” ICG, *Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html (hereafter: ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html), p. 14. “Several Druze spiritual leaders, most prominently Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, have expressed strong apprehensions about the interim authorities’ jihadist past, worrying that the new political order will be inhospitable for religious minorities.” ICG, *A Compromise Is Urgently Needed in Southern Syria*, 18 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3ppsip7n>. See also, Syria Direct, *Suwayda Stands at a Crossroads, One Year After Assad’s Fall*, 19 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2zjp7c97>. For an overview of various Druze factions and their stance vis-à-vis the Government, see The Long War Journal, *Profiles of Militias in Newly Formed Druze National Guard in Suwayda, Syria*, 5 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/343nnztn>; Al Majalla, *Unravelling the Factions, Sheikhs, and Fighters of Sweida*, 24 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4cuy8raw>.

⁵⁹ In response to the incendiary audio recording, “residential areas of Jaramana and Sahnaya near Damascus were attacked by armed men who raided buildings and detained residents. (...) Subsequent clashes that erupted between General Security and Druze militias reportedly led to dozens of casualties, including summary executions of unarmed civilians and looting and burning of homes and vehicles. Violence then expanded to Sweida (...)” OHCHR, *Oral Update by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic at the 59th Session of the Human Rights Council*, 27 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2e3m2r66> (hereafter: OHCHR, *Oral Update by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro*, 27 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2e3m2r66>). See also, ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html; Etana, *Brief: Armed Clashes Erupt in Jaramana & Sahnaya*, 1 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3jwmpen2>.

⁶⁰ “The Druze are a religious minority in Syria but constitute a majority in the province. The Bedouins, part of the country’s Sunni Arab majority, make up most of the inhabitants in one quarter of Suweida city and reside in larger numbers in the province’s west and east.” ICG, *A Compromise Is Urgently Needed in Southern Syria*, 18 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3ppsip7n>.

amid rising intercommunal tensions⁶¹ – rapidly escalated into wider unrest. The Government launched a heavy-handed security campaign, supported by allied tribal forces,⁶² while Israeli airstrikes in Suweida and Damascus targeted Syrian Government positions, framing the strikes as efforts to protect Druze communities.⁶³ Amid rising mistrust, multiple ceasefire announcements and withdrawals of Government forces were issued, but repeatedly failed.⁶⁴

The week-long violence left about one thousand people dead, including several hundred – mostly Druze – civilians, among them women and children.⁶⁵ Dozens of villages were burned and looted, and approximately 187,000 Druze and Bedouin residents were displaced.⁶⁶ All parties were implicated in grave abuses against civilians, including abductions and execution-style killings.⁶⁷

⁶¹ “On 13 July 2025, deadly clashes erupted in the countryside west of al-Suwayda following the abduction and reported execution of three Druze shepherds near the village of Walga. The perpetrators were identified as members of armed Sunni Bedouin tribes. Retaliatory raids quickly followed, as Druze factions attacked tribal encampments, prompting days of escalating violence. Tensions between Druze and Bedouin groups have deepened in recent months due to disputes over land, smuggling routes, and control over local security arrangements.” ACLED, Q&A: *Sectarian Tensions and Israeli Strategy in Southern Syria*, 25 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5n75p79b>. See also, ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html; New Lines Magazine, *In Southern Syria, Tensions Simmer Between Druze and Bedouin Neighbors*, 6 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3nu92utu>.

⁶² “As violence spread, the Syrian government announced it would intervene, deploying Interior and Defense Ministry units and imposing curfews on July 14.” The Government said it intervened “to restore order”. HRW, *World Report 2026: Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136267.html. “Once the authorities entered the fray, they used overwhelming force, but the troops they sent were often undisciplined. Attempts to rein in transgressions, such as there were, proved insufficient. Combined, these shortcomings contributed significantly to the escalation of manageable unrest into serious bloodshed.” ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. ii. The Government’s response “confirmed Druze fears that Damascus will not protect them in the event of a clash, and cemented a division in the Druze leadership’s approach to Damascus.” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Implications of the Recent Violence in Suwayda*, 6 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4v5xa2sz>. “The Syrian transitional government deployed forces to al-Suwayda on 14 July, citing a mission to restore order. However, Druze leaders accused the military of siding with Bedouin tribes and shelling Druze areas. ACLED confirms nine such incidents.” ACLED, Q&A: *Sectarian Tensions and Israeli Strategy in Southern Syria*, 25 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5n75p79b>.

⁶³ ACLED, Q&A: *Sectarian Tensions and Israeli Strategy in Southern Syria*, 25 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5n75p79b>. “Ostensibly to protect the Druze, it [Israel] attacked government armour near Suweida and defence institutions in Damascus, creating a stalemate between the sides that prevails to this day.” ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, pp. i–ii. See also, The Guardian, *Israel Strikes Syria’s Defence Ministry in Third Day of Attacks*, 16 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3xjkc86f>.

⁶⁴ “Ceasefires were announced on 15, 16, and 19 July [2025] and were accompanied by troop withdrawals, reinforced administrative boundaries, and provisions for local patrols. Yet these efforts failed to gain credibility among key Druze leaders, most notably Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, who rejected the deals.” ACLED, Q&A: *Sectarian Tensions and Israeli Strategy in Southern Syria*, 25 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5n75p79b>.

⁶⁵ “Attacks on the Ta’ara, Al Doura and Al Douweira villages reportedly involved heavy artillery, machine guns, and looting, killing 1,000 people, including at least 539 identified Druze civilians – among them 39 women and 21 children. At least 196 people, including eight children and 30 women, were reportedly extrajudicially executed and over 33 villages burned.” OHCHR, *Syria: UN Experts Alarmed by Attacks on Druze Communities, Including Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls*, 21 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2128930.html. Between 13 and 24 July 2025, SNHR documented “the deaths of at least 814 Syrians, including 20 children and 34 women (...), as well as six medical worker – three of them are women – and two media workers, and at least 903 others have been injured with varying degrees of severity (...).” This toll also includes non-civilian casualties. SNHR, *Update of Latest Toll: At Least 814 Syrians Have Been Killed and More Than 903 Others Injured in Suwayda Governorate Since July 13*, 24 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/nhemdmp2>.

⁶⁶ “Credible reports received by the UN Human Rights Office indicate widespread violations and abuses, including summary executions and arbitrary killings, kidnappings, destruction of private property and looting of homes. Among the reported perpetrators were members of the security forces and individuals affiliated with the interim authorities, as well as other armed elements from the area, including Druze and Bedouins. This has led to a mass displacement of the population in the predominantly Druze governorate.” OHCHR, *Türk Calls for Immediate Steps to Ensure Protection of People in Suweida and Across Syria*, 18 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2s4f6up8>. See also, OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: Flash Update No. 9 - Escalation of Hostilities in As-Sweida Governorate (as of 28 August 2025)*, 29 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4nktbz8y>; UN News, *Syria: Ongoing Violence Fuelling Mass Displacement in Sweida*, 21 July 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/07/1165452>.

⁶⁷ HRW, *Syria: Accountability Lacking for Sweida Abuses*, 15 January 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2135307.html; OHCHR, *Türk Calls for Immediate Steps to Ensure Protection of People in Suweida and Across Syria*, 18 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2s4f6up8>.

An internationally sponsored ceasefire has been in effect since 19 July 2025.⁶⁸ In mid-September 2025, the Syrian Government, the US and Jordan approved a roadmap for the stabilization of Suweida;⁶⁹ however, positions remain entrenched and the roadmap has largely not been implemented.⁷⁰ Suweida remains largely under the de facto control of anti-Government Druze armed factions affiliated with the newly formed National Guard, endorsed by Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri – one of the community's three most senior spiritual leaders – who advocates Druze self-governance and Israeli protection.⁷¹ While the ceasefire has largely held, at the time of writing sporadic clashes between Government forces and anti-Government Druze factions continued.⁷² Humanitarian conditions in the Governorate have deteriorated significantly.⁷³ Inter-factional fighting between anti-Government Druze factions has also been reported.⁷⁴ Pending a political solution, the return of displaced populations remains unlikely.⁷⁵

Amid ongoing internationally sponsored negotiations between the Government and Druze factions, a prisoner exchange – one of the measures foreseen under the

⁶⁸ UN News, *Syria: Fragile Ceasefire in Sweida 'Largely Holding' amid Volatility*, 28 July 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/07/1165512>; France 24, *Ceasefire Calms Syria's Sweida after Sectarian Clashes Kill 1,120, Displace 128,000*, 20 July 2025, <https://f24.my/BKH6.X>.

⁶⁹ The roadmap aims "to stabilise the province and reintegrate its institutions into the state." ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. 28. See also, UN General Assembly / Security Council, *Identical Letters Dated 17 September 2025 from the Representatives of Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United States of America to the United Nations Addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council*, A/80/414-S/2025/586, 30 September 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/586>; Etana, *Brief: Suwayda Roadmap Agreement Faces Pushback*, 23 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bd4j4c87>.

⁷⁰ "(...) the Supreme Legal Committee rejected its core provisions and persisted with calls for 'self-determination or secession'". ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. 28.

⁷¹ "The Suwayda National Guard is a coalition of over 40 Druze militias that support the Supreme Legal Committee, an autonomous government formed in early August 2025 to oppose the Syrian government's rule over Suwayda Province." CTP/ISW, *Iran Update*, January 2, 2026, 2 January 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2135493.html. "The confrontation with government troops has generated broad popular support for these positions among Druze in Suweida, sidelining those willing to cooperate with Damascus and support the state's monopoly of violence. Under al-Hijri's auspices, a number of Druze leaders have come together in a de facto governing body in Suweida named the Supreme Legal Committee, while all the armed Druze factions have consolidated under the umbrella of a 'national guard', also supported by al-Hijri." ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. 29. See also, Syria Direct, *Suwayda Stands at a Crossroads, One Year After Assad's Fall*, 19 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2zjp7c97>; Syria in Transition, *The Druze 'National Guard' in Southern Syria*, Issue 28, 18 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ycxw6afm>; The Long War Journal, *Profiles of Militias in Newly Formed Druze National Guard in Suwayda, Syria*, 5 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/343nnztn>; CTP/ISW, *Iran Update*, August 25, 2025, 25 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2114222.html.

⁷² Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: February 17-24, 2026*, 24 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/294a9pky>; UN News, *Syria Transition Gains Ground with Kurdish Deal, but Violence and Humanitarian Strain Persist*, 13 February 2026, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/02/1166961>; The New Arab, *Seven Injured in Clashes Between Syrian Security Forces and Druze Factions in Suweida*, 4 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4k87z2xd>; The New Arab, *Clashes Between Syrian Forces and Druze Militias Continue in Suweida*, 14 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yk4d5xak>; Al Jazeera, *Tensions High as New Violence Spirals in Syria's Suwayda Despite Ceasefire*, 3 August 2025, <https://aje.io/jjydg7>.

⁷³ "Since the clashes, humanitarian support for civilians in need has been severely impeded due to government restrictions on access and continuing insecurity." HRW, *Syria: Accountability Lacking for Sweida Abuses*, 15 January 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2135307.html.

⁷⁴ Syria Weekly, *Data Update (October 14-28, 2025)*, 30 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bp92asyw>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: October 21-28*, 28 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bd83dpjy>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: September 23-29, 2025*, 30 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bdz7hfxs>.

⁷⁵ Reuters, *In Syria's South, Bedouins Uprooted by Sectarian Clashes See Little Hope of Return*, 8 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3ufhvwz5>; AP, *Displaced Bedouin Families in Limbo as Syrian Government and Druze Authorities Remain at Odds*, 5 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4h6zzn63>.

roadmap – was carried out on 26 February 2026 under the auspices of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).⁷⁶

3) Israeli Presence Beyond the 1974 Separation Line

In the south, Israel has expanded beyond the 1974 demilitarized area of separation into western Daraa and Quneitra Governorates,⁷⁷ occupying approximately 350 square kilometres.⁷⁸ It has established military outposts and checkpoints⁷⁹ and conducts regular air and artillery strikes and ground incursions,⁸⁰ with reports of abductions, including of children, and unlawful transfers to Israel, home searches and demolitions, killings, and forced displacement.⁸¹ Ongoing mediation efforts between Syria and Israel⁸² will be decisive for security developments in southern Syria, including the Government's relations with Druze actors in Suweida.⁸³

4) Security Sector Transformation

Immediately after the fall of the former government, the army, intelligence and security agencies, police, and pro-government forces were dissolved, and a general amnesty

⁷⁶ The exchange reportedly involved 61 members of Druze factions detained by the Government in Adra Central Prison and 25 Government forces personnel captured by Druze factions during the July 2025 unrest. Reuters, *Syrian Government Forces and Druze Factions Exchange Prisoners in Sweida*, 26 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/dp8ksebc>; The New Arab, *US Mediating Prisoner Exchange Talks Between Syria Gov't and Druze*, 24 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/9vkv336h>. See also, Enab Baladi, *Suwayda, New Arrangements Loom on the Horizon*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/y5cxf4n2>. An earlier prisoner exchange was reported in October 2025: "A group of 35 Druze men held prisoner in Adra Prison in recent months were released en masse and transported to Suwayda on October 8, as part of a deal to rebuild trust with de facto authorities in Suwayda. Later that day, (...) approximately 70 Bedouin citizens 'kidnapped' in Suwayda [were] also (...) released." Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: October 7-14*, 14 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3z36webs>.

⁷⁷ UN, *Separation of Forces Agreement Between Israel and Syria*, 31 May 1974, <https://peacemaker.un.org/en/node/9424>. "Following the former Syrian government's collapse in December 2024, Israeli forces pushed deep into the UN-monitored demilitarized zone separating the Golan Heights – Syrian territory which Israel has occupied since 1967 – from the part of Quneitra governorate that remained under Syrian control, and rapidly established nine military posts stretching from Mount Hermon through Quneitra city to parts of western Daraa." HRW, *World Report 2026: Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136267.html.

⁷⁸ Karam Shaar Advisory, *Israel's Expanding Military Footprint in Syria: One Year On*, 26 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2fjvn3x2>.

⁷⁹ See *ibid.* for map of Israeli control points inside Syria as of 8 December 2025.

⁸⁰ Between January and December 2025, ACLED recorded more than 900 Israeli operations in southern Syria; ACLED, *Middle East Overview: December 2025*, 8 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y56hmfby>. Furthermore, between December 2024 and September 2025, ACLED has recorded 277 Israeli strikes targeting weapon depots, missile facilities, and air defence batteries; ACLED, *Middle East Overview: September 2025*, 5 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5cn7f722>.

⁸¹ "Israeli forces occupying these areas carried out a range of abuses against residents, including the war crime of forced displacement, implemented through home seizures and demolitions, alongside denial of access to livelihoods, and unlawful transfer of Syrian detainees to Israel. In one village, Israeli forces demolished at least 12 buildings on June 16 [2025] on the pretext that they were too close to a newly established military installation, displacing eight families whose homes had been seized in December 2024. In a nearby village, forces constructed another military installation, razed large swathes of a century-old forest, and blocked residents' access to their agricultural land and grazing pastures near the installation." HRW, *World Report 2026: Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136267.html. See also, Karam Shaar Advisory, *Israel's Expanding Military Footprint in Syria: One Year On*, 9 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2fjvn3x2>; OHCHR, *Syria: One Year Since Regime Change, More Should Be Done to Stop Violations, Achieve Justice*, 5 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2135211.html; OHCHR, *Oral Update by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro*, 27 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2e3m2r66>.

⁸² In early January 2026, Syria and Israel agreed to create a US-backed joint communication mechanism to reduce military tensions and prevent incidents. While aimed at de-escalation, key issues – such as Israeli withdrawal from occupied territory – remain unresolved. Al Jazeera, *Everything You Need to Know About the Syria – Israel Deal in Paris*, 7 January 2026, <https://aje.io/p3bpvg>. See also, Reuters, *Israel, Syria to Set Up Communication Mechanism After US-Mediated Talks*, 6 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yzxnapdd>.

⁸³ MEI, *Syria Is Stabilizing, but US Help Remains Vital*, 13 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mrzx8raa>; ACLED, *Sectarian Violence Threatens Syria's Chance at Stability*, 11 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134139.html.

was announced for conscripts.⁸⁴ “Settlement centres” were established for former military and intelligence personnel to surrender weapons and “settle their status” (*taswiya*).⁸⁵ Compliant individuals were given temporary documents confirming their non-combatant status.⁸⁶ Some refrained from settling their status, citing fear of retribution,⁸⁷ exposing themselves to the risk of arrest.⁸⁸ Starting in October 2025, the Ministry of Interior in Latakia began replacing the temporary *taswiya* documents with civilian ID cards.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ “(...) former Syrian State forces, including the entire military and security apparatus, effectively ceased operations and disbanded as of 8 December 2024. Such forces were formally abolished during a ‘Revolution Victory Conference’ on 29 January 2025.” UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions of the Syrian Arab Republic (January-March 2025): Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/59/CRP.4, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html (hereafter: UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html), p. 54. “Though precise figures are difficult to verify, available data suggest that the authorities had demobilized 100,000-250,000 individuals by the end of January 2025. The authorities also ordered all Palestinian factions operating in Syria to halt their military activity, dismantle their structures, and surrender their bases and training sites.” Former regime elements have largely been barred from joining the new army or police. Middle East Council on Global Affairs, *Syria’s Patchwork DDR: Holding a Transition Together with Loose Threads*, February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3a32ej5r>. See also, UN Special Envoy for Syria, *United Nations Special Envoy Geir O. Pedersen Briefing to the Security Council*, 12 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bdfvznzf>, para. 2.

⁸⁵ “As an initial step towards disarmament and demobilization, also in December 2024, the caretaker authorities established ‘settlement centres’ for former members of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and affiliated security forces to turn in their weapons and settle their status. Tens of thousands of former soldiers reportedly sought to settle their individual status and hand in arms. According to local officials, in the governorates of Latakia and Tartus alone, respectively 83,000 and 40,000 individuals settled their status.” UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, para. 16.

⁸⁶ “Those who have completed the process have received documents confirming their non-combatant status and been granted temporary legal protection.” Middle East Council on Global Affairs, *Syria’s Patchwork DDR: Holding a Transition Together with Loose Threads*, February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/dscnbpsj>. See also, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Without Accountability, Syria’s Sectarian Violence Will Only Worsen*, 10 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/42vuzwa8>. According to Syria Direct, multiple versions of the settlement cards are in circulation, each valid for only three months with no option for renewal as the issuing authority has since been dissolved. The outlet also reported that conscripts received their civil ID cards back instead of being issued a settlement card. Syria Direct, *Assad’s Former Fighters Underground as Demobilization Stalls*, 7 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4zwhs6up>.

⁸⁷ “At first, many feared a trap, leading to imprisonment or execution, if not attack en route to a clearance centre. Eventually, it became clear that while *taswiya* itself was safe, it did not always offer the promised benefit of freedom of movement for those who went through it. Guards at checkpoints would sometimes interpret clearance papers as evidence of complicity in the old regime’s crimes, exposing the bearer to the risk of arrest, kidnapping or even death. Consequently, thousands of dismissed personnel skipped the clearance process. They remained stuck in their home villages, hanging on to their arms.” ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. 11. See also UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, para. 16. On restrictions on the freedom of movement for those holding temporary *taswiya* cards, see Section II.C.8 (“Human Rights Situation: Freedom of Movement”).

⁸⁸ “(...) the authorities have warned of legal consequences for anyone who fails to register, and have carried out limited raids targeting people who have ignored the deadline or are suspected of war crimes and major abuses.” Middle East Council on Global Affairs, *Syria’s Patchwork DDR: Holding a Transition Together with Loose Threads*, February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3a32ej5r>.

⁸⁹ “The Interior Ministry in Latakia confirmed on October 22 that it had begun the process of distributing ID cards to former Assad regime soldiers who had passed through the status settling process following Assad’s fall. (...) Several hundred [of them] turned up to government buildings in Latakia on October 24 to receive their ID cards.” Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: October 21-28*, 28 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mtejudmk>. “Police departments in the internal security directorates of Latakia Governorate are continuing the process of delivering civil identity cards to individuals who previously settled their legal status. This is part of completing the approved legal and administrative procedures, which will allow them to pursue their civil affairs, facilitate their access to basic services, and regularize their legal status in accordance with applicable laws and in a manner that serves the public interest.” Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding Security in New Syria: Year 2, Week 8*, 2 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/y9sxpytt>.

5) Abolition of Mandatory Conscription

Mandatory military conscription – previously a key factor driving men of military age to flee the country – was abolished. The new army operates on a volunteer basis and there are no reports of forced conscription.⁹⁰

6) Integration of Former Armed Groups and Discipline

Early efforts to integrate former armed groups under the new Ministry of Defence proceeded rapidly with limited vetting.⁹¹ Several factions retained their distinct loyalties and command structures, including fighters with documented records of human rights abuses.⁹² This enabled misconduct, poor discipline, and abusive practices,⁹³ as evidenced during the violence in the coastal and western-central regions in early March 2025 and in Suweida in July 2025.⁹⁴ Since then, progress has been reported, with measures introduced to strengthen oversight and discipline,⁹⁵ including arrests of individuals implicated in human rights violations and misconduct,⁹⁶ replacement of certain army units with General Security forces (under the Ministry of Interior), and

⁹⁰ Enab Baladi, *Syria's New Army: Challenges of Uniting Opposites*, 30 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3ubvte8b>; The New Arab, *Why Al-Sharaa's Scrapping of Conscription for Syrians Matters*, 16 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/3ar44rw5>.

⁹¹ "(...) Syrian authorities sought to consolidate power by integrating dozens of non-state armed groups into a fledgling Ministry of Defense. The process in many cases was superficial: many factions retained their own loyalties and held onto fighters and commanders with well documented records of abuse." HRW, *Recommendations on Next Steps for Comprehensive Justice for Syria*, 17 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/4robMEI>. See also, OHCHR, *Syria: One Year Since Regime Change, More Should Be Done to Stop Violations, Achieve Justice*, 5 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2135211.html; Syria Direct, *Daraa Security Forces Plagued by Vendettas, Abuse and Controversial Recruits*, 2 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/46p369rd>.

⁹² "Some SNA commanders involved in past abuses were appointed to influential posts in the new Syrian military." HRW, *World Report 2026: Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136267.html. "Although various rebel groups allied with HTS have been formally incorporated into the army, in practice they remain largely autonomous." The Syria Report, *Transition Year: Despite Positive Developments, Many Challenges Remain Across Syria's Economic and Political Scenes*, 10 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4tauhOx>. See also, Middle East Council on Global Affairs, *Syria's Patchwork DDR: Holding a Transition Together with Loose Threads*, February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3a32ej5r>; Al Majalla, *2026 Will Test the Foundations of 'The New Syria'*, 6 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bd7m75am>; ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html.

⁹³ HRW, *Syria: One Year Since Assad's Fall*, 8 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133818.html; Amnesty International, *Syria: A Year After Assad's Fall, the Rights of Survivors and Families Must Guide Transition*, 8 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133836.html; ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html.

⁹⁴ "The March coastal violations and July unrest in Sweida exposed the limits of control over newly merged forces. Undisciplined units carried out abuses, revenge killings, and disproportionate operations, deepening mistrust between communities." Al Majalla, *2026 Will Test the Foundations of 'The New Syria'*, 7 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bd7m75am>. "The lack of command-control threaded through this system was demonstrated most shockingly in March [2025] when pro-government groups responded to a small-scale regime insurgency on the coast by conducting village-to-village sectarian massacres targeting Alawi communities in Latakia and Tartous." Etana, *Study: Between Symbolism and Substance: Syria's Transition at 6 Months*, July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3ad9mj2a>, p. 14. See also, HRW, *World Report 2026: Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136267.html; ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html; Atlantic Council, *Syria Joining the Anti-ISIS Coalition Is a Westward Pivot—With Opportunities and Risks*, 21 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2u3x4h5k>; UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, p. 1.

⁹⁵ "Security reforms have been centered around internal accountability and coordination mechanisms. For example, Damascus formed the Military Police and Military Intelligence to monitor, investigate, and arrest security members implicated in crimes, and created additional command layers to strengthen command and control." Atlantic Council, *Why Syria's Government Must Turn Inward in 2026*, 29 January 2026, <https://bit.ly/4a8WgVZ>.

⁹⁶ Al Arabiya, *Security Officer Arrested over Syria Killings: Official*, 8 February 2026, <https://ara.tv/3bcjrj>; AP, *Members of Syria's Security Forces and Military Detained over Sectarian Violence in Sweida*, 16 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4uehfk4p>; Enab Baladi, *Fact-Finding Committee Refers 563 Suspects in Syrian Coastal Events to Judiciary*, 28 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5yt8hvpq>; Levant24, *Syria's Interior Ministry Continues Reforms and Security Operations*, 3 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5xp6rvwk>; Syria Direct, *Daraa Security Forces Plagued by Vendettas, Abuse and Controversial Recruits*, 2 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/46p369rd>.

redeployment of unruly units away from minority areas.⁹⁷ Nonetheless, the continued presence of hardline and extremist elements and gaps in providing law and order remain of concern.⁹⁸

7) Recruitment

Recruitment under the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior⁹⁹ is ongoing, with continued concerns regarding the adequacy of vetting processes.¹⁰⁰ Starting in mid-2025, the authorities took steps to integrate non-Sunni personnel, particularly Alawites, into Ministry of Interior units to serve in local security functions.¹⁰¹ This included the rehiring of several thousand vetted former police and military personnel.¹⁰²

8) Former Syrian National Army (SNA) Factions

Former SNA factions, which had previously exercised de facto control over Afrin (Aleppo Governorate), Tal Abyad (Raqqa) and Ras al-Ayn (Hassakeh), were formally dissolved and integrated into the new security forces, with several units – including some with a documented history of severe human rights abuses against civilians – redeployed to other parts of Syria.¹⁰³ In practice, these factions initially remained

⁹⁷ The ICG reported that “Damascus appears to have moved some of the units held in the worst opprobrium away from the coast”. However, the ICG also noted that these and other measures “have helped curb overt misconduct by government-affiliated forces but seem to have done little to bolster the security apparatus in performing its appointed task of protecting the vulnerable.” ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html. See also, Foreign Affairs, *Trouble Is Brewing in Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.foreignaffairs.com/syria/trouble-brewing-syria.

⁹⁸ UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 3 February 2026*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2136535/n2600041.pdf, para. 52, see also paras 55-56, 59-60, 118-119. “(...) the presence of hardline fighters within a purportedly professionalised, neutral security force meant to uphold the rule of law is already leading to chaotic, prejudicial securitisation, as seen with abuses against civilians on the coast, attacks on nightclubs in and around Damascus, and now, the targeting of religious sites.” Etana, *Study: Between Symbolism and Substance: Syria’s Transition at 6 Months*, July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3ad9mj2a>, p. 14. See also, The Long War Journal, *Syrian Military Integrates Al Qaeda-Linked Terror Group into Its Ranks*, 22 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/48m6bvzb>.

⁹⁹ “Unlike the MOD’s divisions, the MOI’s forces are dominated by newly recruited men from across the country. While the MOI’s specialist units remain dominated by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) personnel, the relative lack of previous factional affiliations in the broader public security forces has led to significant improvements in some of the most challenging environments.” Al Jazeera, *Integration of Armed Factions Remains One of Syria’s Biggest Challenges*, 12 January 2026, <https://aje.io/xsi7lu>.

¹⁰⁰ Al Jazeera, *Syria’s Challenges to Rebuild Its Armed Forces*, 4 January 2026, <https://aje.io/vwvhge>.

¹⁰¹ MEI, *Syria Is Stabilizing, but US Help Remains Vital*, 13 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mrzx8raa>; Syria Revisited, *Syria’s Integration of Alawi Police*, 3 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2npbzeap>.

¹⁰² Syria Revisited, *Syria’s Integration of Alawi Police*, 3 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2npbzeap>; Middle East Council on Global Affairs, *Syria’s Patchwork DDR: Holding a Transition Together with Loose Threads*, February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3a32ej5r>; Al Jazeera, *Syria’s Challenges to Rebuild Its Armed Forces*, 4 January 2026, <https://aje.io/vwvhge>; ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html.

¹⁰³ “(...) some larger and better known SNA factions that entered the new army with their smuggling networks and rackets largely intact have been redeployed to home turfs where predatory habits are more difficult to sustain on one’s ‘own people’.” The 62nd Division (...) now serves in Hama where most of its fighters hail, rather than in Afrin. Similarly, the 86th Division, drawn largely from Ahrar al-Sharqiya and the other LCM groups that were based in northern Aleppo and Tal Abyad, has relocated to Deir Ezzor, where its commander is from. The Jaysh al-Islam faction has been folded into the 70th Division and largely returned to its native East Ghouta.” Syria in Transition, *What’s Left of the SNA*, Issue 30, December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/23z5j5yw>. See also, New Lines Magazine, *Turkey’s Lingering Influence in Syria’s New Army*, 2 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yc7e7ude>; Middle East Forum, *A Field Report from Afrin: Assessing the Prospects for Return of Displaced Kurds*, 30 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4krsaxjf>; ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html; CNN, *As Syria’s President Preaches Human Rights, New Evidence Details Abuse Allegedly Carried Out Under One of His Key Commanders*, 12 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/48m5mf37>.

largely intact and continued to operate with a degree of autonomy,¹⁰⁴ and reports in 2025 documented abuses by remaining former SNA factions in Kurdish-majority Afrin, including physical attacks, arbitrary arrests, torture, looting, extortion and property confiscation, primarily targeting Kurds.¹⁰⁵ As of early 2026, their integration has reportedly progressed, although observers disagree on the extent to which it is complete.¹⁰⁶ The deployment of units composed of former SNA factions during the Government's expansion into formerly SDF-held areas in early 2026 has generated apprehension and fear among Kurdish populations.¹⁰⁷

9) Pro-Former-Government Insurgency and Alawite Killings

Mass dismissals from the former government's army, security, and intelligence apparatus created a recruitment pool for anti-Government armed groups.¹⁰⁸ Regular clashes between Government forces and individuals described as former regime "remnants" occurred as authorities conducted arrest campaigns targeting those who declined to settle their status (*taswiya*) or were wanted for crimes committed under the former government.¹⁰⁹ Fuelled by resentment, reprisal attacks against Alawites,¹¹⁰ lack of effective government protection, media-amplified violence, and reported backing from Assad-loyal businessmen and former officials,¹¹¹ an insurgency led by

¹⁰⁴ Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), *Anti-Corruption Efforts in Syria: Security Sector Reform and Economic Governance*, 2 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mw7vmp6p>; STJ, *Olive Levies in Afrin: 'There Is No Law Protecting Farmers; What Prevails Is Jungle Law'*, 14 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3cf832j5>; HRW, *Syria: Türkiye-Backed Armed Groups Detain, Extort Civilians*, 14 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ycy7s93p>; ICG, *A Glimmer of Peace in Syria's North East*, 28 March 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2124586.html.

¹⁰⁵ See Section III.A.1.g (*"Members of Minority Religious and Ethnic Groups: Kurds and Yazidis in Afrin"*).

¹⁰⁶ According to Syria researcher Alexander McKeever, the SNA's transformation is anything but "static": "At the beginning, it really was a rebranding, but with time, the army is institutionalizing to a great degree." The same article notes that Afrin "remains a stronghold of rebranded SNA units." New Lines Magazine, *Turkey's Lingering Influence in Syria's New Army*, 2 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yc7e7ude>. According to CTP/ISW, "the SNA's military units have been nearly if not completely subsumed into the Syrian transitional government, though these units' structures and economic networks may remain relatively unchanged." ISW, *Iran Update, January 21, 2026*, 21 January 2026, www.ecoi.net/de/dokument/2136076.html. "Old faction insignia have largely disappeared from uniforms and signposts. (...) certainly the SNA no longer exists as a coherent bloc with its own distinct administrative realm." Syria in Transition, *What's Left of the SNA*, Issue 30, December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/23z5j5yw>. "Salaries that were previously paid directly by Türkiye to some of the ex-SNA factions now instead go to the defence ministry, which disburses them, increasing the government's control of these groups." ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, pp. 31-32.

¹⁰⁷ "The components of the new Syrian government have a mixed track record of treatment towards Kurds. The factions that came from Idlib, most notably Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, have no serious history of ethnic targeting of Kurds, while several Syrian National Army (SNA) factions, which now serve in parts of the new army, have been sanctioned for years for systematic abuses against Kurds in northern Aleppo." Atlantic Council, *Eight Questions (and Expert Answers) on the SDF's Withdrawal from Syria's Aleppo*, 13 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3m5nn2jy>. See also, New Lines Magazine, *Turkey's Lingering Influence in Syria's New Army*, 2 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yc7e7ude>.

¹⁰⁸ "The lifting of State subsidies and the large-scale dismissal of civil servants – carried out as government coffers were found empty, albeit without sufficient transparency – disproportionately affected certain areas, including the coastal region, which was historically reliant on public sector jobs. Widespread economic despair is known to fuel violence." UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, para. 100. "Hundreds of thousands of workers have been dismissed, with little transparency around the criteria. While authorities cited the need to eliminate 'ghost workers,' reports suggest the process has been arbitrary and, at times, influenced by sectarian or political motives." Etana, *Study: Between Symbolism and Substance: Syria's Transition at 6 Months*, July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3ad9mj2a>. See also, ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html; Karam Shaar Advisory, *The Syrian Public Sector: Restructuring the State After Assad*, 28 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bdh38r4b>.

¹⁰⁹ UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, para. 24.

¹¹⁰ See Section III.A.1.a (*"Members of Minority Religious and Ethnic Groups: Alawites"*).

¹¹¹ On 5 December 2025, Reuters reported that billionaire Rami Makhlouf, a cousin of former president Al-Assad, and former Syrian intelligence chief Kamal Hassan were investing millions of dollars to assemble armed forces that could spearhead an uprising in Syria's coastal region, once Al-Assad's stronghold. Reuters, *Assad's Exiled Spy Chief and Billionaire Cousin Plot Syrian Uprisings from Russia*, 5 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bdf8knes>.

pro-former-government forces¹¹² escalated into coordinated attacks against Government forces in the coastal cities of Jableh and Baniyas (Tartous Governorate) in early March 2025.¹¹³ The Government responded with excessive force, mobilizing units from across the country, including foreign fighters, while unaffiliated factions and individuals also took up arms spontaneously.¹¹⁴ In the days that followed, this resulted in mass killings of civilians, predominantly Alawites. At least 1,400 people were killed, homes were torched and looted, and some 40,000 individuals fled to Lebanon.¹¹⁵ Violations, including possible war crimes, were perpetrated by members of the Government forces, pro-former-government fighters, and private individuals.¹¹⁶

Although insurgent attacks declined due to ongoing arrest campaigns and strengthened local outreach and confidence-building measures in the coastal area,¹¹⁷ sporadic attacks on Government forces and occasional clashes persist,¹¹⁸ as do individual attacks against Alawites for sectarian reasons and/or their real or perceived affiliation with the former government.¹¹⁹

¹¹² Pro-former-government forces “often called ‘remnants’, comprise armed elements loyal to the previous government and to its former senior commanders and who have refused to hand over weapons or settle their status. They comprise thousands of fighters.” UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, footnote 16. See also *ibid.*, para. 27.

¹¹³ “These groups initially lacked a centralized command structure (...). The clashes that erupted on 6 March [2025], however, indicate a higher level of coordination (...). The ‘Military Council for the Liberation of Syria,’ claimed responsibility for operations against the interim authorities on 6 March. Its stated objectives include the ‘full liberation of Syrian territory from all occupying and terrorist forces.’” *Ibid.*, para. 27.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, paras 60-68.

¹¹⁵ “The violence in early March 2025 (...) was most immediately sparked by an arrest operation launched by the Syrian interim authorities on 6 March 2025, to which pro-former government fighters responded by capturing, killing, and injuring hundreds of interim government forces. This rapidly escalated into large-scale violence. Some 1,400 people, predominantly civilians, were reported killed in the ensuing massacres. The vast majority were adult men, but victims included approximately 100 women, the elderly and the disabled, as well as children.” OHCHR, *UN Syria Commission Finds March Coastal Violence Was Widespread and Systematic: Outlines Urgent Steps to Prevent Future Violations and Restore Public Confidence*, 14 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3hkvybt9>. HRW likewise reports that approximately 1,400 people were killed in the early March 2025 violence. HRW, *World Report 2026: Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136267.html. “Multiple investigations were launched by the government, civil society and journalistic outfits, generating estimates ranging from 1,000 to 1,700 Alawite civilians killed in Latakia, Tartous and Hama provinces on 6-10 March. While the vast majority of the dead were men, over two hundred women and children were also among the victims. Nearly 40,000 Syrians sought refuge in Lebanon during and following the massacres.” ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. 22. See also Section II.C.2 (“Human Rights Situation: Patterns of Human Rights Violations and Abuses and State Response”) and Section III.A.1.a (“Members of Minority Ethnic and Religious Groups: Alawites”).

¹¹⁶ HRW et al., ‘Are You Alawi?’ *Identity-Based Killings During Syria’s Transition*, 23 September 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2130354/syria0925+web.pdf, p. 3; UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, paras 83-91.

¹¹⁷ Following the March 2025 violence, the number of attacks by pro-former-government fighters “collapsed rapidly (...) due to effective government counterinsurgency measures and a general lack of public support for the Assadist insurgents, who struggled to present themselves as defenders of the Alawites.” CTP/ISW, *Iran Update, February 3, 2026*, 3 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2m2fz92k>. “Eight months after the horrific violence that swept across the Coast in March, the dramatic calming of the area has developed in large part due to the concerted efforts of the Interior Ministry to neutralize anti-government insurgent cells, demilitarize the region, process thousands of former regime officers’ settlement applications, and intensively engage and build confidence with local notables.” Syria Weekly, *Data Update (October 28-November 11)*, 13 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2huensmz>.

¹¹⁸ “Pro-Assad insurgents have formed small groups and intermittently targeted government forces, though the vast majority of these attacks are ineffective. Pro-Assad groups lack unity and widespread public support. Many Alawites do not support Assad’s return.” CTP/ISW, *Iran Update, January 27, 2026*, 27 January 2026, www.ecoi.net/de/dokument/2136083.html. See also, Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: February 17-24, 2026*, 24 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/294a9pky>; The New Region, *Clashes in Syria’s Latakia Leave at Least Four Dead*, 24 February 2026, <https://thenewregion.com/posts/4671>; Enab Baladi, ‘Saraya al-Jawad’: Group Launches Attacks Against the Government in Syria’s Coastal Region, 7 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yc8hdtwd>.

¹¹⁹ See Section III.A.1.a (“Members of Minority Religious and Ethnic Groups: Alawites”).

10) Da'esh Activity and Counterterrorism Efforts

Da'esh remains a “persistent threat”,¹²⁰ although constrained by counterterrorism operations conducted separately by the SDF and Government forces.¹²¹ Following the fall of the former government in late 2024, Da'esh benefited from the release of more than 500 detained fighters and the seizure of military equipment, including heavy weapons and missiles from former government stockpiles.¹²² Its operational tempo slowed down, however, in the first months of 2025 as it adapted to the post-transition environment; since then, Da'esh has sought to destabilize the new political order by exploiting security gaps and sectarian tensions.¹²³

According to ACLED, Da'esh activity remained at a “relatively moderate intensity” in 2025,¹²⁴ with operations primarily targeting the SDF with improvised explosive devices (IEDs), assassinations, and ambushes.¹²⁵ The Middle East Institute documented 348 Da'esh-linked incidents in 2025, representing a 50 per cent decrease compared with 2024, alongside a 76 per cent reduction in associated casualties (183 deaths in 2025 versus 756 in 2024).¹²⁶ However, intra-year trends for 2025 showed an upward

¹²⁰ UN DPPA, *ASG Khiari Appealed for Swift Implementation of Understanding Between the Government and SDF to Ensure a Peaceful Integration of Northeast*, 22 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4ketzmn>. Da'esh is estimated to have some 3,000 fighters across Iraq and Syria, with the majority in Syria; UN Security Council, *Twenty-Second Report of the Secretary-General on the Threat Posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to International Peace and Security and the Range of United Nations Efforts in Support of Member States in Countering the Threat*, S/2026/57, 2 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2136537/n2600981.pdf (hereafter: UN Security Council, *Twenty-Second Report of the Secretary-General*, 2 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2136537/n2600981.pdf), para. 10.

¹²¹ “(...) the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic made some progress in stabilizing the country and fighting ISIL, including by arresting at least 278 ISIL (Da'esh) suspects, disrupting 45 planned attacks, dismantling 23 terrorist cells and seizing weapons and explosives.” UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 3 February 2026*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2136535/n2600041.pdf, para. 50. “The government's capture of ISIS's emir's for Damascus and Southern Syria in December 2025 was followed (...) by the government's capture of ISIS's overall emir for all of Syria (...) in Aleppo. Removing such leadership figures from the battlefield, alongside sustained campaigns of arrests against ISIS operatives more broadly (...) will inevitably constrain ISIS's ability to operate as effectively.” Syria Weekly, *Data Update (January 6-13, 2026)*, 15 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2wryp2jb>.

¹²² In addition, prison breaks in Aleppo in March 2025 resulted in the escape of additional Da'esh members. UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 21 July 2025 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) Concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Associated Individuals, Groups, Undertakings and Entities Addressed to the President of the Security Council*, S/2025/482, 24 July 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/482> (hereafter: UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 21 July 2025*, 24 July 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/482>), paras 51, 125. See also, Syria in Transition, *Terrorism Reawakened*, Issue 25, June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4krp9w89>.

¹²³ UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 3 February 2026*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2136535/n2600041.pdf, para. 50. “The group sought to incite sectarian tensions to undermine national authorities, including by organizing attacks on places of worship.” UN Security Council, *Twenty-Second Report of the Secretary-General*, 2 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2136537/n2600981.pdf, para. 10, see also para. 59. See also Section III.A.1 (“Members of Minority Religious and Ethnic Groups”).

¹²⁴ ACLED, *Sectarian Violence Threatens Syria's Chance at Stability*, 11 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134139.html.

¹²⁵ “Between June and November [2025], Member States attributed at least 129 attacks to ISIL (Da'esh), mainly through the use of improvised explosive devices, vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, assassinations and ambushes.” However, Da'esh deliberately refrains from claiming certain attacks in order to conceal the actual scope of its operations. UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 3 February 2026*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2136535/n2600041.pdf, para. 54. See also, ACLED, *Sectarian Violence Threatens Syria's Chance at Stability*, 11 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134139.html; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *The United States and the Emerging Security Order in Eastern Syria*, 9 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3jd65ck3>; Karam Shaar Advisory, *From Resurgence to Retrenchment: The Evolution of ISIS After Assad's Fall*, 31 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/379wmseh>.

¹²⁶ “The fall of Assad's regime and the emergence of a new transitional system in Syria also resulted in a 50% decline in Islamic State (ISIS) attacks in 2025 compared to 2024, and a 76% decline in casualties caused by ISIS attacks. (...) 348 ISIS attacks confirmed in 2025 (...)” MEI, *Syria Is Stabilizing, but US Help Remains Vital*, 13 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mrxx8raa>.

trajectory, indicating a potential resurgence despite the year-on-year decline.¹²⁷ The UN reported multiple assassination attempts attributed to Da'esh and Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah (SAS, which is widely considered to be a Da'esh front group)¹²⁸ targeting the Syrian President and the Ministers of Interior and Foreign Affairs.¹²⁹

Beyond its core areas of operation in the Syrian Desert and northeastern Syria,¹³⁰ Da'esh reconstituted cells in urban centres across Government-held areas, as evidenced by attempted and successful attacks and ongoing arrests of Da'esh cells.¹³¹ Throughout 2025, the Government and the SDF each conducted numerous anti-Da'esh operations, while the US-led Global Coalition to Defeat Da'esh launched large-scale air strikes on Da'esh positions across the country.¹³² Following the Government's

¹²⁷ Syria Weekly recorded in Q1 2025: 3.8 attacks and 0.7 deaths per week; Q2 2025: 6.8 attacks and 3.2 deaths per week; Q3 2025: 8.5 attacks and 5.3 deaths per week; and Q4 2025: 9 attacks and 5 deaths per week. Syria Weekly, *Syria Data Update (Feb 10-17, 2026)*, 18 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4866w6jv>. See also, MEI, *Syria Is Stabilizing, but US Help Remains Vital*, 13 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mrzx8raa>; MEI, *Integration or Conflict in Northeastern Syria? Ten Key Points to Consider*, 29 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdnyyswr>.

¹²⁸ Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah is "assessed as being a front for Da'esh, providing Da'esh with plausible deniability and improved operational capacity." UN Security Council, *Twenty-Second Report of the Secretary-General*, 2 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2136537/n2600981.pdf, para. 10. "Since Assad's fall, Ansar al-Sunna has grown and established an operational presence in Latakia, Tartus, Homs, Hama and Rif Dimashq. (...) While the group denies having pledged allegiance to ISIS, its attacks, rhetoric, theology and more all point to it heading in that direction." Syria Weekly, *Weekly Data Update (June 17-24, 2025)*, 26 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yc6sb4tr>. See also, ICG, *Church Massacre in Damascus Indicates Trouble Ahead*, 24 June 2025, www.ecoi.net/de/dokument/2129836.html.

¹²⁹ UN Security Council, *Twenty-Second Report of the Secretary-General*, 2 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2136537/n2600981.pdf, para. 10. "Its [Ansar al-Sunna's] chief shari'i Abu al-Fath al-Shami has issued a fatwa declaring Ahmed al-Sharaa an infidel and 'tyrant,' and Syria's transitional government an enemy made up of disbelievers." Syria Weekly, *Weekly Data Update (June 17-24, 2025)*, 26 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yc6sb4tr>. In an audio recording released on 21 February 2026, Da'esh's global spokesman declared the Syrian Government "as an 'apostate,' 'Crusader' and 'secular' regime described as an American ally that therefore required attacking and overthrowing." Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: February 17-24, 2026*, 24 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/294a9pky>.

¹³⁰ "Although IS has reduced its visible footprint in Syria's vast Badia desert – largely in response to US airstrikes – it has quietly consolidated its grip on three critical mountainous areas: the Bishri Mountains south of Raqqa, the Shaer Mountains east of Hama and Homs, and the rugged al-Amour range stretching to the outskirts of Deir Ezzor. These areas provide natural fortification and house elaborate networks of underground bunkers and hideouts." Syria in Transition, *Terrorism Reawakened*, Issue 25, June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4krp9w89>.

¹³¹ "The Badia remained strategically important but no longer served as a primary stronghold for ISIL. ISIL (Da'esh) established networks across all Syrian governorates, embedding sleeper cells in urban centres, including Damascus." UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 3 February 2026*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2136535/n2600041.pdf, para. 54. According to Arthur Quesnay, a political science researcher affiliated with Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne University, "The Islamic State has decentralized its operations at the cell level. In northeastern Syria, it has shifted to a guerrilla mode, relying on largely autonomous actions, sometimes carried out by isolated individuals with no direct link to the leadership. In major cities, cells are rebuilding independently." New Lines Magazine, *In Syria's Desert, the Islamic State's Shadow Persists*, 15 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/579r34ma>. "(...) senior sources in Syria's Interior Ministry told Syria in Figures that 13 large-scale, potentially mass-casualty plots against minority religious sites, returning refugees, and public holiday gatherings were foiled in 2025 – many through intelligence shared by the United States and other regional partners." Karam Shaar Advisory, *From Resurgence to Retrenchment: The Evolution of ISIS After Assad's Fall*, 31 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/379wmseh>. See also, The National, *Hunting for ISIS Fighters Deep in the Syrian Desert*, 14 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4vkzphxm>; Syria Weekly, *Data Update (December 2-9, 2025)*, 11 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/59j42fv4>.

¹³² "Security raids in late 2025 suggest that Syrian intelligence is becoming more effective, but the group [IS] still has the capacity to mount symbolic attacks and carry out assassination attempts against senior officials, keeping the threat very much alive." ACLED, *Sectarian Violence Threatens Syria's Chance at Stability*, 11 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134139.html. "Damascus's ability to disrupt almost all ISIS plots – aside from one suicide bombing that killed 30 people at Mar Elias Church on the outskirts of Damascus on 22 June – illustrates the Interior Ministry's deep penetration of ISIS networks." Karam Shaar Advisory, *From Resurgence to Retrenchment: The Evolution of ISIS After Assad's Fall*, 31 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/379wmseh>. See also, UN Security Council, *Twenty-Second Report of the Secretary-General*, 2 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2136537/n2600981.pdf, para. 10.

formal accession to the Coalition in November 2025,¹³³ reporting indicated an increase in Da'esh attacks in Government-held areas.¹³⁴

Security developments in northeast Syria risked undermining counter-Da'esh efforts by increasing the likelihood of mass escapes from detention facilities.¹³⁵ To mitigate this risk, the US Government relocated thousands of Da'esh detainees from Syria to secure facilities in Iraq between 21 January and mid-February 2026.¹³⁶

Al Hol camp (Hassakeh Governorate) – which held thousands of individuals, mostly women and children with alleged Da'esh links or family ties¹³⁷ – came under Government control on 20 January 2026. Many inhabitants were reported to have left the camp for unknown destinations during the disorganized transfer of authority, while others were repatriated to Iraq or returned to their areas of origin in Syria.¹³⁸ Several hundred individuals were relocated to a camp in northern Aleppo Governorate.¹³⁹ On 22 February 2026, the authorities announced the closure of Al-Hol camp.¹⁴⁰ A smaller number of mostly third-country nationals remains in Roj camp, which continues to be under SDF control but is also expected to close.¹⁴¹

¹³³ UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 3 February 2026*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2136535/n2600041.pdf, para. 51.

¹³⁴ CTP/ISW, *Iran Update, December 29, 2025*, 29 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134561.html. “According to Enab Baladi’s monitoring, the group carried out 18 operations on Syrian territory from 16 October 2025 to 17 December 2025, eight of them in areas under Syrian government control.” Enab Baladi, *Syria Joins the ‘International Coalition’, the Syrian State Faces Off Against the Islamic State Group*, 26 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5axv3j2f>. On 13 December 2025, Da’esh carried out its first fatal attack on US forces since the fall of the former government, during a joint US-Syrian operation. “The attacker was a member of Syria’s security forces, apparently inspired or even directed by ISIS. (...) the attack exposed gaps in vetting and command and control as well as the risks inherent in quickly integrating new personnel into state forces.” ICG, *10 Conflicts to Watch in 2026: Syria*, 31 December 2025, www.crisisgroup.org/global/10-conflicts-watch-2026. Following the Government’s expansion into previously SDF-held areas, Da’esh has shifted its focus, redirecting attacks from the SDF toward Government forces. The National, *ISIS Launches Daily Attacks in North-Eastern Syria as Fears of Security Vacuum Grow*, 25 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3m6xd4uk>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: February 17-24, 2026*, 24 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/294a9pky>.

¹³⁵ As of late 2024 – the most recent comprehensive data available – approximately 9,000 detainees were held in 25 facilities, including two youth “rehabilitation” centres, run by the SDF, its affiliated security forces, and the DAANES. The majority were Syrian nationals, while the population also included several hundred Iraqis and around 2,000 third-country nationals. Most detainees were adult men, in addition to around 1,000 teenage boys or young men detained since they were minors, and about 100 women, some held with their children. The vast majority of these individuals have never been brought before a court or faced trial. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Caught in the Crossfire: Islamic State Detention Sites at Risk*, 22 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4zbrzk8d>. See also, UN News, *Prison Breaks and Renewed Clashes Raise Alarm in Northeast Syria*, 20 January 2026, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/01/1166799>; ISW, *Iran Update, January 19, 2026*, 19 January 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2135502.html.

¹³⁶ Al Jazeera, *More than 5,000 ISIL Detainees Transferred from Syria, Says Iraqi Ministry*, 13 February 2026, <https://aje.news/ppw6b3>; The Defense Post, *More IS Detainees Heading to Iraq from Syria: Iraqi Officials*, 24 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/39cjr96z>.

¹³⁷ HRW, *Northeast Syria: Camp Closures Leave Thousands Stranded*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4hjrabcn>.

¹³⁸ ISW, *Iran Update, February 16, 2026*, 16 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4zf5ubpm>.

¹³⁹ “(...) the government intends to use the Akhtar camp as a location for assessing residents for potential release and reintegration, or if necessary, rehabilitation and re-education.” Syria Weekly, *Syria’s Al-Hol Camp Comes to an End, But Not the Way Anyone Intended*, 15 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2p6etjhh>. See also, AFP/AP, *Syria Moves Out Last Residents of ISIL-Linked Desert Camp*, 22 February 2026, <https://aje.news/hd4jiv>.

¹⁴⁰ HRW, *Northeast Syria: Camp Closures Leave Thousands Stranded*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4hjrabcn>.

¹⁴¹ Rudaw, *Roj Camp to Be Closed Soon: Kurdish Official*, 21 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yx6y5udx>.

Armed opponents of the new political order – including Da’esh, SAS, and former regime affiliates – have sought to stir sectarian tensions, each claiming responsibility for attacks against religious minorities.¹⁴²

11) Explosive Remnants of War (ERW)

Syria is one of the world’s most heavily contaminated countries by ERW, posing serious risks, especially to farmers and children,¹⁴³ and impeding returns, reconstruction and livelihoods.¹⁴⁴ New hostilities, such as those in northeast Syria, continue to add to ERW contamination.¹⁴⁵ Overall, the number of casualties due to ERW is reported to be declining.¹⁴⁶

C. Human Rights Situation

1) Legal and Institutional Developments

The Government has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to protecting the human rights of all Syrians.¹⁴⁷ The March 2025 Constitutional Declaration dismantled key instruments of repression used by the former government, including by abolishing exceptional laws, nullifying decisions of the Anti-Terrorism Court, and lifting security-

¹⁴² “Saraya Ansar Al-Sunnah consisted of 5 to 12 decentralized cells, focused on targeting Syrian minorities. It included ISIL (Da’esh) members, some former members of Hurras al-Din (not listed) and other armed factions.” UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 3 February 2026*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2136535/n2600041.pdf, para. 53. “Exploiting social faultlines, Saraya Ansar al-Sunna has claimed responsibility for attacks against a range of targets in a pattern of violence designed to stir sectarian tensions (...).” Al Majalla, *Ansar al-Sunna: The Murky New Jihadist Group in Syria*, 19 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4epzepvt>. “(...) according to the Ministry of Interior, former regime remnants tried to conduct a false flag attack on August 6 [2025] against the Mar Elias Maronite Church in al-Khraybat in Tartus, seeking to have it blamed on IS in order to create sectarian tensions.” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Religious Freedom in Syria’s Post-Assad Transition*, 13 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/4pDLxZy>, p. 4. “The attack against Christians worshippers in a Damascus church in late June [2025] demonstrates that enemies of the transition consider the sectarian issue as the weak point of the authorities.” The Atlantic Council, *In a Sectarian Syria, the Winners Should Refrain from Taking All*, 24 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mryuken2>. Ansar al-Sunnah has openly called for the elimination of “infidels”, including Alawites, Shi’ites, Druze, and Christians. The Syria Report, *ISIS and Rebel Offshoots Challenge the Al-Sharaa Administration’s Security Grip*, 28 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/zyhpejce>. See also, UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 21 July 2025*, 24 July 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/482>, para. 61. See also Section III.A.1 (“Members of Minority Religious and Ethnic Groups”).

¹⁴³ “Explosive ordnance contamination poses a serious threat, with 760 incidents causing 1,419 casualties since December 2024, with 155 children killed and 359 injured. Children comprise nearly two thirds of all civilian casualties.” UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), *Syrian Arab Republic 2026 HAC Appeal*, December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2a28rdnb>, p. 2. In December 2025, “65 per cent of the EO [Explosive Ordnance] incidents took place in agricultural land and grazing areas, retaining pursuit of livelihoods as the most dangerous activity for Syrians.” OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Overview, Issue No. 3, December 2025*, 3 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3c77rwwp> (hereafter: OCHA, *Humanitarian Overview: December 2025*, 3 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3c77rwwp>), p. 2.

¹⁴⁴ “These hidden dangers limit freedom of movement, sense of physical security, access to homes, productive land and services, and opportunities to rebuild livelihoods.” UNHCR, *Coming Home: One Year into Syria’s Transition*, 11 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134205.html, p. 14.

¹⁴⁵ MEI, *Integration or Conflict in Northeastern Syria? Ten Key Points to Consider*, 29 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdnyyswr>; OCHA, *Flash Update No. 1: Recent Developments in Ar-Raqqa, Deir-ez-Zor and Al-Hasakeh*, 19 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdfj24>, p. 2.

¹⁴⁶ “(...) from September through to the end of 2025, [the number of people killed every week by unexploded ordnance (UXO)] fell 73% to 4 deaths per week. While tens of thousands of landmines and other munitions have been removed in recent months, this sharp decline in UXO incidence and casualties is primarily the result of intensive efforts by Syria’s Defense and Emergency Ministries to map out UXO-affected areas and educate people to avoid them.” MEI, *Syria Is Stabilizing, but US Help Remains Vital*, 13 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mrx8raa>.

¹⁴⁷ SANA, *Syria Reaffirms Human Rights Commitment Before U.N. Council*, 26 February 2026, <https://sana.sy/en/politics/2298945>; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, 19 March 2025, A/HRC/58/66, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2123127.html, para. 37. See also, OHCHR, *Syria: Hope Emerges amid Ongoing Human Rights Challenges*, 3 December 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/12/1166498>.

based restrictions on civil and property documentation.¹⁴⁸ Steps toward accountability and transitional justice include the establishment of independent national commissions on transitional justice and missing persons,¹⁴⁹ the preparation of a draft transitional justice law,¹⁵⁰ and investigations into violations committed under the former government, with some cases referred to the courts.¹⁵¹

Mass graves continue to be discovered, and the fate of many of the hundreds of thousands of missing individuals – most attributable to the former government – remains unknown.¹⁵² In December 2025, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) described Syria's overall outlook as "very constructive and positive."¹⁵³

a) Engagement with human rights mechanisms

The authorities have demonstrated a willingness to engage with international human rights bodies and accountability mechanisms, including OHCHR, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (IICI), the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic (IIMP), and

¹⁴⁸ HRW, *Recommendations on Next Steps for Comprehensive Justice for Syria*, 17 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/4robMEI>; Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, *The Constitutional Declaration and Challenges of the Syrian Transition*, May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2rwkepf8>, p. 12.

¹⁴⁹ In May 2025, the National Transitional Justice Authority and the National Authority for Missing Persons were constituted to investigate the circumstances of the more than 100,000 people who are estimated to have been forcibly disappeared or gone missing, in order to pursue redress and non-repetition for survivors, victims, and family members. OHCHR, *Oral Update by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro*, 27 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2e3m2r66>. See also, Atlantic Council, *One Year After Assad's Fall, Here's What's Needed to Advance Justice for Syrians*, 7 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/3M3klQM>.

¹⁵⁰ Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Atrocity Alert No. 466: Ukraine, Syria and Crimes Against Humanity Treaty*, 21 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yarpj4ef>. The National Commission for Transitional Justice in November 2025 "confirmed to Amnesty International that the transitional justice law currently being drafted would ensure that the commission is able to address abuses committed by all parties to the conflict, including former Assad-led government and armed opposition groups. The commission added that the draft law would include international crimes not currently domesticated in Syria's penal code and would be reviewed by a working group of 25 civil society organizations." Amnesty International, *Syria: A Year After Assad's Fall, the Rights of Survivors and Families Must Guide Transition*, 8 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133836.html. See also, LAW et al., *A Call for Transformative Justice*, December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4qfAgPh>, para. 15. According to The Syria Report, the draft law foresees the establishment of a compensation fund for HLP violations. The Syria Report, *Draft Transitional Justice Law to Include Compensation for HLP Violations*, 27 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3ymb359n>.

¹⁵¹ "Five cases of high-ranking suspects have so far been referred to court. Minister of Justice, Mazhar al-Wais, told Amnesty International on 26 November 2025 that around 100 suspected perpetrators were currently in detention and that he foresaw further developments on the accountability front in the coming weeks, noting that the Ministry had begun receiving case files from the Ministry of Interior." Amnesty International, *Syria: A Year After Assad's Fall, the Rights of Survivors and Families Must Guide Transition*, 8 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133836.html. "The Ministry of Justice is investigating judges from the Assad-era Counter Terrorism Court and requesting complaints from citizens. These judges are responsible for presiding over tens of thousands of sham trials that imprisoned or sentenced to death detainees based on vague, trumped-up charges that considered the provision of medical aid and the documentation of human rights abuses, among other acts, to amount to terrorism. The Ministry of Justice has also, according to media reports, requested that Lebanon extradite former Assad regime officials accused of war crimes who fled Syria after the fall of the regime." Atlantic Council, *One Year After Assad's Fall, Here's What's Needed to Advance Justice for Syrians*, 7 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/3M3klQM>. See also, Enab Baladi, *Syrian Justice Ministry Denies Death Sentences for Assad-Era Officials*, 3 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3tnfczne>.

¹⁵² "Estimates of the number of people missing from Syria run as high as 300,000. This includes those who have gone missing as a result of summary execution, arbitrary and incommunicado detention, kidnapping and abduction, enslavement, sarin gas attacks, and other human rights abuses." International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), *One Year After the Fall of the Assad Regime: ICMP Reaffirms Commitment to Syria's Missing: Statement by ICMP Director-General*, 8 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/38mzum52>. See also, Syria Direct, *In Search of Closure, Syrians Work to Unearth the Secrets of Assad's Mass Graves*, 15 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2uekmsux>; Al Jazeera, *Inside Syria's Fight to Identify the Disappeared*, 8 December 2025, <https://aje.io/3cr77z>; Reuters, *Assad-Era Conspiracy to Hide Thousands of Dead Turned Syria's Remote Desert into a Mass Grave*, 17 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/hpmjy69r>; BBC, *Months After Fall of Assad, Families of Syria's Missing Still Seeking Justice*, 16 October 2025, www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj07p5zm229o.

¹⁵³ OHCHR, *Syria: Hope Emerges amid Ongoing Human Rights Challenges*, 3 December 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/12/1166498>.

the UN Office of the International Impartial and Independent Mechanism on Syria (IIIM).¹⁵⁴

The Constitutional Declaration provides that the rights and freedoms set out in international human rights instruments ratified by Syria “constitute an integral component of this Constitutional Declaration.”¹⁵⁵

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), which previously operated covertly, has opened an office in Damascus and reports greater operational freedom, improved field access, and enhanced ability to collect information, including through coordination with Government authorities.¹⁵⁶

b) Religious freedom

The authorities have publicly committed to respecting religious freedom, affirming that Syria belongs to all Syrians regardless of religion or ethnicity. They have sought to engage religious leaders from different religious communities and have provided security for religious buildings, including during religious festivities.¹⁵⁷

2) Patterns of Human Rights Violations and Abuses and State Response

Notwithstanding these official commitments, Government forces, affiliated armed groups, and other armed actors have been implicated in grave human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions, abductions, torture and ill-treatment, and the looting and deliberate destruction of property. These abuses have disproportionately targeted

¹⁵⁴ “Access for the Commission, long denied, was finally granted, and we have greatly appreciated the interim government’s willingness to engage on human rights issues.” OHCHR, *Statement by the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic on the Anniversary of the Fall of the Previous Government*, 7 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mr7u8ce9>. “OHCHR – blocked from operating inside Syria for many years – now has a team permanently deployed in Damascus.” OHCHR, *Syria: Hope Emerges amid Ongoing Human Rights Challenges*, 3 December 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/12/1166498>. According to HRW, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry in the Syrian Arab Republic (IICI), the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic (IIMP), and the UN Office of the International Impartial and Independent Mechanism on Syria (IIIM) have not yet received the required authorizations to establish offices in Syria. HRW, *World Report 2026: Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136267.html. See also, IIMP, *Supporting a Syrian Path to Truth: Landmark Visit of the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria to Damascus*, 10 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5n8p9hdn>. In further demonstration of Syria’s engagement with international human rights mechanisms, see also, SANA, *Syria Elected Vice Chair of UN Preparatory Committee on Crimes Against Humanity*, 29 January 2026, <https://sana.sy/en/politics/2293092>.

¹⁵⁵ Article 12(2).

¹⁵⁶ Deutsche Welle (DW), *How an Assad-Era Law Is Threatening Syrian Civil Society*, 5 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3ymvtf5y>; Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), *Syria’s Transition Hangs in the Balance: CIHRS Report on Civil Society’s Struggle for a Voice*, 3 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3cettj9>, p. 20.

¹⁵⁷ Syria in Transition, *The Last Banner of Zaynab*, Issue 29, November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3js6hyfs>; AFP, *Festive Lights, Security Tight for Christmas in Damascus*, 24 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2rayj26b>; The New Arab, *Syria’s Al-Sharaa Visits Damascus’ Mariamite Church, Says Preserving Coexistence ‘a Duty’*, 27 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/57ep4332>; AP, *Shiite Neighborhoods in Damascus Commemorate Ashoura Quietly After Assad’s Ouster*, 6 July 2025, <https://bit.ly/4qoUQh4>; The Media Line, *Syrian President Meets With Jewish, Christian Leaders from the US*, 12 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/zj7urpym>; UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/58/66, 14 March 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2123127.html, para. 37. The authorities have also handed over Jewish religious properties to a newly founded Jewish organization and pledged to return confiscated property to Syria’s Jewish community, the vast majority of whom have lived in exile for decades. The Syrian Observer, *A Kosher Corner in Damascus Reflects Syria’s New Chapter*, 11 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mwzre9vd>; NPR, *Syria, once Home to a Large Jewish Community, Takes Steps to Return Property to Jews*, 3 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3z9fwkc8>.

members of certain minority communities and individuals associated or perceived to be associated with the former government.¹⁵⁸

The high number of civilian casualties during the March 2025 violence in the coastal and western-central regions and during the July 2025 violence in Suweida Governorate – where “members of certain factions of the security forces” were also implicated¹⁵⁹ – combined with limited accountability, gaps in inclusive governance, ongoing hate speech and misinformation,¹⁶⁰ and the presence of extremist elements within the security forces,¹⁶¹ have generated widespread fear, particularly among minority communities, and, in some cases, outright rejection of the new authorities.¹⁶²

Violations were particularly severe during the March 2025 violence against Alawite civilians and the July 2025 unrest in Suweida, where members of the Druze and Bedouin communities were targeted. The Government has pledged accountability and announced the establishment of fact-finding commissions to investigate both events.¹⁶³ Hundreds of arrests were made,¹⁶⁴ and public trials of alleged perpetrators

¹⁵⁸ “(...) we continue to see distressing accounts of summary executions, arbitrary killings and abductions, mainly targeting members of certain communities and individuals accused of affiliation with the former government. Hundreds were killed since the fall of the former regime (...). These killings were carried out by security forces of the interim authorities, groups affiliated with them, elements associated with the former government, local armed groups and unidentified armed individuals.” OHCHR, *Syria: One Year Since Regime Change, more Should Be Done to Stop Violations, Achieve Justice*, 5 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2135211.html. See also Sections II.C.5 (“Accountability for Individuals Associated with the Former Government”), III.A.1 (“Members of Minority Religious and Ethnic Groups”) and III.A.5 (“Individuals Perceived to Be Associated with the Former Government”).

¹⁵⁹ UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, paras 83 and 89. See also Section III.A.1.a (“Members of Minority Religious and Ethnic Groups: Alawites”).

¹⁶⁰ Abuses against members of religious minority groups were “accompanied by an increase in hate speech, especially on social media, and narratives that blamed entire sects, effectively turning civilians into ‘legitimate’ targets.” STJ, *Abduction in Syria: Alawite Women Most Targeted Amidst Transitional Government Inaction*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5x48derf>, p. 17. “(...) hate speech and disinformation campaigns have fueled communal strife and fear.” UN DPPA, *USG DiCarlo Briefs Security Council on Syria’s Transition, Security Challenges, and Path Toward Reconciliation*, 18 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mth95rw9>. “The collapse of Assad-era censorship allowed for freer expression, but it also unleashed hate speech, disinformation and inflammatory rhetoric. Assad loyalists began taking advantage, exaggerating or fabricating reports of sectarian violence that they framed as government-sanctioned ethnic cleansing, thus discouraging minorities from cooperating with the new authorities.” ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. 10. “(...) sectarian fault lines have also been fueled by widespread hate speech and incitement against Alawis, off and online, including in posts with false information reportedly often originating from abroad.” OHCHR, *Oral Update by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro*, 27 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2e3m2r66>.

¹⁶¹ See Section II.B.6 (“Main Security Developments: Integration of Former Armed Groups and Discipline”).

¹⁶² “Those two incidents of violence deepened existing divisions between communities and contributed to a climate of fear and insecurity across Syria’s ethnic mosaic.” Fadel Abdulghany and Kenneth Roth, “Assessing Syria’s Progress Since Assad”, *Opinio Juris*, 20 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4jnxaxur>. “The bloodshed has deepened rifts in Syrian society and fed perceptions, particularly within communities on the receiving end of violence, that the new authorities do not protect all Syrians equally.” ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html. See also, ACLED, *Sectarian Violence Threatens Syria’s Chance at Stability*, 11 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134139.html; Foreign Affairs, *What Syrians Want: New Survey Data Shows the Promises and Perils Facing the Country’s New Government*, 5 December 2025, www.foreignaffairs.com/syria/what-syrians-want; Etana, *Survey Results: Public Opinion in Transitional Syria: One Year into the Transition*, 4 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/c8zj7f6j>; The Atlantic Council, *Dispatch from Syria’s Christian Strongholds: A New Government, a Full Political Spectrum*, 25 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/44wxcfsn>; OHCHR, *UN Syria Commission Finds March Coastal Violence Was Widespread and Systematic: Outlines Urgent Steps to Prevent Future Violations and Restore Public Confidence*, 14 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3hkvybt9>.

¹⁶³ Reuters, *Syria Forms Committee to Investigate Sweida Violence*, 1 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/53nsbcc6>; Al Jazeera, *Syria’s Al-Sharaa Launches Probe into Deadly Clashes, Vows Accountability*, 9 March 2025, <https://aje.io/1pzc1b>.

¹⁶⁴ See footnote 96.

of the coastal violence commenced in November 2025.¹⁶⁵ However, investigations have been criticized for deflecting government responsibility, overlooking the sectarian nature of abuses,¹⁶⁶ and lacking transparency, particularly concerning senior-level accountability.¹⁶⁷ Reports further indicate ongoing failures to prevent abuses against minorities by non-State actors.¹⁶⁸ The IICI was granted unrestricted access to the areas affected by the March and July 2025 violence.¹⁶⁹

3) Abuses by the SDF in Areas Under Its De Facto Control

Reports of human rights abuses in areas under the SDF's de facto control have increased following the fall of the former government.¹⁷⁰ Documented abuses included arbitrary arrests,¹⁷¹ prolonged deprivation of liberty without due process, torture and other forms of ill-treatment – resulting in deaths in custody¹⁷² – and unlawful killings of

¹⁶⁵ “On 18 November [2025], public trial proceedings of 14 people accused of committing violations during the coastal massacres began. The Minister of Justice told Amnesty International that an additional 80 suspects identified in the fact-finding committee report were in custody pending trial.” Amnesty International, *Syria: A Year After Assad's Fall, the Rights of Survivors and Families Must Guide Transition*, 8 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133836.html. “Half the fourteen defendants were insurgents tied to the former regime, while the other half were members of the new government's forces.” ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. 22. See also, Enab Baladi, *Second Session in Trial over Violations During Syria's Coastal Events Held in Aleppo*, 18 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4fsbcfp3>; Arab Reform Initiative, *The Trial of Syria's Coastal Crimes: Initial Observations for Rebuilding Trust in the Judicial System*, 11 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y4xxx9zd>.

¹⁶⁶ The fact-finding commission set up to investigate violations in the coastal region “presented its findings at a press conference on 22 July [2025]. While it acknowledged widespread attacks on civilians, it seemed to diffuse responsibility by portraying the massacres as occurring during a chaotic popular uprising that involved up to 200,000 armed men and in which state forces, cast as agents of order, were simply unable to contain the violence. The report attributed the abuses largely to revenge for insurgent raids, downplaying their sectarian dimension.” Similarly, “official narratives concerning the Suweida events appear to focus blame on the Druze armed factions, with President al-Sharaa praising Bedouin tribal fighters for ‘standing by the state’, while continuing to refer to Druze factions as ‘outlaw groups’.” ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, pp. 22, 29-30. “Some Sunni Syrians equate all Alawites with the Assad regime and therefore see massacres targeting Alawites as justifiable, however. Such killings are therefore technically in ‘revenge’ or ‘retaliation,’ but in practice, how victims are identified is almost always by sect.” CTP/ISW, *Iran Update, July 22, 2025*, 22 July 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2129996.html. The investigation into the coastal violence “failed to recognise responsibility of the interim authorities in charge of the security forces who committed the crimes, laying the blame on individual acts of revenge instead. There was a stark absence of any recognition of its role to protect civilians or maintain control of its forces.” The Syria Campaign, *Findings of National Investigation into Syria's Coast Massacres Spark Anger Among Victims and Human Rights Defenders*, 23 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2c52tabe>. See also, Atlantic Council, *One Year After Assad's Fall, Here's What's Needed to Advance Justice for Syrians*, 7 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/3M3klQM>. Against the background of ongoing violations, STJ further denounced the fact that the investigation was limited to the specific time and place of the early March 2025 violence. STJ, *Left to Their Fate: Grave Violations Against Alawites Following the Coastal Massacres*, 28 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/38f2xfr4>.

¹⁶⁷ HRW, *World Report 2026: Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136267.html; STJ, *Left to Their Fate: Grave Violations Against Alawites Following the Coastal Massacres*, October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3h4j7h8u>, p. 25.

¹⁶⁸ See Section III.A.1 (“Members of Minority Religious and Ethnic Groups”).

¹⁶⁹ 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, <https://tinyurl.com/5dtjxw2r>.

¹⁷⁰ Syria Direct, *A Year After Assad's Fall, Arbitrary Arrests Cast a Shadow over Northeastern Syria*, 5 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mwds4x9u>.

¹⁷¹ In 2025, SNHR recorded the arbitrary arrest and detention of 768 individuals by the SDF, including 72 women and 14 children. SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria*, 3 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yckfe4y7>, p. 5.

¹⁷² Between 8 December 2024 and 23 January 2026, SNHR documented at least 819 cases of forced disappearance, as well as various forms of torture and ill-treatment. During this period, 15 detainees – including two women and one child –, were reported to have died as a result of such abuse. SNHR, *Urgent Need to Preserve Crime Scenes in Former Detention Centers Under the Control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)*, 25 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5bydfy9n>, p. 2. Detention conditions have been described as “harsh”, and families are routinely not informed of the detainees’ whereabouts. Syria Direct, *A Year After Assad's Fall, Arbitrary Arrests Cast a Shadow over Northeastern Syria*, 5 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mwds4x9u>. See also, SNHR, *Condemning the Arbitrary Detention of Journalist Firas al-Barjas and His Referral to the Exceptional Terrorism Court of the SDF*, 24 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bddzanj2>; Ultra Syria, *Death of Detainee Under Torture in SDF Custody amid Widespread Arrest Campaign*, 11 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5x4mck2f>.

civilians.¹⁷³ Mass arrests occurred in the context of anti-Da'esh operations and recruitment drives for the “self-defence service”.¹⁷⁴ Following the Government's expansion into northeast Syria in January 2026, it took control of several of SDF-run detention facilities, leading to the release of children and individuals assessed as having been detained solely on political grounds.¹⁷⁵

Throughout 2025 and into 2026, mandatory recruitment into the “self-defence service” continued, as did the recruitment of children, despite repeated commitments by the SDF leadership to end the practice.¹⁷⁶

The SDF was also implicated in violations of international humanitarian law, including unlawful killings of civilians and attacks on civilian infrastructure.¹⁷⁷

4) Justice, Detention and Due Process

The justice system faces significant challenges in addressing violations committed under the former government as well as ongoing human rights abuses.¹⁷⁸ It is particularly ill-equipped to prosecute serious international crimes, as the Penal Code does not criminalize war crimes, crimes against humanity, and enforced disappearances, inadequately addresses torture, and lacks provisions on command

¹⁷³ On 21 December 2025, “a large-scale raid and arrest campaign” in the town of Theiban (Deir ez-Zour Governorate) “resulted in the killing of three civilians, including a child, by gunfire during the storming of residential homes, in addition to the arbitrary arrest of six local residents.” SNHR, *Six Civilians, Including a Child and a Woman, Were Documented as Killed During Raids Carried Out by the SDF with the Support of the International Coalition Forces*, 14 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/ysatnr4h>. See also, SNHR, *Urgent Need to Preserve Crime Scenes in Former Detention Centers Under the Control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)*, 25 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5bydfy9n>, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ SNHR, *Condemning the Widespread Detention for Forced Conscription by the Syrian Democratic Forces in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor Since 29 September 2025*, 8 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y7jh6xnw>, pp. 1-2; Enab Baladi, *Accusations Against SDF of Arresting Civilians During Security Campaign in Al-Hasakah, Syria*, 31 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4nf4czk3>; SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria*, 4 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/54zxzwt2>, p. 12.

¹⁷⁵ According to SNHR, SDF facilities held detainees on “political, security and criminal charges.” Those detained for political reasons included activists opposed to the SDF. SNHR, *Urgent Need to Preserve Crime Scenes in Former Detention Centers Under the Control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)*, 25 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5bydfy9n>, p. 1. Children released from Al-Aqtan Prison in Raqqa City spoke of torture and ill-treatment. The New Arab, *Syria Frees 126 Children After Taking Al-Aqtan Prison from SDF*, 25 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4u6cknkp>. See also, Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: February 10-17, 2026*, 17 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/s25skbbn>.

¹⁷⁶ See Section III.A.2 (“Individuals Opposing, or Perceived to Be Opposing, the SDF in Areas Under Its De Facto Control”).

¹⁷⁷ For example, in October 2025, SNHR recorded at least eight attacks on civilian infrastructure, including seven schools. SNHR, *Monthly Report for Victims of Extrajudicial Killing in Syria*, 1 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4mkvnuwz>, p. 4. See also Section II.B.1 (“Main Security Developments: Integration of the DAANES/SDF”).

¹⁷⁸ “The Syrian judiciary has been severely damaged due to years of autocratic rule and conflict, which have affected its independence and neutrality.” SNHR, *SNHR's Vision for Transitional Justice in Syria*, 17 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y2n286ty>, p. 22. See also, Atlantic Council, *One Year After Assad's Fall, Here's What's Needed to Advance Justice for Syrians*, 7 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/3M3kIQM>.

responsibility.¹⁷⁹ The judiciary also suffers from shortages of qualified personnel¹⁸⁰ and insufficient legal, technical, and institutional capacity.¹⁸¹

Detention practices also remain a significant concern. Reports indicate prolonged pre-trial detention,¹⁸² poor detention conditions,¹⁸³ torture and other forms of ill-treatment, extortion, and deaths in custody.¹⁸⁴ Adherence to due process guarantees remains inconsistent.¹⁸⁵

Detainees are held in “major prisons, large lockups located in vast complexes once run by Assad’s intelligence apparatus, and smaller lockups at checkpoints and police stations”, in addition to detention facilities formerly managed by armed groups.¹⁸⁶ The

¹⁷⁹ HRW, *Recommendations on Next Steps for Comprehensive Justice for Syria*, 17 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/4robMEI>; SNHR, *SNHR’s Vision for Transitional Justice in Syria*, 17 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y2n286ty>, p. 15. “The government has reactivated the criminal court system, which was put on hold for multiple months after December 8 [2024]. On July 8, the Ministry of Justice announced that judicial reforms have been completed and the national prosecutor is pursuing war crimes charges of four former Assad officials. The nature of the referenced reforms was not further publicized. Considering the extremely short timeline, any reforms to date could not reasonably have met the level necessary to ensure that Syria’s justice system meets fair trial guarantees.” Syrians for Justice and Accountability (SJAC), *A Roadmap for Transitional Justice in Syria: September 2025*, 24 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2fmw85w3>.

¹⁸⁰ “This deficit is not limited to quantity; it also extends to the quality of the remaining judicial personnel, who often lack training in international human rights standards, transitional justice mechanisms, and judicial practices consistent with a democratic system.” SNHR, *The Arab Network for the Independence of the Judiciary: A Necessary Pillar in Syria’s Political Transition*, 30 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4a3tdtk>. “For the Ministry of Justice, it has been training a new batch of government judges and lawyers throughout the second half of 2025, with the first class slated to finish by early 2026.” Atlantic Council, *Why Syria’s Government Must Turn Inward in 2026*, 29 January 2026, <https://bit.ly/4a8WgVZ>.

¹⁸¹ “Given that Syrian government institutions have never undertaken this work previously, it will also take years for national bodies to develop the specialized expertise required to investigate and prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other international crimes that are quite complex, and to amass the evidence required to prosecute these cases.” Atlantic Council, *One Year After Assad’s Fall, Here’s What’s Needed to Advance Justice for Syrians*, 7 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/3M3klQM>. “The flawed system inherited from successive Assad-led governments will require significant reforms before it can offer judicial institutions and law enforcement services that uphold the rule of law and protect all Syrians equally.” UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, para. 97. See also, HRW, *Recommendations on Next Steps for Comprehensive Justice for Syria*, 17 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/4robMEI>.

¹⁸² “(...) time in pre-trial detention has regularly exceeded the permissible duration due to a lack of sufficient detention space and an increased number of detainees.” International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), *Syria Embarks on a Transitional Justice Project*, 1 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2d4r3ha8>. “There are reports that new arrestees, including former Assad government officials, are being held incommunicado.” SJAC, *A Roadmap for Transitional Justice in Syria: September 2025*, 24 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2fmw85w3>.

¹⁸³ “Across Syria, detainees and families described inhumane conditions they or their relatives endured when locked up – overcrowding, scarce food, outbreaks of skin disease from a lack of soap.” Reuters, *Syrians Emptied Assad’s Prisons. They’re Filling Up Again, and Abuse Is Rife*, 22 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4tkdbOg>. See also, Protection Cluster / UNHCR, *Protection Landscape in Syria: A Snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2123726.html, p. 6.

¹⁸⁴ “Transitional authorities carried out arbitrary detentions, with reports of torture and ill-treatment in detention centers and prisons (...) and deaths in custody.” HRW, *World Report 2026: Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136267.html. SNHR recorded 16 deaths in detention due to torture in 2025 attributed to Government forces, as well as one case attributed to the SNA. SNHR, *Monthly Report for Victims of Extrajudicial Killing in Syria*, 1 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3ek4mxjx>, pp. 3, 7. See also, Reuters, *Syrians Emptied Assad’s Prisons. They’re Filling Up Again, and Abuse Is Rife*, 22 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4tkdbOg>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: September 9-16, 2025*, 16 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5cwwfbw2>; CTP/ISW, *Iran Update, August 1, 2025*, 1 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2129730.html; The New Arab, *Syrian Man Dies ‘Under Torture’ Days After Return from Germany*, 31 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/58377hkn>; STJ, *Torture Persists: Testimonies and Indicators Reveal Alarming Incidents in Post-Assad Syria*, 26 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2dnwbrmb>.

¹⁸⁵ “Access to lawyers and family members varies from one facility to another, and public charges are rarely filed against security detainees, unlike people accused of common crimes.” Reuters, *Syrians Emptied Assad’s Prisons. They’re Filling Up Again, and Abuse Is Rife*, 22 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4tkdbOg>. “Trials are proceeding under the Syrian code of criminal procedure, and defendants who cannot afford an attorney must be afforded one under the Syrian Constitution. But it is not clear whether this is fully respected in practice.” ICCT, *Syria Embarks on a Transitional Justice Project*, 1 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2d4r3ha8>. See also, Protection Cluster / UNHCR, *Protection Landscape in Syria: A Snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2123726.html, p. 2.

¹⁸⁶ Reuters, *Syrians Emptied Assad’s Prisons. They’re Filling Up Again, and Abuse Is Rife*, 22 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4tkdbOg>.

total number of individuals in detention and prison facilities is not known.¹⁸⁷ The Government has reported arrests of members of the security forces for abuses committed in detention.¹⁸⁸

The death penalty remains legally available and has reportedly been applied in some criminal cases.¹⁸⁹

On 19 February 2026, President Sharaa issued an amnesty decree granting pardons and sentence reductions for individuals convicted of certain ordinary offences.¹⁹⁰ The decree explicitly excluded anyone accused of “grave violations against the Syrian people”, a phrase widely understood to refer to individuals associated with the former government who are implicated in serious crimes and human rights violations.¹⁹¹

5) Accountability for Individuals Associated with the Former Government

Since the fall of the former government, ongoing security operations have led to the arrest and detention of individuals previously or currently associated with the former president, the military and intelligence/security services, and pro-government armed groups.¹⁹² Arrests appear to have focused primarily on former senior officials,¹⁹³ while former soldiers who settled their status,¹⁹⁴ informants and other lower-level personnel

¹⁸⁷ According to Thameen al-Kheetan of OHCHR: “It remains challenging to determine with precision how many individuals are still detained, how many have been released, or which cases may amount to enforced disappearance. (...) In some instances, families may also hesitate to share information out of fear of repercussions.” Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ “The government said 84 members of the security forces had been disciplined for incidents of extortion involving detainees and 75 for violence.” Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Enab Baladi, *Jarīmat Qatl fī Maḥarda Tu’id Malaf Istihdāf al-Šin’a ilā al-Wājīhah*, 1 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/jh5k7vz3>; Al-Arabiya, *Awwal Hukm l’dām fī Dayr al-Zawr bi-Haqq Shābb l’tadā’ alā Tifla Sūriyya wa-Qatalahā*, 4 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3sywz5nm>. See also, Enab Baladi, *Syrian Justice Ministry Denies Death Sentences for Assad-Era Officials*, 3 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3tncfzne>. The IICI has called on the Government to impose a moratorium on the implementation of the death penalty. OHCHR, *Oral Update by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic at the 60th Session of the Human Rights Council*, 23 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2nn5er25> (hereafter: OHCHR, *Oral Update by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro*, 23 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2nn5er25>).

¹⁹⁰ An English translation of the decree is available at: Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: February 17-24, 2026*, 24 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/294a9pky>.

¹⁹¹ According to the Minister of Justice, more than 1,500 individuals had been released under the amnesty decree by 22 February 2026, with more releases expected. SANA, *Minister Al-Wais: Justice System Undergoes Comprehensive Reform to Ensure Rule of Law*, 22 February 2026, <https://sana.sy/en/syria/2298263>. See also, The New Arab, *Syrian President Sharaa Grants Amnesty Giving Partial Reprieve to Convicted Criminals*, 19 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/25c5suzv>; Radio Free Syria, *President Al-Sharaa Issues General Amnesty as Part of Transitional Justice Efforts*, 18 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4pww637p>.

¹⁹² “The MOI announced on January 5 [2026] that throughout 2025, a total of 6,331 former Assad regime operatives had been detained and charged with crimes against the Syrian people.” Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: December 30, 2025 - January 6, 2026*, 6 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mt33xw5n>. According to SNHR, in 2025, Internal Security Forces arrested at least 948 individuals – including one woman – accused of serious human rights violations committed during the former government’s rule. The arrest operations targeted former military personnel, government employees, journalists, and doctors who had worked in military hospitals linked to the security services. The detainees were subsequently transferred to central prisons in Homs, Hama, and Adra (Rural Damascus). SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria*, 3 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yckfe4y7>, p. 10. See also, Arab Weekly, *Syria Arrests Former Assad Officers in Crackdown on Alleged Secret Networks*, 27 December 2025, <http://the arab weekly.com/node/69398>; Enab Baladi, *Latakia: Syrian Interior Ministry Arrests Two Implicated in Torturing Civilians*, 17 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/36ekbbca>; Al Jazeera, *Syria Arrests ex-Military Official in Charge of Notorious Sednaya Prison*, 22 October 2025, <https://aje.io/c82s3m>; The New Arab, *Syrian Security Forces Arrest Former Regime Air Force General in Latakia*, 29 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/355s8zun>; The National, *Inside the Syrian Government’s Hunt for Assad Military Loyalists*, 3 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4fn3khds>.

¹⁹³ “(...) the new, interim government has promised to bring the worst of those who worked with the regime to justice, including people who committed war crimes and human rights violations. (...) The Syrian government has also offered amnesty to many who served in the Syrian army, saying only those with Syrian ‘blood on their hands’ would face criminal retribution.” DW, *Vigilante Justice in Syria: Who Is Being Targeted and Why?*, 5 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/3ZMwpOR>. Among those arrested are high-ranking military/security officers former ministers, parliamentarians, military doctors, judges. Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding Security in New Syria: Year 2, Week 9*, 8 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3sb9cd4x>; Levant24, *Syrian Government Targets Assad-Era Crimes in Ongoing Arrest Sweep*, 10 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bdz67amk>.

¹⁹⁴ See Section II.B.4 (“Main Security Developments: Security Sector Transformation”).

have generally not been targeted for arrest, or have been released after short periods of detention.¹⁹⁵ There are no reports indicating that membership in the now-dissolved Ba'ath Party on its own, or prior employment in the public sector – unless in senior positions – results in arrest. In addition, former government affiliates have been arrested for their alleged involvement in attacks against security forces and civilians, including during the events in the coastal region in March 2025.¹⁹⁶

While many detainees have since been released,¹⁹⁷ the grounds for their release have not always been transparent.¹⁹⁸

While the arrest, detention, and prosecution of persons reasonably suspected of criminal acts is legitimate, such measures must comply with applicable laws and due process guarantees. There are concerns over violations during arrests and in detention conditions.¹⁹⁹ Many detainees remain in prolonged pre-trial detention,²⁰⁰ and only a small number of former government officials have been referred to court to date.²⁰¹ Reports indicate that arrests may have been arbitrary²⁰² and accompanied by demeaning treatment²⁰³ and excessive use of force, including, in some cases,

¹⁹⁵ "For those who held high-ranking positions or were linked to prominent massacres, government outlets regularly publish announcements of their arrests, and they tend to remain in prison once detained (...). Yet many former informants and lower-level personnel continue to walk the streets. Locals regularly report such criminals to the security forces, but oftentimes they are released after just a few days' detention." Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Without Accountability, Syria's Sectarian Violence Will Only Worsen*, 10 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3mybmqzm>. See also, DW, *Vigilante Justice in Syria: Who Is Being Targeted and Why?*, 5 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/3ZMwpOR>.

¹⁹⁶ SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria*, 3 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yckfe4y7>, p. 10.

¹⁹⁷ "(...) [SNHR] documented at least 1,532 releases from various detention centers in 2025". SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria*, 3 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yckfe4y7>, p. 11. See also, Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding Security in New Syria: Year 2, Week 8*, 2 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/y9sxpvt> (and earlier reports).

¹⁹⁸ In certain instances, individuals – including some high-profile figures – have been granted amnesty, with the Government justifying its decisions on the grounds of their cooperation with the State and the need to ease tensions with the Alawite community. The legal basis for such acquittal is often unclear. "Many Syrians see the government's approach as dangerously lenient (...). Some released individuals reportedly move freely and appear in public without consequence." The New Arab, *Anger Mounts After Syria Frees Assad-Era Officials Accused of War Crimes*, 11 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y5ny8t73>. "The transitional government's arrests of Assadists have been erratic and poorly explained, with some high-ranking officials being imprisoned while others (...) are released without sufficient explanation, which has increased tensions across Syria." CTP/ISW, *Iran Update, June 11, 2025*, 11 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5c7wr8ch>. See also, Reuters, *Facing Alawite Backlash, Syria's New Leaders Take Controversial Steps to Win Loyalty*, 30 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/nxt5vhk2>; Al Jazeera, *The Fragile Fight for Justice in a Post-Assad Syria*, 7 December 2025, <https://aje.io/n68fo2>; Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Without Accountability, Syria's Sectarian Violence Will Only Worsen*, 10 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3mybmqzm>; Syria in Transition, *The Transitional Justice Gamble: How Ahmad al-Sharaa Can Dismantle Assadism for Good*, Issue 25, June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2rebyx3f>.

¹⁹⁹ See Section II.C.4 ("Justice, Detention and Due Process").

²⁰⁰ "While a great many regime-era figures have been captured, they have not been seen or heard from since; no trials, no process, and thus no justice." Syria Weekly, *Weekly Data Update (May 6-13, 2025)*, 15 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3ba8cjd3>.

²⁰¹ Ibid. See also, Protection Cluster / UNHCR, *Protection Landscape in Syria: A Snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2123726.html, p. 6.

²⁰² "Although these [arrest] operations were carried out within the framework of security campaigns, it has not been possible to verify whether they were carried out pursuant to legal arrest warrants issued by the Public Prosecutor or the relevant judiciary authorities." SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria*, 3 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yckfe4y7>, p. 10. "New instances of arbitrary detentions have occurred, with the caretaker authorities detaining ex-regime officials, intelligence officers, and militia leaders, often holding them in incommunicado detention, raising concerns about transparency and due process." Protection Cluster / UNHCR, *Protection Landscape in Syria: A Snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2123726.html, p. 6.

²⁰³ In the lead up to the violence in the coastal region, "[R]eports of harassment and arbitrary arrests during combing campaigns and at checkpoints became more frequent, with Alawis asked questions about their sectarian identity and derogatory terms such as 'nusayri' and 'Alawi pigs' being used to refer to them." UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, para. 30.

extrajudicial executions.²⁰⁴ Detainees have also reportedly been subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment, including deaths in custody.²⁰⁵

While the authorities have repeatedly spoken out against reprisal acts,²⁰⁶ the lack of substantive progress toward accountability for the violations committed by the former government is reported to have driven some individuals to seek revenge outside the formal justice system.²⁰⁷ Since the fall of the former government, reprisal attacks against individuals associated with the former government – including former low-level military and civilian officials, informants, soldiers and militiamen – have regularly been reported.²⁰⁸ These incidents include abductions, physical attacks, and killings, often

²⁰⁴ During a security campaign against former government affiliates in the predominantly Alawite village of Fahel (Homs Governorate) in January 2025, Government security forces executed 16 men: “14 were members of the former Syrian Army, including at least four retired officers. Additionally, at least two of those executed had undergone status settlements at reconciliation centres established by the transitional government in Homs. According to witnesses, the other two victims were civilians who were taken off a bus heading to their village and executed after their Alawite affiliation was revealed during questioning.” A Government official said that “criminal groups” had “entered the village after the security forces had completed their operations.” STJ, *‘Take Him to the Ghoul’: 16 People Executed in a Single Day in Fahel Village, Homs Countryside*, 2 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4mfcwjb3>. See also, SNHR, *The Death of Ahmed Khaddour After Being Assaulted by Members of the Transitional Government’s Internal Security Forces in the Village of Karto in the Tartous Countryside on July 24, 2025*, 28 July 2025, <https://bit.ly/3YDRgn2>; STJ, *Torture Persists: Testimonies and Indicators Reveal Alarming Incidents in Post-Assad Syria*, 26 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2dnwbrmb>.

²⁰⁵ “In late January and early February 2025, SJAC documenters received reports of at least six individuals being killed in the custody of security forces. (...) In some of these cases, SJAC documenters received reports from relatives that the bodies bore signs of torture.” SJAC, *Two Months After Assad’s Fall, Assad-Like Violations Are Still Being Committed in Syria*, 13 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ysd5b2nt>. See also, SHNR, *SNHR Condemns Torture, Death of Three Detainees at the Hands of the Transitional Government’s General Security Directorate*, 3 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mrxs6n84>.

²⁰⁶ “The Fatwa Council emphasized that the implementation of legal punishments and retribution should be the prerogative of the judiciary and relevant authorities, and that no action should be taken individually. It reaffirmed that those who act individually outside the framework of legal authorities expose themselves to punishment.” Enab Baladi, *Syrian Fatwa Council Prohibits Revenge Killings Outside Judicial Framework*, 6 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2bn388rr>. President Sharaa asserted his commitment to “preserving civil peace by ensuring transitional justice and preventing acts of revenge.” Foundation for Defense of Democracies, *Ahmad al Sharaa’s Victory Conference: Syria’s New Era and an Exclusive Translation of Sharaa’s Speech*, 30 January 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5xkk34ry>.

²⁰⁷ “The absence of transitional justice further aggravates tensions. It encourages victims of the former regime to seek revenge outside legal frameworks while collective blame directed at Alawites has led to frequent revenge killings in Alawite-dominated areas. Many Alawites now urge the government to publish a clear list of former regime officials responsible for major crimes, both to individualise accountability and to lift the burden of collective guilt imposed on their community.” Al Jazeera, *Can Syria Be Unified?*, 8 January 2026, <https://aje.io/obwuqx>. “(...) because many Syrians continue to see former regime officials roaming the streets who were involved in crimes against individuals and families, there is an epidemic of vigilante violence happening in many areas of the country.” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Religious Freedom in Syria’s Post-Assad Transition*, 13 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/4pDLxZy>, p. 6. See also, ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. 34; OHCHR, *Oral Update by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro*, 27 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2e3m2r66>.

²⁰⁸ “Throughout 2025, the most consistent and significant contributor to incidences of violence across Syria was vigilantism and targeted revenge killings fueled by years and sometimes even decades of unresolved grievances.” MEI, *Syria Is Stabilizing, but US Help Remains Vital*, 13 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mrx8raa>. According to SNHR, “there are escalating incidents of murder and kidnapping in Homs province, with Alawite-majority areas the most affected. Most attacks are acts of revenge, it says, against former members of the regime, or those suspected of collaborating.” BBC, *‘Killed Because They Are Alawites’: Fear Among Syria’s Minorities After the Fall of Assad*, 10 November 2025, www.bbc.com/news/articles/crux1zp32130. “Over the last two weeks of August [2025], one observer estimated that 36% of over 70 violent deaths recorded were due to targeted killings, or vigilantism. This figure has recently been as high as 60%.” DW, *Vigilante Justice in Syria: Who Is Being Targeted and Why?*, 5 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/3ZMwpOR>. In June 2025, “(...) an amnesty included dozens of former regime soldiers and well-known figures accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The decision has triggered widespread anger and a surge in revenge killings (...)” Syria in Transition, *The Transitional Justice Gamble: How Ahmad al-Sharaa Can Dismantle Assadism for Good*, Issue 25, June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2rebyx3f>.

carried out by unidentified perpetrators.²⁰⁹ Such attacks occur both as isolated incidents and as more organized operations, with targets sometimes announced on social media.²¹⁰ Victims of vigilante violence include individuals of all religious backgrounds.²¹¹ Reports indicate a downward trend in these incidents in the last quarter of 2025 and into 2026.²¹²

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- ²⁰⁹ “Some Syrian returnees and supporters of the new authorities have engaged in score-settling, targeting individuals accused of collaborating with the former regime or occupying their homes during their absence.” The Syria Report, *Transition Year: Despite Positive Developments, Many Challenges Remain Across Syria’s Economic and Political Scenes*, 10 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4tauhOx>. “Since December 2024, SJAC has documented reprisal killings targeting specific male individuals who were allegedly involved with the former government’s military or intelligence apparatus. (...) these attacks are based on the victim’s alleged involvement with the Assad regime and past violations committed against Syrians, and not their sectarian background. These killings target individuals associated with the Assad government in a variety of ways, whether officially as part of the military or intelligence, or unofficially as informants. The victims include Sunni, Alawi, and Shia individuals. In most of these cases, the perpetrators are simply listed as ‘unknown armed men’.” SJAC, *Revenge Killings Targeting Assad Regime Affiliates (December 2024 - May 2025)*, 22 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/42z9rbph>. See also, Politics and Society Institute, “Security and Military Formation in Syria After the Fall of the Assad Regime”, in *Syria: A New Era?*, Issue 3, June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mw79fcyu>, p. 66. Other attacks have been attributed to Da’esh, see, e.g., Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly Conflict & Security: December 9-30, 2025*, 30 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5dnp8y8w>; Syria Weekly, *Data Update (December 2-9, 2025)*, 11 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/59j42fv4>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: November 25-December 2, 2025*, 2 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2j8zxf5z>.
- ²¹⁰ DW, *Vigilante Justice in Syria: Who Is Being Targeted and Why?*, 5 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/3ZMwpOR>. For example, SAS, in response to the release of a prominent former Assad militia commander “called on its followers on June 10 [2025] to share the identities and locations of other recently released Assad regime figures to conduct extra-judicial revenge killings (...). The group has claimed several attacks since its June 10 post (...). It assassinated a former Assad regime member and injured another in the town of Dijabijja, Homs Province, on June 10, and killed an Alawite man in Tartous City on the same day.” CTP/ISW, *Iran Update, June 11, 2025*, 11 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5c7wr8ch>. “[O]n April 21, a viral video spread on social media featuring three masked men who identified themselves as the ‘Special Accountability Force’ in Azaz and threatened to kill regime collaborators who were known to have returned to their city.” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Without Accountability, Syria’s Sectarian Violence Will Only Worsen*, 10 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3mybpmzpm>. “(...) the nature and execution of many of these assassinations suggest that they were carried out by individuals from within the local communities, driven by personal motives rather than centralised political decisions or organised military orders. In a few cases, links were established between perpetrators and certain armed factions or local security actors.” Politics and Society Institute, “Security and Military Formation in Syria After the Fall of the Assad Regime”, in *Syria: A New Era?*, Issue 3, June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mw79fcyu>, p. 66. See also, Al Majalla, *Ansar al-Sunna: The Murky New Jihadist Group in Syria*, 19 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4epzpevt>.
- ²¹¹ For example, in the Sunni town of Qumhane in Hama Governorate, “[S]everal prominent figures and fighters associated with the Assad regime died in reprisal attacks, though most of those at risk have fled to Lebanon or gone into hiding.” Syria in Transition, *New Look Shabiha: A Sunni Town’s Uneasy Reinvention After Years as a Regime Stronghold*, Issue 32, February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5zyz9df5>. “Most of the victims of vigilante violence have been members of Syria’s Sunni majority.” According to Gregory Waters of the Atlantic Council, “Sunni [regime] collaborators are despised by their own communities, so it is easier to target them.” DW, *Vigilante Justice in Syria: Who Is Being Targeted and Why?*, 5 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/3ZMwpOR>. “The majority of these [retaliatory] killings and assassinations have occurred in the provinces of Homs, Aleppo, Hama, and Latakia – areas that witnessed intense activity by regime militias and security services before Assad’s fall and are marked by significant demographic diversity.” Politics and Society Institute, “Security and Military Formation in Syria After the Fall of the Assad Regime”, in *Syria: A New Era?*, Issue 3, June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mw79fcyu>, p. 65. See also, Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding Security in New Syria: Year 2, Week 4*, 5 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/435hhf2y>; SJAC, *Revenge Killings Targeting Assad Regime Affiliates (December 2024 - May 2025)*, 22 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/42z9rbph>.
- ²¹² “From January to October 2025, an average of 23 vigilante killings were confirmed every week across Syria (...) Yet from October to the end of 2025, the rate of vigilantism declined 70% to seven deaths per week; and so far in 2026, only three deaths have been confirmed in six weeks. The almost total cessation of vigilante killings in Syria is largely the consequence of actions taken by the Ministry of Interior, which has quietly detained dozens of perpetrators in recent months. MEI, *Syria Is Stabilizing, but US Help Remains Vital*, 13 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mrzx8raa>. An uptick was recorded in mid-February 2026, when eight deaths were reported within a single week. “Of the 8 deaths this week, 4 took place in Homs, 3 in Daraa and 1 in Tartus.” Syria Weekly, *Syria Data Update (Feb 17-24, 2026)*, 25 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/45fb8jvz>.

6) Civic Space, Political Participation and Media

Freedom of expression and association is generally greater under the new authorities than under the former government,²¹³ but remains uneven and fragile.²¹⁴ Some instances of short-term detention of Government critics,²¹⁵ and harassment and physical attacks by local security forces, pro-Government supporters or other individuals have been reported;²¹⁶ however, there is no indication of a systematic policy to suppress criticism.

Civil society organizations operate with increased independence than in the past.²¹⁷ While bureaucratic obstacles and restrictive legislation related to registration and activity approvals persist, their application is reported to be inconsistent.²¹⁸ The boundaries of permissible expression and activity – particularly on issues related to security, women's rights, and abuses against minorities – vary by location, subject

²¹³ "The first year was marked by a significant expansion of civic space compared to the Assad regime, with a wider margin for freedoms of expression, protest, and movement." Fadel Abdulghany and Kenneth Roth, "Assessing Syria's Progress Since Assad", *Opinio Juris*, 20 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4jnxaxur>. "In cities previously under regime control – particularly Damascus – citizens have begun reclaiming public squares, organizing demonstrations, convening community forums, and forming new associations. Civil society groups have reportedly found it easier to register; public criticism of officials has resurfaced; and transitional leaders have started promoting principles such as transparency and participation (...)." Arab Reform Initiative, *Syria's Expanding but Fragile Civic Space: Opportunities and Risks in the Post-Assad Transition*, 4 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4qfzS3h>, p. 7. "At the societal level, Assad's fall has led to a cautious reopening of civic space. Independent podcasters and YouTube commentators are gaining traction, especially in urban centers. Civil society groups focused on mental health, urban planning, and women's empowerment have started to reemerge, though tentatively." New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, *The New Syrian Government: Turning a Page or Rewriting the Script?*, 4 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yyke5jfc>. See also, The Syria Report, *Transition Year: Despite Positive Developments, Many Challenges Remain Across Syria's Economic and Political Scenes*, 10 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4tauhOx>; Syria in Transition, *Ringing in a New Era: Good Journalism Can Help Reclaim Truth in Post-Assad Syria*, Issue 29, November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/43ehnmw>.

²¹⁴ "Yet the opening [of the civic space] is uneven and fragile. The March 2025 constitutional declaration affirms basic civic freedoms but qualifies them with broad caveats tied to public order, morality and national security—the same elastic concepts long used to restrict civic life. Rights remain contingent on political tolerance rather than legal protection. Much of the old legal and administrative architecture remains intact. Civil society operates within a patchwork of outdated laws, discretionary practices and fragmented authority. The same activity may proceed unhindered in one locality and be quietly blocked in another." Al Majalla, *Syria's Civic Space Opens ... But Not for Everyone*, 19 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3hujyh3v>. See also, CIHRS, *Lan Taqif Maktūf al-Aydi: al-Fatra al-Intiqaliyya fi Suriya min Manẓūr al-Mujtama' al-Madani*, 3 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/4c86BUJ>, pp. 24-32.

²¹⁵ "Transitional authorities carried out (...) brief detentions of journalists and activists". HRW, *World Report 2026: Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136267.html.

²¹⁶ For example, on 18 July 2025, civilians physically and verbally abused several civil activists during a peaceful protest in front of the parliament in Damascus. According to SNHR, "security forces and police nearby did not intervene to protect the protesters or arrest the attackers." SNHR, *Call on the Syrian Government to Prosecute Those Who Attacked Civil Activists During a Peaceful Protest in Front of the People's Assembly in Damascus*, 20 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2z9nb4uu>.

²¹⁷ "For the first time in decades, civil society organizations were able to register and operate publicly, with more than 650 NGOs registering in the first six months of 2025 alone." Fadel Abdulghany and Kenneth Roth, "Assessing Syria's Progress Since Assad", *Opinio Juris*, 20 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4jnxaxur>. "One of the greatest achievements of the past year is the blossoming of civic space inside many parts of Syria, including areas controlled by the former government, with Syrian civil society groups organizing themselves into registered NGOs or informal associations." Amnesty International, *Syria: A Year After Assad's Fall, the Rights of Survivors and Families Must Guide Transition*, 8 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133836.html. See also, Arab Reform Initiative, *Syria's Expanding but Fragile Civic Space: Opportunities and Risks in the Post-Assad Transition*, 4 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4qfzS3h>.

²¹⁸ "(...) progress was tempered by the government's decision to retain Assad-era Law 93, which imposes restrictions on civil society activities and foreign funding." Fadel Abdulghany and Kenneth Roth, "Assessing Syria's Progress Since Assad", *Opinio Juris*, 20 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4jnxaxur>. "Many in the sector were angered when the government announced in October [2025] that the archaic Law 93 of 1958, often used to undermine civil society organisations (CSOs) under Assad, would remain in force. It imposes restrictions and requires prior approvals for pretty much everything, including access to foreign funding. Several Syrian NGOs publicly argued that it stifles independence and operational capacity." Syria in Transition, *Whose Civil Society?: Grassroots Civil Society Groups Are Re-Emerging, but the Struggle over Who Controls Them Has Only Begun*, December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mtn2kwnk>. See also, DW, *How an Assad-Era Law Is Threatening Syrian Civil Society*, 5 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3ymvtf5y>; Amnesty International, *Syria: A Year After Assad's Fall, the Rights of Survivors and Families Must Guide Transition*, 8 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133836.html; CIHRS, *Syria's Transition Hangs in the Balance: CIHRS Report on Civil Society's Struggle for a Voice*, 3 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3cettj9>, p. 28; SJAC, *Joint Position Paper on the Directive from the Minister of Social Affairs and Labor: Restrictions on NGOs Must Be Suspended and Civic Space Expanded*, 22 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/57hts39m>.

matter, and individual profile,²¹⁹ and are often shaped by the discretion of local officials.²²⁰ The absence of clear and consistently applied standards is reported to contribute to self-censorship.²²¹ Women activists, in particular, have reported online defamation, harassment and legal intimidation, especially when addressing sensitive issues such as women's and minority rights.²²² Public protests over economic grievances or specific Government decisions generally occur without restrictions.²²³

Political participation remains limited. Political parties remain suspended, as existing parties were dissolved and no new political party law has yet been enacted.²²⁴

Freedom of the press has improved significantly, with the Government ending pre-publication reviews, lifting censorship, and suspending restrictive press laws of the

²¹⁹ "Geography further shapes civic opportunity. Safer areas, such as Damascus, allow more open engagement. Regions marked by fear, instability, or sectarian tension, including the coast, remain subdued. Local authorities differ in how they regulate civic activity: some use rigid controls, others permit informal practice, and some tighten restrictions as they consolidate power." Arab Reform Initiative, *Syria's Expanding but Fragile Civic Space: Opportunities and Risks in the Post-Assad Transition*, 4 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4qfzS3h>, p. 5. See also, CIHRS, *Syria's Transition Hangs in the Balance: CIHRS Report on Civil Society's Struggle for a Voice*, 3 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3cettj9>, pp. 14-19.

²²⁰ "With unclear rules and overlapping mandates, outcomes often depend on individual officials. Some enforce old regulations rigidly, slowing or blocking activities, while others allow events to proceed informally. Well-connected or politically aligned organizers usually face fewer obstacles, while lesser-known groups encounter delays, cancellations, and tighter scrutiny. In this discretionary system, civic actors must decide whether to test limits or avoid them. The result is a fluid, uneven environment that leaves more critical or rights-focused groups especially exposed to unpredictable restrictions." Arab Reform Initiative, *Syria's Expanding but Fragile Civic Space: Opportunities and Risks in the Post-Assad Transition*, 4 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4qfzS3h>, pp. 5-6.

²²¹ "Rising polarization and informal intimidation further narrowed the space, prompting self-censorship and fear. By mid-2025, growing mistrust and stricter controls pushed many activities into private or low-profile settings." *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²²² "Several women's rights activists have faced defamation campaigns and reputation attacks aimed at silencing them and driving them out of public life. This includes (...) several women who ran as candidates in the parliamentary elections. As a result, many women activists now choose silence over exposure, fearing threats, intimidation or the misuse of their names for political agendas." Women's International League for Peace & Freedom, *New Faces, Old Barriers: Women Locked Out of Syria's Transition*, 14 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3y46yfsa>. The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) reported that female journalists and online activists face significant risks of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) via social media. TFGBV "is used to target individuals and also as part of a broader pattern of gendered social control with an aim to 'force women into silence, deter their participation in public life, or systematically harm specific groups' – including female journalists, activists and humanitarian workers." UNFPA, *Voices From Syria 2025: Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html (hereafter: UNFPA, *Voices from Syria*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html), pp. 29, 31, 35. For example, in April 2025, Government supporters and anonymous online actors launched a coordinated campaign of defamation and harassment against activist Hiba Ezzideen al-Hajji, her family and her organization, 'Equity and Empowerment', in Idlib following a social media post about disappeared women and forced marriage. The activist was accused of insulting Islam and traditional values, of supporting the former government, and the Governor of Idlib filed a legal complaint against her for "insulting the hijab" (headscarf). On 22 April, police closed down her organization. Gulf Centre for Human Rights, *Woman Human Rights Defender Hiba al-Hajji Threatened with Death for Social Media Posts About Disappeared Women*, 19 May 2025, <https://bit.ly/4kfLMbV>; Frontline Defenders, *Syria: Defamation Campaign Against Woman Rights Defender Hiba Ezzideen al-Hajji*, 23 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/djzx3k3c>.

²²³ "Criticism of inefficiency and corruption is voiced, small street protests erupt from time to time, and discontent is tolerated. In July [2025], for instance, hundreds of long-established merchants protested a new law to evict them from their shops. The government responded by pausing the law's implementation and naming several merchant representatives to a consultative committee. Similarly, protests by families of those who disappeared under Assad, calling for investigation and accountability, prompted the government in May to establish a National Commission for the Missing, tasked with engaging victims' families and clarifying their relatives' fate." New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, *The New Syrian Government: Turning a Page or Rewriting the Script?*, 4 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ykye5jfc>. See also, Fadel Abdulghany and Kenneth Roth, "Assessing Syria's Progress Since Assad", *Opinio Juris*, 20 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4jnxaxur>; The Syria Report, *Rising Socio-Economic Protests Mark Syria's Shifting Landscape*, 21 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mu2ckuk7>.

²²⁴ "Political life in Syria remains heavily constrained following the dissolution of most, if not all, Assad-era political parties. In 2026, finalizing the formation of the People's Assembly and the passing of the much-anticipated political parties' law will be critical for the potential revival of Syria's decimated political landscape." TIMEP, *MENA in 2026: Policy Priorities for the Year Ahead*, 26 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3rszkrhs>. See also, Enab Baladi, *Syria Awaits a Political Parties Law*, 10 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/apca8u6f>.

former government.²²⁵ Several exiled journalists and media outlets have returned to Syria, and new independent media outlets have begun operating.²²⁶ Remaining risks stem mainly from non-State actors and localized insecurity.²²⁷ The authorities have occasionally restricted access to conflict areas, citing “safety concerns”, and briefly detained journalists without a clear legal basis.²²⁸ According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), these incidents appear to be isolated rather than part of a systematic campaign.²²⁹ Women journalists and journalists from minority communities are reported to remain particularly vulnerable.²³⁰ The absence of a new media law leaves journalists and other media workers without legal protections against political pressure,²³¹ while access to information remains uneven and often depends on individual officials and weak institutional coordination.²³²

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- ²²⁵ Based on interviews with 20 journalists and press groups, the Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ) assessed that “conditions have dramatically improved. All media outlets are able to travel and report freely, including coverage critical of the government, though the foundations of genuine press freedom are not yet secure.” CPJ, *A Year After Assad’s Fall, Syrian Journalists Enjoy Freedom but also New Risks*, 5 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5y854a5w>.
- ²²⁶ Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF), *World Press Freedom Index 2025: Syria*, 3 May 2025, <https://rsf.org/en/country/syria>; Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, *After Assad: The Exiled Journalists Returning to Syria, and the Risks They’re Weighing*, 26 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3dr7m2ed>; Fadel Abdulghany and Kenneth Roth, “Assessing Syria’s Progress Since Assad”, *Opinio Juris*, 20 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4jnxaxur>; Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), *Journalists’ Perspectives on the Reality of Support and Protection Mechanisms Amidst the Future of Syrian Media*, September 2025, <https://bit.ly/3M9tCw2>, p. 10; Enab Baladi, *Enab Baladi Printed and Distributed in Damascus After over a Decade*, 6 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2s36kwje>.
- ²²⁷ “The country remains fractured as President Ahmed al-Sharaa’s government seeks to integrate multiple groups seeking regional autonomy. (...) Most media killings, injuries, detentions, and assaults since al-Assad’s ouster on December 8, 2024, stem from these political divisions, with violations often carried out by regional militias, rather than government forces, CPJ’s reporting found.” CPJ, *A Year After Assad’s Fall, Syrian Journalists Enjoy Freedom but also New Risks*, 5 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5y854a5w>. See also, RSF, *Seven Journalists Attacked in Syria: RSF Calls on the Authorities to Protect Reporters*, 6 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/46srbjx8>; RSF, *Deadly Clashes in Syria: Authorities Must Ensure Journalists’ Safety and the Public’s Right to Reliable Information*, 11 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3u3yab3w>.
- ²²⁸ HRW, *World Report 2026: Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.hrw.org/document/2136267.html; CPJ, *Journalists Detained, Barred in Syria as Government Regains Aleppo Areas*, 12 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5a42rk52>; International Federation of Journalists, *Syria: Journalists Should Not Be Prosecuted for Expressing their Opinions*, 16 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4wemsczc>; International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, *Syrian Authorities Arrest and Briefly Detain Prominent Activist as Country’s President Makes UN Debut*, 26 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mrxjif3ba>; The New Arab, *Syrian Journalist Noor Suleiman Released After Arrest in Damascus*, 30 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/435p4c6j>; The New Arab, *Journalist Freed in Syria After Brief Detention as Press Fears Grow*, 1 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ypydydapz>.
- ²²⁹ “CPJ said it has not documented any other systematic or widespread campaign of arrests targeting journalists by the new Syrian government. ‘However, there have been a few isolated incidents involving assaults or detentions by security personnel, which, in most cases, Syrian authorities have responded to and resolved promptly.’” The New Arab, *Journalist Freed in Syria After Brief Detention as Press Fears Grow*, 2 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ypydydapz>.
- ²³⁰ “The transitional period has brought a period of relative security and freedom for journalists in areas controlled by the group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) but the situation remains volatile, especially for reporters who are women or belong to the country’s religious minorities.” RSF, *World Press Freedom Index 2025: Syria*, 3 May 2025, <https://rsf.org/en/country/syria>. According to Hamzah Almustafa, Minister of Information: “Cases of harassment, editorial interference, and self-censorship have been reported by local journalists since the regime’s fall, particularly when covering sensitive political events like the incidents on the coast in March.” Levant24, *Press in the New Syria: Full of Challenges and Opportunities*, 3 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2uey8tn7>. “(...) concerns remained about restrictions on certain types of expression, particularly criticism of religious authorities or the transitional government itself.” Fadel Abdulghany and Kenneth Roth, “Assessing Syria’s Progress Since Assad”, *Opinio Juris*, 20 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4jnxaxur>. See also, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, *After Assad: The Exiled Journalists Returning to Syria, and the Risks They’re Weighing*, 26 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3dr7m2ed>.
- ²³¹ SCM, *Journalists’ Perspectives on the Reality of Support and Protection Mechanisms Amidst the Future of Syrian Media*, September 2025, <https://bit.ly/3M9tCw2>, p. 10.
- ²³² Enab Baladi, *Syria: The War for Information*, 4 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/t4bz5h3k>. “Despite formal guarantees, access to the media space remains uneven and heavily mediated by political considerations. Independent journalists and outlets report multiple barriers, including visa denials, surveillance, reported regional access restrictions, particularly in coastal areas, with cases of informal intimidation extending to smear campaigns. These patterns have contributed to fear and self-censorship.” Etana, *Study: Between Symbolism and Substance: Syria’s Transition at 6 Months*, July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3ad9mj2a>, p. 27. “Media freedoms meanwhile remain vulnerable to political or ideological pressures (...)” Syria in Transition, *Protecting the Space: Syria’s Civil Society Must Do More to Survive*, Issue 22, March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4ezjb4ua>.

7) Enforcement of Strict Islamic Norms

The Constitutional Declaration²³³ stipulates that the President must be Muslim and that Islamic jurisprudence is the “principal source of legislation”. It also guarantees freedom of belief, respects all “divine religions” and allows religious communities to follow their own family laws, while affirming equality for all citizens without discrimination based on religion or gender. However, a resolution of the potential tensions between these provisions has not yet been provided by means of legislation or through judicial review.²³⁴

Following the fall of the former government, various actors – including local authorities, individuals affiliated with security institutions, armed elements, and private actors – have attempted to promote or impose stricter interpretations of Islamic norms related to women’s dress, gender mixing, and the sale of alcohol.²³⁵ These efforts have been uneven and localized,²³⁶ and not reflective of broader State policy.²³⁷ In several

²³³ The Syria Report, *The Constitutional Declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic*, 14 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3n2574ma>.

²³⁴ Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Religious Freedom in Syria’s Post-Assad Transition*, 13 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/4pDLxZy>, pp. 1-2; UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, Annex III, sec. II, para. 2, p. 51; Reuters, *Syria Keeps Role for Islamic Law in 5-Year Transition*, 13 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mr3fjd8e>.

²³⁵ “Since February [2025], the Interior and Tourism ministries have ramped up enforcement of moral codes by security agents. These codes are not grounded in clearly defined laws but instead rely on the personal judgment of the agents, many of whom interpret ‘decency’ through the lens of strict religious doctrine. For example, several bars and restaurants serving alcohol have been attacked and shut down. Men have been detained for wearing shorts. Unmarried couples have been questioned for appearing in public together. Even swimming attire is now regulated by morality police affiliated with the tourism sector.” New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy, *The New Syrian Government: Turning a Page or Rewriting the Script?*, 4 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yjyke5jfc>. “The behavior of some religious extremists among the government’s rank and file fuels these concerns [over the imposition of an Islamist agenda]. Several Christians on the coast cited instances of harassment by soldiers for wearing a cross, or wounded fighters who refused to be treated by female nurses.” The Atlantic Council, *Dispatch from Syria’s Christian Strongholds: A New Government, a Full Political Spectrum*, 25 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/44wxcfsn>. “The Ministry of Justice has begun separating entry for men and women, plus there have been reports of men distributing flyers on buses and in Umayyad Mosque in Damascus asking women to wear full-faced veils. In Christian neighbourhoods in the capital, cars have been filmed driving through the streets with preachers advocating for Islam over loudspeakers. An order to shut down bars and restaurants in the old city’s Christian quarter was only revoked after a public outcry.” BBC, *Syrians Have More Freedom After Assad, but Could They Soon Lose It?*, 18 April 2025, www.bbc.com/news/articles/cr4nqe3724vo. See also, The Syria Report, *Discreet Attempts by Syrian Authorities to Increase Influence of Religion Face Opposition*, 17 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4em47x69>; The Guardian, *Syria Asks Women to Dress Modestly on Beaches But Says Bikinis Still Allowed*, 12 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yfhjfn52>.

²³⁶ “Misinformation and false claims on Facebook about new government policies rooted in Islamic law have all fueled a belief that Damascus will soon impose Sharia law upon the country.” The Atlantic Council, *Dispatch from Syria’s Christian Strongholds: A New Government, a Full Political Spectrum*, 25 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/44wxcfsn>. See also, The Syria Report, *Discreet Attempts by Syrian Authorities to Increase Influence of Religion Face Opposition*, 17 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4em47x69>.

²³⁷ “Over the past year, reports have emerged of security personnel enforcing gender segregation on public buses or in public spaces in some areas. These actions are not grounded in law, nor clearly mandated by official policy.” Al Majalla, *The Latakia Makeup Ban Is a Bad Omen for Syria*, 7 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdhnva2>. “(...) the new authorities, despite being former jihadis, have not imposed a hard-line Islamist agenda.” Foreign Affairs, *Trouble Is Brewing in Syria: Sustaining the Country’s Progress Requires a More Inclusive Transition*, 4 February 2026, www.foreignaffairs.com/syria/trouble-brewing-syria. Syria has seen “no coercive imposition of a fundamentalist vision of Sunni Islam – compulsory veiling for women, bans on the worship of other faiths and so on – as the Taliban have done in Afghanistan.” According to ISPI, this stance has been maintained despite the risk of alienating more extremist groups opposed to Al-Sharaa’s pragmatism. ISPI, *Country to Watch in 2026: Syria*, 24 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/42ctu4sw>. “While the new authorities have refrained from imposing an Islamist agenda, as some feared, many Syrians feel that they are falling short of creating an inclusive political order.” ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. 2.

instances, public backlash has resulted in such measures being withdrawn, not implemented, or reframed as non-binding “advice”.²³⁸

Although instances of harassment and abuse have been reported,²³⁹ social life in many areas remains largely unchanged.²⁴⁰ Nevertheless, observers warn that the cumulative effect of these infringements on personal freedoms risks “creating an environment in which personal freedoms are shaped by discretionary power rather than law.”²⁴¹ Segments of society – particularly women, secular-minded Syrians and members of religious minorities – have reported heightened insecurity and have adapted to more conservative behaviours in response.²⁴²

²³⁸ On 26 January 2026, the Governor of Latakia issued a decision to ban makeup for female employees in public institutions. The ban drew public criticism, following which authorities clarified that the ban was not restricting personal freedom, but about “regulating professional appearance”. However, the ban remained in place. Al Majalla, *The Latakia Makeup Ban Is a Bad Omen for Syria*, 7 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdhnva2>. “On 22 May 2025, the Damascus governorate launched a broader campaign targeting liquor shops and bars across predominantly Christian neighbourhoods like Qassaa and Bab Touma. While the stated reason was expired or missing commercial licences, the timing, immediately after Eid al-Fitr, raised concerns about selective enforcement and political signalling. The campaign was suspended after public criticism, again highlighting the fragility of enforcement policies.” And further: “Instances of gender segregation have also surfaced, most visibly in April 2025 when Al-Muwasat Hospital in Damascus mandated separate seating for women on staff transport, prompting backlash and a subsequent policy reversal.” Etana, *Study: Between Symbolism and Substance: Syria’s Transition at 6 Months*, July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3ad9mj2a>, pp. 7, 26. In June 2025, a Government directive advising women to wear modest swimwear at public beaches triggered a public backlash, after which authorities clarified that the directive was mere guidance and carried no legal penalties. The Guardian, *Syria Asks Women to Dress Modestly on Beaches But Says Bikinis Still Allowed*, 12 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yfhjfn52>. See also, The Guardian, *From Tourism to Wine, Syrian Businesses Flounder in Post-Assad Cultural Flux*, 5 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/88efu2y4>; New York Times, *Clashing Visions of Syria’s Future Play Out in Ancient Alleys of Damascus*, 11 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5eh4wup9>; The Syria Report, *Discreet Attempts by Syrian Authorities to Increase Influence of Religion Face Opposition*, 17 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4em47x69>; NPR, *What Happened When Syria’s Conservative New Leaders Tried to Shut 60 Damascus Bars*, 31 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4ea4n7se>.

²³⁹ “In May [2025], masked gunmen burst into al-Karawan, a famous cabaret [in Damascus]. They killed a woman in the audience and wounded several others, witnesses and a police officer said. That came several days after armed men attacked a nearby nightclub, Layali al-Sharq. On security camera footage that was widely circulated on social media, gunmen menaced and hit fleeing clubgoers.” Despite reassurances from the district police commander, “bars and clubs were shuttering pre-emptively. Others have stopped selling or displaying alcohol, managers and patrons said.” New York Times, *Clashing Visions of Syria’s Future Play Out in Ancient Alleys of Damascus*, 11 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5eh4wup9>. In March 2025, SNHR recorded the arrest of “individuals accused of blasphemy/publicly breaking the fast during Ramadan”, mostly in the City of Hama. SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria*, 4 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/54zxzwt2>, p. 10. See also, STJ, *Torture Persists: Testimonies and Indicators Reveal Alarming Incidents in Post-Assad Syria*, 26 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2dnwbrmb>.

²⁴⁰ “Though the new government has refrained from imposing hard-and-fast restrictions on social freedoms, the abrupt empowerment of hard-liners and the increasingly conservative atmosphere have made liberals curb their behavior, fearing what may come next.” New York Times, *Clashing Visions of Syria’s Future Play Out in Ancient Alleys of Damascus*, 11 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5eh4wup9>. “As for religious freedoms, there have been no new laws or rulings restricting social life, but some Syrians report that they have seen what appear to be attempts to enforce Islamic rule.” BBC, *Syrians Have More Freedom After Assad, but Could They Soon Lose It?*, 18 April 2025, www.bbc.com/news/articles/cr4nqe3724vo. For example, in the Christian town of Suqaylabiyah (Hama Governorate), “The town’s main commercial street remains open well after midnight with young people sitting at cafes, drinking tea and alcohol.” The Atlantic Council, *Dispatch from Syria’s Christian Strongholds: A New Government, a Full Political Spectrum*, 25 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/44wxcfsn>. See also, Middle East Forum, *A Field Report from Afrin: Assessing the Prospects for Return of Displaced Kurds*, 30 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4krsaxjf>; Reuters, *Dancing in Damascus: Syrians Cling to Culture Under Islamists’ Rule*, 22 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y63ycnfj>.

²⁴¹ “Individually, each of these developments can be dismissed as limited or exceptional. Taken together, they form a worrying pattern. Appearance, dress, and gendered behaviour are increasingly treated as matters for regulation, justified through elastic concepts such as professionalism, morality, or social order. Once normalised, such justifications can be easily expanded and applied far more widely.” Al Majalla, *The Latakia Makeup Ban Is a Bad Omen for Syria*, 8 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdhnva2>.

²⁴² “The new authorities have not issued any laws that limit alcohol, music or gender mixing. It has not mandated that women wear head scarves or curbed their rights. Yet an atmosphere of religious conservatism has gusted over Damascus, according to many residents. (...) Some secular and non-Muslim women feel pressure to dress more modestly. At security checkpoints, they say they have faced intrusive questions if they are driving with men to whom they are not related.” New York Times, *Clashing Visions of Syria’s Future Play Out in Ancient Alleys of Damascus*, 11 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5eh4wup9>. See also, AFP, *Damascus Club Shooting Sparks Fears of Restriction on Freedoms*, 5 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/tykykf8t>.

8) Freedom of Movement

Freedom of movement has generally improved but continues to depend on individual profiles, geographic location, and local security conditions. Intermittent hostilities, sectarian tensions, reprisal acts, and criminality restrict mobility. Members of minority communities – such as Alawites, Druze, Kurds and Bedouins – face heightened risks when travelling in areas where they constitute a minority or where communal tensions are high.²⁴³ Individuals associated, or perceived to be associated, with the former government often limit their movements due to fear of arrest or reprisals.²⁴⁴ Security measures such as checkpoints and temporary curfews further restrict movement.²⁴⁵

In areas under the de facto control of the SDF, men of military age frequently restrict their movements to avoid forced recruitment into the mandatory “self-defence service”.²⁴⁶

Movement is also constrained by checkpoints in areas under Israeli military presence.²⁴⁷

Women across the country face additional constraints linked to insecurity and discriminatory social norms.²⁴⁸ Women and girls from minority communities – especially Alawites – are restricting their movements due to heightened fears of kidnapping.²⁴⁹

²⁴³ An assessment conducted by the Protection Cluster for North-West Syria found that 89% of respondents from minority groups reported facing restrictions on their freedom of movement: “These restrictions may stem from checkpoints, security threats, or discriminatory policies. They significantly impact minorities’ ability to flee danger, access services, seek livelihoods, or reunite with family members, exacerbating their vulnerability and isolation.” NWS Protection Cluster, *Minorities Protection Barriers Assessment*, May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4jdeu8pu>, p. 15. According to STJ, “(...) checkpoints in rural Latakia, Homs, and Tartous turned into traps for enforced disappearance, where civilians were stopped in broad daylight, and security bodies either denied their detention or provided contradictory accounts of their fate.” And further: “Disappearances at checkpoints starkly illustrate the fragility of the right to freedom of movement and personal security, turning daily life into an experience fraught with fear and uncertainty.” STJ, *Living Between Hope and Fear: Testimonies Documenting the Persistence of Enforced Disappearance in Post-Assad Syria*, 29 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ba3jxhek>, pp. 3, 7. See also, ETANA, *Study: Refugee Returns & Migration Dynamics After Assad*, June 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2126769.html, p. 36.

²⁴⁴ Those who only hold military ID cards issued by the former government or temporary *taswiya* cards can easily be identified as having been affiliated with the former government’s army or security apparatus, which may expose them to ill-treatment and arrest. ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. 11; Syria Direct, *Assad’s Former Fighters Underground as Demobilization Stalls*, 7 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4zwhs6up>.

²⁴⁵ “Procedures at the checkpoints vary widely, with the guards’ conduct ranging from respectful to near predatory.” ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. 37. In areas with a Da’esh presence, checkpoints are a regular target for attacks. The National, *Four Killed in ‘ISIS Attack’ on Syrian Police Checkpoint*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3uamtawk>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: February 17-24, 2026*, 24 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/294a9pky>; Hawar News Agency, *18 ISIS Attacks Recorded in North and East Syria in October*, 3 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/wzzdvwsn>.

²⁴⁶ See Section III.A.2 (“Individuals Opposing, or Perceived to Be Opposing, the SDF in Areas Under Its De Facto Control”).

²⁴⁷ Israeli “incursions typically involve armored patrols through populated areas, followed by the establishment of temporary checkpoints on main roads, where all passing Syrian civilians are stopped, searched, questioned, and have their phones examined. In some cases, biometric data is also collected.” Karam Shaar Advisory, *Israel’s Expanding Military Footprint in Syria: One Year On*, 26 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2fjvn3x2>. See also, Enab Baladi, *Israeli Army Detains Four Civilians in Quneitra*, 8 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mu8j4a2x>; Al Jazeera, *Israel Launches New Raids in Syria’s Quneitra, Establishes Checkpoints*, 20 December 2025, <https://aje.io/clyf0e>.

²⁴⁸ “Women and girls in Syria face extremely limited freedom of movement, which is linked directly to oppressive and discriminatory social norms, as well as ongoing and escalating insecurity. (...) Restrictions on the movement and expression of women and girls are closely connected with gendered social norms related to shame, control and perceived ‘protection’.” UNFPA, *Voices from Syria*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, pp. 24-25. See also, UNFPA, *An Overview of Gender-Based Violence in Syria*, 23 June 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2131303.html, p. 7. See also Section III.A.6.d (“Women and Girls: Kidnappings”).

²⁴⁹ See also Sections III.A.1 (“Members of Minority Religious and Ethnic Groups”) and III.A.6.d (“Women and Girls: Kidnappings”).

Millions of travel bans imposed by the former government on alleged opponents, deserters and draft evaders have been lifted or are in the process of being lifted.²⁵⁰ Individuals whose names have not yet been cleared may continue to face restrictions on their freedom of movement.²⁵¹

9) Conclusion on the Availability of State Protection

In light of the available information presented in this chapter regarding continued human rights violations and abuses committed by various actors, including members of the Government security forces, persistent gaps in the judiciary, as well as shortcomings in establishing law and order and enforcing discipline among groups formally integrated into the security forces, UNHCR does not consider the Government capable of providing protection to Syrians and former habitual residents at risk of persecution by non-State actors, including societal forms of persecution at the hands of family members and other community actors.

D. Socio-Economic and Humanitarian Situation

1) Humanitarian Overview

Humanitarian conditions remain dire,²⁵² with Syria being one of the largest humanitarian emergencies globally.²⁵³ An estimated 90 per cent of the population lives in poverty and two-thirds – approximately 16.5 million people – require humanitarian assistance.²⁵⁴ Intermittent violence and new displacement have further increased needs, exacerbated widespread economic hardship and deepened existing vulnerabilities.²⁵⁵ Female-headed households and displaced families are particularly vulnerable.²⁵⁶ According to the 2025 Food Security Assessment, 13.3 million Syrians

²⁵⁰ “Syrian Interior Minister Anas Khattab said last June [2025] that the ministry had canceled most of the security wanted lists, leaving only those pursued for judicial and criminal reasons. He noted that nearly one-third of Syria’s population had once been wanted by branches of the former regime’s security apparatus.” Enab Baladi, *Syrian Justice Ministry Lifts Millions of Travel-Ban Notices on Syrians*, 3 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/muvxt3h7>. See also, Enab Baladi, *Syrian Interior Ministry Removes Five Million Names from Travel Ban Lists*, 20 November 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/ypa75h4k>.

²⁵¹ STJ, *Syria: Testimonies Reveal the Continued Restriction of the Right to Movement Despite the Decision to Lift Travel Bans*, 25 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yzfam4zz>.

²⁵² UN News, *Syria Transition Gains Ground with Kurdish Deal, But Violence and Humanitarian Strain Persist*, 13 February 2026, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/02/1166961>; UN News, *Top Syria Envoy: Humanitarian Situation Is ‘Extremely Serious’*, 19 November 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/11/1166404>.

²⁵³ UN News, *Fragile Progress in Syria, at Risk from Exclusion and Foreign Interference, UN Warns*, 18 September 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/09/1165874>. See also, UNICEF, *Syrian Arab Republic Appeal*, 10 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2a28rdnb>.

²⁵⁴ UNHCR, *Operational Update: Syria – January 2026*, 26 February 2026, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/121289>, p. 1. “(...) about one in four people in Syria is unemployed and nine out of ten live in poverty.” UNDP, *From Crisis to Recovery: Securing Peace and Stability in Syria and Beyond*, 24 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5n837s5m>. “(...) reliance on humanitarian aid has increased, though it remains insufficient to meet the needs of all vulnerable groups.” UNDP, *The Impact of the Conflict in Syria: A Devastated Economy, Pervasive Poverty and a Challenging Road Ahead to Social and Economic Recovery*, 19 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ae8abm7m>, p. 31. See also, UNICEF, *Syrian Arab Republic Appeal*, 10 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2a28rdnb>, pp. 1-2.

²⁵⁵ OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Overview, Issue No. 2, November 2025*, 23 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/3Ned9a9> (hereafter: OCHA, *Humanitarian Overview: November 2025*, 23 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/3Ned9a9>), p. 2.

²⁵⁶ World Bank, *Syria: Macro-Fiscal Assessment*, June 2025, <https://bit.ly/4rBaL8>, p. 8. “Women-headed households—often widows, wives of the missing or those who returned without their husbands—struggle to meet basic needs, facing economic exclusion, stigma, increased GBV risks, legal and HLP constraints, exploitation and abuse.” Protection Cluster / UNHCR, *Protection Landscape in Syria: A Snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2123726.html, p. 5.

are food insecure.²⁵⁷ Maternal malnutrition and acute malnutrition among children under the age of five are at critical levels.²⁵⁸

a) Economic conditions and labour market

Labour force participation remains low and unemployment high, especially among women and youth.²⁵⁹ Public-sector salary increases in June 2025²⁶⁰ did not keep pace with rising living costs: as of December 2025, the monthly minimum wage covered only one-third of households' essential needs and 52 per cent of food requirements,²⁶¹ leaving many unable to meet basic needs.²⁶² These pressures have been compounded by the gradual removal of State subsidies – including for fuel, cooking gas, and public transport²⁶³ – as well as increases in bread prices and electricity tariffs

²⁵⁷ Of these, 7.2 million are acutely food insecure, including 0.7 million severely food insecure. Syria Food Security Cluster, *Interactive Response Dashboard 2026*, updated March 2026, <https://fscluster.org/syria>. See also, WFP, *WFP Syria External Situation Report: December 2025*, 28 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdbbjuf2>, p. 1; Foreign Affairs, *What Syrians Want: New Survey Data Shows the Promises and Perils Facing the Country's New Government*, 5 December 2025, www.foreignaffairs.com/syria/what-syrians-want; Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), *Syrian Arab Republic: Emergency and Resilience Plan 2026-2028*, 2 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/56we7fs2>, p. 2.

²⁵⁸ "Acute malnutrition affects more than 600 000 children under 5 years of age. Pregnant and lactating women are also affected, with many facing elevated nutritional risks" FAO, *Syrian Arab Republic: Emergency and Resilience Plan 2026-2028*, 2 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/56we7fs2>, p. 3. Child malnutrition in Syria has sharply worsened since 2019, with rates nearly tripling nationally and exceeding emergency thresholds in several governorates, reaching 14% in coastal areas. Furthermore, malnutrition among pregnant and breastfeeding women averages 7%, reaching 19% in some areas. WFP, *Nourishing Syria's Future: How WFP Is Rethinking Nutrition for a Generation Born into Conflict*, 18 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/kfjb3rkc>.

²⁵⁹ "Syria is characterised by low levels of labour force participation (caused by exceptionally low participation for women) and high unemployment rates. The labour force participation rate of 37.9 per cent in 2024, was estimated at 62.8 per cent for men, and 13.3 per cent for women (...). The unemployment rate was also elevated at 13 per cent in 2024, of which the rate was 24.7 per cent for women and 31.5 per cent for youth." [In the absence of recent labour market data, estimates are based on modelled projections.] International Labour Organization (ILO), *Syrian Arab Republic: The Employment, Environment, Climate Nexus Factsheet*, August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3tzm8827>, p. 2. See also, Enab Baladi, *Aleppo Youth Fall Victim to Exploitation in Private Sector*, 24 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mrxsharh>.

²⁶⁰ "Under the decree, the minimum wage for government employees was raised to (...) around \$75, up from around \$25." The Arab Weekly, *Syria Announces Increase in Pensions, Public Sector Wages*, 23 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yck65mu6>. "Although the authorities raised public-sector salaries and pensions by 200% in July 2025 (...) the average cost of living for a family of five in Damascus was estimated at around 11.6 million pounds (\$983). Large segments of society survive and rely on remittances from relatives abroad, which is currently estimated to be over \$4 billion annually." The New Arab, *Syria New Electricity Tariffs Are Cruel Neoliberal Shock Therapy*, 30 January 2026, <https://bit.ly/3NTFoeE>.

²⁶¹ WFP, *Monthly Market Price Bulletin: Syria – Issue #132*, December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3e5cxrw6>, p. 4. "The lifting of subsidies on bread, electricity, and telecommunications (...) further erodes the already weak purchasing power of households." The Syria Report, *Transition Year: Despite Positive Developments, Many Challenges Remain Across Syria's Economic and Political Scenes*, 10 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4tauhOx>.

²⁶² OCHA, *Humanitarian Overview: November 2025*, 23 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/3Ned9a9>, p. 4. See also, UNDP, *From Crisis to Recovery: Securing Peace and Stability in Syria and Beyond*, 24 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5n837s5m>; Foreign Affairs, *What Syrians Want: New Survey Data Shows the Promises and Perils Facing the Country's New Government*, 5 December 2025, www.foreignaffairs.com/syria/what-syrians-want; TIMEP, *Economy at a Crossroads: The Social Protection Challenge in Syria*, 1 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mwufmpah>; Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), *From Ruins to Renewal: How Can Syria Rebuild After 14 Years of War?*, 26 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2cus2xfy>.

²⁶³ "As of 8 December 2024, only bread, fuel, public transport, housing gas, and electricity continued to receive subsidies. After the Assad regime's sudden collapse, the remaining elements of the subsidy system began to be dismantled." Karam Shaar Advisory, *Rethinking Subsidies in the Post-Assad Era*, 28 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2whme77d>.

announced in October 2025,²⁶⁴ despite continued and prolonged power cuts.²⁶⁵ These measures pushed large segments of the population into deeper destitution²⁶⁶ and triggered public protests.²⁶⁷ The resulting rise in prices is expected to further accelerate inflation, exacerbating already high living costs.²⁶⁸

b) Infrastructure, basic services, and pressure on systems

Fourteen years of conflict have severely damaged critical infrastructure, housing, and basic services.²⁶⁹ Despite ongoing efforts to restore electricity, water and other essential services, major gaps remain,²⁷⁰ including in areas not directly affected by fighting, where neglect and underinvestment have led to further deterioration.²⁷¹

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), by late 2025 only 59 per cent of hospitals and 31 per cent of primary healthcare centres were fully functional, leaving

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- ²⁶⁴ "In October [2025], Syria's energy ministry hiked prices by up to 6,000 percent (...)." AFP, *Syrians Decry Soaring Electricity Prices*, 30 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3zfbxbjt>. "The tariffs increased from an average of 10,000-50,000 Syrian pounds (around \$0.85 – \$4), to bills ranging from 600,000 to over 2 million pounds (\$50-\$169). Some families even saw their bills reach between 5-6 million pounds (\$423-\$508)." The New Arab, *Syria New Electricity Tariffs Are Cruel Neoliberal Shock Therapy*, 30 January 2026, <https://bit.ly/3NTFoeE>. "(...) the government raised the price of subsidized bread to 4,000 Syrian pounds and commercial bread to 6,000, while reducing the number of loaves per bundle." Al Hal, translated by the Syrian Observer, *Engineering Poverty in Syria: Soaring Electricity Prices and the Illusion of Government Reform*, 27 January 2026, <https://bit.ly/4atwU6z>.
- ²⁶⁵ "(...) the new Syrian authorities have repeatedly vowed to increase electricity production in a country where power cuts can last up to 20 hours a day. (...) However, citizens have yet to feel noticeable changes in their living conditions. Damascus residents now receive up to six hours of state-provided electricity daily, but those outside the capital remain mostly in the dark." AFP, *Syrians Decry Soaring Electricity Prices*, 30 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3zfbxbjt>. See also, Enab Baladi, *Soaring Electricity Bills: Power Costs Squeeze Syrians and Test the New Government*, 8 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3rzwzfrb>; The New Arab, *Syria's 'Three-Phase Plan' to Address Country's Debilitating Electricity Crisis*, 21 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/9fyejzwn>.
- ²⁶⁶ "(...) with most of Syria's population living below the poverty line and the minimum wage at around \$75, many have found themselves unable to pay the new tariffs." AFP, *Syrians Decry Soaring Electricity Prices*, 30 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3zfbxbjt>.
- ²⁶⁷ Enab Baladi, *Soaring Electricity Bills: Power Costs Squeeze Syrians and Test the New Government*, 8 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3rzwzfrb>; The New Arab, *Syria New Electricity Tariffs Are Cruel Neoliberal Shock Therapy*, 30 January 2026, <https://bit.ly/3NTFoeE>; AFP, *Syrians Decry Soaring Electricity Prices*, 30 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3zfbxbjt>.
- ²⁶⁸ The New Arab, *Syria New Electricity Tariffs Are Cruel Neoliberal Shock Therapy*, 30 January 2026, <https://bit.ly/3NTFoeE>; WFP, *Monthly Market Price Bulletin: Syria – Issue #130*, October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yuaacu97>, p. 2.
- ²⁶⁹ "In total, nearly one-third of Syria's housing stock – 1.3 million units – has been either entirely destroyed or severely damaged, a staggering figure when compared to the country's estimated 4.5 million families. This widespread destruction, coupled with large-scale displacement, rising housing costs, and restricted access to essential housing, land and property (HLP) documentation, has fuelled the growth of informal settlements. These now account for more than 60% of urban housing, where living conditions are often dire, with limited access to basic services such as clean water, sanitation, and electricity. UNDP, *The Impact of the Conflict in Syria: A Devastated Economy, Pervasive Poverty and a Challenging Road ahead to Social and Economic Recovery*, 19 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ae8abm7m>, pp. 38-39. "The state of the water and sanitation infrastructure – from water pipe networks, sewage treatment plants to septic tanks – is dire. Around 70 percent of the raw sewage is not treated, some remote villages receive water just two hours per month, and in some areas water facilities are working only at 40 percent of their capacity." The Syria Report, *Water and Sanitation Infrastructure Repair Bill at USD 10 Billion*, 15 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/35bfykr3>. See also, MSF, *What Does Syria Look like a Year Since the Fall of Assad?*, 11 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4taMhs9>.
- ²⁷⁰ "Syria has experienced massive destruction and damage to homes and basic infrastructure, including water and power stations, fuel plants, medical facilities, and farmland, which are continuing to disrupt essential services, limiting access to water, electricity, and healthcare across many parts of the country." UNHCR, *Coming Home: One Year into Syria's Transition*, 11 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134205.html, p. 6. "Syria is facing an acute water crisis. Years of war and conflict have severely damaged the country's water and sanitation infrastructure: two-thirds of water treatment plants, half of pumping stations, and one-third of water towers are no longer functioning properly, according to UNICEF. (...) Poor water treatment, contamination from damaged sewage systems, and inadequate chlorination all increase the risk of waterborne diseases and outbreaks." MSF, *What Does Syria Look like a Year Since the Fall of Assad?*, 11 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/4taMhs9>. See also, UNICEF, *Syrian Arab Republic Appeal*, 10 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2a28rdnb>, p. 2.
- ²⁷¹ OCHA, *Briefing to the Security Council on the Humanitarian Situation in Syria by Ms. Edem Wosornu, Director, Crisis Response Division*, OCHA, on Behalf of Tom Fletcher, USG and Emergency Relief Coordinator, 22 January 2026, <https://bit.ly/3ZMwz8V>, (hereafter: OCHA, *Briefing to the Security Council on the Humanitarian Situation in Syria*, 22 January 2026, <https://bit.ly/3ZMwz8V>), p. 4.

7.4 million people with limited access to essential medicines and treatment.²⁷² The education sector faces similar strains: 40 per cent of schools are non-operational, 2.5 million children remain out of school, and an additional 1.6 million are at risk of dropping out.²⁷³

Large-scale returns of internally displaced persons and refugees have placed substantial additional pressure on Syria's already fragile labour market and overstretched housing sector, and have severely weakened basic infrastructure and services.²⁷⁴ With nearly two million homes damaged or destroyed²⁷⁵ and basic services functioning at minimal capacity, these return movements have driven up housing costs,²⁷⁶ strained schools,²⁷⁷ placed additional pressure on health facilities, and intensified demand for scarce jobs.²⁷⁸ The education system also faces the additional challenge of integrating returning students who have been educated abroad under different curricula and in different languages, and who may experience

²⁷² World Health Organization (WHO), *Health Resources and Services Availability Monitoring System (HeRAMS): Public Hospitals (2021–2025) and Primary Health Care Centers (2021–2025)*, accessed 19 March 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/54uwwb6h>. "The Ministry of Health recently estimated that 30 percent of the country's hospitals have been destroyed during the conflict, and warned that shortages of medical equipment and medications are acute." The Syria Report, *Funding in the Health Sector Continues to Lag*, 10 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5n76whjh>. See also, Enab Baladi, *Syrian Health Ministry Launches National Strategic Plan*, 16 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/56v29b52>; Enab Baladi, *Awaiting Recovery: Syria's Health Sector Traps Patients*, 3 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yp2pjcf>; OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Overview, Issue No. 1, October 2025*, 20 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/3KtJybu>, p. 4.

²⁷³ OCHA, *Humanitarian Overview: November 2025*, 23 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/3Ned9a9>, pp. 1, 5. UNICEF, *Syrian Arab Republic Appeal*, 10 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2a28rdnb>, p. 2; Inter Press Service, *They Have Known Nothing but War: The Plight of Syria's Out-of-School Children*, 16 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5n62k24a>; UNICEF, *A New Chapter for Education in Syria: Back-to-Learning Campaign Presents New Opportunities to Millions of Students in Syria*, 21 September 2025, <https://bit.ly/4iw5Fuw>.

²⁷⁴ "The voluntary return of some refugees, while a welcome sign of confidence in the new government, creates additional economic pressures on housing, employment, and services." Fadel Abdulghany and Kenneth Roth, "Assessing Syria's Progress Since Assad", *Opinio Juris*, 20 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4jnxaxur>. Returnees "are resettling in areas where basic services are already overstretched, minimal, or severely damaged." UNICEF, *Syrian Arab Republic Appeal*, 10 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2a28rdnb>, p. 1. "(...) the primary driver of needs in 2025 is no longer conflict intensity, but the scale and speed of population return. Over one million people have returned home since December 2024, placing immense pressure on already weakened services and infrastructure." Action for Humanity, *Returning to Hope: One Year After the Liberation*, 8 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yz6c3zms>, p. 26.

²⁷⁵ "(...) the number of homes destroyed fully or partially in Syria is nearing two million, including 375,000 completely destroyed homes and more than 1.5 million partially damaged homes." Enab Baladi, *A Long Road to Tearing Down Syria's Last Tent*, 22 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/9eucj3tb>.

²⁷⁶ "(...) even the limited number of returns that have already taken place are reported to have created significant pressures: rising rents, increased food prices and mounting strain on essential services. In Damascus and Aleppo in particular, housing costs have surged due to the return of IDPs and refugees, while the destruction in Rif Dimashq has pushed many returning displaced families into the capital, intensifying demand even further." BICC, *Observations from a Visit to Syria: Reconstruction, Social Fragmentation, and the Limits of Return Discussions*, 8 December 2025, <https://bicc.de/Cosmos/Peacebits/Syria>. See also, Enab Baladi, *Collapse-Risk Buildings, Darayya's Activity Grows amid Structural Dangers and Lack of Planning*, 17 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/48ndcwv8>; The Syria Report, *Nashabiya Residents Left to their own Devices to Repair War-Damaged Homes*, 10 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5336asch>; The Syria Report, *Deir-ez-Zor Housing Crisis Worsens amid Lack of Reconstruction*, 10 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3428v3b3>; Enab Baladi, *Azmat al-Sakan fi Hama: Kabus Yarfa' al-Ijarat wa Yu 'iq al-'Awda*, 1 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5n6423ty>; OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Overview, Issue No. 1, October 2025*, 20 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/3KtJybu>, p. 6; The Syria Report, *Rental Prices in Aleppo Soar Following Return of Refugees*, 7 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/37rpp5dz>.

²⁷⁷ "Enab Baladi documented a shortage of classroom desks in schools across several Syrian provinces (...). In Daraa, our correspondent said the province faces a desk crisis for several reasons, including the return of displaced people who had been in Jordan and Turkey to their hometowns and villages, as well as the absence of any new school construction in Daraa for the past 11 years". Enab Baladi, *Tens of Thousands of Students Sit on the Floor in Syria*, 1 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4uawrf9d>.

²⁷⁸ "The expected accelerated return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes has intensified pressures on already fragile labour markets and social protection systems (...)." ILO, *Syria: Promoting Decent Work in Time of Transition*, 15 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/33y7u4kn>, p. 1. "Job creation is Syria's most urgent economic priority. Years of displacement, asset loss, and labour market disruption have left millions without a stable income. At the same time, a growing number of young Syrians are entering the labour market." UNDP, *Syria's Economy After the 2024 Transition: Jobs, Enterprise, and a Path Forward*, 25 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/cvvnb57>. See also, Syria in Transition, *Young, Motivated, Struggling: Syria's Returning Workforce Faces a Broken Labour Market*, Issue 30, December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yw23kp3>.

significant psychological stress linked to abrupt changes in their living and learning environments.²⁷⁹

2) Conditions in IDP Camps and Sites

Living conditions for the over 1.08 million IDPs living in IDP camps and sites (out of 5.5 million IDPs in total) remain particularly dire, with 709 sites classified as being in “severe or catastrophic conditions” and ill-prepared for harsh climatic conditions.²⁸⁰ Humanitarian funding shortfalls have significantly reduced the provision of basic services and humanitarian assistance,²⁸¹ while winter storms and other natural disasters have further exacerbated vulnerabilities.²⁸²

3) Disruptions due to Insecurity

Sporadic armed hostilities in different parts of the country continue to disrupt access to water, electricity, health and education, as well as freedom of movement and humanitarian access.²⁸³ In Suweida Governorate, which remains largely outside Government control, trade disruptions and movement restrictions impede basic service delivery, leaving many residents dependent on humanitarian assistance.²⁸⁴ In late January 2026, a first convoy of humanitarian aid reached the isolated city of Kobane, which saw a large influx of people fleeing clashes between the Syrian army

²⁷⁹ “Many returnee children experience social anxiety, fear of bullying, and academic frustration due to unfamiliar curricula and teaching methods. Experts warn that these psychological shocks may be more damaging than academic gaps themselves, threatening to push students out of the school system entirely. (...) To date, the Ministry of Education has not issued any clear policy regarding returnee students. There are no official programs to address their specific needs.” Noon Post, *Going Back to School Has Become an Added Challenge for Syrian Children*, 23 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4hrzu965>. See also, Qantara, *Returning Pupils Face Language Barrier*, 16 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/53j3sm83>; Enab Baladi, *Returning Syrian Students Struggle with Education Gaps*, 29 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/38v7f9zj>; The New Arab, *Syrian Children Returning to Post-Assad Syria Face Major Struggles with Arabic in Education After Years of Exile*, 14 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y4awa7ty>; Enab Baladi, *Challenges Hinder Integration of Syrian Students Returning from Turkey*, 5 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ztvek82u>.

²⁸⁰ UNHCR, *Syrian Arab Republic: Comprehensive Overview of IDPs and IDP Returns Dashboard*, 26 February 2026, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/121292>; OCHA, *Humanitarian Overview: November 2025*, 23 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/3Ned9a9>, p. 3. See also, UN News, *Syria Transition Gains Ground with Kurdish Deal, but Violence and Humanitarian Strain Persist*, 13 February 2026, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/02/1166961>; Roya News, *Two Children Die as Floods Devastate Northwest Syria Camps*, 8 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/ysswpsny>; Rozana, *One Year On, Assad Is Gone: But Syria's Displaced Are Still Living in Limbo*, 5 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3yd554ts>.

²⁸¹ OCHA, *Humanitarian Overview: November 2025*, 23 December 2025, <https://bit.ly/3Ned9a9>, p. 3.

²⁸² “Heavy snowstorms and extreme cold in northern areas have affected nearly 160,000 people living in camps, damaging shelters and contributing to the deaths of two infants. (...) Syria is still reeling from the impact of drought-like conditions, which damaged 70 per cent of the last wheat harvest. While increased rainfall has helped to restore water levels in some areas, it has also flooded and damaged land across several governorates.” OCHA, *Briefing to the Security Council on the Humanitarian Situation in Syria*, 22 January 2026, <https://bit.ly/3ZMwz8V>, p. 3. See also, Enab Baladi, *Snow Worsens the Suffering of Residents in Northern Syria's Camps*, 2 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/46vwyk6f>.

²⁸³ For example, hostilities in north and northeast Syria in January 2026 have “cut people off from clean water, some hospitals have been forced to close, and many children cannot attend school. The closure of the main artery between Homs and Ar Raqqa and damaged bridges – along with explosive ordnance – have affected humanitarians’ ability to deliver aid.” OCHA, *Briefing to the Security Council on the Humanitarian Situation in Syria*, 22 January 2026, <https://bit.ly/3ZMwz8V>, pp. 1-2. See also, OCHA, *Humanitarian Overview: December 2025*, 3 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3c77rwwp>, p. 4; North Press Agency (NPA), *Thousands of Students out of Class as Kobani Schools Become IDP Shelters*, 8 February 2026, <https://npasyria.com/en/135411>; OCHA, *Flash Update No. 1: Recent Developments in Ar-Raqqa, Deir-ez-Zor and Al-Hasakeh*, 19 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdfj24>.

²⁸⁴ “Five months after the escalation of hostilities in As-Sweida Governorate, the humanitarian needs and impact remain significant, with civilians continuing to bear the brunt of the crisis.” Conflict and disrupted supply chains have driven up food and fuel prices. OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response in Southern Syria - Situation Report No. 4 (as of 14 December 2025)*, 15 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/52cjupe4>, p. 2. See also, OCHA, *Briefing to the Security Council on the Humanitarian Situation in Syria*, 22 January 2026, <https://bit.ly/3ZMwz8V>, pp. 2-3; Etana, *Brief: Uneasy Calm in Suwayda*, 23 October 2025, <https://etanasyria.org/brief-uneasy-calm-in-suwayda>.

and the SDF, but as of late February 2026, humanitarian needs outstripped aid deliveries.²⁸⁵

4) Humanitarian Access

Humanitarian access improved toward the end of 2025 and is considered “broadly feasible”, with the Government granting blanket approvals for missions and shipments. Remaining constraints are localized and generally linked to temporary security developments.²⁸⁶

E. Displacement and Return

1) Scale of Displacement

Syria’s conflict between 2011 and 2024 has generated one of the world’s largest displacement crises. As of February 2026, approximately 5.5 million people remain internally displaced,²⁸⁷ while about 3.7 million refugees remain in the region.²⁸⁸ New displacement continues to occur due to intermittent localized violence, including the March 2025 violence in the coastal and western-central regions,²⁸⁹ the July 2025 unrest in Suweida Governorate,²⁹⁰ and the January 2025 hostilities between Government forces and the SDF in north and northeast Syria.²⁹¹

²⁸⁵ Jerusalem Post, *Besieged Kobane Faces Humanitarian Disaster amid Syrian Government, SDF Deadlock*, 18 February 2026, www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-887095; DW, *Syria: Life-Saving Aid Reaches Kurdish City of Kobane*, 25 January 2026, www.dw.com/en/un-aid-arrives-in-embattled-kurdish-city-of-kobane-syria/a-75652409.

²⁸⁶ OCHA, *Humanitarian Overview: December 2025*, 3 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3c77rwwp>, p. 3. During the fighting in northeast Syria in January 2026, humanitarian operations took place “in an unpredictable environment shaped by movement limitations, curfews, and localized insecurity, which are expected to persist during the period of clashes and affect the pace of assistance delivery.” OCHA, *Flash Update No. 1: Recent Developments in Ar-Raqqa, Deir-ez-Zor and Al-Hasakeh*, 19 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdfj24>, p. 2.

²⁸⁷ Of these, over 1.08 million live in 1,419 IDP sites and camps in north-west and north-east Syria. UNHCR, *Syrian Arab Republic: Comprehensive Overview of IDPs and IDP Returns Dashboard*, 26 February 2026, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/121292>. Approximately 125,000 Palestinian refugees remain in protracted displacement inside Syria, representing about 30% of the total Palestinian refugee population. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), *UNRWA Humanitarian Appeal 2026: Syria, Lebanon and Jordan*, 23 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4fy7xhxa>, p. 4.

²⁸⁸ The majority of Syrian refugees in the region are hosted in Türkiye, with sizable populations also present in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt; UNHCR, *Operational Data Portal: Syria Regional Refugee Response*, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>.

²⁸⁹ “As of December 2025, over 100,000 Syrians fled Syria and crossed into Lebanon, the majority immediately following the fall of the Assad government, while others fled in March 2025 pre-empting or amid violence in the coastal areas.” UNHCR, *Coming Home: One Year into Syria’s Transition*, 11 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134205.html, p. 13. UNHCR Protection Monitoring in Lebanon found that in the first quarter of 2025 new arrivals from Syria represented diverse religious and political backgrounds, including minority groups such as Alawites, Shi’ites, and Christians. Displacement occurred in waves – initially following the fall of the former government and later in March 2025, triggered by violence in Tartous, Latakia, Homs, and Hama Governorates. UNHCR, *Lebanon: Protection Monitoring Finds Q1 2025*, 4 July 2025, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/117330p>, p. 8.

²⁹⁰ “(...) the Syrian government estimates that around 150,000 civilians [Druze] (...) and 70,000 Bedouins” were displaced during unrest in Suweida in July 2025. The New Arab, *After the SDF, the Syrian Government Turns Its Eyes on Tackling Suweida*, 16 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2m85m426>.

²⁹¹ “(...) recent clashes displaced tens of thousands; although many have returned, about 130,000 people remain uprooted across Al-Hasakeh, Ar-Raqqa and Aleppo governorates. More than 90 per cent are women and girls, with many sheltering in overcrowded camps or with host families already under strain.” UN News, *Syria Transition Gains Ground with Kurdish Deal, but Violence and Humanitarian Strain Persist*, 13 February 2026, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/02/1166961>. See also, The Syria Report, *From Afrin to Qamishli: Repeated Paths of Displacement*, 3 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mvvnw5ye6>.

2) Refugee and IDP Returns and Intentions

The fall of the former government has enabled an increasing number of voluntary returns from abroad. UNHCR estimates that between 8 December 2024 and 27 February 2026, over 1.47 million Syrians have returned to Syria, mainly from neighbouring countries.²⁹²

UNHCR's June 2025 intentions survey conducted in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon found that 18 per cent of refugees plan to return within one year – down from 27 per cent in February 2025 – while 80 per cent hope to return eventually. Return decisions are influenced by both pull factors, such as improved security, family reunification, and prospects for rebuilding Syria, and push factors in host countries, including high living costs, limited access to basic services, and scarce employment opportunities.²⁹³ UNHCR's May 2025 intentions survey conducted in 13 European countries found that 3 per cent of respondents planned to return to Syria within one year, with more than half of these having made preparations to return. The principal enabling factors for return were identified as safety and security, improved infrastructure, and access to livelihood opportunities.²⁹⁴

As of 26 February 2026, over 1.739 million IDPs had returned to their areas of origin, including over one million who departed from IDP sites and camps.²⁹⁵

An IDP Movement Intentions Survey carried out across 505 IDP sites in September 2025 found that 57 per cent of IDP households plan to remain in displacement sites over the next year, with only one in four planning to return to their areas of origin, mostly in northwest Syria. While more than two-thirds of those intending to return expect to go back to their former homes, 79 per cent reported that these homes were severely damaged or destroyed.²⁹⁶

²⁹² UNHCR, *Regional Flash Update #66: Syria Situation*, 27 February 2026, www.unhcr.org/media/syria-situation-regional-flash-update-66, p. 1.

²⁹³ UNHCR, *Enhanced Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon*, 11 September 2025, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/118532>, p. 10. "In 2025, following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime, refugee return movements tripled compared to the total recorded over the previous five years. These returns have largely been driven by deteriorating conditions in displacement, particularly unaffordable rent and the lack of legal status abroad, rather than improvements in their previous places of habitual residence in Syria." UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan UNRWA Humanitarian Appeal 2026*, 23 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4fy7xhxa>, p. 4.

²⁹⁴ UNHCR, *Intentions and Perspectives of Syrian Refugees and Asylum-Seekers in Europe*, May 2025, www.unhcr.org/europe/media/intentions-and-perspectives-syrian-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-europe.

²⁹⁵ The vast majority (over 1.5 million) returned between January and August 2025. UNHCR, *Comprehensive Overview of IDPs and IDP Returns Dashboard*, 26 February 2026, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/121292>.

²⁹⁶ CCCM Cluster / International Organization for Migration (IOM) / UNHCR, *Syria IDP Movement Intentions Survey: Syria*, 18 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132853.html, p. 2.

3) Obstacles to Return and Prospects for Future Returns

Key barriers to sustainable return include damaged or destroyed housing,²⁹⁷ unresolved housing, land and property (HLP) issues,²⁹⁸ limited employment opportunities and high cost of living,²⁹⁹ inadequate basic services,³⁰⁰ and concerns over safety and security.³⁰¹ A significant number of refugees and IDPs lack civil documentation, which in turn hinders access to services, including education.³⁰²

Many IDPs and refugees remain cautious and are awaiting further improvements. UNHCR expects that even under optimistic scenarios, the return of refugees and IDPs will take years, and some may never be able to return.³⁰³ While the Government has expressed its commitment to facilitating returns, it has emphasized limited absorption

²⁹⁷ Many refugee returnees returned “to damaged, looted, or structurally unsafe homes, particularly in Damascus, Aleppo, Idlib, and Homs governorates.” REACH / Shelter Cluster / UNHCR, *Syria Nationwide Housing Damage Assessment (October-November-December 2025)*, 23 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3edyjwtu>, p. 1. See also, The Syria Report, *Nashabiya Residents Left to Their Own Devices to Repair War-Damaged Homes*, 10 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5336asch>; The Syria Report, *East Aleppo's Damaged Buildings Risk Collapse amid Neglect*, 14 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4ws4r9k>; UNHCR, *Enhanced Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon*, 11 September 2025, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/118532>, p. 5; Enab Baladi, *Caravans: A Temporary Solution to Housing Crisis in Daraa*, 17 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/42zrcuxc>.

²⁹⁸ “As return numbers grow, so do tensions related to HLP [housing, land and property] and competing ownership claims (...).” IOM, *Syrian Arab Republic: Communities of Return Index – Round 3 (October 2025)*, 15 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y68x8reu>, p. 2. “For many of the over 7 million Syrians who remain displaced, massive property-related challenges will need to be tackled in the wake of industrial-scale destruction, pillage and confiscation of homes and lands. The broken judicial and record-keeping system inherited from successive governments makes reclaiming homes from secondary occupants difficult, sometimes leading to violence and communal tensions.” OHCHR, *Oral Update by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro*, 27 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2e3m2r66>. See also, The Syria Report, *Darayya Residents Return, but Rubble and Property Issues Persist*, 9 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/vejta29h>; The Syria Report, *Delayed Justice: How Syria's Transitional Administration Is Managing HLP*, 8 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3zk6ef43>; Refugees International, *Beyond the Fall: Rebuilding Syria After Assad*, 2 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2ptzn3mj>.

²⁹⁹ “When asked about barriers hindering return movements, KIs [key informants] cited the high cost of living (81% of communities), followed by the lack of livelihood opportunities (74%). With limited employment opportunities and minimal income sources, the purchasing power of returnees will continue to remain limited, exacerbating already high costs of living.” IOM, *Syrian Arab Republic: Communities of Return Index – Round 3 (October 2025)*, 15 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y68x8reu>, p. 2. “Economically, returning Syrians face bleak prospects, as businesses, markets, and industries remain gutted, financial resources are exhausted, liquidity shortages and environmental destruction prevent the effective resumption of economic activities including agricultural livelihoods.” Protection Cluster / UNHCR, *Protection Landscape in Syria: A Snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2123726.html, p. 4.

³⁰⁰ UNHCR, *Flash Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon*, February 2025, www.unhcr.org/media/flash-regional-survey-syrian-refugees-perceptions-and-intentions-return-syria, p. 3.

³⁰¹ “The rise in abductions and the unstable security environment have led to a significant drop in Syrian refugees' willingness to return from neighboring countries.” STJ, *Abduction in Syria: Alawite Women Most Targeted Amidst Transitional Government Inaction*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5x48derf>, p. 17.

³⁰² Protection Monitoring conducted in Syria between September and November 2025 showed that “[C]ivil documentation barriers remain a major, cross-cutting protection risk that directly restricts access to services, movement, and legal rights.” Those disproportionately impacted are women-headed households, child-headed households and returnees from outside Syria. IOM / Protection Cluster / UNHCR, *Syria Protection Monitoring: Summary of Key Findings – September to November 2025*, 14 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2sajhww4>, p. 3. “Approximately 25% of refugee returnees and 15% of IDP returnees lack at least one key civil document. Civil registries have been reactivated in mid-2025 but many of the civil registry offices are not functioning today, leaving many without proof of identity, property, or family status. For some families, this means children cannot go to school, with one in four returnee households citing missing documents as the main reason for school exclusion.” UNHCR, *Coming Home: One Year into Syria's Transition*, 11 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134205.html, p. 14.

³⁰³ UNHCR, *Coming Home: One Year into Syria's Transition*, 11 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134205.html, pp. 5, 7. “Today, most displaced Syrians remain in limbo – unable to return for good, but finding little to sustain them where they are. Many are waiting for basic services and a minimal degree of stability before rebuilding their lives.” Refugees International, *Beyond the Fall: Rebuilding Syria After Assad*, 2 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2ptzn3mj>.

capacity and is prioritizing the return of IDPs, especially those residing in IDP camps and sites.³⁰⁴

III. Assessment of International Protection Needs

A. Refugee Status Under the 1951 Refugee Convention

This Section outlines a number of risk profiles for asylum-seekers from Syria, based on UNHCR's legal assessment of available country of origin information at the time of writing. UNHCR considers that asylum-seekers from Syria falling within one or more of these risk profiles may be in need of international refugee protection under Article 1A of the 1951 Refugee Convention,³⁰⁵ depending on the circumstances of the individual case. There is a certain degree of overlap between some of the profiles, and the particular circumstances of an individual asylum-seeker may mean that two or more profiles may be applicable to the applicant. Depending on the specific circumstances of the case, family members or other members of the households of individuals with these profiles may also be in need of international protection on the basis of their association with individuals at risk.

Not all persons falling within the risk profiles outlined in this Section will necessarily be found to be a refugee under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Conversely, the risk profiles listed here are not exhaustive. Hence, a claim should not automatically be considered as without merit simply because it does not fall within any of the profiles identified here. Where applications for international protection by asylum-seekers who have fled Syria are considered on an individual basis, they should be assessed carefully in accordance with established fair and efficient refugee status determination procedures. The evidence presented by the applicant must be taken into account, as well as reliable and up-to-date information about the situation in Syria.

While past persecution is not a requirement for recognizing an applicant as a refugee, particular consideration should be given to any past persecution to which applicants for refugee status may have been subjected.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ InfoMigrants, *Germany Moves to Return more Syrians, but Damascus Says the Country Is Not Yet Ready*, 16 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5yjf24de>; Euractiv, *EU Edges Towards Forced Returns to Syria*, 28 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3x7225bz>; UNHCR, *UNHCR: Global Refugee Gathering Ends with Substantial New Solidarity Pledges*, 17 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3bwzs7d2>; BICC, *Observations from a Visit to Syria: Reconstruction, Social Fragmentation, and the Limits of Return Discussions*, 8 December 2025, <https://bicc.de/Cosmos/Peacebits/Syria>. Furthermore, "large-scale returns may lead to rising social and community tensions, intimate partner and family violence, sexual and other types of exploitation as well as secondary displacement, threatening the fragile gains made in the early months of Syria's transition." Protection Cluster / UNHCR, *Protection Landscape in Syria: A Snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2123726.html, p. 5.

³⁰⁵ UN General Assembly, *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 28 July 1951, UN Treaty Series, Vol. 189, p. 137, www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/unga/1951/en/39821.

³⁰⁶ UNHCR, *Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status Under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, April 2019, www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2019/en/123881, para. 45.

1) Members of Minority Religious and Ethnic Groups

a) Alawites

Syria's conflict has deepened pre-existing sectarian and ethnic divisions. While opposition to the former government was largely composed of Sunni Arabs,³⁰⁷ religious minorities, particularly Alawites, were widely associated – whether accurately or by perception – with the former government and its allies.³⁰⁸ This perceived alignment has exposed Alawites to reprisals following the former government's collapse,³⁰⁹ despite internal diversity and the fact that not all benefited from this association.³¹⁰

Since the fall of the former government, Alawites have faced both large-scale and individual acts of violence³¹¹ on account of their religious identity and presumed

³⁰⁷ "Throughout the war, the regime grew increasingly sectarian, relying on Alawite militias, Hezbollah and Iran. The regime disproportionately targeted and persecuted the Sunni community that rose against it, including sieges and constant bombings." The Atlantic Council, *In a Sectarian Syria, the Winners Should Refrain from Taking All*, 24 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mryuken2>.

³⁰⁸ "Assad's 'Alawitization' of the military and security sectors entrenched the association between regime survival and communal survival, deepening sectarian cleavages that now define the post-conflict order." Manara Magazine, *Syria's Future Between Fragmentation and Rival Reconstruction*, 11 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2uzr43bb>. See also, UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, para. 31; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Regime Change and Minority Risks: Syrian Alawites After Assad*, 21 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5et3vwss>.

³⁰⁹ UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, para. 33. "The retaliatory attacks witnessed in the coast in March [2025], and seen on a smaller scale in other parts of the country, are in part a response to five decades of systematic crimes perpetrated by security forces with impunity which affected all Syrians. They were further inflamed by actions taken by previous successive Assad-led governments that pitted communities against one another." OHCHR, *Oral Update by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro*, 27 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2e3m2r66>.

³¹⁰ "While key positions in the former government were occupied by individuals from prominent Alawi families – often tied to the Assad clan – many Alawis remained marginalized, economically disadvantaged, and politically disenfranchised. Rural areas of the Alawi heartland, such as Latakia and Tartus governorates, continued to suffer from underdevelopment and limited state services." UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, para. 34. "Yet state embeddedness did not translate into uniform benefits or greater material prosperity for Alawites compared to the rest of the population. (...) Alawite privilege was variable and structured by different identities, especially by class and tribe." Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, *Regime Change and Minority Risks: Syrian Alawites After Assad*, 21 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/27xvjpv2>.

³¹¹ "By February 2025, reports of summary killings, disappearances, and arbitrary detentions of Alawis had become frequent. Witnesses described house raids, arbitrary arrests, and checkpoint harassment, often justified as rooting out 'regime remnants.' In several towns across Latakia, Tartous, Hama, and Homs, former government soldiers and security forces who had 'settled their status' with interim authorities through official reconciliation procedures in hopes of protection were killed or subjected to violence and detention by government-affiliated forces nonetheless. (...) the March [2025] killings were an escalation of an already established pattern." HRW et al., *'Are You Alawi?' Identity-Based Killings During Syria's Transition*, 23 September 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2130354/syria0925+web.pdf, pp. 4, 44; see also pp. 14, 45-46. "In the months leading up to the March violence, the number of incidents of what can be described as revenge attacks or killings was on the rise." UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, para. 40.

political affiliation.³¹² During the March 2025 events, Alawites, particularly men,³¹³ were singled out for torture and executions, often accompanied by sectarian rhetoric and degrading treatment.³¹⁴ Alawite homes, shops, agricultural lands and warehouses were also looted and burned.³¹⁵ Tens of thousands fled in the wake of the violence.³¹⁶ The IICI found that there were

“reasonable grounds to believe that individual members of certain factions of the security forces of the interim government (...) as well as private individuals participating in hostilities engaged in acts that amounted to violations [of] international humanitarian law, including acts that may amount to war crimes, as well as serious violations of international human rights law. (...) The Commission has found no evidence of a governmental policy or plan to carry out such attacks.”³¹⁷

³¹² During the March 2025 violence “[M]ost of the victims were Alawites, whom many Syrians hold collectively responsible for the fallen regime’s abusive rule. Retribution often seems to have been behind the attacks, while the language and behaviour of perpetrators frequently suggested sectarian motives.” ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. i. “Fighters carried out many of the massacres under the pretext of ‘investigation,’ the patterns of abuse and identity-based targeting revealed a darker intent: to punish Alawi communities collectively, regardless of individual guilt or innocence.” HRW et al., ‘Are You Alawi?’ *Identity-Based Killings During Syria’s Transition*, 23 September 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2130354/syria0925+web.pdf, p. 2. “Among Syria’s minorities, two key factors make the Alawites most vulnerable to mass violence in post-Assad Syria. The first factor is that, like the Druze, Alawites have their own distinct beliefs that deviate from Sunni Islam. (...) The second factor contributing to the Alawites’ vulnerability is the widespread perception that they were the main beneficiaries of the Assad regime, which engaged in mass murder against its own citizens.” The Conversation, *Understanding the Violence Against Alawites and Druze in Syria After Assad*, 23 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/d36b5t9r>. “Some of the attackers responding to the March uprising carried lists of names of men to target, including former members of Assad militias who had been temporarily amnestied by the new government. Entire families with those surnames would later appear on lists of the dead (...)” And further: “The first question arriving fighters asked residents was telling, according to more than 200 witnesses and survivors: ‘Are you Sunni or Alawite?’” Reuters, *Syrian Forces Massacred 1,500 Alawites. The Chain of Command Led to Damascus*, 30 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mhw2rv5>. See also Section III.A.5 (“Individuals Perceived to Be Associated with the Former Government”).

³¹³ “While older people, women and children were in some instances also killed, these attacks primarily targeted Alawi men and were clearly fuelled by sectarian slurs and hate speech.” OHCHR, *Oral Update by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro*, 27 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2e3m2r66>.

³¹⁴ Armed men “moved house-to-house, demanding to know residents’ sect, looting valuables, torching homes, and executing children, women, and men, including older people, often using overtly anti-Alawi slurs and rhetoric. In some places, fighters wiped out entire families. Atrocities also included acts of humiliating abuse: men forced to crawl and bark like dogs before being shot and older detainees beaten on camera.” HRW et al., ‘Are You Alawi?’ *Identity-Based Killings During Syria’s Transition*, 23 September 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2130354/syria0925+web.pdf, pp. 1-2. See also, UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, paras 73-74; Reuters, *Syrian Forces Massacred 1,500 Alawites. The Chain of Command Led to Damascus*, 30 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mhw2rv5>.

³¹⁵ “(...) armed factions systematically looted and torched homes, shops, and vehicles across the coast. In one village, at least 26 houses and a dozen cars were burned or stolen, while gold, cash, and phones were taken; similar patterns were reported in [sic] elsewhere.” HRW et al., ‘Are You Alawi?’ *Identity-Based Killings During Syria’s Transition*, 23 September 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2130354/syria0925+web.pdf, p. 18. See also, UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, para. 75.

³¹⁶ UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, para. 79.

³¹⁷ Ibid., paras 83 and 89. See also, HRW et al., ‘Are You Alawi?’ *Identity-Based Killings During Syria’s Transition*, 23 September 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2130354/syria0925+web.pdf, pp. 2-4, 35; Syria Revisited, *Examining Coastal Massacre Investigations*, 27 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3swevaea>.

Since the March 2025 violence, retaliatory attacks against Alawites have continued,³¹⁸ primarily by non-State actors,³¹⁹ with violence against the community remaining “at a disturbingly high level.”³²⁰ Abductions, torture and killings have been concentrated in the demographically diverse Governorates of Lattakia, Tartous, Homs, and Hama.³²¹ Reports also describe the confiscation and occupation of Alawite property,³²² forced

³¹⁸ “Continued attacks on Alawite civilians add to the anxiety of many. More abuses by armed factions outside General Security took place weeks after the major violence ceased. (...) In central governorates such as Homs and Hama, particularly in rural districts, Alawites are still reporting instances of harassment, kidnapping and extrajudicial killing.” ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. 23. See also, 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, <https://tinyurl.com/5dtjxw2r>; STJ, *Left to Their Fate: Grave Violations Against Alawites Following the Coastal Massacres*, October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3h4j7h8u>, p. 24; UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, paras 81, 102; SNHR, *No Fewer than 20 Civilians Extrajudicially Killed in Homs City Between April 23-28, 2025*, 30 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mr43z8mf>, p. 1. Reports of attacks against Alawite civilians by unidentified gunmen include: two Alawite men being shot and injured on 3 January 2026; the killing of an Alawite man on 29 December 2025; the killing of an Alawite man on 28 December 2025; a grenade being thrown into a residential street in an Alawite village on 27 December 2025 (no casualties reported); an Alawite man and his son being kidnapped on 15 December 2025; an Alawite man being shot and injured on 15 December 2025; the killing of an Alawite man on 9 December 2025; the killing of an Alawite woman with her husband being injured on 20 November 2025; an Alawite man being kidnapped and subsequently killed on 18 November 2025; an Alawite man being shot and injured on 11 November 2025; the discovery of the executed body of an Alawite man on 21 October 2025; the killing of an Alawite man on 20 October 2025; the killing of an Alawite man on 18 October 2025; the killing of an Alawite man and several others being injured on 11 October 2025; the killing of an Alawite man on 10 October 2025; the killing of an Alawite man on 7 October 2025; the killing of an Alawite man on 5 October 2025; the killing of three Alawite men on 30 September 2025. See, Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: December 30, 2025 - January 6, 2026*, 6 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mt33xw5n>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly Conflict & Security: December 9-30, 2025*, 30 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5dnp8y8w>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: November 18-25, 2025*, 25 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4zrrw2d8>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: November 11-18, 2025*, 18 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ym2r9x7r>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: October 21-28, 28 October 2025*, <https://tinyurl.com/bd83dpjy>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: October 14-21, 21 October 2025*, <https://tinyurl.com/3ht47a75>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: October 7-14, 14 October 2025*, <https://tinyurl.com/3z36webs>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: September 30-October 7, 7 October 2025*, <https://tinyurl.com/2s4zjs6k>.

³¹⁹ UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, para. 89. In November 2025, security forces successfully prevented revenge attacks against Alawites in Homs following an incident that initially appeared to have been of sectarian nature. “The government’s rapid intervention in Homs following tribal attacks on Alawite neighbourhoods prevented a wider sectarian confrontation. Coordinated deployment, consultation with local notables, and tighter operational control kept the violence from spiralling.” Al Majalla, *2026 Will Test the Foundations of ‘The New Syria’*, 6 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bd7m75am>. See also, STJ, *Drive-by Killings: A Recurrent Pattern of Direct Killings Using Motorcycles Against Civilians in Syria*, 26 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/y8ret3ry>.

³²⁰ ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. 32.

³²¹ Ibid., p. 23. “Violence against members of the Alawite sect, which continues to be associated with the former regime of Bashar al-Assad (...) predominantly took place in the northwestern provinces of Hama, Tartous, Lattakia, and Homs, home to large Alawite communities.” ACLED, *Middle East Overview: November 2025*, 7 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/aypw72cm>. See also, Syria Direct, *Extrajudicial Killings of Alawites Plague Homs City*, 9 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/j9uj23tp>.

³²² “We [the IICJ] continue to receive disturbing reports of (...) the confiscation and occupation of the property of those who fled the March violence.” OHCHR, *Oral Update by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro*, 23 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2nn5er25>. Since the March 2025 violence, “the eastern Lattakia countryside has witnessed a series of sectarian violations, ranging from killings, looting of properties, and widespread seizure of agricultural lands. These violations were concentrated in Alawite villages and carried out by armed factions loyal to the transitional government.” The Syria Report, *Pro-Government Factions Seize Farmlands in Eastern Lattakia Region*, 26 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mbhxz5cp>. See also, UN Human Rights Council, *Violations Against Civilians in the Coastal and Western-Central Regions*, 11 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132228.html, para. 102.

displacement of community members,³²³ and the desecration of Alawite shrines by often unknown actors.³²⁴

While abductions for various motives remain a concern in Syria,³²⁵ they disproportionately affect Alawite women and girls.³²⁶ During these kidnappings, victims are subjected to verbal and physical abuse as well as gender-based violence, including sexual violence and forced – and in some cases, child – marriage.³²⁷ According to Amnesty International, these abductions may also amount to trafficking for exploitation.³²⁸ UN experts documented a

“pattern of violations (...) involving gender-based violence, threats, forced marriage of minors, and a glaring lack of effective response by Syrian interim Government [which] suggests a targeted campaign against Alawite women and girls based on intersecting grounds (...).”³²⁹

Perpetrators are often not identified, with reports implicating Sunni extremists, including foreign fighters – some of whom may be linked to the Government³³⁰ – as

³²³ “In August [2025], an armed group evicted many Alawi residents in the Damascus suburb of Sumariya, claiming they held eviction orders on behalf of the State (...).” OHCHR, *Oral Update by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro*, 23 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2nn5er25>. “Local pro-government factions attacked Alawi residents in the [Sumariyeh] neighborhood [in Damascus], ordering them to leave within three days and detaining and beating some people. While the governor quickly issued statements telling residents to not leave, many have over fears of continued violence.” Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding Security in New Syria: Week 38*, 1 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2v2fya5m>. See also, The Syria Report, *Excavations and Armed Group’s Pressures Renew Tension in Al-Sumariya*, 25 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2u472z7w>; The Syria Report, *Delayed Justice: How Syria’s Transitional Administration Is Managing HLP*, 8 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3zk6ef43>.

³²⁴ See, for example, Syrian Archive, *Bombing of Sheikh Muhammad al-Ajmi Shrine in the Fan al-Wustani Village in the Hama Countryside*, 15 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yc5fz5wm>; Syrian Archive, *Bombing of the Sheikh Nasser Asaad Shrine in the Village of Tal Abdul Aziz in the Hama Countryside*, 15 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yc34n5pz>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: October 21-28*, 28 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bd83dpjy>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: April 15-22, 2025*, 22 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yf9cmf2u>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: March 4-11, 2025*, 11 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5cy3es2c>; SNHR, *Unidentified Gunmen Desecrate a Religious Shrine in W. Hama, February 28, 2025*, 1 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yc6d6c2t>; SNHR, *Unidentified Individuals Desecrate a Religious Shrine in W. Homs, January 23, 2025*, 25 January 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2jzty4yb>.

³²⁵ “Although abductions and extortion have been a persistent pattern throughout the 14-year Syrian conflict, these incidents increased sharply in 2025.” STJ, *Abduction in Syria: Alawite Women Most Targeted Amidst Transitional Government Inaction*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5x48derf>, p. 7.

³²⁶ “The cases of abduction were not limited to a specific geographic area or gender, although most involved women from the Alawite sect.” Ibid., p. 5. See also, ICG, *Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, footnote 24; OHCHR, Syria: *UN Experts Alarmed by Targeted Abductions and Disappearances of Alawite Women and Girls*, 23 July 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2127975.html.

³²⁷ In September 2025, the IICI reported that it continued “to receive reports of primarily Alawite women abducted in broad daylight in city centres by unknown armed actors. Initial information indicates that some were sexually assaulted before their release, while others were subjected to forced marriage.” OHCHR, *Oral Update by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro*, 23 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2nn5er25>. “(...) two abducted women, who were married when abducted, contacted their family to request a divorce from their husbands, informing them that they would be or already had been newly married to their abductor, indicating that they had been subjected to forced marriage or coerced to ask for divorce.” Amnesty International, *Syria: Authorities Must Investigate Abductions of Alawite Women and Girls*, 28 July 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2127895.html. “The [UN] experts stressed the disturbing accounts of some victims being drugged and physically assaulted during captivity. Although the lack of survivor-sensitive and safe reporting mechanisms makes it difficult to verify incidents of sexual violence, the experts stressed that such abuse could not be ruled out. Reports of forced child marriage were particularly alarming.” OHCHR, *Syria: UN Experts Alarmed by Targeted Abductions and Disappearances of Alawite Women and Girls*, 23 July 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2127975.html. See also, STJ, *Abduction in Syria: Alawite Women Most Targeted Amidst Transitional Government Inaction*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5x48derf>, pp. 4-6, 12-13, 15, 19; BBC, *I Would Scream in My Sleep: Women from Syria’s Alawite Minority Tell of Kidnap and Rape*, 18 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mr2byvxx>; AP, *A Year After Assad’s Fall in Syria, Alawite Women Face Kidnappings and Rape*, 10 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yfbmke9m>.

³²⁸ Amnesty International, *Syria: Authorities Must Investigate Abductions of Alawite Women and Girls*, 28 July 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2127895.html.

³²⁹ OHCHR, *Syria: UN Experts Alarmed by Targeted Abductions and Disappearances of Alawite Women and Girls*, 23 July 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2127975.html.

³³⁰ BBC, *I Would Scream in My Sleep: Women from Syria’s Alawite Minority Tell of Kidnap and Rape*, 18 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mr2byvxx>; AP, *A Year After Assad’s Fall in Syria, Alawite Women Face Kidnappings and Rape*, 10 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yfbmke9m>.

well as, in some cases, Government security forces and officials.³³¹ Reported motives include sectarian hatred, with some extremists viewing Alawites as “heretics”, and retaliation linked to the community’s perceived collective affiliation with the former government, which itself had a documented record of using sexual violence against women and girls in detention.³³² In some cases, ransom demands are made to families – sometimes through calls from foreign numbers or accompanied by photos depicting torture and ill-treatment³³³ – yet payment does not necessarily secure the victim’s release.³³⁴

Observers report weak or non-existent investigations,³³⁵ with cases often dismissed or misclassified by the authorities.³³⁶ Shame and fear of reprisals frequently deter families from filing a report.³³⁷ Lacking support from the authorities, some families turn to social media to search missing relatives, which can expose survivors to stigmatization.³³⁸ Upon release, women and girls may also face repercussions from

³³¹ “Several cases reportedly involved security actors or individuals affiliated with the institutions of the interim Government of Syria.” OHCHR, *Syria: UN Experts Alarmed by Targeted Abductions and Disappearances of Alawite Women and Girls*, 23 July 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2127975.html.

³³² “The increase in abductions after the fall of the Assad regime has been linked to a narrative that portrays the entire Alawite sect as collectively responsible for atrocities committed during his rule. This reasoning has turned ordinary civilians, especially women and girls, into ‘legitimate’ targets for retaliation.” STJ, *Abduction in Syria: Alawite Women Most Targeted Amidst Transitional Government Inaction*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5x48derf>, p. 8. According to Bassam Alahmad, executive director of STJ, “religious affiliation is increasingly playing a role in kidnappings and murders. (...) The heart of the problem though, he adds, is that the Alawite community is being targeted for real or assumed links to the Assad regime.” DW, *Kidnapped, Abused: Reports of Missing Alawite Women in Syria*, 11 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/denfdchx>. See also, AP, *A Year After Assad’s Fall in Syria, Alawite Women Face Kidnappings and Rape*, 10 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yfbmke9m>;

³³³ DW, *Kidnapped, Abused: Reports of Missing Alawite Women in Syria*, 11 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/denfdchx>; Daraj, *Who Is Kidnapping Syrian Alawite Women in Broad Daylight?*, 18 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3b8zf8y8>.

³³⁴ See, for example, STJ, *Abduction in Syria: Alawite Women Most Targeted Amidst Transitional Government Inaction*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5x48derf>, p. 12. See also, Amnesty International, *Syria: Authorities Must Investigate Abductions of Alawite Women and Girls*, 28 July 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2127895.html; DW, *Kidnapped, Abused: Reports of Missing Alawite Women in Syria*, 11 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/denfdchx>.

³³⁵ “It is highly disturbing that in many cases where women went missing, families report that local police authorities have not yet investigated such acts.” OHCHR, *Oral Update by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro*, 23 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2nn5er25>. See also, 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, <https://tinyurl.com/5dtjxw2r>; Amnesty International, *Syria: Authorities Must Investigate Abductions of Alawite Women and Girls*, 28 July 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2127895.html; OHCHR, *Syria: UN Experts Alarmed by Targeted Abductions and Disappearances of Alawite Women and Girls*, 23 July 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2127975.html.

³³⁶ “Relatives of victims face systematic denial when reporting abductions to the Transitional Government’s security forces. Official responses are often marked by neglect or sectarian bias, and in cases involving the abduction of girls, families are often subjected to stigmatizing moral accusations that shift blame onto the victims themselves.” STJ, *Abduction in Syria: Alawite Women Most Targeted Amidst Transitional Government Inaction*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5x48derf>, p. 13. See also, BBC, *I Would Scream in My Sleep: Women from Syria’s Alawite Minority Tell of Kidnap and Rape*, 18 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mr2byvxx>; Arab News, *Syrian Probe Debunks Kidnap Allegations*, 2 November 2025, www.arabnews.com/node/2621218/amp; Daraj, *Women Continue to Be Kidnapped in Syria as the Authorities Deny by ‘Swearing’*, 30 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3nbkymr4>; Reuters, *‘She’s Not Coming Back’: Alawite Women Snatched from Streets of Syria*, 27 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/22a5fmj4>.

³³⁷ STJ, *Abduction in Syria: Alawite Women Most Targeted Amidst Transitional Government Inaction*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5x48derf>, pp. 6, 17; Amnesty International, *Syria: Authorities Must Investigate Abductions of Alawite Women and Girls*, 28 July 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2127895.html; Daraj, *Who Is Kidnapping Syrian Alawite Women in Broad Daylight?*, 18 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3b8zf8y8>.

³³⁸ “Without an effective government response, families are forced to publicly appeal for the return of their daughters through social media, a practice that can worsen the stigma faced by women.” STJ, *Abduction in Syria: Alawite Women Most Targeted Amidst Transitional Government Inaction*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5x48derf>, p. 6. See also, ICG, *Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, footnote 24; New Lines Magazine, *A Rape Case Highlights Sexual Violence in Syria*, 18 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4eera3zy>.

their families due to stigma,³³⁹ while families may fear retaliation from the perpetrators or the Government if they speak publicly about the case.³⁴⁰ Incidents involving Alawite women and girls have become politicized, with loyalists of the former government amplifying threats, while Government supporters downplay or deny abuses.³⁴¹

SAS claimed responsibility for the 26 December 2025 attack on a mosque in an Alawite neighbourhood of Homs, which killed at least eight.³⁴² The group had previously claimed responsibility for the killing of an Alawite man in Homs in April 2025.³⁴³

In the coastal region, Alawites supporting or perceived to be supporting the Government have been targeted for killings by pro-former-government forces, including cases where alleged collaborators' names were disseminated on social media.³⁴⁴ This included the killing of an Alawite participating in the September 2025 indirect parliamentary elections.³⁴⁵

Criminal groups have also singled out minority community members, particularly Alawites, "because they consider them the most vulnerable to predation."³⁴⁶

³³⁹ "In conservative communities, abductions are worsened by social stigma and the pressure to remain silent in order to protect the family's reputation. (...) In one case, a husband divorced his wife who had survived abduction and forced marriage, and married another woman immediately after her return, saying he could not bear the 'social responsibility' of the incident." STJ, *Abduction in Syria: Alawite Women Most Targeted Amidst Transitional Government Inaction*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5x48derf>, pp. 16-17.

³⁴⁰ "When abducted women are released, their families often avoid discussing what happened, fearing retaliation from the perpetrators who are still at large, authorities demanding secrecy, and the victims themselves, who may deny the crime occurred." Ibid., p. 17. See also, BBC, *I Would Scream in My Sleep: Women from Syria's Alawite Minority Tell of Kidnap and Rape*, 18 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mr2byvkx>; Amnesty International, *Syria: Authorities Must Investigate Abductions of Alawite Women and Girls*, 28 July 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2127895.html.

³⁴¹ ICG, *Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. 10; Syria Revisited, *Syria's Kidnapping Controversy: What the Government's Recent Investigation Gets Right, and Wrong*, 6 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2ns7ypz7>; Enab Baladi, *Distorted Narratives Create Division Among Syrians*, 12 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2s4f4yzf>.

³⁴² SAS "likely attacked this target to reignite the Sunni-Alawite sectarian strife that has recently occurred in Homs City." CTP/ISW, *Iran Update, December 26, 2025*, 26 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134560.html. See also, Al Arabiya, *Syria Says Two ISIS Members Arrested over Last Month's Homs Mosque Blast*, 12 January 2026, <https://ara.tv/iwxqu>; ACLED, *Middle East Overview: January 2026*, 12 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4k7x4vtk>.

³⁴³ CTP/ISW, *Iran Update, December 26, 2025*, 26 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2134560.html.

³⁴⁴ For example: "Media reports emerged on November 4 [2025] that an Alawite man in Latakia, identified as Haydar Baik, had been kidnapped and executed by anti-government insurgents after being accused of working with the government." Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: October 28 - November 11*, 11 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3my9zfck>. "The executed body of an Alawite man was discovered in Latakia city on October 26 [2025]. Local media described him as having been a vocal supporter of the new government and accused anti-government insurgents of being responsible for his kidnap and murder." Furthermore: "Anti-government insurgents executed – on video – an Alawite man identified as Jafar Ali al-Darmini after accusing him of collaborating with government military forces in the Salhab area [Hama Governorate] on October 23. Video footage of the killing was later posted by the Coastal Shield Brigade social media channels." Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: October 21-28*, 28 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bd83dpjy>. "Video footage was released by anti-government insurgent group, the Coastal Shield Brigade, on September 7 [2025] showing the execution of an Alawite man – identified as Ali Ahmed Fadel – the group accused of collaborating with the transitional government. On September 9, the commander for Internal Security in Latakia confirmed the execution. Meanwhile, the Coastal Shield Brigade began publishing new names of alleged 'traitors' located in Latakia and Tartus." Syria Weekly, *Data Update (August 26-September 9, 2025)*, 11 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y3xt4s4r>. See also, Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: February 17-24, 2026*, 24 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/294a9pky>.

³⁴⁵ "An academic specializing in agricultural science was shot dead by anti-government insurgents inside his home in the village of Mia'r Shaker [Tartous] on September 30 [2025]. The attack was subsequently celebrated by anti-government sources, which described the man as an 'Alawite traitor' who had applied to run for a seat in Syria's People's Assembly (described as an 'ISIS assembly')." Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: September 30-October 7*, 7 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2s4zjs6k>. See also, Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding Security in New Syria: Weeks 42-43*, 7 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/cd4yyte9>.

³⁴⁶ ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. 10.

b) Twelver Shi'ites

Similar to Alawites, members of the Twelver Shi'ite community have been vulnerable to sectarian and revenge-motivated violence on account of the prominent role of Shi'ite militias in supporting the former government.³⁴⁷ Information on the targeting of Twelver Shi'ites remains limited, and details about victims – including any affiliation with the former government – as well as perpetrators and motives are often scarce.³⁴⁸ However, killings³⁴⁹ and attacks on homes and businesses have been reported, typically carried out by unknown individuals.³⁵⁰

An attempted Da'esh attack on the Shi'ite Sayyida Zeinab shrine in Damascus on 11 January 2025 was foiled by the authorities.³⁵¹

³⁴⁷ The Middle East Forum reports that the Twelver Shi'ite villages of Nubl and al-Zahra, "surrounded on all sides by Sunni localities", initially saw residents flee out of fear they would be targeted "on a sectarian basis and as revenge for collaboration with the [former] regime". Following assurances of safety, and the return of some individuals without incident, many residents chose to return, though others remained displaced in Aleppo, Damascus, Lebanon and Iraq. While these two villages have not experienced large-scale targeting, and are subject to security arrangements intended to protect the local population, residents nevertheless report reluctance to travel outside the villages due to fears of sectarian or revenge killings, particularly given their disarmament relative to the surrounding Sunni localities. More broadly, however, "not all [Twelver Shi'ite communities] have enjoyed the same protection" as Nubl and al-Zahra. In Homs province, where the community is more geographically dispersed, there have been "multiple reports of displacement and violations", including the assassination of Shi'ite cleric Rasul Shahud in July 2025, who was "almost certainly targeted (...) on a sectarian basis". In addition, the original inhabitants of al-Fua and Kafariya—evacuated in 2018 after prolonged siege—have been unable to return, with their homes confiscated and repopulated, and some reporting that they do not feel it would be safe to return in the absence of safety guarantees and amid threats of sectarian or revenge violence. Middle East Forum, *Eyewitness Report: Twelver Shiite Villages of Nubl and Al-Zahra in the Aleppo Countryside in the Post-Assad Period*, 27 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/42kbwtwv>. "Worryingly, in Hama and Homs, once religiously mixed districts have reportedly seen retaliatory violence from Sunni armed groups, with [Twelver] Shiite families reporting arson attacks on homes and businesses linked to the former government." Amwaj Media, *Deep Dive: Can Iraqi Outreach Secure a Future for Syria's Shiites?*, 6 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5ftapu4k>. See also, Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi (Blog), *Guest Post: The Twelver Shia in Syria*, 16 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/49ceu5ch>; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Regime Change and Minority Risks: Syrian Alawites After Assad*, 21 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5et3vwss>; Amwaj Media, *Inside Story: Syria's Shiites Face Uncertain Fate in Future Dominated by Sunni Islamists*, 10 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5ezzkp73>.

³⁴⁸ In early January 2026, "ten Sunni, Alawi, and Shia men were killed by gunmen. Some killings were explicitly linked to past involvement in regime forces, others appeared targeted but with unclear motivations (...)." Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding Security in New Syria: Year 2, Week 4*, 5 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/52dt3jnp>. "Another attack in Homs city may have been a reprisal or revenge killing, but the perpetrators and motive for the murder remain unclear. On January 12 [2025], five people from Al-Mazraa (a Shia majority village on the outskirts of Homs city) were found murdered. According to some reports, unknown gunmen shot them, while others noted that the deceased had been affiliated with Shujaa Al-Ali, a notorious high-ranking official in the Assad government, who was killed in late December 2024. Other reports claimed that people from Al-Mazraa had committed significant violations against civilians in the neighboring Sunni-majority neighborhoods of Al-Wa'er and Baba Amr earlier in the war, hinting that this killing may have been a matter of revenge." SJAC, *Human Rights Violations in Syria: December 2024 - January 2025*, 22 January 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3yypsnww>.

³⁴⁹ Reports of killings by unidentified gunmen include: the killing of a Shia man and his fiancé on 18 February 2026; the killing of a Shia man on 30 January 2026; the killing of a Shia man on 1 January 2026; the killing of two Shia men on 4 November 2025; the killing of a Shia man on 16 October 2025; the killing of a Shia man on 28 September 2025; the abduction of a Shia man on 28 September 2025 and the subsequent discovery of his body the following day; the killing of a Shia man and two others being injured on 21 September 2025. Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: February 17-24, 2026*, 24 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/294a9pky>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: January 27-February 2, 2026*, 3 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/ew9t89cz>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: December 30, 2025 - January 6, 2026*, 6 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mt33xw5n>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: October 28 - November 11, 2025*, 11 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3my9zfcx>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: October 14-21, 2025*, 21 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3ht47a75>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: September 23-29, 2025*, 30 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bdz7hfxs>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: September 16-23, 2025*, 23 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mrxutwu>.

³⁵⁰ "While Syria's [Twelver] Shiite community has so far managed to avoid a mass casualty attack, several members of the community (...) feared it was only a matter of time. These anxieties have only grown as the community experiences ongoing low-level violence and threats, often carried out by unnamed perpetrators and without statements of responsibility." Amwaj Media, *Deep Dive: Can Iraqi Outreach Secure a Future for Syria's Shiites?*, 6 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5ftapu4k>.

³⁵¹ Etana, *Syria Update #14: 17 January*, 17 January 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2120884.html.

c) Druze

During the July 2025 unrest, Druze civilians were subjected to a range of violations by Government security forces and affiliated tribal groups.³⁵² Reported abuses included the forcible shaving of moustaches and other forms of sectarian-motivated humiliating treatment,³⁵³ arbitrary arrests, abductions, torture, and extra-judicial killings.³⁵⁴ Women and girls were also targeted, facing abductions and gender-based violence,³⁵⁵ including rape, in some cases followed by execution,³⁵⁶ amidst online calls for their enslavement.³⁵⁷ Homes, shops and livestock were looted and burnt.³⁵⁸

These abuses occurred amid a surge of online incitement of violence, with hateful social media rhetoric portraying Druze as infidels and collaborators with Israel.³⁵⁹ According to UN experts, the “scale of violence reported (...) points to a targeted campaign against the Druze minority.”³⁶⁰

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- ³⁵² UN experts reported that “intense sectarian clashes (...) escalated into widespread violence involving local militias, Syrian interim authorities’ forces and affiliated armed groups. (...) Reports that the interim authorities’ forces aided attacks have entrenched impunity and fear, silencing victims’ families and obstructing efforts to locate the disappeared.” OHCHR, *Syria: UN Experts Alarmed by Attacks on Druze Communities, Including Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls*, 21 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2128930.html. On 17 July 2025, “Syria’s tribal confederation announced a nationwide mobilization, calling on tribal forces to deploy to Suwayda. (...) As the tribal mobilization continued to expand, and tribal forces continued to advance in Suwayda, widespread reports of crimes committed in Druze areas proliferated – including executions and the burning and looting of property.” Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: July 15-22, 2025*, 22 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/pvzjmpen>.
- ³⁵³ HRW “documented acts that amounted to identity-based outrages upon personal dignity. These included forced shaving of Druze men’s mustaches and abusive language referencing Druze identity. Particularly among older or more traditional Druze men in Syria, mustaches have historically carried cultural and symbolic significance.” HRW, *Syria: Accountability Lacking for Sweida Abuses*, 15 January 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2135307.html. “(...) reports circulated that Druze were forced to crawl on their hands and knees and labeled as ‘pigs.’” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Implications of the Recent Violence in Suwayda*, 6 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4v5xa2sz>. See also, OHCHR, *Syria: UN Experts Alarmed by Attacks on Druze Communities, Including Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls*, 21 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2128930.html.
- ³⁵⁴ “(...) Druze detainees—including large numbers of civilians kidnapped by pro-government forces and Bedouin militias—were reportedly being held in Adra Central Prison. (...) One former detainee (...) said they were released with no record of their arrest or detention (...). Suwayda’s governor, Mustafa al-Bakour, previously claimed these detainees were being held in ‘precautionary detention’ without charge, however it appears that at least some of these detentions were protracted and arbitrary; there is also no evidence of due process being applied.” Etana, *BRIEF: Suwayda-Damascus Prisoner Exchange*, 6 March 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mryfptca>. “The [UN] experts pointed to the reported abduction of at least 105 Druze women and girls by armed groups affiliated with the Syrian interim authorities, with 80 still missing.” OHCHR, *Syria: UN Experts Alarmed by Attacks on Druze Communities, Including Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls*, 21 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2128930.html. “The Supreme Druze Religious Council (...) submitted a formal appeal to the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Syria (...). The document cites a series of attacks characterized by executions, sexual assaults, torture, and the deliberate targeting of Druze religious figures and cultural sites.” Jerusalem Post, *Druze Religious Council Submits Evidence to UN on Genocide, Systematic Attacks Against Syrian Druze*, 29 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/52behzdb>. HRW “documented seven incidents of summary killings between July 14 and 19 [2025] in which government forces and affiliated militia killed at least 54 Druze civilians, including children.” HRW, *Syria: Accountability Lacking for Sweida Abuses*, 15 January 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2135307.html. See also, Amnesty International, *Syria: A Year After Assad’s Fall, the Rights of Survivors and Families Must Guide Transition*, 8 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133836.html; Amnesty International, *Syria: New Investigation Reveals Evidence Government and Affiliated Forces Extrajudicially Executed Dozens of Druze People in Suwayda*, 2 September 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132428.html; OHCHR, *Türk Calls for Immediate Steps to Ensure Protection of People in Suweida and Across Syria*, 18 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2s4f6up8>.
- ³⁵⁵ OHCHR, *Syria: UN Experts Alarmed by Attacks on Druze Communities, Including Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls*, 21 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2128930.html.
- ³⁵⁶ “In at least three cases, Druze women were allegedly raped before being executed.” Ibid.
- ³⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁵⁸ “Eight residents said that security units and armed groups raided homes and businesses, looting valuables, and burning or destroying property, then withdrawing. Some reported that entire neighborhoods were ransacked, with civilians returning to find their homes stripped bare.” HRW, *Syria: Accountability Lacking for Sweida Abuses*, 15 January 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2135307.html.
- ³⁵⁹ Institute for Strategic Dialogue, *How Violence in Southern Syria Fuelled Anti-Druze Hate and Online Misinformation*, 28 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4dtpwp4t>; OHCHR, *Syria: UN Experts Alarmed by Attacks on Druze Communities, Including Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls*, 21 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2128930.html.
- ³⁶⁰ OHCHR, *Syria: UN Experts Alarmed by Attacks on Druze Communities, Including Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls*, 21 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2128930.html.

Following the July 2025 unrest in Suweida, Druze communities in the Governorate remain largely isolated. Reports indicate that individuals travelling between Government-held and Druze-controlled areas, or those who are present near dividing lines, have in some instances been attacked, abducted, or killed.³⁶¹ A number of those arrested or abducted are still unaccounted for.³⁶² With more than 30 villages destroyed in the violence, many of those displaced remain unable to return.³⁶³

During periods of heightened tensions and increased sectarian rhetoric – such as the April 2025 events in Rural Damascus and the July 2025 unrest in Suweida – Druze individuals living outside Suweida have faced sectarian-motivated violence.³⁶⁴ Incidents have included harassment, sectarian slurs, and physical assaults, and in

³⁶¹ Examples include the killing of four Druze men and the injuring of another on 7 February 2026 in the al-Matuna area of northern rural Suwayda; the killing of a Druze man and a Druze woman and the injuring of at least 10 others when two unidentified gunmen opened fire on a passenger bus travelling near the village of Buraq in Rif Dimashq on the highway to Suweida in October 2025; the kidnapping of 12 Druze civilians who were travelling to Suweida on 17 August 2025; the injuring of three Druze civilians during an attack on their vehicle in eastern Daraa on 17 August 2025; the killing of a Druze woman and the injuring of her daughter while driving through eastern rural Daraa on 16 August 2025. Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: February 2-9, 2026*, 10 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2ywfappp>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: October 21-28, 28 October 2025*, <https://tinyurl.com/bd83dpjy>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: August 12-19, 2025*, 19 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2bv495n8>.

³⁶² "An aid worker said that dozens of people remain missing or abducted, with families having received no information about their whereabouts or condition." HRW, *Syria: Accountability Lacking for Sweida Abuses*, 15 January 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2135307.html. "According to the 'Higher Legal Committee' formed by the spiritual leadership of the Druze community in the province [Suweida], there are at least 230 persons still missing, including 17 women and eight children." The New Arab, *After the SDF, the Syrian Government Turns Its Eyes on Tackling Suweida*, 16 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3ky7mrm4>.

³⁶³ "(...) there was widespread looting and systematic burning of nearly every home in 35 mixed or predominantly Druze villages by tribal fighters (...). In addition, for communities in Druze-armed group-controlled areas, permission from local authorities led by Sheikh Al-Hijri is required for any travel outside their areas of control, which is reportedly limited to international travel and medical appointments." OHCHR, *Violations Committed During the July 2025 Violence in Suwayda, Syria*, 27 March 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/55yv3uuh>, paras 44, 129. See also, UN News, *'Repeated Bouts of Violence' Put Syria Rebuilding at Risk: Independent Rights Investigator*, 30 October 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/10/1166226>; OHCHR, *Syria: UN Experts Alarmed by Attacks on Druze Communities, Including Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls*, 21 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2128930.html.

³⁶⁴ "Tuesday's [29 April 2025] fighting was sparked by a fake audio recording attributed to a Druze cleric (...), which was circulated on social media. Unknown gunmen launched their attack on Jaramana seemingly in connection with the audio clip. The cleric supposedly speaking in the clip posted a video on social media later on Tuesday clarifying that he had no connection to the Islamophobic recording. 'I did not say that, and whoever made it is evil and wants to incite strife between components of the Syrian people,' said Marwan Kiwan. Syria's interior ministry confirmed that the recording was falsely attributed to a Druze official, and stressed that people should abide by the law and not engage in acts of vigilantism." The Guardian, *Deadly Syria Clashes Continue for Second Day Outside Damascus*, 30 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2wr5y3yr>. "Druze survivors, including university students in Damascus, Homs, Aleppo and Latakia face ongoing harassment and fear for their safety." OHCHR, *Syria: UN Experts Alarmed by Attacks on Druze Communities, Including Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls*, 21 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2128930.html. See also, Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), *'Aqib al-Tawattur al-Ta'ifi fi Rif Dimashq wa Al-Suwayda': Irtiqā' Hasīla al-Muwājahāt ilā 74 Shakhṣan fi Aqal min 48 Sā'a*, 1 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5n7fbbwm>; SOHR, *Wa Ḥālāt l'dām Maydānī wa 92 Qatīlan Khilāl al-Ishtibākāt wa al-Kamā'in: Irtiqā' al-Adad al-Jmālī li-Tawatturāt al-Ta'ifiyya fi Al-Suwayda' wa Rif Dimashq ilā 101*, 1 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y9hsaby9>.

some cases even killings.³⁶⁵ Universities have been a particular flashpoint.³⁶⁶ Some Druze individuals have been subjected to arrest for allegedly “communicating with Israel”.³⁶⁷

d) Bedouins

During the July 2025 unrest in Suweida Governorate, Druze factions carried out reprisal attacks against Bedouin civilians, including execution-style killings, abductions, the desecration of bodies, and the looting of homes.³⁶⁸ According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), the violence “appeared to be an effort to expel

³⁶⁵ “The violence in Suwayda triggered an increase in hate speech and anti-Druze rhetoric online. (...) the Syrian government, Druze leadership in Suweida and local analysts explicitly noted the link between misinformation and real-world violence. According to an investigation by The Arab Post, between 28 and 30 April [2025], hate speech, including some misleading and false information, was spread by Iraqi, Lebanese, Israeli and local pro-Assad networks to fuel sectarian tensions.” Institute for Strategic Dialogue, *How Violence in Southern Syria Fuelled Anti-Druze Hate and Online Misinformation*, 28 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4dtpwp4t>. For reports of harassment and other forms of physical violence, including killings, see Syria TV, *Tajaddud al-Ishtibākāt fī Al-Suwayda*... Qā'id Faṣīl 'Ashā'irī: Al-Hudna Takhuṣṣ al-Hukūma wa Lā Tashmalunā, 27 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4v8e8h7d>; OHCHR, *Syria: UN Experts Alarmed by Attacks on Druze Communities, Including Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls*, 21 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2128930.html; SOHR, *Ceasefire Agreement Violations | Clashes Renew in Al-Suwayda Countryside amid Fears of Worsening Humanitarian Situation*, 20 July 2025, www.syria-hr.com/en/366252/; The Arab Post, *Ḥamla Raqmiyya bi-Libās Ṭā'ifi... 'Arabī Bust' Yakshif Kayfa Aḍḥat Shabakat Ḥisābat Ba'duhā Ajnabiyya Khaṭāb al-Karāhiyya bayna al-Sūriyyīn Khilāl Aḥdāth Jaramānā*, 2 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5eema6wy>; SOHR, *'Aqib al-Tawattur al-Ta'ifi fī Rif Dimashq wa Al-Suwayda': Irtiqā' Hasila al-Muwājahāt ilā 74 Shakhṣan fī Aqal min 48 Sā'a*, 1 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5n7fbbwm>; SOHR, *Fī Kamīn 'alā Ṭariq Dimashq–Al-Suwayda': Irtiqā' 'Adad al-Qatlā ilā 15 min Abnā' al-Ṭā'ifa al-Durziyya Baynahum Maḥrūqū al-Juthath*, 1 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/8j9ywjvw>; SOHR, *Wa Ḥālāt l'dām Maydānī wa 92 Qatīlan Khilāl al-Ishtibākāt wa al-Kamā'in: Irtiqā' al-'Adad al-Ijmālī li-Tawatturāt al-Ta'ifiyya fī Al-Suwayda' wa Rif Dimashq ilā 101*, 1 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y9hsaby9>; SOHR, *Dea'th Toll Update | 47 Civilians Killed in Rif Dimashq and Al-Suwayda*, 30 April 2025, www.syria-hr.com/en/360974/; The Guardian, *Deadly Syria Clashes Continue for Second Day Outside Damascus*, 30 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2wr5y3yr>.

³⁶⁶ In July 2025, “[F]ollowing Israeli strikes on Damascus in response to violence in Suwayda, Druze students became direct targets of sectarian incitement. Online posts accused us of treason, as other posts and messages doxxing Druze students in a Damascus University official campus group and in WhatsApp channels like one roughly named ‘Expose the Traitors’ depict. According to student testimonies collected between July and August 2025 from Damascus University, dormitories were stormed, personal belongings seized and students branded ‘traitors’.” Similar sectarian-motivated targeting of Druze students was reported in April 2025, resulting in the stabbing of one student. Dawn Mena, *Academic Spaces Under Siege: Documenting Crimes Against Humanity in Syrian Higher Education*, 30 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2u2w75x4>. See also, OHCHR, *Syria: UN Experts Alarmed by Attacks on Druze Communities, Including Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls*, 21 August 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2128930.html; Daraj, *Sectarian Tensions in Syrian Universities: The Ugly Side of School Mates Appears*, 14 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bdzhe4wk>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: April 22-29, 2025*, 29 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/jm7vfvhn>.

³⁶⁷ “Three Druze men were reportedly detained by Public Security forces in the village of Erneh southwest of Damascus late on April 22 after being accused of communication with the Israel Defense Force (IDF).” Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: April 22-29, 2025*, 29 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/jm7vfvhn>.

³⁶⁸ HRW “documented two mass killings apparently by Druze armed groups in the city of Shahba, north of Sweida city, on July 17 [2025]. The victims were 19 Syrian Bedouin civilians, including children. Witnesses said that after the withdrawal of Syrian government forces, fighters affiliated with Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri’s armed groups surrounded the area, issued a short deadline for residents to leave, and then opened fire. (...) Human Rights Watch also documented cases of the desecration of bodies (...)” HRW, *Syria: Accountability Lacking for Sweida Abuses*, 15 January 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2135307.html. “On July 11 [2025], armed Bedouin robbed a Druze vegetable seller along the Damascus-Suwayda highway, taking him prisoner, and other Druze then abducted a Sunni man in retaliation, setting off a spate of tit-for-tat kidnappings that soon escalated into fierce clashes between Druze militias and Bedouin groups. (...) Druze militias also engaged in sectarian targeting, with the SMC, for example, accused of killing scores of Bedouin. A photo posted on social media showed a Druze militiaman standing in front of the body of a Bedouin hanging from a bridge, while users online celebrated a video showing armed men transporting dead Bedouin troops on the hoods of their trucks.” Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Implications of the Recent Violence in Suwayda*, 6 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4v5xa2sz>. Le Monde reported that Druze fighters abducted Bedouin civilians as leverage to compel prisoner exchanges for captured Druze. Le Monde, *Southern Syria's Bedouins, the Other Victims of the Battle for Sweida*, 27 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/47kfy6fh>. “Following the forced or non-consenting displacement of Bedouins from their homes in Maqwas neighbourhood, Shahba town, Sahwet Balata village, Ora village, and elsewhere, their homes and business were looted, as were their livestock and vehicles left behind. (...) In some cases, their homes were deliberately burnt or destroyed, but in most cases, they have been and remain occupied by members of SMCAGs [Suweida Military Council and other Suwayda-based armed groups], or civilians displaced into areas controlled by such groups (...)” OHCHR, *Violations Committed During the July 2025 Violence in Suwayda, Syria*, 27 March 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/55yv3uuu>, para. 111. See also, Amnesty International, *Syria: A Year After Assad's Fall, the Rights of Survivors and Families Must Guide Transition*, 8 December 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133836.html; Al Majalla, *Unravelling the Factions, Sheikhs, and Fighters of Sweida*, 24 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4cuy8raw>.

Bedouin residents from the area.”³⁶⁹ The OHCHR reported that nearly all Bedouin civilians were forcibly displaced from localities across Suweida Governorate during the July 2025 violence,³⁷⁰ with the largest wave following the withdrawal of Government forces on 16 July 2025.³⁷¹ The Bedouins who remained trapped in Suweida city were then evacuated through Government-organized humanitarian corridors in the weeks following the 19 July 2025 ceasefire agreement.³⁷² Nearly all Bedouins displaced from Suweida Governorate remain unable to return at the time of writing due to the lack of agreement permitting the “return to their homes in areas under Syrian National Guard control”,³⁷³ and in part because most villages outside Druze control in the region remain destroyed.³⁷⁴ Displaced Bedouin communities face precarious living conditions, including overcrowded temporary accommodation, poor shelter conditions, and extremely limited access to basic services including displaced children’s access to educational systems.³⁷⁵

As most Bedouins have been displaced from Suweida, only a few incidents of abuse by Druze factions were reported after the 19 July 2025 ceasefire.³⁷⁶

e) Christians

Following the 28 March 2026 armed attack on the predominantly Christian town of Suqaylabiyah (Hama Governorate), several churches across Syria reportedly curtailed

³⁶⁹ ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. 27.

³⁷⁰ OHCHR, *Violations Committed During the July 2025 Violence in Suwayda, Syria*, 27 March 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/55yv3uuu>, paras 109, 188.

³⁷¹ “Following the 16 July [2025] ceasefire government forces and tribal fighters accompanying them withdrew from Suwayda city and most villages that evening. In the wake of their withdrawal, Bedouin civilians in Suwayda faced attacks by Suwayda Military Council and other Suwayda-based armed groups (SMCAGs) (...). Bedouin civilian communities were attacked in and around Shahba town to the north of Suwayda and also in areas to the south, including in Sahwet Balata and neighboring villages, subject to violent raids and eventually transferred out of Suwayda government. (...) Such attacks forced tens of thousands of Bedouins to leave the Druze-held areas of the governorate, ultimately resulting [in] the displacement of nearly all Bedouins from areas under control of SMCAGs by the end of July 2025.” Ibid., para. 41, see also para. 109.

³⁷² “Between 19 and 20 July [2025], government internal security forces redeployed to parts of western and northern rural Suwayda and stated its intention to separate armed actors and reopen limited humanitarian corridors. The following day, on 21 July, approximately 1,500 Bedouin civilians trapped inside Suwayda city were evacuated under the supervision of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC). More such evacuations followed over subsequent weeks.” Ibid., para. 46.

³⁷³ “Most displaced Druze and Bedouin communities have not been able to return to their homes across the contact line because (...) they have been prevented from returning due to restrictions by the government and the Suwayda National Guard. (...) They [the Bedouins] are acutely aware of the lack of support to their situation as well as the lack of progress towards an agreement between parties that would ensure they can return to their homes in areas under Suwayda National Guard control.” Ibid., paras 57, 130. Additionally, “Bedouin communities remain fearful of another round of violence and do not feel safe to return to their villages which are currently under the control of (...) Druze armed groups respectively.” Ibid., para. 55.

³⁷⁴ “Up to 35 villages [some of which were mixed] across the western and northern countryside were deliberately burnt and destroyed between 13 and 20 July [2025], with the most systematic looting and burning taking place on 18 and 19 July during the tribal mobilization, though both continued afterward as well. (...) The issues related to the displaced population and the widespread damage, destruction, and theft of property, especially in northern and western villages—require urgent attention.” Ibid., paras 44, 187. “Nearly all Bedouins have been forcibly displaced from areas under the control of authorities in Suwayda. (...) In response to questions about Bedouin displacement, local authorities stated that the Bedouin community could return when conditions improve.” Ibid., para. 188. “Bedouin communities from mixed villages currently under government control are not permitted to return.” Ibid., para. 129.

³⁷⁵ “(...) Bedouin displaced persons sites across Dar’a and Rural Damascus (...) included isolated barren fields or abandoned buildings, with extremely limited services available and poor-quality tents (for those hosted in open areas), and a few cases of overcrowded hotels (...).” Ibid., footnote 54. “Many children displaced outside Suwayda, in particular from Bedouin communities, had not yet been integrated into the educational systems at the time of the Commission’s visits in rural parts of Dar’a and parts of Rural Damascus.” Ibid., para. 133.

³⁷⁶ “Two Bedouin men were shot and severely injured and their home set on fire and destroyed by a group of Druze militiamen who attacked them in the village of Dhibin in southern Suwayda on January 6 [2026]. *Syria Weekly*, *Syria Weekly: January 6-13, 2026*, 13 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/ycy6yczx>. “Video footage emerged on September 17 [2025] of a man inside Suwayda being interrogated under duress by Druze militiamen, accusing him of being ‘an agent’ of the Bedouin community. Some footage showed the man purportedly admitting to collaboration with ISIS.” *Syria Weekly*, *Syria Weekly: September 16-23, 2025*, 23 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mrxutwu>.

Holy Week and Easter celebrations due to security concerns.³⁷⁷ Da'esh and SAS have claimed responsibility for earlier attacks against Christian communities, including the 22 June 2025 attacks on the Mar Elias Greek Orthodox church in Damascus, which killed at least 25 people,³⁷⁸ as well as attempted attacks on churches and Christian gatherings in Aleppo City on 31 December 2025 that were foiled by security forces.³⁷⁹ Violence has also affected – and at times directly targeted – individual members of Christian communities, with perpetrators and motives often remaining unknown.³⁸⁰

f) Christian Converts

While conversion from Islam to other religions is not explicitly prohibited by law,³⁸¹ Muslims who convert to Christianity are prohibited from changing their religion on

³⁷⁷ Following the attack, several churches announced “the cancellation of outdoor celebrations for Palm Sunday and Easter, restricting festivities to inside church premises.” L'Orient Today, *In Syria, Christians Prepare for Easter in Fear*, 31 March 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5n72rnfk>.

³⁷⁸ Al Jazeera, *Deadly Church Attack Raises Security Fears for Syrians, Minorities*, 25 June 2025, <https://aje.io/enjmv>. See also, Levant24, *Ministry of Justice Details Mar Elias Church Bombing Investigation*, 9 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/53x8v852>.

³⁷⁹ Euronews, *Syria Says IS Planned New Year's Eve Attacks on Churches and Social Gatherings*, 1 January 2026, <https://bit.ly/4qUtxev>. According to the Ministry of Interior, Da'esh suspects also confessed to planning a car bombing against a church in Maaloula (Rural Damascus) on the same day. Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Christians in the New Syria: Accepted, But at-Risk*, 9 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ymkyvtx2>.

³⁸⁰ See, for example, STJ, *Abduction in Syria: Alawite Women Most Targeted Amidst Transitional Government Inaction*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5x48derf>, p. 8; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: February 10-17, 2026*, 17 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/s25skbnn>; Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Christians in the New Syria: Accepted, But at-Risk*, 9 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ymkyvtx2>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: October 21-28, 28 October 2025*, <https://tinyurl.com/bd83dpjy>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: September 30-October 7, 7 October 2025*, <https://tinyurl.com/2s4zjs6k>; The Atlantic Council, *Dispatch from Syria's Christian Strongholds: A New Government, a Full Political Spectrum*, 25 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/44wxcfsn>.

³⁸¹ While the US Department of State reported in 2020 that Syria law “prohibits the conversion of Muslims to other religions as contrary to sharia.” (US Department of State, *2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria*, 10 June 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/53fw8s2j>, p. 5), subsequent sources have consistently indicated that no Syrian law criminalizes apostasy for Muslims. The Dutch Foreign Ministry asserted in 2023 that there “is no law in Syria that makes leaving Islam a criminal offence.” Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (BZ), *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, August 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/tv74sw96>, sect. 7.3 *Islamic Apostates*, p. 65. The Jubilee Campaign similarly reported in 2024 that “there is no penal provision criminalizing apostasy explicitly (...).” Jubilee Campaign, *Religious Freedom: Country Factsheets*, September 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/53mj5h9t>, p. 30. The current constitutional framework reflects this legal ambiguity. Following the repeal of the 2012 Constitution, a new Constitutional Declaration was adopted on 13 March 2025 and is to remain in force for a five-year transitional period. Kassiou, *Al-Naṣṣ al-Kāmil li-l-Iʿlān al-Dustūr al-Sūrī (13 Ādhār 2025)*, 13 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y276eyc5>. The declaration protects freedom of belief (Art. 3(2)) and incorporates Syria's ratified international human rights treaties (Art. 12(2)), which would include Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights concerning the freedom to adopt a religion or belief of one's choice. Ibid., Arts 3(2), 12(2); OHCHR, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, 16 December 1966, <https://tinyurl.com/2txn89he>, Arts 18(1)-(3). At the same time, the Constitutional Declaration designates Islamic jurisprudence as the principal source of legislation (Art. 3(1)), while supporting the principle of legality (Art. 17(1)). Kassiou, *Al-Naṣṣ al-Kāmil li-l-Iʿlān al-Dustūr al-Sūrī (13 Ādhār 2025)*, 13 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y276eyc5>, Arts 3(1), 17(1). It remains unclear whether, and to what extent, the transitional authorities would treat classical Islamic jurisprudence as supplementing the Penal Code in the absence of an express statutory prohibition. CIVICA Fellow Dima Hussain speaking on legal pluralism in Syria remarks that “HTS, the group that was controlling Idlib, is now ruling over major parts of Syria (...). It would not be surprising to see the model established in Idlib replicated in other governorates, one that centres around a Shari'a-based legal system (...).” European University Institute, *How History Informs the Present: Shari'a Law and Tribal Justice in Syria*, 5 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5n7ufms3>. According to a Christian theologian working for a Damascus-based church organization, “[u]nlike in government-held areas of Syria, there have been many cases of conversion from Islam to Christianity in Kurdish-controlled Northeast Syria (...) [and] [c]onverts do not face repercussions from the authorities in that area (...).” Danish Immigration Service (DIS), *Syria: Situation of Certain Groups*, December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2ft9fs8d>, Annex 1, p. 85, para. 15. As conversions from Islam to Christianity in the rest of Syria are generally not publicly disclosed due to fear of societal repercussions, no reported cases of apostasy adjudication, and therefore no legal precedent under the current Government, had been identified as of December 2024; the government's current position on apostasy had likewise not been publicly elaborated. ACCORD, *Anfragebeantwortung zu Syrien: Apostasie: Haltung der Übergangsregierung, Gesetzliche Regelung (oder Fatwas und Frühere Urteile von Scharia-Gerichten), Haltung Anderer Akteure in Syrien, Situation in Gebieten unter der Kontrolle von Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) und Verbündeten vor der Machtübernahme [a-12744]*, 18 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mrxtkvzt>.

government-issued documents.³⁸² As a result of social conventions, religious proscriptions, and the lack of legal recognition, instances of open conversions from Islam to Christianity are reported to be rare.³⁸³ Christian converts are reportedly often forced to keep their faith secret given the widespread animosity towards converts from Islam in Syrian society and the fact that families and tribes would likely interpret conversion by one of their members as an affront to their collective “honour”.³⁸⁴ Open conversion would likely result in ostracism and/or violence at the hands of the individual’s community, tribe or family.³⁸⁵

g) Kurds and Yazidis in Afrin

Prior to the fall of the former government, SNA factions were implicated in war crimes and human rights abuses against civilians while exercising de facto control over Afrin District (Aleppo Governorate), including physical attacks, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, looting, extortion, and property confiscation.³⁸⁶ Despite their progressive integration into State security forces,³⁸⁷ violations by former SNA factions continued to be documented throughout 2025.³⁸⁸ These violations regularly targeted individuals of Kurdish origin, either on the basis of ethnicity and/or due to real or

³⁸² “(...) converts to Christianity could not officially change their religion on government documents (...)” Help The Persecuted, *An Update from the Ground in Syria*, 7 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/dmmp4ffm>. A high-profile church leader is aware of a case in which a Christian man married a Muslim woman who converted to Christianity. Her inability to change her religion on her government documents has caused their marriage to be unrecognized and leaves their young daughter unable to be legally registered. DIS, *Syria: Situation of Certain Groups*, December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2ft9fs8d>, Annex 1, p. 128, para. 24.

³⁸³ “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.” Nevertheless, a high-profile church leader affirmed that there were “many Muslims who had converted to Christianity.” DIS, *Syria: Situation of Certain Groups*, December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2ft9fs8d>, p. 39. See also, BZ, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, August 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/tv74sw96>, sect. 7.3 *Islamic Apostates*, p. 65.

³⁸⁴ “Christians from a Muslim or Druze background are put under pressure by their families and communities, as conversion brings great dishonor to them. This is particularly true in majority-Sunni areas, where converts risk being attacked or expelled from family homes.” Open Doors International, *World Watch List 2023: Situation of Religious Freedom for Christians – Syria*, 30 September 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/bdzfcv9h>, pp. 1-2.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 4-6.

³⁸⁶ HRW, “*Everything Is by the Power of the Weapon*”: Abuses and Impunity in Turkish-Occupied Northern Syria, 29 February 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/myws767u>, pp. 28-54.

³⁸⁷ See Section II.B.8 (“*Main Security Developments: Former Syrian National Army (SNA) Factions*”).

³⁸⁸ “Syrian National Army (SNA) factions that fought the Assad government with backing from Türkiye continue to detain, mistreat, and extort civilians in northern Syria (...) arrests decreased in March [2025] but hundreds remain detained in SNA-run, Turkish-supervised prisons.” HRW, *Syria: Türkiye-Backed Armed Groups Detain, Extort Civilians*, 14 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ygy7s93p>. A 2025 report by STJ describes “the systematic and widespread practices of looting and extortion in the Kurdish-majority Afrin/Efrîn region. (...) Many farmers face harassment aimed at forcing them to pay extortion fees. Those who resist often suffer beatings, arbitrary arrests, property confiscations, and even destruction of their olive trees.” STJ, *Olive Levies in Afrin: ‘There Is No Law Protecting Farmers; What Prevails Is Jungle Law’*, 14 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3cf832j5>, p. 4. See also, New Lines Magazine, *Turkey’s Lingering Influence in Syria’s New Army*, 2 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yc7e7ude>; STJ, *Syria/Afrin: Communication to the UN on Systematic HLP Violations: Seizure, Looting, and Extortion*, 29 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/26xdct76>; SNHR, *Monthly Report for Victims of Extrajudicial Killing in Syria: The Death of 3666 Individuals Including 328 Children and 312 Women, and 32 Deaths Due to Torture Recorded in the year 2025 in Syria*, 1 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3ek4mxjx>, pp. 3, 7; Kurdistan 24, *Crimes Escalate in Afrin as Kurdish Civilians Killed amid Ongoing Looting and Lawlessness*, 7 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/n3hnpssr>.

perceived affiliation with the SDF/YPG/YPJ or the DAANES.³⁸⁹ Former SNA factions are also widely reported to have retained their profit-generating and patronage networks, including through continued extortion and property seizures targeting Kurdish farmers.³⁹⁰ In defiance of Government directives, they have additionally refused to return confiscated property.³⁹¹

Yazidis have similarly been subjected to property confiscation and, in some instances, harassment and pressure to convert to Islam.³⁹²

h) Palestinians

Under the 1951 Refugee Convention, Palestinian refugees falling within the personal scope of Article 1D, who have been excluded under Art. 1D(1) (who are receiving or are eligible to receive protection or assistance from UNRWA) and who are subsequently included under Art. 1D(2) (when that protection or assistance has ceased) are ipso facto entitled to the benefits of the 1951 Refugee Convention, provided Articles 1C, 1E or 1F of the Convention do not apply.³⁹³

Asylum claims of Palestinians who do not fall within the scope of Article 1D should be adjudicated under Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Palestinian refugees face the same threats as Syrian nationals and may fall under any of the risk profiles outlined in this document.

³⁸⁹ In the first six months of 2025, SNHR recorded arbitrary arrests/detentions and kidnappings by the SNA, targeting those coming from areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), including women, based on ethnicity, mainly in Aleppo Governorate. It also documented arbitrary arrests on charges of individuals cooperating with the SDF, mostly in Afrin District. SNHR noted that these arrests occurred prior to the SNA's "actual integration" into the State security forces. SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria: June*, 4 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/54zxzwt2>, pp. 10-13. Following the fall of the former government, "prisons and detention centers in Afrin have not been opened. Several reports indicate that these centers hold a large number of Kurds arrested by various SNA factions on pretextual charges, such as working with or affiliation with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). (...) the factions have widely used arbitrary detention and torture as tools to extract ransoms or to pressure residents to leave Afrin and abandon their properties (...)." STJ, *Syria/Afrin: Promises by Transitional Authorities to Restore Rights and End Violations Against Kurds*, 11 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/nhc3y5cm>, p. 4.

³⁹⁰ "Between May 2024 and July 2025, STJ carried out a series of field studies that included 39 interviews with direct victims or relatives of victims of property rights violations in Afrin. Of the participants, 37 were from the Kurdish community (...) Testimonies suggest that the violations were not isolated incidents but rather ongoing policies implemented on a large scale. Reported practices included forced displacement, seizure of homes and land, arbitrary arrests, financial extortion for release, and systematic torture. These violations were linked to specific military units within the SNA and allied factions (...)." STJ, *Syria/Afrin: Communication to the UN on Systematic HLP Violations: Seizure, Looting, and Extortion*, 29 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/26xdct76>, pp. 4-5, see also sects 4-5, pp. 5-11; New Lines Magazine, *Turkey's Lingering Influence in Syria's New Army*, 2 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yc7e7ude>.

³⁹¹ "(...) the shedding of factional names and incorporation of groups into new army divisions do not exclude the possibility that some individual figures and commanders within the old factions – now operating under the new army divisions – are still holding confiscated real estate in Afrin and refusing to hand over these assets to their original owners for reasons such as lack of alternative accommodation, self-enrichment, and patronage networks." Middle East Forum, *A Field Report from Afrin: Assessing the Prospects for Return of Displaced Kurds*, 30 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4krsaxjf>. See also, STJ, *Syria/Afrin: Communication to the UN on Systematic HLP Violations: Seizure, Looting, and Extortion*, 29 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/26xdct76>, sect. 6; Syria in Transition, *What's Left of the SNA*, Issue 30, December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/23z5j5yw>.

³⁹² According to a community leader, "there is fear among Yazidis from the village about formally lodging complaints" to seek the return of confiscated property, and that "the community has also faced some harassment from Muslims who seek to convert Yazidis to Islam". Middle East Forum, *A Field Report from Afrin: Assessing the Prospects for Return of Displaced Kurds*, 30 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4krsaxjf>. See also, The New Humanitarian, *Fear and Uncertainty for Yazidis and Kurds in Syria amid Government Advances*, 26 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mu7uzudd>.

³⁹³ UNHCR, *Guidelines on International Protection No. 13: Applicability of Article 1D of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees to Palestinian Refugees*, December 2017, HCR/GIP/17/13, www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2017/en/119322.

2) Individuals Opposing, or Perceived to Be Opposing, the SDF in Areas Under Its De Facto Control

Throughout 2025 and into 2026, the SDF continued to arbitrarily arrest and detain individuals – including children³⁹⁴ – who are opposing, or perceived to oppose, its authority.³⁹⁵ Those targeted included individuals opposing forced conscription into the “self-defence service”,³⁹⁶ those supporting the Government or factions allied with it,³⁹⁷ journalists and activists,³⁹⁸ as well as persons perceived to support rival factions such as Arab tribal forces, the SNA³⁹⁹ or Da’esh.⁴⁰⁰

Throughout 2025, the SDF continued to enforce mandatory “self-defence service”, requiring men to serve for 12 months upon reaching the age of 18.⁴⁰¹ Those who refuse to join or who defect⁴⁰² risk arrest, detention, and forcible transfer to recruitment

³⁹⁴ SNHR continues to document incidents of arbitrary arrest and detention of children by the SDF, often on the basis of alleged Da’esh affiliation or support for the Government. In 2025, SNHR documented the arrest and detention of 72 children by the SDF. SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria: December*, 3 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yckfe4y7>, p. 5; SNHR, *Strengthening the Child Protection System in Syria: Addressing the Legacy of Fifteen Years of Systematic Violations and Ensuring a Safe Future for Generations*, 21 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mswcjkau>, p. 12. For example, a “teenage boy (...) was detained by SDF forces at the Ghazal checkpoint in Hasakeh on January 27 [2026] after a video of President Ahmed al-Sharaa was found on his cell phone.” Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: January 27-February 2, 2026*, 3 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/ew9t89cz>.

³⁹⁵ “In 2025, the SDF carried out arbitrary detentions, including of individuals accused of dissent, amid broader concerns over restrictions on expression and due process in areas under their control.” HRW, *World Report 2026: Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136267.html.

³⁹⁶ “According to media reports, hundreds of young men were arrested as part of recruitment measures in the governates of Raqqa and Hasaka after an increase in checkpoints was observed in some areas controlled by Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).” German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), *Briefing Notes Summary: Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration – Syria – July to December 2025*, 31 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3mcma98z>, p. 20.

³⁹⁷ Activities perceived by the SDF as acts of opposition – and which have led to arbitrary arrest and detention – included celebrating the anniversary of the former government’s fall, possessing Syrian flags or images of the Syrian President, criticizing SDF rule on social media, and travelling to Government-held areas. Syria Direct, *Caught Between Damascus and Qandil, SDF Integration Hangs in the Balance*, 10 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdhzb6jw>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: January 27-February 2, 2026*, 3 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/ew9t89cz>; MEI, *Integration or Conflict in Northeastern Syria? Ten Key Points to Consider*, 29 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdnyyswr>; Enab Baladi, *Raqqa, SDF Arrests Participant in Liberation Day Celebrations*, 9 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4a5c56h7>; SNHR, *Syrian Democratic Forces Arrest Two Children in Al-Qubba Village, Aleppo Countryside*, August 23, 2025, 26 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mrbuh644>; SNHR, *The Syrian Democratic Forces Arrested a Child in the Town of Hazima in the Countryside of Raqqa Governorate on August 9, 2025*, 12 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3jn34mx2>; SNHR, *The Syrian Democratic Forces Arrested Four Brothers in the Al-Mashlab Neighborhood in Raqqa City on July 5, 2025*, 8 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/my6677hj>.

³⁹⁸ See, for example, CPJ, *Firas al-Barjas*, January 2026, <https://cpj.org/data/people/firas-al-barjas>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: September 30-October 7*, 7 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2s4zjs6k>; SNHR, *The Syrian Democratic Forces Arrested Journalist Raman Hasso in the Town of Amuda in the Hasaka Countryside on July 1, 2025*, 4 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/23cft94h>; SNHR, *SDF Arrests a Media Worker in Deir ez-Zour*, January 28, 2025, 30 January 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4jebec6n>.

³⁹⁹ SNHR “monitored arrests/detentions targeting civilians on charges of collaborating with Arab tribal forces and the National Army [SNA], and participating in Operation Deterrence of Aggression, which was launched on 27 November 2024 [and resulted in the fall of the former government].” SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria: June*, 4 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/54zxzwt2>, p. 12.

⁴⁰⁰ See, for example, Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: January 27-February 2, 2026*, 3 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/ew9t89cz>; Enab Baladi, *SDF Launches Arrest Campaign in Deir Ezzor*, 3 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3j4h4d9s>; SNHR, *Condemning the Arbitrary Detention of Journalist Firas al-Barjas and His Referral to the Exceptional Terrorism Court of the SDF*, 24 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bddzanj2>; Syria Direct, *A Year After Assad’s Fall, Arbitrary Arrests Cast a Shadow over Northeastern Syria*, 5 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mwds4x9u>.

⁴⁰¹ BAMF, *Briefing Notes Summary: Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration – Syria – July to December 2025*, 31 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3mcma98z>, p. 20. “The conscription law took its final form on June 23, 2019, when AANES adopted a new law consisting of 35 articles, making it similar to the Syrian regime’s mandatory military service law and named ‘Duty of Self-Defense.’ (...) According to the Self-Defense law, mandatory military service is imposed on males who have reached 18 years of age, and females have the right to join voluntarily (non-mandatory service).” Enab Baladi, *AANES Adopts Amendments to Conscription Laws*, 22 February 2024, <http://bit.ly/4f6pjMd>.

⁴⁰² “The SDF defines a deserter in the Self-Defense Duty Law as a fighter who has been absent for 15 consecutive days after joining (...).” Enab Baladi, *AANES Adopts Amendments to Conscription Laws*, 22 February 2024, <http://bit.ly/4f6pjMd>.

centres.⁴⁰³ Detainees are regularly held incommunicado and may be subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment, in some cases resulting in death.⁴⁰⁴ Individuals who refuse service may be perceived as opposing the SDF or as affiliated with rival actors, such as the Government, the SNA, or Da'esh. Following the fall of the former government, defections – particularly among Arab members – reportedly increased, prompting intensified arrest campaigns.⁴⁰⁵

Large-scale defections from the SDF were reported during the Government's expansion into SDF-held areas in January 2026. Given the rapid advance of Government forces, the mass defection of Arab tribal units, and the SDF's withdrawal from Arab-majority areas with little reported resistance, there are no indications that Kurdish-led SDF forces were in a position to punish defectors in the territories from which they withdrew.⁴⁰⁶ At the time of writing, the SDF's military and civilian forces were in the process of being integrated into State institutions under the terms of the 30 January 2026 ceasefire and comprehensive agreement. With the SDF's forces operating under State control and no longer controlling checkpoints or Arab-majority territories, the SDF should no longer be in a position to continue the forced recruitment practices previously reported in those areas.

⁴⁰³ Between January 2024 and January 2026, SNHR recorded the arbitrary arrest and detention of at least 1,391 individuals, including 151 children and several university students, by the SDF in Aleppo, Raqqah, Hassakeh and Deir ez-Zour Governorates. The arrests were accompanied by physical abuse and many of those arrested, including children, were transferred to recruitment camps. SNHR, *Quarterly Report on Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention in Syria: No Less than 210 Cases of Arbitrary Arrests and Detentions in the First Quarter of 2026* (hereafter: *Cases of Arbitrary Arrests and Detentions in the First Quarter of 2026*), 5 April 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4x99rx6f>, p. 6; SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria: December*, 3 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yckfe4y7>, p. 9; SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria: At Least 141 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention Recorded in November 2025*, 2 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4tbdbrce>, p. 7; SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria: At Least 197 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention Recorded in October 2025*, 2 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/43wcyhvx>, p. 7; SNHR, *SNHR's Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria: At Least 109 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest and Detention Recorded in July 2025*, 2 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/79p286mj>, p. 8; SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria: June*, 4 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/54zxzwt2>, pp. 12, 15; SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria: At Least 157 Arbitrary Arrests Recorded in Syria in May 2025*, 4 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4x6j8je2>, p. 9; SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria: At Least 89 Arbitrary Arrests Recorded in Syria in April 2025*, 3 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/42nma77t>, p. 8; SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria: At Least 117 Arbitrary Arrests Recorded in March 2025*, 10 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mrxaa4pd>, p. 9; SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria: At Least 216 Arbitrary Detentions Recorded in February 2025*, 3 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/wppbdhys>, p. 9; SNHR, *SNHR's Annual Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria: At Least 2,623 Arbitrary Detentions Documented in 2024, Including 349 in December*, 4 January 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/558bzj2u>, pp. 5, 14, 17.

⁴⁰⁴ SNHR, *Cases of Arbitrary Arrests and Detentions in the First Quarter of 2026*, 5 April 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4x99rx6f>, p. 10, para. 4. "The SDF delivered the dead (...) body of Ahmed al-Sajer to his family home on September 9 [2025], three days after his detention by the SDF for having pro-government material on his cell phone. His body bore many marks of torture." Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: September 9-16, 2025*, 16 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5cwwfbw2>. SNHR documented cases of children being sent by the SDF to recruitment camps and preventing them from communicating with their family. SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria: June*, 4 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/54zxzwt2>, p. 15. See also, Shaam News Network, 3 Ayyām 'alā l' tiqālihi: Ittihāmāt li-'Qasād' bi-Taṣfiyat Munshiq 'Anhā Dākhil Aḥad Sujūniḥā fī al-Hasaka (Three Days after his Arrest. SDF Accused of Liquidating a Defector Inside One of its Prisons in Hasaka), 13 July 2025, <https://bit.ly/4koWQxd>.

⁴⁰⁵ "(...) the SDF had recently increased the number of military checkpoints in some areas under its control to detain and forcibly draft men of military service age, especially those from Arab tribes." The New Arab, *SDF Forcibly Drafts Young Men amid Fear of Conflict with Syrian Government*, 1 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5b6k4ayv>. "(...) Zaman al-Wasl revealed an internal rift within the SDF, amid escalating disputes between Kurdish and Arab leaders (...) and increasing instances of defection and rebellion among local recruits (...)." Zaman al-Wasl, *US Forces Evacuate Two Military Bases in Hasakah, Head to Iraq*, 15 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4k3z5enp>. See also, Syria TV, *Hamalāt Qasād lā Tatawaqqaf: l' tiqālāt wa-Mudāhamāt Taṭūl Munshaqqīn bi-Rif Dayr al-Zūr* (SDF Campaigns Do Not Stop. Arrests and Raids on Dissidents in Deir Ezzor Countryside), 10 May 2025, <https://bit.ly/4quUTBr>.

⁴⁰⁶ "Its offensive so far has led to relatively few casualties, as the SDF has opted to withdraw from Arab-majority areas (...) rather than confront the Syrian government." The Guardian, *Syrian and Kurdish Forces Agree to Extend Ceasefire as Threat of War Looms*, 24 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mr8jb9fa>.

In some instances, family members of critics,⁴⁰⁷ evaders, and defectors have been detained or dismissed from public-sector employment as a means of pressuring their relatives.⁴⁰⁸

3) *Individuals Opposing, or Perceived to Be Opposing, Anti-Government Druze Factions in Areas Under Their De Facto Control*

In Suweida Governorate, anti-Government Druze factions affiliated with the National Guard have been implicated in the harassment, abduction, torture and killing of Druze critics, including prominent community figures.⁴⁰⁹ Druze individuals aligned with the Syrian Government are reportedly labelled as “traitors”, and some have been forced to remain outside Suweida or leave the Governorate due to fear of reprisals.⁴¹⁰ Others have been targeted for expressing public support for the Government, including through social media posts, or for criticizing the de facto authorities.⁴¹¹ Observers note

⁴⁰⁷ “A former opposition media activist, Ibrahim al-Ashawi, was shot and injured by SDF forces during a raid on his home in northern rural Raqqqa on October 10 [2025]. The following day, Ashawi’s brother was detained by SDF forces in a raid, with local media claiming it was in an attempt to coerce his brother’s return from medical treatment in Aleppo.” Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: October 7-14*, 14 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3z36webs>. “A 75-year-old woman (...) was detained by SDF forces during a raid on her home in rural Hasakeh late on August 23 [2025]. Local media reported that the raid was in response to the woman’s son having posted a comment critical of the SDF on Facebook – while living in Lebanon.” Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: August 19-26*, 2025, 26 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5dkxt9sw>.

⁴⁰⁸ “(...) in the past six months, more than 100 Arab men and several women have been detained by SDF forces after their relatives defected to join government forces.” Al Majalla, *Fading Hopes that the SDF Will Agree to Syrian Integration*, 11 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ys9tpbfa>. Arrest campaigns in Deir ez-Zour and Raqqqa Governorates “also included the detention of relatives of defectors from its ranks, with the aim of pressuring them to surrender.” SNHR, *Monthly Report on Arrests/Detentions in Syria: June*, 4 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/54zxzwt2>, p. 12. See also, Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: October 14-21*, 21 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3ht47a75>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: September 30-October 7*, 7 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2s4zjs6k>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: May 13-20*, 2025, 20 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4pez6nud>.

⁴⁰⁹ Activists seeking a political solution to the crisis in Suweida have reportedly been threatened and assaulted and labelled as traitors and “agents of Al-Jolani” by members of the National Guard. Enab Baladi, *Can Civil Initiatives Help Resolve the Suwayda Stalemate?*, 8 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mr3yatcf>. “The Suwayda National Guard has conducted several politically motivated arrests and killings of prominent Druze individuals in Suwayda Province, likely as part of an effort to discourage dissent and to consolidate political control.” CTP/ISW, *Iran Update*, February 4, 2026, 4 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3yshutha>. “A Druze journalist, identified as Maref al-Shaer, was shot five times in the knees and kidnapped by Druze militiamen in a targeted attack in central Suwayda city on January 6. His brother had previously been taken hostage by Druze militiamen for communicating with the government in Damascus and the government of Jordan. He was released two days later amid public outcry, but went on to receive several death threats.” Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: January 6-13*, 2026, 13 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/jcy6yczx>. On 28 November 2025, “[T]he Suwayda National Guard conducted several politically motivated arrests and killings of prominent Druze individuals (...) and three relatives of transitional government-allied Laith al Balous, among others. Suwayda National Guard members recorded themselves torturing Sheikh Matni on November 29 [2025] and forcibly shaving his moustache and beard, which hold religious significance for the Druze. The Suwayda National Guard reportedly delivered Matni’s body, which showed visible signs of torture, to the entrance of the Suwayda City hospital on December 2.” CTP/ISW, *Iran Update*, December 2, 2025, 2 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/42tvkv4m>. “A Druze notable identified as Osama al-Aqil was shot dead by Druze militiamen in a targeted attack in the village of al-Majdal on September 22. Local media claimed the attack was linked to Aqil’s expressions of support for Layth al-Balous and his alignment with the transitional government in Damascus.” Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: September 16-23*, 2025, 23 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mrxutwuu>.

⁴¹⁰ For example, Suleiman Abdul Baqi, a pro-Damascus official appointed by the Government as head of security in Suweida Governorate, reported that National Guard forces had raided his residence in Suweida City. The Long War Journal, *Instability Grows in Syria’s Druze Heartland as ‘National Guard’ Militia Arrests Opponents*, 2 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/28crshve>. See also, Syria TV, translated by The Syrian Observer, *Unexpected Departure of Prince Hassan al-Atrash from Suweida and His Arrival in Damascus*, 19 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yc7yv8hz>; Syria in Transition, *The Druze ‘National Guard’ in Southern Syria*, Issue 28, 18 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yxcw6afm>.

⁴¹¹ In December 2025, “a total of 4 Druze men were shot dead in targeted assassinations described in local media as being a reaction to the victims’ public expressions of criticism of the de facto Druze authority run by Hikmat al-Hijri on social media.” Syria Weekly, *Data Update (December 9-30, 2025)*, 31 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mmyc8br2>. See also, Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly Conflict & Security: December 9-30*, 2025, 30 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5dnp8y8w>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: December 2-9*, 2025, 9 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ym77486m>.

that this politically-motivated violence is intended to deter any form of intercommunal dissent.⁴¹²

4) *Individuals Opposing, or Perceived to Be Opposing, Da'esh in Areas with Continued Da'esh Presence*

While Da'esh predominantly targets security forces, some attacks against civilians persist, including individuals who refuse to pay the imposed Islamic tax (*jizya*),⁴¹³ as well as tribal leaders and civilian government employees affiliated with the Government or the SDF.⁴¹⁴

5) *Individuals Perceived to Be Associated with the Former Government*

Both State and non-State actors have at times attributed affiliation to the former government solely based on an individual's religious background (particularly Alawites and Shi'ites) in a broad and discriminatory manner.⁴¹⁵

Family members associated with individuals of this profile have at times also been harmed – either deliberately targeted or affected by incidental violence.⁴¹⁶ Reported

⁴¹² "The National Guard's arrest, torture, and reported killing of prominent locals who may have challenged the Suwayda Autonomous Government likely aims to deter dissent by increasing the perceived cost of opposition to its rule." CTP/ISW, *Iran Update, December 2, 2025*, 2 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/42tvkv4m>. "The National Guard's recent arrest campaign appears to be an effort to consolidate power over opponents of Hijri. Sources close to the National Guard have stated that the arrests were of suspects who were attempting to 'undermine security.'" The Long War Journal, *Instability Grows in Syria's Druze Heartland as 'National Guard' Militia Arrests Opponents*, 2 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/28crshve>. "The sense of existential threat has pushed the Druze toward closing and cleaning their ranks." Syria in Transition, *The Druze 'National Guard' in Southern Syria*, Issue 28, 18 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ycxw6afm>.

⁴¹³ Such reports were received from rural Deir ez-Zour Governorate. Individuals who refuse to pay the tax face a risk of retaliation, including attacks on their shops or other property. Syria Weekly, *Data Update (August 26-September 9, 2025)*, 11 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y3xt4s4r>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: August 12-19, 2025*, 19 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2bv495n8>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: June 24-July 1, 2025*, 1 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mvckk224>; Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: May 27-June 3, 2025*, 3 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5h2pk7wa>.

⁴¹⁴ "The Aleppo Governor's director of al-Safira district, Barakat Yousef, survived an attempted assassination by suspected ISIS militants near the Tel Hasoul bridge in rural southeastern Aleppo on December 4 [2025]." Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: December 2-9, 2025*, 9 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ym77486m>. "One local employee of the al-Jazrat Power Station was shot dead by suspected ISIS militants in the village of al-Kobar in western Deir ez Zour on September 13." Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: September 9-16, 2025*, 16 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5cwwfbw2>. "A local tribal notable and his wife were shot dead by suspected ISIS militants in a targeted attack near Abu Khashab in western Deir ez Zour on August 16." Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: August 12-19, 2025*, 19 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2bv495n8>. "A local school principal was shot dead by ISIS militants in a targeted attack in the village of al-Shafa outside Hajin on August 3." Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: July 29-August 12, 2025*, 12 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2z5nx5ps>.

⁴¹⁵ "Most attacks targeted people formerly associated with Bashar al-Assad's regime, by profession, family, or **religious group**" (emphasis added). MEI, *Syria Is Stabilizing, but US Help Remains Vital*, 13 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mrxz8raa>. "Saraya Ansar al-Sunna made no mention of religious goals or motives, claiming instead that it was borne of anger and a desire for justice. Yet its rhetoric is unmistakably sectarian. By singling out 'Nusayris and Rawafid', it conflates these communities with remnants of the Assad regime." Al Majalla, *Ansar al-Sunna: The Murky New Jihadist Group in Syria*, 19 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4epzepvt>. "(...) many Sunni extremists conflate individuals with an Alawite identity with supporters of the Assad regime, making sectarian identity the primary basis for selecting victims, even when framed as retaliation for Assadist violations." Just Security, *Sectarian Violence and the Price of Ignoring Transitional Justice in Syria*, 7 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3f5tv784>. "By February 2025, reports of summary killings, disappearances, and arbitrary detentions of Alawis had become frequent. Witnesses described house raids, arbitrary arrests, and checkpoint harassment, often justified as rooting out 'regime remnants'." HRW et al., *'Are You Alawi?' Identity-Based Killings During Syria's Transition*, 23 September 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2130354/syria0925+web.pdf, p. 4.

⁴¹⁶ "Most attacks targeted people formerly associated with Bashar al-Assad's regime, by (...) family (...)." MEI, *Syria Is Stabilizing, but US Help Remains Vital*, 13 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/mrxz8raa>. HRW et al., *'Are You Alawi?' Identity-Based Killings During Syria's Transition*, 23 September 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2130354/syria0925+web.pdf, pp. 21, 26, 33.

abuses include forced evictions, attacks on their homes,⁴¹⁷ and, in some cases, killings.⁴¹⁸ In some instances, relatives of former government officials have been arrested in order to pressure the wanted individuals to surrender.⁴¹⁹

6) Women and Girls

Prolonged conflict has intensified gender inequalities,⁴²⁰ with women and girls facing multiple forms of gender-based violence (GBV),⁴²¹ as detailed below:

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- ⁴¹⁷ "In Damascus' Qadam, Sunni residents attacked some Alawi residents on October 10 [2025], with security forces intervening. This clash followed the discovery of a mass grave in the neighborhood two weeks ago, which had resulted in protests against 'shabiha' still living in the neighborhood, and recent arrests of regime criminals from the area." Syria Revisited, *Rebuilding Security in New Syria: Week 44*, 14 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/23b77pt9>. "Local residents of the town of al-Qarfa [Dera'a Governorate] raided and burned the homes of several former Assad regime officers and militiamen, amid widespread localized protests against their continued presence and property ownership. No casualties were confirmed. (...) The home of a former Assad regime militiaman was struck by an RPG in the village of Qarfa late on October 2, but no casualties were caused." Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: September 30-October 7*, 7 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2s4zjs6k>. "Across Latakia, Homs, Damascus, and Tartous governorates, thousands have lost livelihoods since December 2024 through mass dismissals from public jobs and the disbandment of former military and security units. Many families have also faced forced evictions from state housing and private homes, leaving entire communities that once depended on the state for income, shelter, and protection in deepening precarity. The dismissals disproportionately affected Alawis due to the makeup of the Assad-era Syrian state." HRW et al., 'Are You Alawi?' *Identity-Based Killings During Syria's Transition*, 23 September 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2130354/syria0925+web.pdf, pp. 13-14. "Five civilians were injured when unidentified gunmen threw a grenade at the home of a family accused of having previously been informants for Assad's regime in the town of Subaykhan in eastern Deir ez Zour late on September 18." Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: September 16-23, 2025*, 23 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mrxutwuu>. See also, The Syria Report, *Pressures and Raids Drive Residents of Al-Sumariya Out of Their Homes*, 2 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mw3scjkk>.
- ⁴¹⁸ "Two children were killed and another was injured when unidentified gunmen launched an attack on the home of a man suspected to have been an Assad regime militiaman in the Qaniyat Asi area of northern Homs late on August 4." Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: July 29-August 12, 2025*, 12 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2z5nx5ps>. "A former Assad regime officer and his child were shot dead by unidentified gunmen in the village of Jadreen in western rural Hama on July 20." Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: July 15-22, 2025*, 22 July 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2x36brup>. "One Alawite man – the father of two wanted Assad regime military officers associated with Sednaya Prison – was executed inside his home by unidentified gunmen in Qardaha [Latakia Governorate] on April 12 [2025]. (...) A man and his wife were killed by unidentified gunmen in the village of al-Shaniyah in western rural Homs on April 11. Local reporting said the man had been an Assad regime militiaman active around al-Houla [Homs Governorate]." Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: April 8-15, 2025*, 15 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/44zuren3>. See also, Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: May 27-June 3, 2025*, 3 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5h2pk7wa>.
- ⁴¹⁹ In one instance, "in mid-January [2025], security forces arrested two brothers from Homs city (...) to prompt a third brother, Yahya – who was allegedly affiliated with the Assad government – to turn himself into [sic] the authorities. Days after the arrest, one of the arrested brothers, Muhanna, was found dead in Homs city." SJAC, *Two Months After Assad's Fall, Assad-Like Violations Are Still Being Committed in Syria*, 13 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ysd5b2nt>.
- ⁴²⁰ "The years of conflict in Syria exacerbated gender inequalities, exposing women and girls to increased violence, displacement, and discriminatory laws limiting their rights. Women also continue to be largely excluded from transitional decision-making and political processes (...)." HRW, *World Report 2026: Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136267.html. See also, Orion Policy Institute, *Women and War in Syria: Gendering of the Syrian Civil War*, 27 June 2025, <https://orionpolicy.org/women-and-war-syria>; The Atlantic Council, *Syria's Women Face a New Chapter. Here's How to Amplify Their Voices*, 10 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/wrf67s7j>.
- ⁴²¹ Protection monitoring conducted between September and November 2025 found that 60% of key informants identified violence in the home as "the most significant safety concern for women and girls." IOM / Protection Cluster / UNHCR, *Syria Protection Monitoring: Summary of Key Findings - September to November 2025*, 14 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2sajhww4>, pp. 1, 5. "GBV risks continue to be heightened as a result of the ongoing conflict, displacement, overcrowding, lack of privacy and gender-segregated spaces, and community tensions. Loss of income sources and access to basic goods and services further exacerbates risks of resorting to negative coping strategies, including early marriage, and sexual exploitation, especially among women and girls." Protection Cluster / UNHCR, *Syria Protection Sector Update #3: Sweida Situation*, 19 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bd7he7>, p. 1. "Women and girls are, as has long been the case, facing the worst consequences of these intersecting political, social, and economic crises, including multiple and increasing forms of gender-based violence (GBV)." UNFPA, *An Overview of Gender-Based Violence in Syria*, 23 June 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2131303.html, p. 3.

a) Domestic Violence

Widespread and normalized,⁴²² domestic violence includes physical, psychological, sexual, verbal and economic abuse; restrictions on freedom of movement and access to basic services; and reproductive coercion.⁴²³ Widowed, divorced, elderly women, and women and girls with disabilities and those in IDP camps face elevated risks.⁴²⁴ Underreporting is common due to stigma, fear of retaliation, and mistrust of services, preventing survivors from accessing specialized services.⁴²⁵ Discriminatory laws and cultural practices on child custody, alimony, housing, and inheritance, as well as the stigma associated with divorce, prevent women from leaving abusive relationships.⁴²⁶ Marital rape is not criminalized.⁴²⁷ Although progress toward a comprehensive domestic violence law was noted in August 2024,⁴²⁸ its status under the new authorities is unclear.⁴²⁹

b) Femicides, Including “Honour”-Based Violence

Femicides, including “honour” killings, are typically committed by male partners or relatives over perceived threats to family “honour”, particularly in cases involving

⁴²² UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2025*, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, pp. 22, 27; UNFPA, *An Overview of Gender-Based Violence in Syria*, 23 June 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2131303.html, pp. 3-8. In OCHA's 2025 Rapid Needs Assessment, based on 7,617 surveys conducted between 5 and 15 February 2025 across approximately 2,600 communities in Syria, “violence in the home” was identified as the second most significant safety and security concern for women and girls (21 per cent), following family pressure to marry (23 per cent). OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: Rapid Needs Assessment*, 18 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yefvmsw2>. According to Nour Bakir, a psychologist in Idlib, “Syria has recently witnessed a significant increase in cases of violence against women and girls, including domestic and spousal abuse, which in some cases has resulted in death.” Women’s Media Center, *Syria’s Quiet Crisis of Drug-Related Violence Against Women*, 6 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4es4pck9>.

⁴²³ “Nowhere is safe, with violence occurring in homes, public places, and digital and online platforms. Their [women and girls] freedom of movement is severely curtailed. Restrictive and discriminatory social and gender norms underpin this violence, which is exacerbated by displacement, economic hardship, and insecurity.” UNFPA, *An Overview of Gender-Based Violence in Syria*, 23 June 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2131303.html, p. 3, see also pp. 5-8. See also, UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2025*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, pp. 21-28. “(...) existing social and legal constraints further limit women’s reproductive autonomy, making it difficult for them to make informed healthcare decisions.” Orion Policy Institute, *Women and War in Syria: Gendering of the Syrian Civil War*, 27 June 2025, <https://orionpolicy.org/women-and-war-syria>.

⁴²⁴ “Women with disabilities also report that they ‘are exposed to psychological violence and bullying (...). Widows and divorced and elderly women were also reported to be particularly vulnerable to psychological violence.” UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2025*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, p. 23. See also, UNFPA, *An Overview of Gender-Based Violence in Syria*, 23 June 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2131303.html, pp. 4-7; Protection Cluster / UNHCR, *Protection Landscape in Syria: A Snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2123726.html, p. 5.

⁴²⁵ “Survivors of gender-based violence face significant barriers in accessing medical and psychological support due to stigma, fear, and the lack of available services.” Orion Policy Institute, *Women and War in Syria: Gendering of the Syrian Civil War*, 27 June 2025, <https://orionpolicy.org/women-and-war-syria>. See also, UNFPA, *Syria Situation Report #2*, 10 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3dfa6mcf>, p. 2.

⁴²⁶ UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2025*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, p. 26. See also, Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, *New Chapter for Syria’s Women*, 4 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/32z5nsjh>.

⁴²⁷ UN Human Rights Council, *Rape as a Grave, Systematic and Widespread Human Rights Violation, a Crime and a Manifestation of Gender-Based Violence Against Women and Girls, and Its Prevention*, A/HRC/47/26, 19 April 2021, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/47/26>, para. 70.

⁴²⁸ UN Human Rights Committee, *Concluding Observations on the Fourth Periodic Report of the Syrian Arab Republic*, CCPR/C/SYR/CO/4, 21 August 2024, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2113107.html, para. 22.

⁴²⁹ Although the authorities have not directly addressed domestic violence, the head of the Women’s Affairs Office, Aisha al-Dibs, stated in December 2024 that foreign-supported programmes had contributed to rising divorce rates and that Sharia law would underpin the envisioned model for Syrian women. Her remarks prompted significant public backlash, after which Foreign Minister Assaad al-Shibani publicly affirmed the authorities’ commitment to fully supporting women’s rights. The New Arab, translated by the Syrian Observer, *Controversy After Aisha al-Dibs Statements on Role of Syrian Women*, 29 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/h45cskh8>; The New Arab, *Syria Official’s Comments on Women Spark Uproar*, 29 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/3snrpcmz>.

premarital or extramarital sexual relations, even when resulting from rape.⁴³⁰ Former female detainees face heightened risks of “honour” killings, due to the widespread use of sexual violence in detention under the previous government, with such violence injuring the “honour” of the family.⁴³¹ In 2025, incidents were reported across various regions, with some gaining visibility on social media.⁴³² Articles 192 and 242 of the Penal Code permit judges broad discretion to reduce sentences if the defendant asserts an “honourable” motive.⁴³³ In practice, “honour”-based violence is often not prosecuted.⁴³⁴ Despite a June 2025 Supreme Fatwa Council decree banning extrajudicial killings, including “honour killings”,⁴³⁵ the Government has not enacted legislative measures or issued formal condemnations.⁴³⁶

c) Forced and Child Marriage

Forced and child marriage remain prevalent, driven by economic hardship, insecurity, and displacement,⁴³⁷ and reputational concerns following the loss of male guardians.⁴³⁸ Survivors of sexual violence are sometimes compelled to marry

⁴³⁰ UNFPA, *An Overview of Gender-Based Violence in Syria*, 23 June 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2131303.html, p. 4; STJ, *Syria's Transitional Phase: 'Honor' Killings Persist amid Failing Protection and Legal Response*, 19 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/zcm8ryvc>, pp. 3-8. Circumstances that may trigger an “honour” killing include real or perceived adultery, extramarital or premarital relationships (regardless of sexual activity); actual or perceived rape or other forms of sexual violence; relationships deemed unacceptable by the family; and perceived violations of family-imposed restrictions on dress, interactions with men and boys, employment, education, social behaviour, or freedom of movement. UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2025*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, pp. 120, 123.

⁴³¹ “In Syria, (...) few victims dare to speak out even months after Assad's ouster. His regime's widespread use of rape in the detention system has done little to break the taboo. Rape is such a sensitive topic, linked to a woman's honour, that speaking out and denouncing the regime's atrocities runs the risk of social ostracism. Sometimes even by one's family.” France24, *Rape: Assad's Weapon of War During the Syrian Revolution*, 18 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/44tbuev4>. See also, UNFPA, *Voices from Syria*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, pp. 31, 38, 67.

⁴³² On 6 April 2025, a man uploaded a video on social media showing him killing his sister for reason of “honour”, following the abduction of her and another sister by a gang involved in drug trafficking. The kidnapping raised speculation as to whether the girls were subjected to sexual violence. The other sister was reportedly killed by her father for the same reasons. STJ, *Syria's Transitional Phase: 'Honor' Killings Persist amid Failing Protection and Legal Response*, 19 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/zcm8ryvc>, pp. 3-4. See also, STJ, *Syria's Transitional Phase: 'Honor' Killings Persist amid Failing Protection and Legal Response*, 19 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/zcm8ryvc>.

⁴³³ “In 2020, the Government of Syria repealed a law that amounted to legal recognition of so-called ‘honour killings’. However, Article 192 of the Penal Code still gives judges wide discretion to significantly reduce sentences if extenuating circumstances apply, including when the crime had an ‘honourable’ motive, or if murder was committed in rage and motivated by an illegal act provoked by the victim (Article 242).” IICI, *Gendered Impact of the Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on Women and Girls*, 12 June 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/yf4cdykt>, p. 6. See also, STJ, *Syria's Transitional Phase: 'Honor' Killings Persist amid Failing Protection and Legal Response*, 19 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/zcm8ryvc>, p. 9.

⁴³⁴ Despite public outrage and calls for accountability in some cases, STJ reported that societal acceptance continues to enable widespread impunity. STJ, *Syria's Transitional Phase: 'Honor' Killings Persist amid Failing Protection and Legal Response*, 19 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/zcm8ryvc>, p. 8. See also Worldcrunch, *Regimes May Change in Syria: The Scourge of Honor Killings Persist*, 17 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/24kp5s7x>.

⁴³⁵ Al-Monitor, *Syria's Top Islamic Body Issues Decree Against Honor Killings: What to Know*, 6 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/rja9sfpc>; The New Arab, *Syria Religious Authorities Issue Fatwa Against Extrajudicial Killings, Revenge Attacks*, 7 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yc6p76ec>.

⁴³⁶ STJ, *Syria's Transitional Phase: 'Honor' Killings Persist amid Failing Protection and Legal Response*, 19 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/zcm8ryvc>, p. 8.

⁴³⁷ IICI, *Gendered Impact of the Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on Women and Girls*, 12 June 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/yf4cdykt>, sect. 4, p. 12; UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2025*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, pp. 21-28. Respondents to OCHA's 2025 Rapid Need Assessment identified family pressure to marry as the most significant safety and security concern facing adult women and adolescent girls. OCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: Rapid Needs Assessment*, 18 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yefvmsw2>. See also, UNICEF, *As Syria's Children Step Out of the Shadows of War, Securing Their Future Is More Critical than Ever*, 25 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/55xt34t4>.

⁴³⁸ “Death or detainment of the father, or the perceived need to ‘protect’ a girl's honour, may drive child marriage.” UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2025*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, p. 28.

perpetrators,⁴³⁹ and there are reports of women and girls being forced into temporary marriages for sexual exploitation and trafficking.⁴⁴⁰

Legal reforms in 2019 set the minimum age at 18 years for both men and women, with consent required for both parties; however, judges may authorize marriage from age 15.⁴⁴¹ In 2025, NGOs documented cases of girls married as young as 12.⁴⁴² Child marriages typically occur through unregistered customary unions or delayed civil registration, denying women and girls legal protections in cases of divorce or for children born during the unregistered period.⁴⁴³

d) Kidnappings

Abductions of women and girls are reported to occur for sectarian, political and criminal reasons. Certain groups face heightened vulnerability, particularly women and girls from the Alawite community.⁴⁴⁴ In response, many women and girls significantly restrict their movement, which limits their access to education and employment.⁴⁴⁵

e) Sexual Violence

Women and girls face sexual violence from State and non-State actors, including security forces, armed groups, intimate partners, supervisors, landlords, and service providers.⁴⁴⁶

Rape and sexual assault outside marriage are criminalized.⁴⁴⁷ However, legal gaps remain: penalties for non-marital rape can be reduced if the perpetrator marries the

⁴³⁹ IICI, *Gendered Impact of the Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on Women and Girls*, 12 June 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/yf4cdykt>, pp. 3, 6-8; UNFPA, *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) in Northwest Syria*, 11 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/45h4zyz3>, p. 17.

⁴⁴⁰ Starting in 2017, "[N]ew forms of sexual exploitation emerge more strongly, including serial temporary marriages – in which girls are forced to enter a series of successive marriages, either for financial gain to themselves or to their families or as rewards for fighters." UNFPA, *Voices from Syria* 2025, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, p. 66.

⁴⁴¹ Article 16 of the Personal Status Law sets the marriageable age to 18, but Article 18 of Law No. 4 of 2019 allows for the marriage of children of at least 15 years of age if that child claims to have reached puberty, requests marriage, and gains permission from a judge. UNICEF / UNFPA, *Delivering Interventions to Address Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen*, 22 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/59f8br9e>, p. 49.

⁴⁴² "Girls were married as young as 12 or 14, sometimes to cousins or much older men." UNFPA, *Voices from Syria*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, p. 81. In September 2025, a public wedding celebration of two children aged 15 and 16 in rural Idlib sparked widespread debate over whether child marriage constitutes a violation of children's rights, the role of religious and social traditions, and the effectiveness of Syrian law in regulating child marriage. BBC News Arabic, *The Marriage of Two Children in Idlib Sparks Widespread Debate About the Phenomenon of Child Marriage in Syria*, 15 September 2025, www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPx5gKr0lI0.

⁴⁴³ "(...) it was common for families to delay the registration of marriage until the married children reached the legal minimum age. This was said to create several issues later, as it provided no legal protection in the case of divorce and any children born during this period of legal limbo could also not be registered. (...) most cases of child marriage take place informally outside the court and are not documented." UNICEF / UNFPA, *Delivering Interventions to Address Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen*, 22 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/59f8br9e>, pp. 18, 53.

⁴⁴⁴ See Section III.A.1.a ("Members of Minority Religious and Ethnic Groups: Alawites").

⁴⁴⁵ Widespread kidnappings create "a widespread sense of fear among women and girls. Many avoid leaving their homes alone because of repeated daytime abductions while going to school or work." STJ, *Abduction in Syria: Alawite Women Most Targeted Amidst Transitional Government Inaction*, 23 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/5x48derf>, p. 17; "Many interviewees said that women and girls, primarily from the Alawite community, but also others living in the affected governorates, are now afraid or extremely cautious when leaving their homes to attend school, university, or work." Amnesty International, *Syria: Authorities Must Investigate Abductions of Alawite Women and Girls*, 28 July 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2127895.html. See also, UNFPA, *Voices from Syria*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, p. 31.

⁴⁴⁶ UNFPA, *Voices from Syria*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, pp. 23-24, 27, 81.

⁴⁴⁷ IICI, *Gendered Impact of the Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on Women and Girls*, 12 June 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/yf4cdykt>, p. 6.

victim;⁴⁴⁸ induced abortion is prohibited, even in cases of rape;⁴⁴⁹ and adultery provisions are applied discriminatorily, with harsher penalties for women.⁴⁵⁰ Social stigma and ineffective State response compel many survivors to remain silent to mitigate further harm.⁴⁵¹

Women and girls from religious minority groups – particularly Alawite and Druze – have been subjected to sexual violence in the context of broader violence in the coastal region (March 2025) and in Suweida (July 2025), as well as in the course of abductions.⁴⁵²

Women and girls in overcrowded camps or informal shelters face heightened risks,⁴⁵³ as do those working in informal labour sectors.⁴⁵⁴ Technology-facilitated GBV (TFGBV) is increasingly used for financial and sexual exploitation, revenge, coercion, and reputational harm,⁴⁵⁵ often leading to offline violence and abuse, including forced and early marriage, “honour” killings, or trafficking.⁴⁵⁶ Widows, unaccompanied children, adolescents, and IDPs are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and forced labour at the hands of criminal networks⁴⁵⁷ amid limited counter-trafficking measures.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 3, 6–8; UN Human Rights Council, *Rape as a Grave, Systematic and Widespread Human Rights Violation, a Crime and a Manifestation of Gender-Based Violence Against Women and Girls, and Its Prevention*, A/HRC/47/26, 19 April 2021, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/47/26>, para. 89; UNFPA, *Syria: Gender Justice & the Law*, December 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/3ndafadu>.

⁴⁴⁹ New York Times, *In Syria, Kidnappings of Women and Girls Fuel a Minority Group's Fears*, 3 April 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/bdrhpsk3>.

⁴⁵⁰ “The Penal Code includes several articles that perpetuate a patriarchal culture and discriminate against women in terms of determining the criminal nature of an act, the means of proof, and the severity of the punishment. For example, Article No. 473 starts with the sentence ‘The ‘adulterous’ woman shall be punished...’ instead of ‘Anyone who commits the crime of adultery shall be punished’. The law punishes any woman who commits this ‘crime’ with a more severe penalty than a man (unless he is married). The same article distinguishes between the method used to prove the act of adultery, as evidence against men is not accepted ‘except if it emerged from written letters and documents that he wrote’. As an additional example, while Article No. 474 criminalizes the act of adultery committed by a woman, it is allowed for a husband to practice it ‘outside the marital house.’” STJ / National Endowment for Democracy, *Syria: Gender-Sensitive Transitional Justice as a Basic Requirement to Support the Transitional Path*, 19 June 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/4rt5xh34>, p. 14. “Adultery also remains a criminal offence in Syria, which means that victims of rape risk being subjected to criminal investigations themselves.” IICI, *Gendered Impact of the Conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic on Women and Girls*, 12 June 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/yf4cdykt>, p. 6.

⁴⁵¹ UNFPA, *Voice from Syria*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, pp. 41, 45; UNFPA, *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) in Northwest Syria*, 11 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/45h4zyz3>, pp. 4, 6, 7, 17, 19.

⁴⁵² See Sections III.A.1.a and c (“Members of Minority Religious and Ethnic Groups: ‘Alawites’ and ‘Druze’”).

⁴⁵³ UNFPA, *Voices from Syria*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, pp. 34–35. “Pervasive insecurity, as well as displacement and living conditions in camps or temporary shelters – including shared or makeshift housing, lack of toilets and lighting or inadequate sanitation in camps – lead to increased risks of GBV.” UNFPA, *An Overview of Gender-Based Violence in Syria*, 23 June 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2131303.html, p. 7. “Ongoing internal displacement, refugee return movements, the destruction of infrastructure, exposure to traumatic events, along with rising living costs, could increase the vulnerability of displaced populations, the majority of whom are women and girls, to GBV, early marriage, and economic violence. In northwest Syria, the overstretched health system is limiting GBV response services.” UNFPA, *Syria Situation Report #2*, 10 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3dfa6mcf>, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁴ “Women and girls face sexual abuse and exploitation in employment settings – particularly on agricultural lands or in informal labour arrangements – (...) where vulnerability is heightened by poverty, displacement, lack of protection and gendered power dynamics.” UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2025*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, p. 23.

⁴⁵⁵ Forbes, *The Epidemic of Digital Violence Against Syrian Women and Girls*, 5 September 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bdd64x6k>; UNFPA, *An Overview of Gender-Based Violence in Syria*, 23 June 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2131303.html, p. 6.

⁴⁵⁶ UNFPA, *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) in Northwest Syria*, 11 June 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/45h4zyz3>, pp. 4, 6, 8, 15, 16.

⁴⁵⁷ Protection Cluster / UNHCR, *Protection Landscape in Syria: A Snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2123726.html, p. 3.

⁴⁵⁸ IOM, *Strengthening Counter-Trafficking and Victim Assistance in Syria*, 14 August 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2uu5pxyt>.

f) Women Without Male Support

Women without male support from their (extended) family – including female heads of household, divorced women, and widows – face heightened risks of poverty, food insecurity, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and trafficking.⁴⁵⁹ They frequently lack legal protection in relation to inheritance, property, and child custody, and face barriers to employment, housing, and access to basic services and humanitarian assistance. Social, religious and cultural norms as well as real and perceived security threats restrict mobility,⁴⁶⁰ and limit independent living, particularly for unmarried women.⁴⁶¹

7) Children⁴⁶²

Children, many born into conflict, violence and displacement,⁴⁶³ continue to face serious risks from localized hostilities,⁴⁶⁴ abductions for political, sectarian or criminal purposes,⁴⁶⁵ and arbitrary arrest and detention based on perceived political opinion.⁴⁶⁶ They are also exposed to domestic violence, early and forced marriage, sexual violence, child labour, and under-age recruitment.⁴⁶⁷

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- ⁴⁵⁹ "Women-headed households – often widows, wives of the missing or those who returned without their husbands – struggle to meet basic needs, facing economic exclusion, stigma, increased GBV risks, legal and HLP constraints, exploitation and abuse. Many lack documentation and are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, while humanitarian aid remains difficult to access." Global Protection Cluster / UNHCR, *Protection Landscape in Syria: A Snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2123726.html, p. 5. See also, ICG, *Lessons from the Coast and Suweida*, 26 November 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2133988.html, p. 24; UNFPA, *An Overview of Gender-Based Violence in Syria*, 23 June 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2131303.html, p. 7.
- ⁴⁶⁰ UNFPA, *Voices from Syria*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, pp. 24-28, 36, 41, 46; Protection Cluster / UNHCR, *Protection Landscape in Syria: A Snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2123726.html, p. 5.
- ⁴⁶¹ "Unmarried women and girls face the most extreme restrictions, often being completely barred from leaving the home, regardless of age." UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2025*, 12 October 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2132278.html, p. 46.
- ⁴⁶² For further guidance, see UNHCR, *Guidelines on International Protection No. 8: Child Asylum Claims Under Articles 1(A)2 and 1(F) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 22 December 2009, HCR/GIP/09/08, www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2009/en/71246.
- ⁴⁶³ "More than 75 per cent of Syria's 10.5 million children are estimated to have been born during the 14-year civil war, with their entire childhood set against a backdrop of displacement, violence, and devastation." UNICEF, *As Syria's Children Step Out of the Shadows of War, Securing Their Future Is More Critical than Ever*, 25 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/55xt34t4>.
- ⁴⁶⁴ For example, during the March 2025 violence, at least 60 children were reported killed. HRW et al., *'Are You Alawi?' Identity-Based Killings During Syria's Transition*, 23 September 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2130354/syria0925+web.pdf, pp. 33-34. On 16 March 2025, a "drone attack by Türkiye or Turkish-backed Syrian factions on a farm near villages controlled by the SDF south of Kobane killed seven Kurdish children (...)." HRW, *World Report 2026: Syria*, 4 February 2026, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2136267.html. See also, Save the Children, *North East Syria: Thousands of Children Flee Violence in Freezing Temperatures and in Desperate Need Despite Tentative Ceasefire*, 19 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3sn829cx>; Context, *Behind Syria's 'Quiet' Year, Children Still Face Serious Risks*, 9 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2vyf8at9>.
- ⁴⁶⁵ During the events in the coastal and western-central regions and in Suweida, children were abducted and held as hostages. SNHR, *Strengthening the Child Protection System in Syria: Addressing the Legacy of Fifteen Years of Systematic Violations and Ensuring a Safe Future for Generations*, 21 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mswcjkau>, p. 12. On the abduction of Alawite and Druze girls, see Sections III.A.1.a and III.A.1.c ("Members of Minority Religious and Ethnic Groups: 'Alawites' and 'Druze'").
- ⁴⁶⁶ See Section III.A.2 ("Individuals Opposing, or Perceived to Be Opposing, the SDF in Areas Under Its De Facto Control").
- ⁴⁶⁷ "Child labour, early marriage, and forced recruitment have surged, while children face rising psychological and behavioural disorders, including anxiety, depression, and loss of hope for the future. Child labour rates have tripled, though unofficial estimates suggest the situation is even worse." UNDP, *The Impact of the Conflict in Syria: A Devastated Economy, Pervasive Poverty and a Challenging Road Ahead to Social and Economic Recovery*, 19 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ae8abm7m>, p. 35. Protection Monitoring conducted in Syria between September and November 2025 showed that key child protection issues included: "violence/abuse/neglect within the household (50.8%), lack of access to education (44.7%), worst forms of child labor (43.5%), and child marriage (41.9%), alongside psychological/emotional distress (35.1%) and family separation/UASC (32.2%)." IOM / Protection Cluster / UNHCR, *Syria Protection Monitoring: Summary of Key Findings - September to November 2025*, 14 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2sajhww4>, p. 4. See also Sections III.A.2 ("Individuals Opposing, or Perceived to Be Opposing, the SDF in Areas Under Its De Facto Control") and III.A.6 ("Women and Girls").

Throughout the Syria conflict, various armed groups have been reported to recruit and use children for military purposes, including their direct participation in hostilities.⁴⁶⁸ While there have been no reports of ongoing child recruitment by Government forces, the SDF, YPG, Women's Protection Units (YPJ), Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), and the Revolutionary Youth Movement⁴⁶⁹ have continued to recruit boys and girls after the fall of the former government.⁴⁷⁰ Though all elements of the SDF have engaged in child recruitment, the Revolutionary Youth Movement has been identified as the primary party responsible for the recruitment of child soldiers for the SDF.⁴⁷¹ Children from vulnerable backgrounds – such as from impoverished or displaced families or those with histories of domestic violence – have been particularly targeted,⁴⁷² and families are often not informed of their children's whereabouts.⁴⁷³

Following the assumption of control by Government forces over previously SDF-held areas in the Governorates of Aleppo, Deir ez-Zour, Raqqa, and Hassakeh, child recruitment in those areas is expected to have ceased.⁴⁷⁴ Furthermore, as part of the agreements reached in January 2026 between the Syrian Government and the SDF, the PKK and the Revolutionary Youth Movement have been required to leave Syrian

⁴⁶⁸ In 2024, some 527 children (489 boys and 38 girls) were verified as having been recruited and used, including in combat functions, by various armed groups, including SNA factions, HTS, former pro-government forces, and groups affiliated with the DAANES (SDF, YPG/YPJ and the Revolutionary Youth Movement). UN General Assembly / UN Security Council, *Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/79/878-S/2025/247, 17 June 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2126448/n2510498.pdf, para. 199. At the time of writing, there are no reports of Government forces recruiting children. On 18 February 2026, the Minister of Justice met with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to discuss "opportunities for cooperation, including in removing Syria from the international list of states perpetrating grave violations against children." Syria Weekly, *Syria Weekly: February 17-24, 2026*, 24 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/294a9pky>.

⁴⁶⁹ "The Revolutionary Youth is an armed group affiliated with the Democratic Union Party (PYD), licensed under AANES, and organizes military activities alongside cultural and political activities. The Revolutionary Youth is considered an extremist wing within the SDF, and it has direct ties to the Kurdistan Workers' Party [PKK]. It is accused of recruiting children (...)." Enab Baladi, *SDF-Damascus Agreement in Aleppo: A Test Balloon for Broader Consensus*, 7 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yeyatdry>.

⁴⁷⁰ Levant24, *German Report Reignites Scrutiny of Kurdish Child Recruitment*, 13 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2wsh554y>. "SNHR's data shows that the SDF continued these practices after the fall of the Assad regime." According to SNHR, children are either induced to join or abducted for recruitment. SNHR, *Strengthening the Child Protection System in Syria: Addressing the Legacy of Fifteen Years of Systematic Violations and Ensuring a Safe Future for Generations*, 21 November 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mswcjkau>, p. 13. As of mid-October 2025, SNHR had accounted for approximately 413 children remaining in military training camps. SNHR, *Syrian Democratic Forces Kidnapped Child Omar Abdul Rahim Qader for Forced Conscription in Aleppo Governorate on October 16, 2025*, 19 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4c5sjt96>. See also, Verify-sy.com, "Şirāt Qandil": Al-Jisr al-Jasadi alladhi Yarbut al-Aṭfāl al-Kurd al-Sūriyyīn bi Jahannam "Al-'Ummāl al-Kurdistānī", 31 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3jzc42y8>; UN General Assembly / UN Security Council, *Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/79/878-S/2025/247, 17 June 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2126448/n2510498.pdf, para. 199; SJAC, *Child Recruitment Practices Continue in Syria Before and After the Fall of Assad*, 5 June 2025, <https://bit.ly/4pEPPrSa>. See also Section III.A.2 ("Individuals Opposing, or Perceived to Be Opposing, the SDF in Areas Under Its De Facto Control").

⁴⁷¹ Reporting by Syria Direct indicated that the majority of families of Kurdish children who had disappeared or been recruited across northern and eastern Syria identified the Revolutionary Youth Movement as the group responsible in these incidents. Syria Direct, *Tajnid al-Aṭfāl al-Sūriyyīn fī Manāṭiq "Qasad" Yatawāṣal bi-Istighlāl Ḥamāsāt al-Qāṣirīn*, 16 September 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/ydtck2zr>. See also, Verify-Sy, "Şirāt Qandil": Al-Jisr al-Jasadi alladhi Yarbut al-Aṭfāl al-Kurd al-Sūriyyīn bi Jahannam "Al-'Ummāl al-Kurdistānī", 13 April 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3jzc42y8>.

⁴⁷² "The Kurdish youth group in question has been accused of targeting vulnerable children, often from impoverished backgrounds, who may see this as a way to gain a sense of purpose or financial support." Funds for NGOs, *Kurdish Youth Group Allegedly Recruiting Children for Armed Groups in Northeast Syria*, 21 January 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/56prfz2m>.

⁴⁷³ "Documented evidence (...) shows that the recruitment of minors in areas controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces has, in most cases, followed a recurring pattern of enticement or abduction, followed by the child's separation from their family and the severing of all ties with them." SNHR, *Child Recruitment in SDF-Controlled Areas: Legal Framework and Documented Practices*, 14 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/ype2drdz>. SNHR also noted "documented patterns of intimidation against families and attempts to prevent them from reporting or peacefully protesting for the return of their children." Levant24, *Reports Reveal Systematic Child Recruitment by the SDF*, 21 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yc2df2xx>.

⁴⁷⁴ In Syria, the recruitment of children into armed forces as well as their use in hostilities is prohibited. Syrian Arab Republic, *Child Rights Law No. 21 of 2021*, 15 July 2021, accessed via Dstouria, <https://tinyurl.com/ywxnxvsa>, Art. 46.

territory.⁴⁷⁵ The situation of children formerly associated with these groups in areas now under Government control, including their prospects for rehabilitation and reintegration, remains unclear.⁴⁷⁶

Da'esh has been reported to recruit children from displacement camps in the past.⁴⁷⁷ Following the mass escape of many former inhabitants from Al-Hol camp in January 2026, there are concerns that Da'esh may seek to target these children for recruitment.⁴⁷⁸

Discriminatory provisions in Syria's nationality law prevent Syrian women from passing their nationality to their children.⁴⁷⁹ Stateless children and children at risk of statelessness face obstacles to the enjoyment of basic human rights, including access to education and health care.⁴⁸⁰

8) Individuals (Perceived to Be) of Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities, Gender Expression and/or Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC)⁴⁸¹

Article 520 of the 1949 Penal Code criminalizes same-sex sexual acts – defined as “sexual intercourse contrary to nature”, regardless of consent – and carries penalties of up to three years imprisonment.⁴⁸² While there are no reports that the provision has been either repealed or directly enforced by the new authorities, individuals of diverse SOGIE have reportedly been arrested under arbitrary and discriminatory

⁴⁷⁵ Al Majalla, *Back to Qandil: PKK Fighters Finally Leaving Syria*, 12 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/396fcbcn>. In June 2025, the SJAC issued recommendations to the Syrian Government on the integration of SDF/AANES civil and military institutions, amid reports of child recruitment by the Revolutionary Youth Movement on behalf of the SDF, YPG, YPJ, and Asayish. Chief among those recommendations was a call for the disbanding of the Revolutionary Youth Movement “during the integration of military forces due to their ongoing institutional pattern of child recruitment.” SJAC, *Child Recruitment Practices Continue in Syria Before and After the Fall of Assad*, 5 June 2025, <https://bit.ly/4pEPPrSa>.

⁴⁷⁶ At the time of writing there are no reports describing the Syrian Government's treatment of SDF child soldiers nor the children released from recruitment centres. However, under article 46 of the Child Rights Law No. 21 of 2021, the Syrian Government is tasked with taking measures appropriate to rehabilitating child victims of recruitment to reintegrate them into society. Syrian Arab Republic, *Child Rights Law No. 21 of 2021*, 15 July 2021, accessed via Dstouria, <https://tinyurl.com/ywxnxvsa>, Art. 46.

⁴⁷⁷ “Many minors were recruited from camps and deployed to the Badia.” UN Security Council, *Letter Dated 21 July 2025*, 24 July 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/482>, para. 118. See also, The Soufan Center, *Avoiding a Resurgent Islamic State: Repatriation, Rehabilitation & Reintegration*, 8 January 2025, <https://thesoufancenter.org/intelbrief-2025-january-8>.

⁴⁷⁸ ISW, *Iran Update, February 16, 2026*, 16 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/4zf5ubpm>.

⁴⁷⁹ Syria, *Legislative Decree 276 - Nationality Law*, 24 November 1969, www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1969/75964. See also, Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion et al., *Understanding Statelessness in the Syria Refugee Context*, 2016, www.refworld.org/reference/countryrep/idmc/2016/100569.

⁴⁸⁰ HRW, *World Report 2025: Syria*, 16 January 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2120035.html; European Network on Statelessness et al., *Statelessness in Syria: Country Position Paper*, August 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/342juvuf>.

⁴⁸¹ The profound stigmatization of individuals of diverse SOGIESC severely limits the availability of reliable information on their lived experiences and needs. Available sources primarily document violence against gay men and transgender women, while lesbian, bisexual, and queer women remain largely invisible due to patriarchal norms, widespread gender-based violence, harmful practices like child marriage and “honour” killings, weak State institutions, and the absence of legal protections for sexual orientation or gender identity and expression. Lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer (LBTQ) women face significant risks of discrimination, violence, torture, and even death, which contributes to their invisibility. Information on intersex individuals is also limited, and they are often conflated with transgender persons, which amplifies social stigma and exposes them to similar discrimination, mistreatment, and risks. See, TIMEP, *Policies of Erasure: How the MENA's Region Intersex People Are Made Invisible*, 20 April 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/2p3737jx>.

⁴⁸² Unofficial translation of Article 520 of the 1949 Penal Code. The Penal Code (Law 148/1949,) as amended, available in Arabic at: WIPO, *Syrian Arab Republic, Law No. 148/1949 on the Syrian Penal Code*, <http://bit.ly/2rj5PvT>. Both men and women are criminalized under this provision. Guardians of Equality Movement (GEM, Geneva-based Syrian LGBTQIA+ organization), *The Syrian LGBTQIA+ People in Conflict and Displacement, and Their Contribution to Peace and Accountability Efforts*, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/2vr4fuhe>, p. 14. According to François Zankih, GEM director, “The laws targeting the LGBT community have not changed since the French Mandate”. Syria Untold, *Living Better, Living Hidden: The Struggle of Transwomen in Syria*, 5 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2bubzhpu>. See also, Worldcrunch, *As Syria Faces New Divides, LGBTQ+ Hate Remains the Most Reliable Consensus*, 22 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4aVHleC>.

interpretations of other legal provisions, including offences related to public decency, prostitution, or illegal substances.⁴⁸³

Discrimination and violence against individuals of diverse SOGIE persisted throughout 2025, including arrests and physical and verbal assaults by security forces and unidentified armed groups.⁴⁸⁴ Some incidents involving transgender women were recorded and disseminated on social media, at times by members of the security forces,⁴⁸⁵ and these posts were frequently met with hate speech and incitements to violence in online responses.⁴⁸⁶ In several cases, arrested individuals were subjected to degrading public portrayals, thereby outing them to a wide audience including their families.⁴⁸⁷ Entrapment through social media and dating apps has been reported as a

⁴⁸³ A Damascus lawyer told L'Orient Today: "In 80 percent of cases, the law is applied. (...) On this basis, some cases are still prosecuted for 'offending public morals' or 'moral violations'." L'Orient Today, *'Killing a Homosexual Has Become Halal': From One Regime to Another, the Struggle of Syria's Queer Community*, 10 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/4pDZ17A>. "On multiple occasions, cities like the capital Damascus and Jaramana in the south have witnessed arbitrary arrest campaigns targeting dozens of individuals under vague charges such as 'moral corruption,' 'promoting decadence,' or even 'drug trafficking'." Worldcrunch, *As Syria Faces New Divides, LGBTQ+ Hate Remains the Most Reliable Consensus*, 22 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4aVHleC>.

⁴⁸⁴ For example, a man from Homs told L'Orient Today that he was arrested at a checkpoint by security forces in February 2025 and identified as homosexual based on his tattoos. During his detention, he was subjected to verbal abuse, including being called "faggot", "pig", "infidel" and "Satan worshiper". After five hours of "insults, beatings, and torture", he was released. According to a researcher with SEEN for Gender and Sexual Equity (SGSE), a Syrian NGO advocating for sexual and gender equality, the first documented physical attack occurred on New Year's Eve 2024, when an armed group attacked a party in the Damascus suburbs. From January 2025 onward, the number of assaults recorded by SEEN steadily increased, with community spaces raided, individuals targeted, and kidnappings reported. "We recorded seven cases in just the first month of 2025," the researcher noted. L'Orient Today, *'Killing a Homosexual Has Become Halal': From One Regime to Another, the Struggle of Syria's Queer Community*, 10 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/4pDZ17A>. "LGBTQ+ individuals are at increasing risk of severe discrimination, legal persecution, and threats of violence, and their future remains uncertain." Protection Cluster / UNHCR, *Protection Landscape in Syria: A Snapshot (March 2025)*, 3 April 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2123726.html, p. 5. "Since the fall of the previous regime on December 8, 2024, requests for support and assistance from LGBTQIA+ individuals in Syria submitted to the Guardians of Equality Movement have increased by 70%. The organization, in collaboration with human rights activists, has documented a series of serious violations faced by Syrian LGBTQIA+ individuals. These violations include entrapment through dating apps, home invasions, kidnapping, arbitrary detention, torture, humiliation, threats of physical violence and mutilation, as well as other dangerous practices such as forced filming and defamation, exposing the victims to escalating and ongoing risks. These violations were carried out by groups affiliated with the current government as well as armed non-governmental groups." GEM, *LGBTQIA+ Individuals in Syria After the Fall of the Assad Regime*, 19 April 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jxZ3fG>, p. 7. "This repression is not new; it is a continuation of systematic practices that include arbitrary arrests, public defamation and physical assaults carried out by security forces under the previous regime. As control shifted to Islamist factions (which, in theory, fall under Syria's new Ministry of Defense), the repression did not subside but intensified. Hate speech evolved from political and security-based justifications to a broader religious framework with perceived divine legitimacy." Worldcrunch, *As Syria Faces New Divides, LGBTQ+ Hate Remains the Most Reliable Consensus*, 22 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4aVHleC>. See also, Al-Jumhuriya, *A Silent Chase: The Government Crackdown on Trans Women Across Syria*, 5 September 2025, <https://bit.ly/4sCijco>; Media Diversity Institute, *Syrian Authorities Ramp Up LGBTQ+ Crackdowns Under Al-Sharaa Rule*, 13 June 2025, <https://bit.ly/3N8kBUe>.

⁴⁸⁵ "At the beginning of 2025, there was an escalation in violence, torture, and hatred targeting sexual and gender minorities in Syria. Multiple videos showed security forces storming a New Year's celebration in the Jaramana area [Rural Damascus], detaining the attendees after photographing them and taking them to the local police station. According to witnesses, they were released the following day. Another video showed the moment armed groups without official affiliation stormed a house where several Syrian transgender women were living in the Jaramana area. Meanwhile, images and videos from the cities of Damascus, Latakia, and Aleppo sparked widespread reactions among Syrians." GEM, *LGBTQIA+ Individuals in Syria After the Fall of the Assad Regime*, 19 April 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jxZ3fG>, p. 7. "In one video, a transgender person is seen detained inside a vehicle belonging to one of the controlling militias, being beaten, kicked and threatened with a blade to have their genitals cut off amid a barrage of verbal abuse and insults." Worldcrunch, *As Syria Faces New Divides, LGBTQ+ Hate Remains the Most Reliable Consensus*, 22 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4aVHleC>. Transwomen interviewed by Al-Jumhuriya said that the lack of recent videos documenting the abuse of transwomen by security forces does not indicate that the practice has stopped. "All of them agreed that the 'chase' is still ongoing." Al-Jumhuriya, *A Silent Chase: The Government Crackdown on Trans Women Across Syria*, 5 September 2025, <https://bit.ly/4sCijco>.

⁴⁸⁶ GEM, *LGBTQIA+ Individuals in Syria After the Fall of the Assad Regime*, April 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jxZ3fG>, p. 8.

⁴⁸⁷ "These [arbitrary] arrests are presented on social media as national achievements worth celebrating. Those who spread them believe they are performing a 'moral duty' worthy of recognition, as they see themselves as contributing to the 'purification' of society from those they perceive as a 'threat'. To reinforce this humiliating narrative, detainees are deliberately portrayed in degrading images — depicted as mentally ill, shown as men wearing women's clothing, and forced to remove their wigs — all aimed at stripping them of their humanity and humiliating them before the public." Worldcrunch, *As Syria Faces New Divides, LGBTQ+ Hate Remains the Most Reliable Consensus*, 22 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4aVHleC>.

method used to identify – and subsequently expose – SOGIE individuals on social media.⁴⁸⁸ Many are reported to remain in hiding or seek to flee the country.⁴⁸⁹

The Government has neither commented on nor taken action to address these human rights violations and abuses against individuals of diverse SOGIESC.⁴⁹⁰ In areas under the de facto control of the AANES/SDF, authorities have at times shown a degree of tolerance toward persons of diverse SOGIESC; however, there is no legal recognition of same-sex relationships or gender identity, and SOGIESC individuals continue to face severe social stigma.⁴⁹¹

Individuals of diverse SOGIESC also face pervasive societal discrimination, including in access to employment, housing, health care, education, and justice.⁴⁹² They remain at heightened risk of social exclusion, hate speech, harassment, intimidation, forced conversion practices,⁴⁹³ and physical, psychological and sexual violence,⁴⁹⁴ including “honour” crimes, perpetrated by family members, vigilantes, and the wider

⁴⁸⁸ Al-Jumhuriya, *A Silent Chase: The Government Crackdown on Trans Women Across Syria*, 5 September 2025, <https://bit.ly/4sCljco>; L'Orient Today, 'Killing a Homosexual Has Become Halal': From One Regime to Another, the Struggle of Syria's Queer Community, 10 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/4pDZ17A>; GEM, *LGBTQIA+ Individuals in Syria After the Fall of the Assad Regime*, April 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jxZ3fG>, p. 7.

⁴⁸⁹ According to Helem, Lebanon's main LGBTQ organization, it has received a growing number of assistance requests from individuals from Syria, up to 40% of whom identify as transwomen. Al-Jumhuriya, *A Silent Chase: The Government Crackdown on Trans Women Across Syria*, 5 September 2025, <https://bit.ly/4sCljco>. “One of the main challenges transgender women face is the impossibility of working and the forced isolation imposed by fear of going out in public. (...) most of them dream of only one thing: fleeing Syria. Since the fall of the Assad regime, 400 Syrian transgender women have contacted Helem (...) seeking help to escape to the country [Lebanon].” Syria Untold, *Living Better, Living Hidden*, 5 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2bubzhpu>.

⁴⁹⁰ In December 2024, Mohamed Khaled, a member of HTS' political affairs bureau, responded to questions from foreign journalists regarding how HTS would approach social issues such as LGBT rights and the sale of alcohol in bars. He stated: “It's open for discussion...there will be committees, there will be a constitution, and this is all going to be decided by the laws.” Wall Street Journal, *Syria's Rebel Leaders Have Control of the Country. Now What?*, 23 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/km872fr4>. Although the Government has not issued any public statements addressing the rights of individuals of diverse SOGIESC since December 2024, the prior HTS governance record in Idlib remains a relevant indicator of risk, particularly given documented use of Sharia-based courts to impose severe corporal punishments, and in some cases death sentences, against persons accused of consensual same-sex conduct. While this prior practice is not conclusive evidence of current State policy, it informs the current fears expressed by persons of diverse SOGIE in Syria, especially amid the reported rise in anti-LGBT violence since December 2024, which includes abuses attributed to groups affiliated with the current Government. GEM, *LGBTQIA+ Individuals in Syria After the Fall of the Assad Regime*, 19 April 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jxZ3fG>, p. 7; GEM, *The Syrian LGBTQIA+ People in Conflict and Displacement, and Their Contribution to Peace and Accountability Efforts*, 15 June 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/2vr4fuhe>, pp. 16, 19.

⁴⁹¹ “Although the Autonomous Administration [AANES] has adopted human rights charters and de-criminalized homosexuality, homosexual acts continue to be treated as an offense. Homosexuals have, at times, been arrested on the pretext of alleged public interest (i.e., on the basis of social customs and traditions).” GEM, *The Syrian LGBTQIA+ People in Conflict and Displacement, and Their Contribution to Peace and Accountability Efforts*, 15 June 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/2vr4fuhe>, p. 16. A Syrian Kurdish transgender woman who lived in AANES-controlled territory interviewed for an Al Jazeera article said: “Just because there are no laws against LGBTQ in Rojava [AANES], this doesn't mean there are rights. There have been cases of discrimination against LGBTQ people (...). As a LGBTQ person in Rojava you are faced with two options: Either you choose to come out and [be] killed, or live your life afraid of being outed.” Al Jazeera, *Decolonising Syria's So-Called 'Queer Liberation'*, 5 August 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/yc77xu8h>.

⁴⁹² “The Syrian judiciary remains indifferent, with many legal professionals themselves opposing the very existence of LGBTQ+ individuals.” Worldcrunch, *As Syria Faces New Divides, LGBTQ+ Hate Remains the Most Reliable Consensus*, 22 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4aVHleC>. See also, GEM, *LGBTQIA+ Individuals in Syria After the Fall of the Assad Regime*, 19 April 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jxZ3fG>, pp. 7, 13; GEM, *HIV: Discrimination Prevents LGBTQ Syrians from Accessing Treatment*, 1 December 2024, <https://bit.ly/457WqeJ>; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Out of the Shadows*, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/mwtykju5>, pp. 23, 64-65, 70-72, 83-90.

⁴⁹³ Conversion “therapy is common across all sects in Syria, and the trauma these practices inflict sometimes goes far beyond psychological violence alone. ‘We have collected numerous testimonies describing episodes of torture, including the use of electrical cables, carried out by psychologists themselves’, says François Zankih, director of GEM.” Syria Untold, *Living Better, Living Hidden: The Struggle of Transwomen in Syria*, 5 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2bubzhpu>.

⁴⁹⁴ According to UNFPA, individuals of diverse SOGIESC face an increased risk of gender-based violence. UNFPA, *An Overview of Gender-Based Violence in Syria: Advocacy Brief 2025*, 23 June 2025, www.ecoi.net/en/document/2131303.html, p. 4.

community.⁴⁹⁵ Most experience intense pressure to conceal their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression,⁴⁹⁶ as perceived deviations from socially prescribed norms of masculinity or femininity are often met with social exclusion, intimidation, and violence.⁴⁹⁷ Weak law enforcement and the radicalization of segments of society have reportedly exacerbated these risks, while increased freedom of movement has facilitated the commission of “honour” crimes.⁴⁹⁸

Syria’s penal and personal status laws do not recognize gender-affirming surgeries for transgender individuals, nor do they allow for legal changes to gender markers.⁴⁹⁹ This legal framework exposes transgender and gender non-conforming individuals to ongoing risks of verbal and physical violence when presenting identification, including at checkpoints, thus limiting their freedom of movement.⁵⁰⁰

By contrast, Syrian law permits so-called “sexual correction” procedures for intersex persons and allows for corresponding changes to legal sex markers in civil status

⁴⁹⁵ In a 2024 survey, two-thirds of respondents said their religious institutions incited violence against individuals of diverse SOGIE, and nearly all reported rejection by those institutions. Respondents also cited abuse perpetrated by family members, including physical and psychological violence, forced marriage, so-called “conversion therapy”, and attempted “honour” killings. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Out of the Shadows*, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/mwtykju5>, pp. 49-56, 78-79. See also, Al-Jumhuriya, *A Silent Chase: The Government Crackdown on Trans Women Across Syria*, 5 September 2025, <https://bit.ly/4sCljco>; L’Orient Today, *Killing a Homosexual Has Become Halal’: From One Regime to Another, the Struggle of Syria’s Queer Community*, 10 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/4pDZ17A>; GEM, *LGBTQIA+ Individuals in Syria After the Fall of the Assad Regime*, 19 April 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jxZ3fG>, p. 9.

⁴⁹⁶ A lesbian Christian woman, emphasizing her double minority status, told L’Orient Today that since the fall of the former government, she has had to take additional precautions, including “growing out short hair, avoiding public spaces, hiding personal data on her phone, changing how she dresses, [and] removing her cross necklace.” L’Orient Today, *Killing a Homosexual Has Become Halal’: From One Regime to Another, the Struggle of Syria’s Queer Community*, 10 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/4pDZ17A>. See also, Syria Untold, *Living Better, Living Hidden: The Struggle of Transwomen in Syria*, 5 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2bubzhpu>; Queer Majority, *LGBT Syrians Are Being Hunted by Their Neighbors*, 16 May 2025, <https://bit.ly/4qhv2mQ>; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Out of the Shadows*, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/mwtykju5>, pp. 7, 9, 53, 57, 64, 87.

⁴⁹⁷ “Society itself also rejects LGBTQ+ people, drawing on religious texts, inherited customs and traditions, and the prevalence of toxic masculinity that dictates people’s behavior, gender roles, and sexuality.” Daraj, *Queer Syrians in Germany: We Dream of a Country that Protects Us*, 8 September 2025, <https://bit.ly/3Zcvua0>. GEM observed in Damascus Governorate that “despite the removal of the fear of arrest by the previous regime for LGBTQIA+ individuals, a sense of caution and fear of the unknown still lingers within some groups. ‘This is evident in changes in clothing styles and the avoidance of wearing accessories’.” GEM observed in Northwest Syria that “communication, visibility, or gatherings are ‘extremely difficult – if not impossible’”, while a gay man from Hama said that “members of our community in Hama are afraid of being visible in public, and we meet in secret.” Similar accounts were received from the coastal area. GEM, *LGBTQIA+ Individuals in Syria After the Fall of the Assad Regime*, 19 April 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jxZ3fG>, pp. 14-17. “Men and boys who do not conform to hegemonic norms of masculinity in terms of their appearance or behaviour face bullying and violence by other men and boys (e.g. being called ‘weak’ and ‘like a girl’).” UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2024: Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview*, 10 November 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/8nkutyh>, p. 76. See also, L’Orient Today, *Killing a Homosexual Has Become Halal’: From One Regime to Another, the Struggle of Syria’s Queer Community*, 10 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/4pDZ17A>.

⁴⁹⁸ GEM, *LGBTQIA+ Individuals in Syria After the Fall of the Assad Regime*, 19 April 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jxZ3fG>, p. 9. According to François Zankih, director of GEM: “The community is at higher risk, not because the old regime protected it, but because it left behind a militarized, fragmented, and exhausted country.” L’Orient Today, *Killing a Homosexual Has Become Halal’: From One Regime to Another, the Struggle of Syria’s Queer Community*, 10 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/4pDZ17A>. “Today, this queer community is facing a new ruling power with repressive tools which are different, and whose hostility comes from a different place – religious extremism – unlike the Assad regime’s repression, which was rooted in broader suppression of freedoms.” Media Diversity Institute, *Syrian Authorities Ramp Up LGBTQ+ Crackdowns Under Al-Sharaa Rule*, 13 June 2025, <https://bit.ly/3N8kBUe>. See also, Queer Majority, *LGBT Syrians Are Being Hunted by Their Neighbors*, 16 May 2025, <https://bit.ly/4qhv2mQ>.

⁴⁹⁹ GEM, *The Syrian LGBTQIA+ People in Conflict and Displacement, and Their Contribution to Peace and Accountability Efforts*, 15 June 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/2vr4fuhe>, p. 14.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.; Syria Untold, *Living Better, Living Hidden: The Struggle of Transwomen in Syria*, 5 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/2bubzhpu>; L’Orient Today, *Killing a Homosexual Has Become Halal’: From One Regime to Another, the Struggle of Syria’s Queer Community*, 10 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/4pDZ17A>.

records.⁵⁰¹ These procedures are subject to a complex approval process that reportedly exposes individuals to further victimization.⁵⁰²

B. Considerations Relating to the Application of an Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative

A decision to deny international protection to an applicant on the basis of a proposed internal flight alternative must be based on an assessment that the specific location proposed meets the relevance and reasonableness requirements, taking into account the individual circumstances of the applicant.⁵⁰³ Where the actor of persecution is the State or its agents, there is a presumption that no internal flight alternative is available.⁵⁰⁴ Where the actor of persecution is a non-State agent, it needs to be assessed whether the persecutor is willing and able to pursue the applicant in the proposed area of relocation. In this respect it should be recalled that UNHCR does not consider the Government capable of providing protection to Syrians and former habitual residents at risk of persecution by non-State actors, including societal forms of persecution at the hands of family members and other community actors (see Section II.C.9).

In terms of the reasonableness assessment, UNHCR refers back to the findings in Section II.D on the socio-economic and humanitarian situation in Syria, including in particular the fact that humanitarian conditions remain severe, with an estimated 90 per cent of the population living in poverty and two-thirds – approximately 16.5 million people – requiring humanitarian assistance. Although overall security and socio-economic conditions are comparatively better in Damascus City and other major urban centres, public services are often inadequate or overstretched – including as a result of the presence of IDPs⁵⁰⁵ and the significant returns of IDPs and refugees.⁵⁰⁶ Housing

⁵⁰¹ GEM, *The Syrian LGBTQIA+ People in Conflict and Displacement, and Their Contribution to Peace and Accountability Efforts*, 15 June 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/2vr4fuhe>, p. 15; Cairo 52 Legal Research Institute, *Case No. Unknown for 2023: Syria*, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/bpabdm65> and *Case No. 80/2017 Judgement No. 234: Syria*, 7 November 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/bdsfh2m7>. However, “the status of intersex individuals remains unregulated. The decision on the ‘sex’ of the child is made by doctors, parents, and the relevant articles of the personal status law. Medical and surgical interventions are then made on the child according to what the parents want. We rarely hear about cases of adults requesting a change of the sex or gender assigned to them at birth on the grounds of their status as intersex.” Syria Untold, *Intersex Representation in Syrian Television Drama*, 6 October 2023, <https://bit.ly/3YA7CNU>.

⁵⁰² GEM, *The Syrian LGBTQIA+ People in Conflict and Displacement, and Their Contribution to Peace and Accountability Efforts*, 15 June 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/2vr4fuhe>, pp. 14-15.

⁵⁰³ For detailed guidance on assessing the availability of an internal flight alternative, see UNHCR, *Guidelines on International Protection No. 4: “Internal Flight or Relocation Alternative” Within the Context of Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention and/or 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 23 July 2003, HCR/GIP/03/04, www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2003/en/32047.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., paras 7, 13-14.

⁵⁰⁵ For example, Damascus hosts a significant number of IDPs, placing additional strain on already limited public services. According to IOM, IDPs make up 31 per cent of the city’s 1.88 million residents. IOM, *Syrian Arab Republic: Population Mobility and Baseline Assessment – Round 11 (01 - 31 December 2025)*, 15 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/yh64t2dt>, p. 7.

⁵⁰⁶ See Section II.D.1.b (“Socioeconomic and Humanitarian Situation: Infrastructure, basic services, and pressure on systems”).

is extremely limited, and the cost of living, particularly rent, remains very high.⁵⁰⁷ The ongoing economic crisis further compounds these challenges, as even those in employment, including government workers who constitute a significant portion of the workforce, earn insufficient income to meet basic needs.⁵⁰⁸

In conclusion, in view of ongoing concerns about human rights violations and abuses, the volatile security situation, protracted and new internal displacement, community tensions, and the severe economic and humanitarian crisis, UNHCR does not consider it appropriate to deny international protection to Syrians and former habitual residents of Syria on the basis of an internal flight or relocation alternative.

C. Exclusion from International Refugee Protection

Among Syrian nationals and former habitual residents of Syria seeking asylum, there may be individuals who have been associated with acts that bring them within the scope of the exclusion clauses contained in Article 1F of the 1951 Refugee Convention.⁵⁰⁹ In such cases, it is necessary to conduct a careful examination of any issues of individual responsibility for crimes which may give rise to exclusion from international refugee protection.

In addition, to preserve the civilian character of asylum, States must assess the situation of new arrivals carefully so as to identify those involved in armed activities and ensure their separation from the refugee population.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁷ In Deir ez-Zour City, two neighbourhoods of Al-Joura and Al-Qusour are “almost the only residential refuge within a city largely in ruins, leading to heavy pressure on water, electricity, and sewage networks, in addition to worsening overcrowding and rising rental costs compared with other neighbourhoods.” The Syria Report, *Deir-ez-Zor Housing Crisis Worsens amid Lack of Reconstruction*, 10 February 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3428v3b3>. “Thousands of people in eastern Aleppo city live in buildings officially classified as being at risk of collapse. Despite repeated warnings, the lack of alternatives and the high cost of rent have forced many people to go on living in buildings that lack basic structural safety.” The Syria Report, *East Aleppo’s Damaged Buildings Risk Collapse amid Neglect*, 14 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4wsww4r9k>. “(...) current housing rents in Aleppo are five times higher than they were before the fall of the Assad regime on December 24. Today, the monthly rent for a flat in the western neighbourhoods ranges between USD 500 and USD 1,000 depending on its size and location. Most landlords rent their flats under annual, and sometimes semi-annual, contracts. As a result, tenants pay the entire rent upfront in U.S. dollars, in addition to the real-estate office’s commission – equivalent to one month’s rent – and a security deposit of at least USD 700 for furnished flats.” The Syria Report, *Rental Prices in Aleppo Soar Following Return of Refugees*, 7 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/37rpp5dz>. “At a time when Tartus is suffering from a poor service and economic reality, the crisis of rising rents for residential apartments has exacerbated the suffering of residents in the coastal area and its countryside.” Enab Baladi, *Tartus: Unprecedented Rise in Rent Prices*, 29 May 2025, <https://bit.ly/4iBNoMn>. See also, REACH / Shelter Cluster / UNHCR, *Syria Nationwide Housing Damage Assessment: October-November-December 2025*, 23 January 2026, <https://tinyurl.com/3edyjwttu>, p. 19; +963 Media, *Syria’s Real Estate Turns into a Haven for Speculation*, 13 October 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/nyk3y87x>.

⁵⁰⁸ See Section II.D.1.a (“Socioeconomic and Humanitarian Situation: Economic conditions and labour market”).

⁵⁰⁹ UNHCR, *Guidelines on International Protection No. 5: Application of the Exclusion Clauses: Article 1F of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 4 September 2003, CR/GIP/03/05, www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2003/en/14733. See also HRW, *Recommendations on Next Steps for Comprehensive Justice for Syria*, 17 November 2025, <https://bit.ly/4robMEI>, sect. II; and extensive documentation by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, *Documentation*, www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/iici-syria/documentation.

⁵¹⁰ See UNHCR, *Guidance Note on Maintaining the Civilian and Humanitarian Character of Asylum*, December 2018, www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2018/en/122651.

IV. Non-Signatory States to the 1951 Refugee Convention

In countries that are not signatory States to the 1951 Refugee Convention, UNHCR calls on States to ensure that all Syrians and former habitual residents of Syria are protected from refoulement in line with their obligations under international and regional law. UNHCR encourages States to provide a legal basis of stay to Syrians and former habitual residents of Syria, such as forms of temporary protection or other stay arrangements, with appropriate safeguards, until such time as it can be determined, on the basis of an objective assessment, that the human rights and security situation in Syria has durably improved and, in the absence of international protection needs, voluntary return is reasonable and can be carried out in safety and dignity.⁵¹¹ Until such time, persons from Syria benefitting from temporary protection or other stay arrangements, including administrative or tolerated stay, should have access to basic services and fundamental rights on a non-discriminatory basis, including civil registration, access to health care, access to education, family unity, freedom of movement, access to shelter, and the right to work.⁵¹²

V. Cessation

Under Article 1C (sub-paragraphs 5 and 6) of the 1951 Refugee Convention, refugee status may cease for reasons of fundamental and durable changes in the objective circumstances in the country of origin upon which refugee status was based. UNHCR acknowledges the significant improvements in the human rights and security situation in Syria since the fall of the former government in December 2024, as reflected in the current document. It is equally clear that, for the time being, these improvements have not yet led to a situation where the vast majority of Syrians can live free from a fear of persecution or other forms of serious harm. Against this background, UNHCR does not consider that the human rights and security situation in Syria has changed in a manner that is durable and fundamental so as to allow for a declaration of a general cessation of refugee status under Article 1C(5) and 1C(6) for all Syrians and former habitual residents of Syria who were recognized as refugees based on events prior to December 2024.⁵¹³ Given the fragile state of Syria's reconstruction and recovery and the real risk that precipitous large-scale returns to Syria may have a destabilizing

⁵¹¹ UNHCR, *Guidelines on Temporary Protection or Stay Arrangements*, February 2014, www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2014/en/74916.

⁵¹² Ibid.; Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom), *Conclusion No. 111 (LXIV): Civil Registration*, 17 October 2013, www.refworld.org/policy/exconc/excom/2013/en/18494.

⁵¹³ For further guidance on the application of the cessation clauses contained in the 1951 Refugee Convention, see UNHCR, *Guidelines on International Protection No. 3: Cessation of Refugee Status Under Article 1C(5) and (6) of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (the "Ceased Circumstances" Clauses)*, HCR/GIP/03/03, 10 February 2003, www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2003/en/14489 (hereafter: UNHCR, *Guidelines on International Protection No. 3*). Similarly, it would be premature to declare a general cessation of status for Syrians and former habitual residents of Syria who were recognized as refugees under broader refugee definitions contained in regional instruments, including in particular the 1969 OAU Convention and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration, or who were granted subsidiary protection under the EU Qualification Directive. It would likewise be premature to terminate temporary protection applied to Syrians in Türkiye under the Temporary Protection Regulation. Republic of Türkiye, *Temporary Protection Regulation*, 2014/6883, 22 October 2014, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/natleginstr/natlegbod/2014/151442>.

effect, UNHCR calls on States to refrain from implementing cessation exercises until such time as the situation in Syria has seen significant improvements in overall stability.

VI. Comprehensive Solutions

With a view to laying the groundwork for the eventual resolution of the Syrian refugee situation if conditions in Syria continue to improve, and in line with the Global Compact on Refugees (2018), UNHCR calls on asylum States to prioritize solutions for Syrian beneficiaries of international protection, or temporary protection as the case may be, by taking a comprehensive solutions approach.⁵¹⁴

First, as noted in Section II.E.2, UNHCR estimates that between 8 December 2024 and 27 February 2026, over 1.47 million Syrians have returned to Syria, mainly from neighbouring countries. Intention surveys have consistently shown that many Syrians remain interested in voluntarily returning to Syria once conditions allow.⁵¹⁵ UNHCR is working with countries of asylum to support the voluntary return of Syrian refugees in dignity and based on a free and informed choice, while according due weight to the need to prepare for orderly returns given the humanitarian crisis in the country and the serious constraints on Syria's current absorption capacity.⁵¹⁶

Second, UNHCR calls on States to ensure that Syrian refugees who have been in countries of asylum for a considerable period of time have a pathway to naturalization, in line with Article 34 of the 1951 Refugee Convention which provides that States "shall as far as possible facilitate the assimilation and naturalization of refugees".⁵¹⁷

Third, in relation to Syrians whose international protection status may eventually be ceased on an individual basis on the grounds that the circumstances in connection with which they were recognized as refugees have ceased to exist and who are not yet eligible for naturalization, UNHCR recalls that its Executive Committee has recommended that for such persons States consider "appropriate arrangements [...] for those persons who cannot be expected to leave the country of asylum, due to a long stay in that country resulting in strong family, social and economic links there".⁵¹⁸ Countries of asylum are thus encouraged to provide the individuals concerned with an alternative residence status, which retains previously acquired rights.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁴ For UNHCR's overarching policy direction on comprehensive responses and solutions, see the Global Compact on Refugees (2018), which incorporates the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF); and see also ExCom Conclusion No. 117 (LXXV) on Durable Solutions and Complementary Pathways (2024), which underscores the need to pursue a combination of solutions reflecting the specific circumstances of each refugee situation. Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom), *Conclusion No. 117 (LXXV): Durable Solutions and Complementary Pathways*, October 2024, www.refworld.org/policy/exconc/excom/2024/148870; UN General Assembly, *2018 Global Compact on Refugees*, 2018, www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/unga/2018/124198; UNHCR, *Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework*, 2016, www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/asylum-and-migration/new-york-declaration-refugees-and-migrants-0.

⁵¹⁵ See Section II.E.2 ("Displacement and Return: Refugee and IDP Returns and Intentions").

⁵¹⁶ UNHCR, *Operational Update: Syria – January 2026*, 26 February 2026, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/121289>.

⁵¹⁷ UN General Assembly, *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, UN Treaty Series, Vol. 189, p. 137, 28 July 1951, www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/unga/1951/en/39821.

⁵¹⁸ Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom), *Conclusion No. 69 (XLIII): Cessation of Status*, 9 October 1992, www.refworld.org/policy/exconc/excom/1992/en/4199.

⁵¹⁹ UNHCR, *Guidelines on International Protection* No. 3, para. 22.

Finally, UNHCR continues to call on States to offer resettlement opportunities for the most vulnerable Syrian refugees and continue to facilitate and expand access to complementary pathways for Syrian refugees for whom neither return nor local integration in the first country of asylum is a viable option.

VII. Family Reunification

UNHCR calls on host States to continue to process applications for family reunification lodged by Syrians and former habitual residents of Syria whose family members are left behind in Syria or who have been displaced across the region. The principle of family unity is protected under international law, including in binding regional legal instruments.⁵²⁰ Family reunification is often the only way to ensure that the right to family life and family unity of refugees is respected.⁵²¹

UNHCR calls on States to take into account the constraints that refugees may face in being able to meet administrative and documentation requirements and proposes that affordable, pragmatic and flexible approaches be taken, including through the use of innovative processing methods and remote interviews. UNHCR encourages States to apply liberal and humane criteria in identifying qualifying family members, taking into account diverse family compositions and structures.⁵²²

VIII. Returns to Syria

UNHCR recognizes individuals' fundamental human right to return to their country of origin. UNHCR stands ready to support Syrian refugees who, being fully informed of the situation in their places of origin or an alternative area of their choice, choose voluntarily to return. In these cases, UNHCR provides support to enable voluntary return in safety and dignity and in conditions conducive to sustainable reintegration, taking into account ongoing structural challenges in Syria, including persistent security challenges, housing, land and property issues, documentation constraints and limited access to basic services and livelihoods. In view of the many challenges facing Syria's population, including a large-scale humanitarian crisis, continued high levels of internal displacement and widespread destruction and damage of homes and critical infrastructure, for the time being UNHCR is not promoting large-scale voluntary repatriation to Syria. Instead, UNHCR underscores the need for orderly and phased returns so as not to overwhelm the absorption capacity of the receiving communities in Syria, with the attendant risk of destabilization and renewed conflict.

⁵²⁰ UNHCR, *The Right to Family Life and Family Unity of Refugees and Others in Need of International Protection and the Family Definition Applied*, January 2018, 2nd edition, www.refworld.org/reference/research/unhcr/2018/en/120412 (see in particular chap. 2); UNHCR, *Summary Conclusions on the Right to Family Life and Family Unity in the Context of Family Reunification of Refugees and Other Persons in Need of International Protection*, Expert Roundtable, 4 December 2017, www.refworld.org/reference/confdoc/unhcr/2017/en/120836 (see in particular para. 3 and references to regional legal instruments provided therein).

⁵²¹ UNHCR, *UNHCR Guidelines on International Legal Standards Relating to Family Reunification for Refugees and Other Beneficiaries of International Protection*, December 2024, www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2024/149243, paras 4-9.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, paras 10-14.

Any assistance provided by UNHCR to refugees to return to Syria aims at supporting individuals who, being fully informed of the situation in their places of origin or an alternative area of their choice, choose voluntarily to return. Any action by UNHCR to support voluntary returns to Syria, including efforts aimed at sustainable reintegration for returnees and IDPs in Syria, should not be construed as an assessment by UNHCR of the safety and other aspects of the situation in Syria for individuals who have sought international refugee protection in countries of asylum. Voluntary return and forced return are processes of a fundamentally different character, engaging different responsibilities on the part of the various actors involved.

Refugees should not be forcibly returned, in line with States' non-refoulement obligations.⁵²³ The same applies to individuals who have applied for asylum but whose refugee status has not yet been determined, and to others whose international protection needs have not been individually assessed. Similarly, Syrian beneficiaries of temporary protection in Türkiye should not be forcibly returned to Syria.⁵²⁴ The situation in Syria continues to be volatile and may remain uncertain for some time to come, creating significant challenges for the safe and dignified return of those determined not to be in need of international protection. Against that background, UNHCR calls on States to exercise caution when considering forced returns to Syria of those determined not to be in need of international protection, taking into account the sustained and large-scale humanitarian crisis in the country and the potentially destabilizing impact of large-scale returns on the fragile situation in Syria.⁵²⁵

UNHCR will continue to monitor the situation in Syria with a view to assessing the international protection needs of Syrians and formerly habitual residents of Syria.

⁵²³ UN General Assembly, *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 28 July 1951, UN Treaty Series, Vol. 189, p. 137, www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/unga/1951/en/39821; and UN General Assembly, *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 31 January 1967, UN Treaty Series, Vol. 606, p. 267, www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/unga/1967/en/41400.

⁵²⁴ Türkiye adopted the Temporary Protection Regulation in 2014 under Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection (2013). Republic of Türkiye, *Temporary Protection Regulation*, 2014/6883, 22 October 2014, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/natleginstr/natlegbod/2014/151442>. Because of Türkiye's geographical limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Syrians in Türkiye are not eligible for refugee status under the Convention. Syrians and habitual residents of Syria who arrived in Türkiye on or after 28 April 2011 are granted temporary protection under Provisional Article 1 of the Temporary Protection Regulation.

⁵²⁵ See Section II.D.1 ("*Socioeconomic and Humanitarian Situation: Humanitarian Overview*").

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