



Syria

An update



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

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

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

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Executive summary

Following intensified clashes in January 2026, Syrian government forces took full control of Aleppo city after the SDF withdrew from the predominantly Kurdish neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah. Security in Aleppo Governorate has broadly improved since then, with urban areas — including Aleppo city — considered comparatively stable. Rural areas remain more volatile due to tribal weapons possession and intermittent clan and family disputes. Targeted killings of former Assad affiliates continue across Syria but have decreased in frequency since early 2026. Movement is generally unrestricted, and travel is generally safe during the day. Checkpoints remain, although they are fewer in number and procedures are less intrusive than under the former government.

Homs Governorate is assessed as one of the more unstable areas in Syria. Sectarian violence — particularly targeted killings, kidnappings and harassment of Alawites, Christians and Shia — remains prevalent, much of it driven by revenge motives from the conflict period. IS retains activity in the Badia desert and around Tadmur (Palmyra), primarily targeting security forces. While freedom of movement is not formally restricted, Alawites and other minorities in Homs may face harassment or other mistreatment at checkpoints, where ethnoreligious background may be inferred from accent, dress and place of origin. Night-time travel is widely avoided.

Returns to Aleppo Governorate have been substantial, including both cross-border returnees and IDPs returning to areas such as Afrin and Sheikh Maqsoud, while returns to Homs have been more limited due to extensive destruction and a severe shortage of habitable housing. High rents relative to low wages constitute a major obstacle to return in both governorates.

The January 2026 ceasefire between the SDF and the Syrian government resulted in the SDF relinquishing control of approximately 80% of the territory it had previously administered. While Hasakah Governorate has remained relatively stable, localised tensions, including Nowruz-related unrest in March 2026, illustrate the fragility of the security situation. The Mandatory Self-Defence Duty in SDF-controlled areas has been effectively suspended, and no new SDF recruitment has taken place since January 2026. The integration of SDF brigades into Syrian government forces remains at an early stage. The Revolutionary Youth Movement continues to recruit young people, including minors, in Kurdish-majority areas, with some reported cases of forced recruitment.

The Internal Security Forces have been placed under a unified command structure (Internal Security Command). Professionalisation efforts are ongoing, including measures to improve discipline, vetting procedures, codes of conduct, organisational structures, and deployment patterns, although progress has been uneven across regions. The formal judicial framework remains largely unchanged, with most judges retained from the previous system and

implementation of institutional reforms is limited. Civilian disputes continue to be handled through formal judicial and police mechanisms, although effectiveness varies across regions. Informal and tribal dispute-resolution mechanisms remain active alongside the formal judiciary. Corruption and the influence of personal connections persist, though reportedly less overtly than before.

Freedom of expression has improved compared to the Assad era, although informal red lines remain, particularly regarding sectarian issues, minority rights, and the actions of the security forces. Alawites, Druze and Kurds were reported to face greater risks than Sunni Arabs when expressing criticism of the authorities. Repercussions for criticism were reported to occur more frequently through harassment and intimidation by pro-government actors than through direct state action.

The timing of departure from Syria does not appear to affect treatment by the authorities upon return. However, individuals who left Syria late in the conflict, particularly from former government-controlled areas, may in some communities be perceived as having supported the former government, potentially resulting in social suspicion or local tensions.

There are no formal legal restrictions on internal resettlement, and Syrians may generally settle anywhere in the country without official approval. In practice, access to housing often depends on local trust networks and community relations. While major cities such as Damascus and Aleppo are generally accessible for resettlement, local social and security dynamics may affect settlement opportunities in some areas.

IS no longer controls territory in Syria and operates through underground cells, primarily in the eastern Badia desert, including parts of Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, Homs and Palmyra. IS targets security forces and SDF-affiliated individuals rather than ordinary civilians. No documented cases are identified by sources of returnees being targeted by IS because of prior conflicts with the group. IS capability to reach individuals in areas such as Aleppo city or Latakia is very limited.

The Yazidi community in Syria is very small, concentrated mainly in Hasakah Governorate and parts of northeast Syria. Sources report no widespread violations or systematic discrimination by the transitional authorities. Yazidis can generally practise their religion, although their religion is not officially recognised by the authorities, and they are regarded with sympathy in many communities due to the abuses they suffered in the past by IS. Reported incidents are limited to certain areas, particularly Afrin, where Yazidis have reportedly faced negative attitudes and some restrictions on religious practice.

Returnees are generally not reported to face harassment, abuse, or discriminatory treatment by the authorities or local communities due to behaviour, dress, appearance, or lifestyles perceived as “Western”.

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Introduction

This thematic report examines the situation in Syria concerning a number of issues since the beginning of 2026. The report covers the situation in the governorates of Aleppo, Homs and Hasakah with regard to security and freedom of movement. In addition, the report looks into conditions for return to Aleppo and Homs governorates and developments in northeast Syria, including issues related to recruitment. The report further examines the judiciary and internal security structures, opposition to the interim government, the impact of the timing of departure from Syria on treatment upon return, the possibility to settle in other areas than one's home area, possible consequences for individuals with previous conflicts with the Islamic State (IS), the situation of Yazidis, and the issue of so-called "westernisation".

The purpose of this report is to provide up-to-date information relevant to the processing of asylum cases. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the report are included in [Annex 2](#).

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

The reporting period covers 1 January 2026 to 31 May 2026. However, relevant information that has emerged after this period is also included.

The information presented in this report is based on written sources as well as data collected through online meetings with interlocutors inside and outside Syria.

Different types of sources were consulted during the research, including human rights organisations, research institutions and think tanks, NGOs, legal sources, and journalists. The purpose of the meetings was explained to all interlocutors, and they were informed that their statements would be included in a public report. Some sources requested varying degrees of anonymity.

Draft meeting minutes were forwarded to the sources for approval, giving them the opportunity to amend, comment on, or correct their statements to ensure that the minutes accurately reflected the information they had provided. Most sources approved their statements. Those who did not reply to DIS' follow-ups were informed that, unless they submitted their feedback or approval within the specified deadline, their statements would be considered approved and included in the report. The meeting minutes can be found in [Annex 1](#).

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

¹ EUAA, *Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology*, February 2022, [url](#)

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For transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the meeting minutes have been numbered consecutively and referenced in the report's footnotes. Information provided by sources that fell outside the scope of the ToR, while still being considered relevant to asylum cases, was included in the meeting minutes but not addressed in the report.

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

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

Research and editing were finalised on 17 June 2026. The report is publicly available on the website of DIS, www.us.dk, and may be consulted by all stakeholders involved in refugee status determination, as well as by the general public.

Abbreviations

COI	Country of Origin Information
DAANES	Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
HTS	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
HXP	Self-Defence Forces
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IS	Islamic State
ISC	Internal Security Command
ISF	Internal Security Forces
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PYD	Democratic Union Party
RYM	Revolutionary Youth Movement
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SNA	Syrian National Army
SNHR	Syrian Network for Human Rights
STJ	Syrians for Truth and Justice
TDA	The Day After
ToR	Terms of Reference
YPG	People's Protection Units
YPJ	Women's Protection Units

Maps



Figure 1: Syrian Arab Republic, © United Nations²

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

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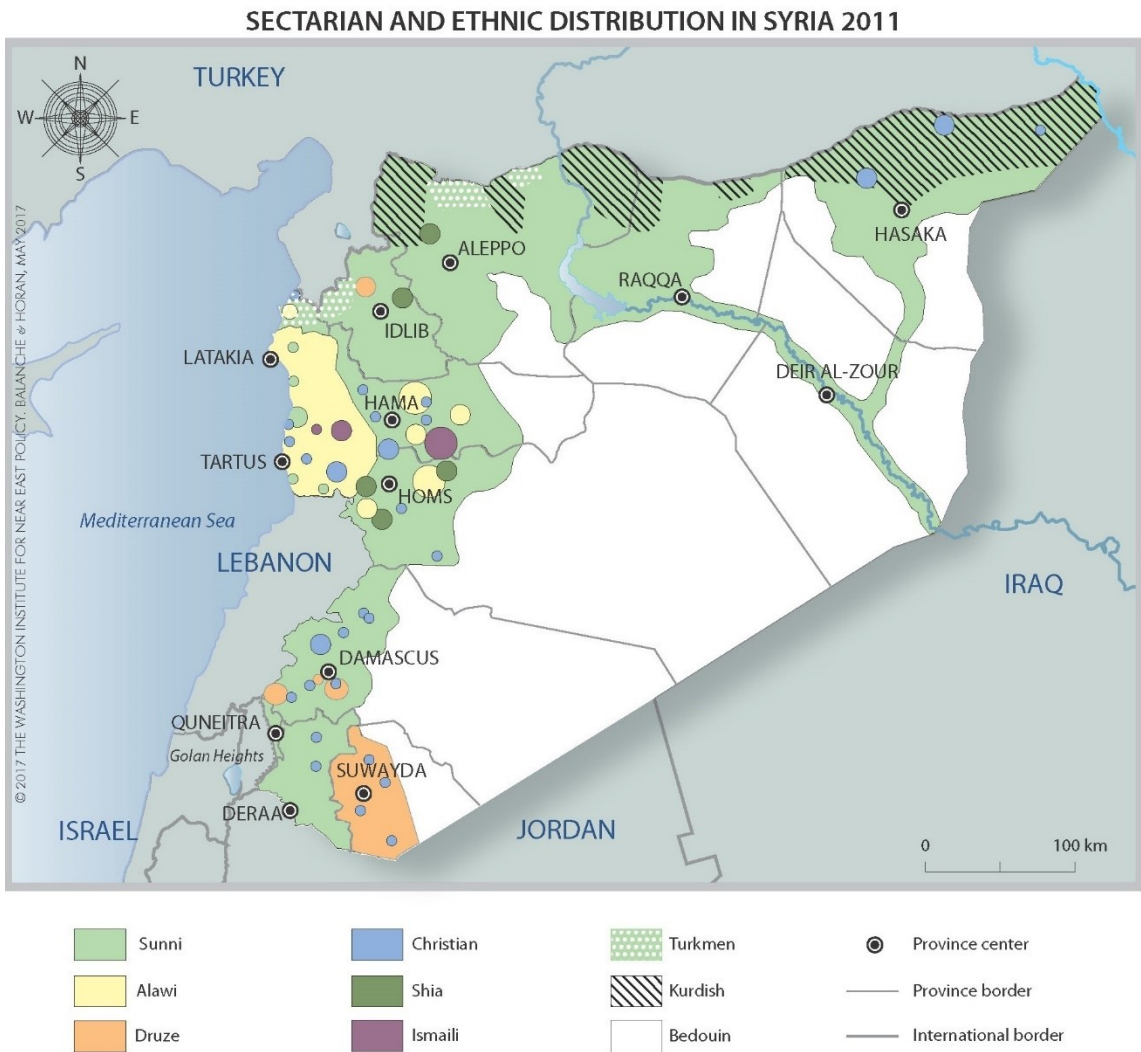


Figure 2: A map of Sectarian and ethnic distribution in Syria 2011, Fabrice Balanche & Mary Kalbach Horan, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.³

³ Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria's civil war*, 2018, [url](#)

1. Security situation and freedom of movement in Aleppo Governorate

1.1. Security situation

1.1.1. January 2026 clashes

Frequent small-scale clashes between the Syrian Transitional Government forces and the SDF during 2025 culminated in intensified hostilities on 6 January 2026. These clashes particularly affected the predominantly Kurdish neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqoud and Ashrafiyah in Aleppo city, which at the time remained under SDF control.⁴

Following repeated rocket attacks by SDF-affiliated forces from the two neighbourhoods targeting other neighbourhoods in Aleppo, the Syrian authorities initiated a military operation against these forces, which lasted approximately one week and resulted in the area being cleared of SDF fighters. On 10 January 2026, government forces assumed full control of Aleppo city upon a ceasefire agreement between the SDF and the Syrian government.⁵ Approximately 400 Kurdish fighters were evacuated to northeast Syria and around 300 Kurds were arrested.⁶ According to IOM data from 6 February 2026, approximately 66% of those displaced during the initial hostilities in Aleppo — corresponding to 138,053 displaced persons recorded on 9 January 2026 — had subsequently returned.⁷

1.1.2. The current security situation

Since the ceasefire agreement and the withdrawal of SDF forces from Sheikh Maqoud and Ashrafiyah neighbourhoods in January 2026, no major clashes or significant security incidents have been recorded in Aleppo Governorate.⁸ While the Syrian NGO Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) assessed that the security situation in Aleppo Governorate had reportedly improved (as of April 2026) and that government forces had consolidated control over most of the

⁴ EUAA, *COI Query: Syria – Developments concerning military service, the situation of Kurds, and the security situation in areas (formerly) controlled by Kurdish-led forces, 1 October 2025 to 25 March 2026*, 26 March 2026, [url](#)

⁵ Lister, C., *How Damascus and the SDF came to blows in Aleppo — and what might come next*, 13 January 2026, [url](#); UN News, *Syria: Aleppo fighting leaves civilians dead, displaces thousands*, 7 January 2026, [url](#); BBC News, *Last Kurdish forces leave Aleppo after ceasefire deal reached*, 11 January 2026, [url](#); Reuters, *Last Kurdish fighters leave Syria's Aleppo city after days of clashes*, 11 January 2026, [url](#); New York Times, *Syrian Military Takes Aleppo Neighborhoods After Clashes With Kurds*, 11 January 2026, [url](#); Al Jazeera, *Relative calm in Syria's Aleppo as Kurdish fighters disarm*, 10 January 2026, [url](#)

⁶ Arab Weekly, *Syria government forces take control of Aleppo's Kurdish neighbourhoods*, 12 January 2026, [url](#); New Arab, *Syria govt forces detain 300 Kurds, evacuate 400 fighters from Aleppo*, 11 January 2026, [url](#)

⁷ IOM, *Syrian Arab Republic: Emergency Mobility Tracking Situation Report – Aleppo/North East Syria (NES) Conflict, Round 10 (04 February 2026)*, 6 February 2026, [url](#)

⁸ Lister, C., *How Damascus and the SDF came to blows in Aleppo — and what might come next*, 13 January 2026, [url](#); UN News, *Syria: Aleppo fighting leaves civilians dead, displaces thousands*, 7 January 2026, [url](#); BBC News, *Last Kurdish forces leave Aleppo after ceasefire deal reached*, 11 January 2026, [url](#); Reuters, *Last Kurdish fighters leave Syria's Aleppo city after days of clashes*, 11 January 2026, [url](#); New York Times, *Syrian Military Takes Aleppo Neighborhoods After Clashes With Kurds*, 11 January 2026, [url](#); Al Jazeera, *Relative calm in Syria's Aleppo as Kurdish fighters disarm*, 10 January 2026, [url](#); Omran: 2

governorate,⁹ a consulted Syrian media organisation noted that the security situation in Aleppo city only became largely calm after the SDF withdrew from the two Kurdish-dominated neighbourhoods.¹⁰

STJ reported that two organised return convoys had already reached their destinations in Afrin. Returnees included, among others, individuals originally displaced from Afrin. In addition, many residents of previously contested neighbourhoods in Aleppo city such as Sheikh Maqsood and Ashrafiyah have reportedly been able to return to their homes.¹¹ The Syrian news outlet Enab Baladi reported that on 14 April 2026 a third group of displaced people from Afrin residing in camps in Qamishli returned to their home areas in Afrin. These developments came within the framework of implementing the January 2026 agreement between the Syrian government and the SDF which included provisions related to facilitating the return of displaced persons to their areas of origin.¹²

Sources assessed, however, that security conditions vary between urban and rural areas of Aleppo Governorate. Rural areas are less secure due to weaker government control and the continued presence of weapons among tribes, clans and armed actors. By contrast, urban centres, including Aleppo city, are comparatively more secure owing to the stronger presence of government security forces.¹³ According to the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum's country report on Syria, the interim authorities have focused on consolidating security and control in key cities such as Damascus and Aleppo since the fall of the former government.¹⁴

Aleppo Governorate, with the exception of the Kobane/Ain al-'Arab area, is under Syrian government control.¹⁵ Omran Center for Strategic Studies described Kobane as an almost entirely Kurdish city into which government security forces had not entered. According to the source, arrangements under the agreement between the Syrian government and the SDF stipulated that internal security personnel in Kobane were to be recruited locally, while government commanders reportedly entered the city periodically to oversee implementation of the agreement.¹⁶

Despite improvements in the security situation in Aleppo Governorate, sources identified a number of remaining security challenges. According to a Syrian human rights organisation, the Syrian government's control remains partly nominal and incomplete in practice, as tribes, clans, and families in the area continue to possess weapons and are not fully subject to state authority. Clashes between such groups, including targeted killings, reportedly continued to

⁹ STJ: 1–2

¹⁰ Syrian media organisation: 25

¹¹ STJ: 3

¹² Enab Baladi, *Third group of displaced Afrin families in Qamishli returns to home areas*, 14 April 2026, [url](#)

¹³ STJ: 4–5; Omran 4; Syrian human rights organisation: 2, 6; Syrian media organisation: 32

¹⁴ Austria, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Staatendokumentation, *Country Report Syrien (version 13)*, 28 February 2026, p. 45

¹⁵ Syrian journalist: 10

¹⁶ Omran: 5

occur in both Aleppo city, including the Sheikh Maqoud and Ashrafiyah neighbourhoods, and rural parts of the governorate, sometimes resulting in fatalities.¹⁷

A Syrian media organisation confirmed that weapons remain widespread in Aleppo Governorate leading to armed disputes between families and tribes. Such clashes are not a new phenomenon and also occurred under the Assad government and during the conflict. Moreover, the source noted that armed disputes involving families, clans or tribes mainly occur in rural Aleppo rather than in Aleppo city.¹⁸

In the Kurdish neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqoud and Ashrafiyah in Aleppo, some individuals arrested during the January 2026 fighting reportedly remained in the custody of the Syrian authorities as of April 2026, according to a Syrian human rights organisation.¹⁹ However, a Syrian media organisation noted that these reports had not been documented, and it remained unclear whether the individuals concerned were civilians or affiliated with SDF armed structures.²⁰

According to the consulted human rights organisation, residents of Shiite villages such as Nubul, Zahra and Farayyah have been subjected to mistreatment, including attacks and assaults, by local armed groups. The source noted, however, that no such incidents had been reported during the preceding three months. Nevertheless, Shiite internally displaced persons (IDPs) from these villages had not fully returned to their areas of origin as of April 2026.²¹

The same source stated that, in Aleppo Governorate, individuals with perceived ties to the former Assad government have been subjected to attacks. In addition, the source noted that Kurds living in the Sheikh Maqoud and Ashrafiyah neighbourhoods who are perceived to be affiliated with the SDF face a risk of targeted attacks by government forces. However, while arrests of Kurds affiliated with the SDF had been reported in the past, no recent reports of such arrests had been received. In Aleppo city, Kurdish residents without links to armed Kurdish factions generally do not face direct security threats.²²

A Syrian media organisation noted that targeted killings continue to occur across Syria and are mostly directed at security personnel. These incidents are generally attributed to IS-linked actors or criminal groups. Targeted killings of persons affiliated with the former Assad government continue to occur across Syria, including in Aleppo, although they are less frequent there than in Homs, Latakia and Hama. The number of such killings has decreased since the beginning of 2026 compared with 2025, when many such incidents were reported.²³ The organisation Syrians for Truth and Justice noted that in Aleppo city there had previously been frequent reports of targeted killings and kidnappings involving individuals perceived to have

¹⁷ Syrian human rights organisation: 2

¹⁸ Syrian media organisation: 25–30

¹⁹ Syrian human rights organisation: 5

²⁰ Syrian media organisation: 26

²¹ Syrian human rights organisation: 7

²² Syrian human rights organisation: 3

²³ Syrian media organisation: 28

links to the former government. These incidents reportedly occurred on a near-weekly basis during 2025. However, such incidents have become less frequent as of May 2026.²⁴

According to the consulted Syrian media organisation, the decline in targeted killings is partly linked to the fact that the Syrian government has begun prosecuting perpetrators of killings targeting Alawites and individuals affiliated with the former government.²⁵

Omran Studies noted that although the overall security situation in Aleppo remained generally good, Syria continues to be a post-conflict environment characterised by widespread circulation of weapons and the occurrence of extrajudicial killings. Additionally, Assad-affiliated actors, including former Shabiha [pro-Assad paramilitary militias] members, remain present in Aleppo, and some may have been incorporated into internal security structures due to insufficient vetting procedures.²⁶

1.1.3. Security incidents in Aleppo Governorate: 1 January–29 May 2026

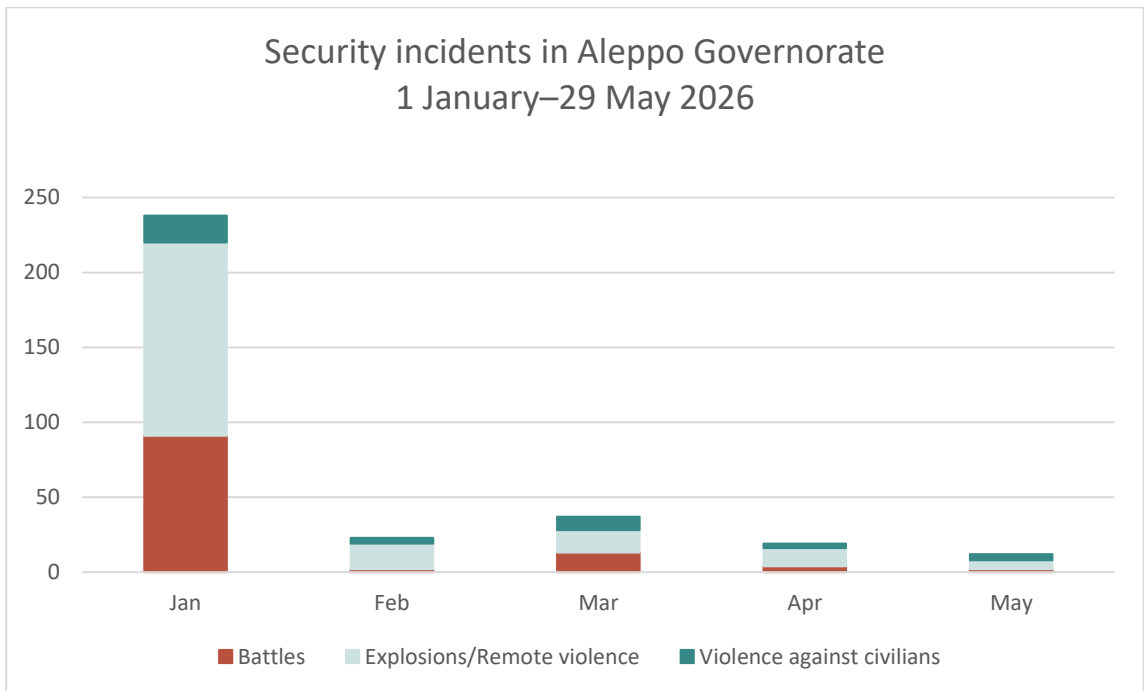


Figure 3: Security incidents in Aleppo Governorate: 1 January–29 May 2026. The figure has been produced by DIS based on ACLED security-event data.

²⁴ STJ: 5

²⁵ Syrian media organisation: 29

²⁶ Omran: 2

As illustrated in Figure 3, Aleppo recorded the highest number of incidents²⁷ in January. Approximately 240 incidents were recorded in Aleppo in January 2026 alone, representing the majority of incidents reported in the governorate during the reporting period.²⁸

The elevated level of violence in January coincided with the military operations and armed clashes between Syrian government forces and the SDF in and around Aleppo Governorate.²⁹ During this period, battles accounted for a substantial share of recorded incidents, while explosions and remote violence constituted the largest category of security incidents in January. Violence against civilians was comparatively less frequent.³⁰

Following the consolidation of government control and the subsequent implementation of agreements between the Syrian government and the SDF,³¹ incident levels in Aleppo declined significantly.³² Monthly incident totals fell to approximately 20 incidents in February, increased slightly in March, and declined in April and May. By the end of the reporting period, the number of incidents recorded in Aleppo had fallen to 10 in the month of May.³³

Explosions and remote violence remained the predominant type of incident throughout the period, although they decreased substantially after January. Battles experienced the sharpest decline, reflecting the reduction in active confrontations.³⁴

1.2. Freedom of movement

Travel within Aleppo Governorate is generally possible without major obstacles, and sources reported improvements compared to earlier periods, particularly following the January 2026 agreement and clashes involving the SDF. Movement patterns are influenced by security considerations.³⁵

²⁷ ACLED uses the term 'security event' when registering these security incidents. In accordance with EUAA's use of ACLED data, the term 'security incident' is used here and solely includes these three event categories: battles; explosions/remote violence; and violence against civilians.

'Explosions/Remote violence' includes attacks using explosive devices, e.g. bombs, grenades, IEDs, artillery fire or shelling, missile attacks, air or drone strikes, and other widely destructive heavy weapons or chemical weapons regardless of whether the target is civilian or military. 'Battles' involves armed clashes between two organised parties; and 'Violence against civilians' refers to deliberate attacks on non-combatant individuals inflicted by organised armed groups. ACLED, *ACLED Codebook*, n.d., [url](#)

²⁸ DIS analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, *Curated Data Files, Syria*, 29 May 2026

²⁹ EUAA, *COI Query: Syria – Developments concerning military service, the situation of Kurds, and the security situation in areas (formerly) controlled by Kurdish-led forces, 1 October 2025 to 25 March 2026*, 26 March, [url](#); BBC News, *Last Kurdish forces leave Aleppo after ceasefire deal reached*, 11 January 2026, [url](#)

³⁰ DIS analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, *Curated Data Files, Syria*, 29 May 2026

³¹ EUAA, *COI Query: Syria – Developments concerning military service, the situation of Kurds, and the security situation in areas (formerly) controlled by Kurdish-led forces, 1 October 2025 to 25 March 2026*, 26 March, [url](#); BBC News, *Last Kurdish forces leave Aleppo after ceasefire deal reached*, 11 January 2026, [url](#)

³² DIS analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, *Curated Data Files, Syria*, 29 May 2026

³³ DIS analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, *Curated Data Files, Syria*, 29 May 2026

³⁴ DIS analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, *Curated Data Files, Syria*, 29 May 2026

³⁵ STJ: 6–8; Syria expert: 1, 6; SNHR: 1, 5; Syrian human rights organisation: 13

Main roads and highways are generally considered safe during daytime, and civilians are reportedly able to travel between Aleppo, Damascus, northeast Syria, Afrin and other parts of the country. However, night-time travel—especially after midnight and on rural roads—is avoided by some due to security risks, including theft, kidnapping, and armed groups seeking financial gain. Some IS members or criminal groups may operate in rural areas.³⁶ Public transportation, including buses between Damascus and Aleppo, is functioning, and flights between Aleppo and Türkiye were also reported to operate as of April 2026.³⁷

Checkpoints remain present on highways, at entrances to Aleppo city, and on roads connecting cities and towns, although the extensive checkpoint system associated with the former government is no longer in place and checkpoints inside Aleppo city are now limited or largely temporary.³⁸ At checkpoints, vehicles may be searched for weapons or smuggled goods, and identity checks are conducted selectively, particularly targeting groups of young men or persons travelling at night, while families are generally subjected to less scrutiny.³⁹ Temporary checkpoints may also be established in response to security incidents or criminal activity.⁴⁰ Civilians generally do not experience significant problems when passing checkpoints, and procedures are described as manageable and relatively quick.⁴¹

A Syria expert referred to isolated incidents affecting Kurdish individuals. During Newroz celebrations, harassment of Kurdish persons at a roadblock in Afrin was reported, although no similar incidents were subsequently identified.⁴²

The consulted Syrian human rights organisation expressed concerns regarding undisciplined or poorly trained security personnel, including some affiliated with former Turkish-backed armed groups who may perceive Kurds as linked to the SDF.⁴³

³⁶ STJ: 7–8; Omran: 9; SNHR: 1–3

³⁷ Omran 12; Syrian media organisation: 34

³⁸ Syria expert: 4; Omran: 10; Syrian media organisation: 35; SNHR: 4

³⁹ Syria expert: 3–4

⁴⁰ Syrian media organisation: 35

⁴¹ Omran: 11; SNHR: 4

⁴² Syria expert: 5

⁴³ Syrian human rights organisation: 4

2. Security situation and freedom of movement in Homs Governorate

2.1. Security situation

According to a consulted Syrian journalist, the Syrian government controls all of Homs Governorate. The area around al-Tanf in the eastern part of the governorate had previously been under the control of forces opposed to the former Assad government and affiliated with the international coalition, particularly the United States. These forces have now been integrated into structures operating under the Ministry of Defence.⁴⁴

The consulted sources described the security situation in Homs Governorate as among the most complex and unstable in Syria, with security conditions shaped by sectarian tensions, the legacy of the conflict, and the presence of individuals associated with the former Assad government.⁴⁵ STJ described Homs as among the most unstable areas in Syria and noted that conditions had not improved to the same extent as in some coastal areas.⁴⁶ Some sources highlighted that security conditions vary considerably between localities and that some areas remain relatively calm despite continuing tensions and isolated incidents.⁴⁷

According to the consulted sources, Alawites are especially affected by security incidents, including targeted killings, kidnappings, threats, harassment, and other forms of violence.⁴⁸ Homs Governorate has recorded a particularly high number of violent attacks against persons associated with the former Assad government, many of whom are Alawites.⁴⁹ Christians and Shia also face security concerns in parts of the governorate.⁵⁰ One source noted, however, that some incidents presented as sectarian attacks may in reality stem from personal, family, tribal, or economic disputes that are subsequently framed in sectarian terms.⁵¹

Many attacks are linked to revenge motives connected to events during the conflict. Individuals believed to have participated in violations under the former government, including former members of the army and Shabiha militias, have reportedly been targeted by persons seeking retribution for harm suffered during the conflict.⁵² A consulted Syrian media organisation noted that some victims are targeted because of actual or perceived affiliation with the former government, while family members, including women and children, may also be targeted.⁵³

⁴⁴ Syrian journalist: 12

⁴⁵ STJ: 9–13; Omran: 13–16; Syrian media organisation: 36–40

⁴⁶ STJ: 9, 12

⁴⁷ Omran: 15–16; Syrian media organisation: 39–40

⁴⁸ STJ: 9–13; Syrian human rights organisation: 8–11; TDA: 23

⁴⁹ Syrian human rights organisation: 8; Omran: 13; Syrian media organisation: 38

⁵⁰ STJ: 9; Syrian human rights organisation: 10

⁵¹ Syrian media organisation: 40

⁵² Omran: 13; Syrian media organisation: 38

⁵³ Syrian media organisation: 38

According to STJ, most reported attacks in Alawite-dominated areas appear intended to pressure Alawite communities to relocate towards the coastal region.⁵⁴

According to the Syrian media organisation, arrests have taken place in connection with violence on the coast and in Homs, including arrests of persons affiliated with or supportive of the current government who had incited violence against persons affiliated with the former Assad government.⁵⁵

A Syrian human rights organisation described Homs as a governorate where radical Muslim clerics promote hostile rhetoric towards Alawites and Shiites. However, while such clerics are at times restrained or prevented from preaching by the authorities, they are at other times able to preach without interference from the Syrian authorities.⁵⁶

The security situation varies between localities and communities within the governorate rather than along a simple urban-rural divide. Some areas are relatively calm despite mixed populations, including Talbiseh and al-Rastan in northern Homs, while tensions persist in areas such as al-Houla due to unresolved grievances dating back to the conflict. Wadi al-Nasara was described as generally calm, although tensions linked to events during the conflict reportedly remain between some local communities.⁵⁷ Despite these local variations, targeted killings occur more frequently in rural parts of Homs, particularly in northern areas bordering Hama Governorate.⁵⁸

Criminal activity was reported in parts of the governorate, particularly in border areas near Lebanon, including smuggling and other illicit activities.⁵⁹ Some sources nevertheless assessed that many security incidents in Homs are better understood as sectarian or retaliatory violence than as ordinary criminality.⁶⁰

IS continued its activity in Homs Governorate, particularly in the Badia desert region and around Tadmur (Palmyra).⁶¹ According to Omran, IS activity is primarily directed against government and security-related targets rather than ordinary civilians.⁶² At the same time, the source noted that IS may seek to exploit sectarian tensions, referring to attacks targeting Alawite religious sites as an example.⁶³

⁵⁴ STJ: 10

⁵⁵ Syrian media organisation: 29

⁵⁶ Syrian human rights organisation: 11

⁵⁷ Omran: 14–16

⁵⁸ Syrian media organisation: 39

⁵⁹ STJ: 13

⁶⁰ STJ: 11, 13; Syrian human rights organisation: 8–11

⁶¹ STJ: 15–17; Omran: 18–23

⁶² Syrian human rights organisation: 12; Omran: 20, 23

⁶³ Omran: 23

2.1.1. Security incidents in Homs Governorate: 1 January–29 May 2026

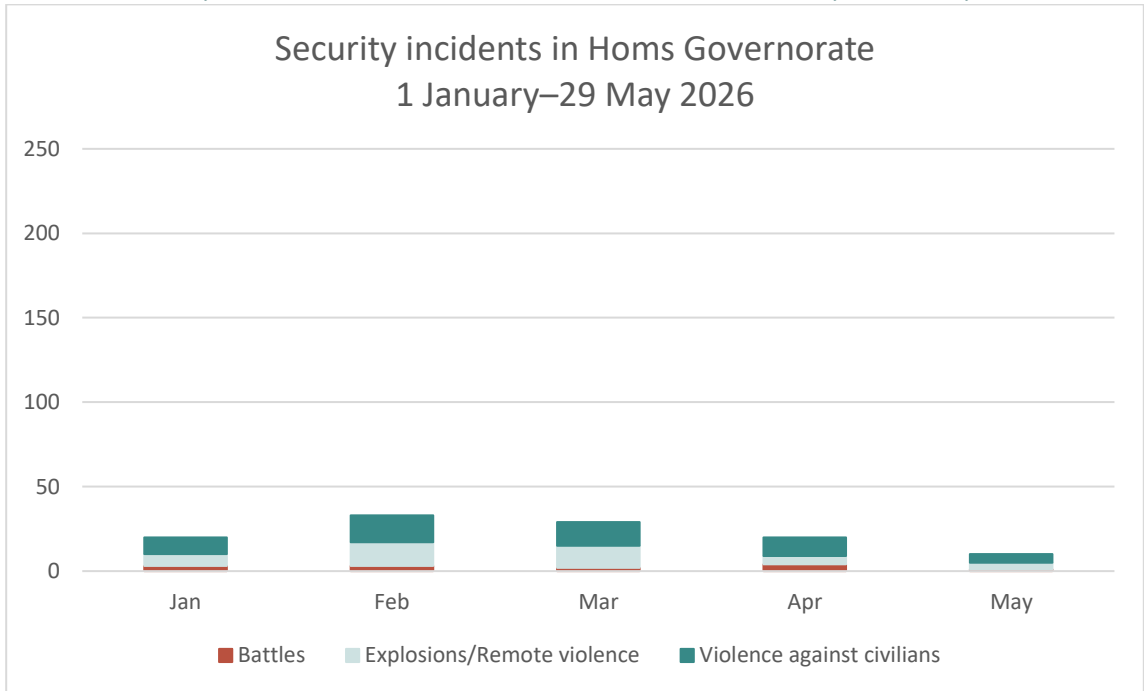


Figure 4: Security incidents Homs Governorate: 1 January–29 May 2026.⁶⁴
 The figure has been produced by DIS based on ACLED security-event data.

As illustrated in figure 4, the highest number of incidents in Homs Governorate was recorded in February, with a total of 33 security incidents, followed by 29 in March, 20 each in January and April, and 10 in May. In February and March, violence against civilians accounted for 16 and 14 incidents, respectively. Explosions/remote violence also constituted a significant share of recorded incidents, accounting for 14 and 13 incidents, respectively. The number of recorded battles was highest in April, with four incidents, compared with just one in May.⁶⁵

2.2. Freedom of movement

Movement in Homs Governorate is generally possible, and civilians are able to travel within the governorate and between Homs, Damascus and other areas by regular public transportation, including buses.⁶⁶ Road travel is generally carried out during the day, while night-time travel is often avoided unless necessary, particularly in the Homs–Hama–coast triangle.⁶⁷ One source noted that no notable or recurring security incidents targeting civilians on roads within Homs

⁶⁴ DIS analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, *Curated Data Files, Syria*, 29 May 2026

⁶⁵ DIS analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, *Curated Data Files, Syria*, 29 May 2026

⁶⁶ Syrian human rights organisation: 13, 17; Syrian media organisation: 42; SNHR: 1–2

⁶⁷ Omran: 25; Syrian media organisation: 46

Governorate had been recorded recently and assessed that the security situation on the roads had improved compared to previous periods.⁶⁸

At the same time, according to the consulted sources, movement conditions in Homs are more difficult and more security-sensitive than in Aleppo due to sectarian tensions, revenge attacks, and the overall security situation in the governorate.⁶⁹

Checkpoints are widespread in Homs Governorate, particularly on routes between Damascus and Homs and in northern parts of the governorate.⁷⁰ Treatment at checkpoints reportedly varies depending on the location, the personnel operating the checkpoint, and the perceived ethno-religious background of travellers. Ethno-religious affiliation is commonly inferred from a person's place of origin, accent, clothing or appearance rather than from identity documents.⁷¹

Procedures at checkpoints may include vehicle inspections, questioning about travel purpose, identity checks, body searches and, in some cases, removal from vehicles.⁷² Omran described the procedures as generally manageable unless individuals have specific security-related issues, such as unresolved cases connected to former military or security structures.⁷³ The consulted Syrian human rights organisation referred to a case in which three Kurdish men travelling by bus from Hasakah through Homs were detained at a checkpoint after photos related to the SDF were found on their phones; they were reportedly released only following negotiations and public pressure.⁷⁴

According to the consulted sources, minority groups, particularly Alawites and Shia, face greater difficulties and insecurity in relation to movement in Homs Governorate.⁷⁵ Alawites may be subjected to physical assaults, humiliations, intrusive questioning, or verbal harassment at checkpoints.⁷⁶ Some individuals reportedly adapt their behaviour in order to avoid attention, including by limiting non-essential travel, avoiding movement at night, trying to blend in, or concealing visible markers associated with minority identity.⁷⁷ A Syria expert referred to cases of Alawite women wearing headscarves in order to avoid being identified as non-Sunni at checkpoints.⁷⁸ Women from minority communities reportedly prefer to travel accompanied by men.⁷⁹

Some sources also highlighted variations in movement conditions between urban and rural areas, as well as between neighbourhoods within Homs Governorate. Some predominantly

⁶⁸ SNHR: 3

⁶⁹ STJ: 14; Syria expert: 7; Syrian media organisation: 45–46; Syrian journalist: 14

⁷⁰ Syria expert: 7; Omran: 16; Syrian journalist: 14

⁷¹ Syria expert: 8

⁷² Syria expert: 10

⁷³ Omran: 26

⁷⁴ Syrian human rights organisation: 15

⁷⁵ STJ: 14; Syria expert: 9–12; Syrian human rights organisation: 14; Syrian journalist: 14

⁷⁶ Syrian human rights organisation: 14; Syria expert: 10

⁷⁷ STJ: 14; Syria expert: 11–12; TDA: 23

⁷⁸ Syria expert: 11

⁷⁹ TDA: 23; Syrian journalist: 14

minority neighbourhoods reportedly have only one entry and exit point controlled by checkpoints.⁸⁰ In rural areas, individuals may be better able to avoid entering areas dominated by other communities, whereas this is often not possible in Homs city due to the mixed composition of neighbourhoods and the location of state institutions.⁸¹

Despite these challenges, sources emphasised that minorities continue to move about for work, education and daily activities.⁸²

⁸⁰ STJ: 14; Syria expert: 12

⁸¹ STJ: 14; Syrian media organisation: 45

⁸² STJ: 14; Syrian journalist: 14

3. Conditions for return to Homs and Aleppo governorates

UNHCR reports that since December 2024, an estimated 1.6 million refugees have returned to Syria and 1.9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) have returned to their home areas, primarily to Aleppo, Idlib, Hama, Homs, and Damascus.⁸³

Returns to Aleppo and Homs governorates include both refugees returning from neighbouring countries and internally displaced persons returning from other parts of Syria. Individuals who are able to return and have access to housing or sufficient financial resources are reportedly doing so. In Aleppo Governorate, return movements include Syrians returning from neighbouring countries as well as displaced persons returning to areas such as Afrin, Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah. In Homs Governorate, returns have also been observed to both the city of Homs and rural areas of the governorate.⁸⁴

At the same time, several sources noted that return conditions are strongly affected by the extent of destruction, housing availability and the economic situation. Individuals without housing or sufficient financial resources are generally less likely to return. Rent prices in both Homs and Aleppo Governorates were reported to be high due to extensive destruction and limited housing availability, while wages remain low relative to housing costs. Individuals who previously owned housing in Homs but have settled elsewhere, including in Afrin, are often reluctant to return because of the extent of destruction and the economic conditions in the governorate.⁸⁵

Returns to Homs Governorate are more limited than returns to Aleppo due to the scale of destruction and the reduced availability of habitable housing. One source assessed that the level of destruction in Homs is significantly higher relative to the size of the city than in Aleppo.⁸⁶

The composition of returnees varies depending on the area. According to a Syrian human rights organisation, in Homs Governorate, returnees are predominantly Sunni Muslims, reflecting the fact that many of those displaced from the area during the conflict were Sunni. Syrians returning from Türkiye to Aleppo are often individuals facing unemployment in Türkiye, whereas those who remain employed generally do not return due to the economic conditions in Syria despite improvements in the security situation.⁸⁷

⁸³ UNHCR, *Syria: Protection and Reintegration Insights - Voices of returnees and host communities across Syria (January - March 2026)*, 28 April 2026, [url](#)

⁸⁴ STJ: 3; Syria expert: 27; Syrian human rights organisation: 18, 22

⁸⁵ Syrian human rights organisation: 18, 21–22

⁸⁶ Syria expert: 28

⁸⁷ Syrian human rights organisation: 19–20

Sources indicated that security conditions in both governorates have improved compared to earlier periods, although differences remain between locations and population groups. In Aleppo Governorate, the security situation is calmer following the withdrawal of the SDF from parts of Aleppo city and the reduction in clashes. In Homs Governorate, however, ongoing sectarian tensions, targeted violence and security incidents continue to affect conditions for return and daily life.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ STJ: 1–5, 9–14; Syrian media organisation: 25–39

4. Situation in northeast Syria

According to a report from the Swedish Migration Agency from April 2026, the security situation in Hasakah Governorate was largely stable as of early March 2026, with no information indicating significant armed clashes in the governorate. Despite localised fluctuations in security conditions during the implementation phase of the January ceasefire agreement between the SDF and the Syrian government, the overall situation in the governorate remained relatively calm. The improved stability enabled some previously displaced persons to return to areas where conditions had stabilised. However, the agency also reported unrest and criminal activity, as well as the widespread presence of landmines and other explosive remnants of war. In addition, the region experienced missile and drone attacks launched by Iran-aligned Shia militias in Iraq in the context of the regional conflict involving the United States, Israel and Iran.⁸⁹

EUAA reported in a COI query from March 2026 that throughout the first three months of 2026, the security situation in northeast Syria remained volatile. On a general level, the governorates in northeastern Syria were affected by armed confrontations and terrorist activity by IS.⁹⁰

Following the expulsion of Kurdish-led forces from the Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah districts of Aleppo city by Syrian armed forces, as described earlier in this report, the fighting spread to eastern Aleppo Governorate and rapidly expanded into an all-out government offensive against the SDF and the areas under its control in the governorates of Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, and Hasakah in northeastern Syria. As a result, the SDF was gradually forced to retreat into Kurdish-majority areas of Hasakah Governorate.⁹¹

After significant territorial losses by the SDF, Syrian government forces reached the outskirts of Hasakah city and other Kurdish-majority areas, and a ceasefire was agreed on 30 January 2026, suspending further government advances in Hasakah Governorate.⁹²

The ceasefire agreement between the SDF and the Syrian government effectively brought an end to hostilities between the parties following the fighting in December 2025 and January 2026, during which the SDF and the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) lost approximately 80% of their territory across four governorates in northeastern Syria.⁹³

Under the agreement, SDF forces stationed along the northern front lines were to withdraw, while government forces would deploy to the SDF-controlled cities of Hasakah and Qamishli. A

⁸⁹ Swedish Migration Agency, *Utvecklingen i nordöstra Syrien*, 24 April 2026, [url](#), p. 7–8

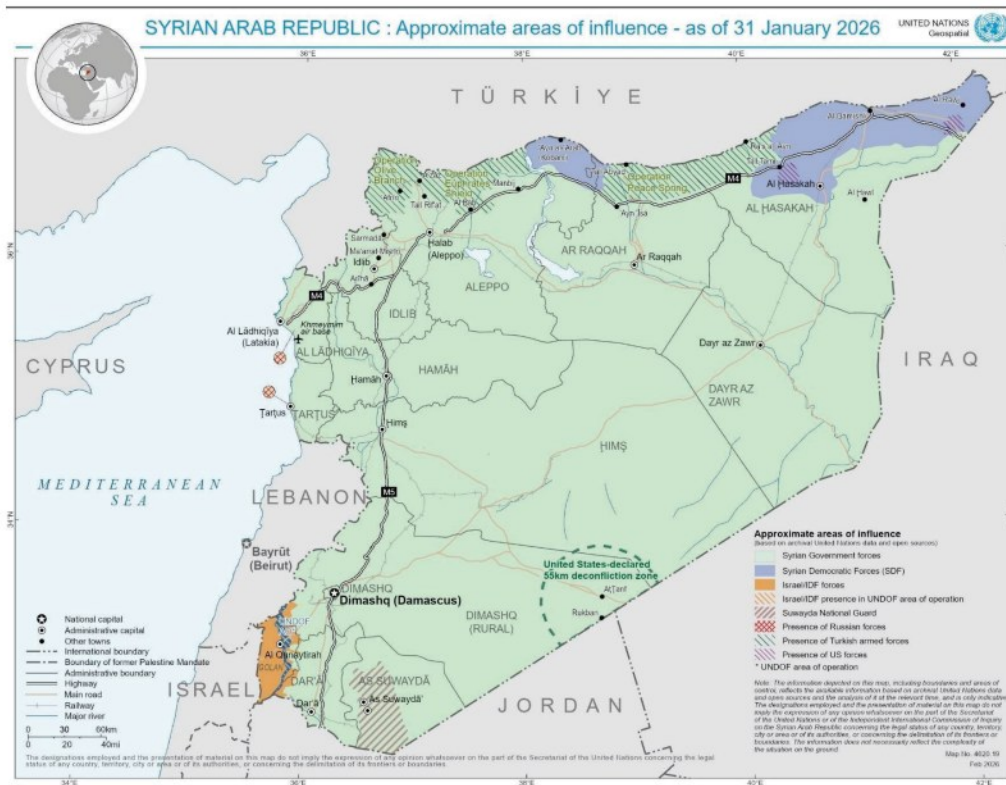
⁹⁰ EUAA, *COI Query: Syria – Developments concerning military service, the situation of Kurds, and the security situation in areas (formerly) controlled by Kurdish-led forces*, 26 March 2026, [url](#), p. 15

⁹¹ Swedish Migration Agency, *Utvecklingen i nordöstra Syrien*, 24 April 2026, [url](#), p. 5–6

⁹² Swedish Migration Agency, *Utvecklingen i nordöstra Syrien*, 24 April 2026, [url](#), p. 5–6

⁹³ Swedish Migration Agency, *Utvecklingen i nordöstra Syrien*, 24 April 2026, [url](#), p. 8; EUAA, *COI Query: Syria – Developments concerning military service, the situation of Kurds, and the security situation in areas (formerly) controlled by Kurdish-led forces*, 26 March 2026, [url](#), p. 8

new military division composed of SDF brigades and operating under the Syrian government would also be established to operate across northeast Syria. According to the agreement, Syrian government forces would not enter Kurdish-majority neighbourhoods. Instead, a limited number of units affiliated with the Syrian Ministry of Interior would take control of state institutions in the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli, including civil registry offices, passport directorates and Qamishli Airport.⁹⁴



Annex III Map of approximate Areas of Influence

A/HRC/19/12

Figure 5: United Nations Human Rights Council, *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence – as of 31 January 2026*, 12 March 2026, [url](#)

4.1. Security situation in Hasakah Governorate

Sources consulted for this report indicated that, since the ceasefire agreement between the SDF and the Syrian government on 30 January 2026, the overall security situation in Hasakah Governorate has improved and no major clashes between the SDF and Syrian government forces have been reported. Large-scale armed confrontations have largely subsided, and the focus of the Syrian authorities and the SDF has shifted towards negotiations concerning the

⁹⁴ EUAA, *COI Query: Syria – Developments concerning military service, the situation of Kurds, and the security situation in areas (formerly) controlled by Kurdish-led forces*, 26 March 2026, [url](#), p. 8

integration of SDF structures into state institutions and the return of internally displaced persons.⁹⁵

According to consulted sources, the integration process remains ongoing, though gradual and incomplete, and tensions continue to arise in relation to arrests conducted by either the SDF or government forces, which have at times led to protests and confrontations.⁹⁶

Despite the relative reduction in large-scale violence, a consulted Syrian human rights organisation did not consider the security situation in Hasakah Governorate to be fully stable. Criminality and localised violence reportedly persist due to the widespread possession of weapons among tribes, clans and families, and clashes between clans or within families continue to occur and at times result in shootings in towns and villages.⁹⁷

Two consulted sources described how minor incidents can escalate into riots or security-related clashes, citing unrest in Qamishli and Hasakah city during Nowruz celebrations in March 2026 as an example. According to these sources, the unrest reflected tensions linked to Kurdish symbols and the broader political sensitivities in Hasakah Governorate.⁹⁸

By the end of March, tensions in Hasakah Governorate escalated into violent protests following the lowering of the Syrian flag during Nowruz celebrations in Kobani in Aleppo Governorate. The incident was followed by retaliatory attacks against Kurds in Aleppo and subsequent attacks by Kurdish actors on Syrian government positions and checkpoints in Qamishli and elsewhere in Hasakah Governorate. Clashes were also reported near checkpoints operated by Syrian government forces and SDF forces. The SDF responded by deploying forces and imposing curfews to prevent further escalation.⁹⁹

The Syrian human rights organisation assessed that the heightened sensitivities surrounding the agreement between the SDF and the Syrian government contributed to tensions in Hasakah Governorate, as the Syrian authorities have presented the agreement as a victory for the Syrian government.¹⁰⁰

The Dutch journalist and analyst Wladimir van Wilgenburg noted that tensions remain present in some Arab tribal areas, including parts of Hasakah Governorate, where dissatisfaction persists regarding the continued nominal Kurdish authority in certain areas.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Syrian human rights organisation: 23; Wilgenburg: 1; Syria expert: 42

⁹⁶ Wilgenburg: 6–9; Syria expert: 43–45

⁹⁷ Syrian human rights organisation: 23

⁹⁸ Wilgenburg: 2–4; Syrian human rights organisation: 23

⁹⁹ Swedish Migration Agency, *Utvecklingen i nordöstra Syrien*, 24 April 2026, [url](#), p. 8–9; Enab Baladi, *Security tension following flag incident, official condemnations and calls for calm*, 22 March 2026, [url](#); Wilgenburg: 3; Syrian human rights organisation: 23

¹⁰⁰ Syrian human rights organisation: 23

¹⁰¹ Wilgenburg: 4

4.1.1. *Islamic State (IS) presence in Hasakah Governorate*

The presence of IS cells in Syria is geographically limited and primarily concentrated in the eastern Badia desert of Homs Governorate rather than in Hasakah Governorate itself.¹⁰² IS no longer controls territory in Syria and operates through underground cells carrying out targeted attacks, primarily against security forces and persons perceived to be affiliated with the SDF.¹⁰³ According to two sources, no major IS-related incidents had been reported in Hasakah Governorate during the reporting period.¹⁰⁴

4.1.2. *Security incidents in Hasakah Governorate: 1 January–29 May 2026*

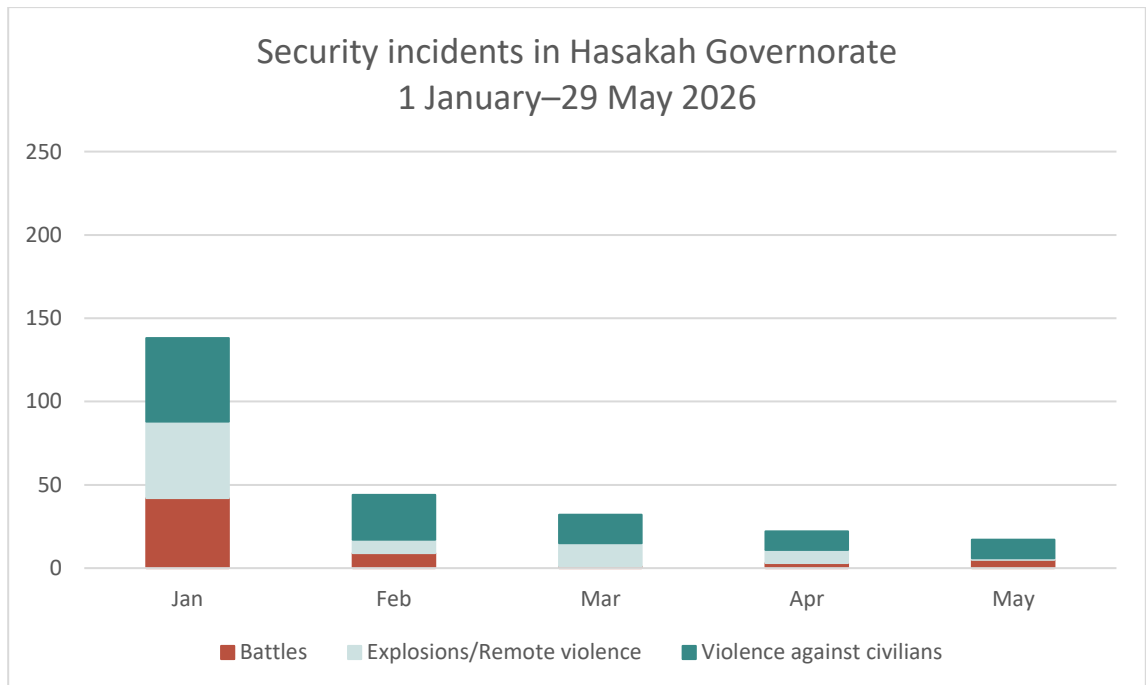


Figure 6: Security incidents Hasakah Governorate: 1 January–29 May 2026.¹⁰⁵

The figure has been produced by DIS based on ACLED security-event data.

As illustrated in figure 6, the highest number of incidents was recorded in January, when a total of 138 security incidents were reported in the governorate. Violence against civilians accounted for 50 incidents, followed by 46 incidents of explosions/remote violence and 42 battles.¹⁰⁶

Since the January ceasefire agreement between the Syrian government and the SDF, the number of security incidents decreased significantly, falling to 44 in February, 32 in March, 22 in April, and 17 in May. Incidents of violence against civilians declined from 50 in January to 11 in

¹⁰² STJ: 15–17

¹⁰³ Syrian human rights organisation: 25

¹⁰⁴ Syria expert: 2; Syrian journalist: 11

¹⁰⁵ DIS analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, *Curated Data Files, Syria*, 29 May 2026

¹⁰⁶ DIS analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, *Curated Data Files, Syria*, 29 May 2026

May. Similarly, incidents of explosions/remote violence decreased from 46 to 1, while the number of battles fell from 42 to 5 over the same period.¹⁰⁷

4.2. Freedom of movement in Hasakah Governorate

According to sources, movement in northeast Syria, including Hasakah Governorate, is generally possible, and travel between major cities such as Qamishli, Hasakah, Raqqqa, Deir ez-Zor, Kobane, Amuda and Damascus continues to take place regularly.¹⁰⁸ Roads in northeast Syria are generally more open and relatively safer than during earlier periods, including under the Assad government.¹⁰⁹ According to the Syria expert interviewed for this report, no systematic pattern of obstruction or targeting of civilians has been identified in the reporting period.¹¹⁰

Sources assessed that movement between Hasakah Governorate and other areas of Syria has become easier following the January 2026 agreement between the SDF and the Syrian government and subsequent integration measures.¹¹¹ Travel between Hasakah Governorate and Kobane, which had previously been difficult due to siege-like conditions in Kobane, has become possible again following the agreement. Bus services between Damascus and northeast Syria also operates daily and regularly.¹¹²

Checkpoints remain widespread throughout northeast Syria, including in Hasakah Governorate, and continue to affect movement patterns.¹¹³ However, movement is generally possible despite their continued presence.¹¹⁴

In areas still under SDF influence in Hasakah Governorate, SDF-checkpoints remain in place, while checkpoints in other areas of Hasakah Governorate are controlled by government forces.¹¹⁵ Checkpoint personnel inspect vehicles, verify identities, search for weapons, and in some cases conduct arrests on the basis of judicial warrants or security concerns.¹¹⁶

At the same time, IS activity and unresolved tensions stemming from the incomplete integration process between the SDF and the Syrian government contribute to insecurity, particularly for travellers in rural areas and on routes outside major cities.¹¹⁷ Incidents at checkpoints reportedly continue to occur, including cases where Syrian Arab residents seeking to enter Hasakah or Qamishli have been turned back at SDF checkpoints. According to reports, one such incident involved a pregnant woman who died after allegedly being denied passage to

¹⁰⁷ DIS analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, *Curated Data Files, Syria*, 29 May 2026

¹⁰⁸ STJ: 7; Syrian human rights organisation: 24; Syria expert: 46, 48; Omran: 32; SNHR: 33, 34.

¹⁰⁹ SNHR: 33, 35, 38; Syria expert: 48

¹¹⁰ Syria expert: 48

¹¹¹ Wilgenburg: 22; Syria expert: 46, 48; SNHR: 38

¹¹² Wilgenburg: 22; SNHR: 33, 37

¹¹³ Wilgenburg: 22–23; Syria expert: 46–48; Syrian human rights organisation: 24; Omran: 30; SNHR: 36

¹¹⁴ Syria expert: 46, 48; Omran: 32

¹¹⁵ Wilgenburg: 23; Syria expert: 46–47

¹¹⁶ SNHR: 36

¹¹⁷ Syrian human rights organisation: 24; Syria expert: 42–45; Omran: 28, 33

hospital care.¹¹⁸ In another case, passengers on a bus travelling from Kurdish-controlled areas in Hasakah to Damascus were reportedly subjected to ill-treatment by government security personnel at a checkpoint.¹¹⁹

According to Omran Center for Strategic Studies, instances in which SDF personnel prevent individuals of Syrian Arab background from passing through checkpoints are intended to signal the SDF's continued control over the area.¹²⁰

A Syria expert stated that some individuals feel uneasy when passing through checkpoints, particularly outside their home area or after a long absence. Syrian Arab travellers may be concerned when passing through SDF checkpoints, while Kurdish travellers may feel apprehensive at government-controlled checkpoints.¹²¹ According to SNHR, concerns also persist regarding the risk of arrest or enforced disappearance at some SDF checkpoints, particularly in Hasakah city and its surrounding areas.¹²²

SNHR highlighted inadequate infrastructure and the lack of viable bridges on routes connecting Hasakah Governorate with the rest of Syria, particularly through Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa governorates, as a greater obstacle to freedom of movement than systematic security measures.¹²³

4.3. Recruitment

4.3.1. *Mandatory Self-Defence Duty in HXP*

The Mandatory Self-Defence Duty has been a compulsory military service scheme for young men in areas under the control of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES). Introduced in July 2014, the scheme was established in response to the need to expand military forces in the fight against IS. Individuals performing the duty serve in the Self-Defence Forces (HXP). Under the Law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty, men over the age of 18 from North and East Syria have been required to perform the duty, while the DAANES Defence Office in each administrative area determined the specific age groups subject to conscription. According to Article 2 of the Self-Defence Duty Law from June 2022, the duration of the duty is one year.¹²⁴

However, according to the consulted source, recruitment to the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty has been suspended and is no longer implemented in practice.¹²⁵ No new conscription is therefore taking place, although the duty has not been formally abolished.¹²⁶ Individuals

¹¹⁸ Omran: 29

¹¹⁹ Omran: 29; Syrian human rights organisation: 24

¹²⁰ Omran: 29–30

¹²¹ Syria expert

¹²² SNHR: 38

¹²³ SNHR: 34

¹²⁴ DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), pp. 13, 18

¹²⁵ STJ: 38; Wilgenburg: 10; Syria expert 49; Syrian media organisation: 47

¹²⁶ STJ: 38; Wilgenburg: 10; Syrian media organisation: 47

already conscripted into the HXP must, however, complete their service.¹²⁷ Similarly, the Swedish Migration Agency reported in April 2026 that the duty was no longer enforced and that no recruitment to the HXP was taking place, despite the absence of an official announcement abolishing it.¹²⁸

The suspension reportedly occurred following the January agreement between the SDF and the Syrian government.¹²⁹

A Facebook page pertaining to DAANES authorities that had previously provided updates regarding the Self-Defence Duty has been inactive since 2024. This, according to Dutch journalist and analyst Wladimir van Wilgenburg, suggests that recruitment had already begun to decline during 2024.¹³⁰

4.3.2. Recruitment to the SDF (YPG/YPJ)

According to the consulted sources, recruitment practices in SDF-controlled areas have changed significantly following the January 2026 agreement between the SDF and the Syrian government. No new recruitment to the SDF has taken place since the agreement and the initiation of the integration process into Syrian state structures. Existing fighters in the SDF continue to serve and remain in place, as no disbandment of SDF units has been announced.¹³¹

As of April 2026, negotiations concerning the integration of the SDF into Syrian state and military structures were ongoing. Although some administrative integration had taken place, military integration had not yet begun. As a result, according to sources, the future structure and role of the SDF remained unclear, and the overall integration process was described as gradual and incomplete.¹³²

In early May 2026, Sipan Hamo, assistant to the Syrian Minister of Defence for Eastern Region Affairs and commander of the YPG,¹³³ announced that the integration of the SDF into the Syrian Armed Forces (SAF), under the Ministry of Defence, had begun in practice. The plan to integrate four SDF brigades into the SAF remained in its early stages. According to the plan, these brigades would be distributed to the cities of Hasakah, Qamishli, and al-Malikiyah in Hasakah Governorate, and one brigade to Kobani (Ain al-Arab) in the eastern countryside of Aleppo Governorate.¹³⁴

As of May 2026, the number of SDF fighters exceeded the number that could be absorbed into the four planned brigades. Further negotiations between the SDF and the Syrian authorities

¹²⁷ Syrian media organisation: 47

¹²⁸ Swedish Migration Agency, *Utvecklingen i nordöstra Syrien*, 24 April 2026, [url](#), p. 18

¹²⁹ STJ: 38; Wilgenburg: 10; Syria expert: 49

¹³⁰ Wilgenburg: 10

¹³¹ Wilgenburg: 11–12; Syria expert: 49; Syrian media organisation: 47

¹³² Syrian media organisation: 49; Wilgenburg: 6, 7, 9, 11; Syria expert: 42, 45; Swedish Migration Agency, *Utvecklingen i nordöstra Syrien*, 24 April 2026, [url](#), p. 11–13

¹³³ Reuters, *Syria appoints Kurdish YPG commander deputy defence minister*, 10 March 2026, [url](#)

¹³⁴ Enab Baladi, *Hamo: Four SDF Brigades Join Defense Ministry*, 2 May 2026, [url](#)

were therefore still required, as the Ministry of Defence had not yet determined the final brigade and division structures or their command arrangements.¹³⁵

4.3.3. *Recruitment to the Revolutionary Youth Movement*

Recruitment to the Revolutionary Youth Movement (in Kurdish *Ciwanên Şoreşger/Jowanna Shorashger*) is distinct from both ordinary SDF recruitment and the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty (HXP).¹³⁶

The Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) is a radical leftist youth group that is ideologically aligned with the PKK and promotes its views among young people in North and East Syria through cultural, social and political activities. These activities include demonstrations, meetings, language and music classes, and were viewed by several sources in the 2024DIS report as a gateway to the SDF, PKK, and other Kurdish-dominated armed groups. The group primarily recruits through ideological influence, persuasion and encouragement rather than physical force.¹³⁷

According to sources consulted for this report, the RYM continues to recruit young people, including minors, in areas under Kurdish influence or nominal Kurdish control, and there are reports of forced recruitment of both males and females by the RYM, although the consulted Syria expert stated that recruitment to the RYM occurred only in isolated cases.¹³⁸ Based on past experience, the Syrian media organisation assessed that some of those recruited by the RYM would later join Kurdish armed groups, including the PKK, SDF and affiliated structures.¹³⁹

Two sources noted that whether recruitment to the RYM should be regarded as voluntary or forced depends partly on how such recruitment is perceived by the families concerned. If parents do not consent to their underage children joining the RYM, the recruitment is considered forced, even where the child appears to have joined the group voluntarily.¹⁴⁰ The Syria expert described a recent case in which a 16-year-old girl was reported to have been abducted by the RYM but later released following pressure from her family. According to the source, the circumstances of the case suggested that the girl may have joined the RYM voluntarily and for ideological reasons.¹⁴¹

Wladimir van Wilgenburg assessed that the RYM likely remains active and continues to maintain offices in some Kurdish-majority cities. The movement has not been included in ongoing negotiations concerning the integration of the SDF into state structures. The exact

¹³⁵ Enab Baladi, *Hamo: Four SDF Brigades Join Defense Ministry*, 2 May 2026, [url](#)

¹³⁶ Wilgenburg: 17–20; Syria expert: 51; Syrian media organisation: 48

¹³⁷ DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, June 2024, [url](#), pp. 29–31

¹³⁸ Wilgenburg: 18–20; Syrian media organisation: 48; Syria expert: 51

¹³⁹ Syrian media organisation: 48

¹⁴⁰ Wilgenburg: 19; Syria expert: 51

¹⁴¹ Syria expert: 51

nature of the RYM remains unclear, and it is not always evident whether it primarily functions as a youth movement, a protest movement, or a military group.¹⁴²

4.3.4. Recruitment to the PKK

Available information on recruitment to the PKK in Syria is limited. The information identified primarily concerns recruitment through the RYM (see section 4.3.3.) and the often unclear distinction between the PKK and the SDF, which may affect how recruitment practices are described and attributed by different sources.

4.3.4.1. Distinguishing between SDF and PKK in northeast Syria

The distinction between the SDF and the PKK is often contested and may depend on political perspective. Türkiye reportedly considers the SDF and PKK to be the same organisation, whereas the SDF presents itself as distinct from the PKK.¹⁴³

Many local residents in northeast Syria do not clearly distinguish between the PKK and the SDF. Instead, they perceive them as part of a broader Kurdish political grouping associated with Abdullah Öcalan, as opposed to the Iraq-based Barzani-aligned political grouping in Kurdish politics. As a result, individuals may refer broadly to “the PKK” when speaking about recruitment or activities carried out by the SDF or affiliated groups.¹⁴⁴

Wladimir van Wilgenburg distinguished between different categories of fighters within the SDF. According to the source, PKK-trained “cadres” typically occupy senior or leadership positions and have generally undergone training in PKK mountain camps. By contrast, ordinary Syrian SDF fighters, including members of the YPG and YPJ, are typically recruited locally, are permitted to marry and have families, and are not generally reported to have received training in PKK mountain camps.¹⁴⁵

The consulted Syria expert similarly assessed that PKK-linked individuals remain present within SDF-affiliated structures, particularly among non-Syrian cadres and within units such as the YPJ, and that these elements have not been fully integrated into Syrian state structures and continue to operate within SDF frameworks.¹⁴⁶

According to the consulted Syrian media organisation, the PKK’s presence in Syria is a complex issue. The source reported that PKK cadres in Syria have opposed the PKK’s declared halt to confrontation with Türkiye, but noted that it lacked detailed information on current PKK activities in Syria.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Wilgenburg: 20

¹⁴³ Wilgenburg: 13

¹⁴⁴ Wilgenburg: 14–15

¹⁴⁵ Wilgenburg: 16

¹⁴⁶ Syria expert: 52

¹⁴⁷ Syrian media organisation: 50–51

4.4. Possible consequences for individuals with previous conflicts with the PKK or SDF (YPG/YPJ)

Information concerning consequences for individuals with previous conflicts with the PKK, SDF (YPG/YPJ), or Kurdish authorities is limited.

The consulted Syrian human rights organisation was not aware of cases in which ordinary Syrian citizens had been targeted by the PKK or the SDF (YPG/YPJ) upon return to Syria due to previous conflicts with these groups.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, Wladimir van Wilgenburg was not aware of cases in which returnees who had evaded self-defence duty were arrested or imprisoned upon returning to SDF-controlled areas. According to the source, this may be linked to the fact that self-defence duty is no longer being enforced.¹⁴⁹

At the same time, SNHR referred to isolated cases in which Syrians travelling between Erbil and SDF-controlled areas in Syria were subjected to temporary detention, security screenings and inspections of their mobile phones by the SDF.¹⁵⁰

The organisation Syrians for Truth and Justice referred to a documented case linked to Kurdish authorities and security entities. The case concerned a Kurdish Syrian man holding Swedish citizenship who reportedly died in 2026 while in the custody of security forces affiliated with the DAANES after having been arrested in October 2025. However, no concrete reason for the arrest or formal charges against the individual appeared from the documented case.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Syrian human rights organisation: 37

¹⁴⁹ Wilgenburg: 21

¹⁵⁰ SNHR: 51

¹⁵¹ STJ: 39; STJ, *Northeast Syria: The Death of Alaa al-Amin in Detention: Announced Investigations and Concerns over Lack of Transparency*, 13 April, 2026, [url](#)

5. Judiciary and internal security structures

5.1. Internal Security Forces (ISF)

5.1.1. Organisation and structure

On 24 May 2025, the Ministry of Interior announced the establishment of the Internal Security Command (ISC), which brought all Internal Security Forces (ISF), which serves as Syria's national police force, and other police units¹⁵² under a unified command structure. In addition to general policing units responsible for combatting crime and law enforcement, the ISC comprise a range of specialised units, including traffic police, immigration and passport police, tourist police, and units tasked with counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, communications, the protection of government institutions and diplomatic missions, border security, narcotics-related crime, and emergency response.¹⁵³

Distinct police stations and specialised departments within the Ministry of Interior have been established, including units responsible for checkpoints, narcotics, "Road Security", and "Public Relations". The Internal Security Forces have also been subject to ongoing restructuring and institutional modernisation efforts. The establishment of specialised departments and the broader reform process are reported to reflect an increased level of institutional organisation compared to the earlier transitional phase. These developments have reportedly contributed to improved organisational readiness and operational effectiveness at the local level, despite continuing challenges related to capabilities and the broader operating environment.¹⁵⁴

Forces designated as "order restoration forces" (*quwwat hifz al-nizam*) operate in practice as anti-riot units and are primarily deployed during large public events such as demonstrations and sporting events. During protests over living conditions in Damascus on 17 April 2026, which escalated into unrest, these units were deployed with helmets, uniforms, and crowd-control equipment. Their role reportedly includes crowd control and separating groups, while their presence outside such events appears limited.¹⁵⁵

Members of the ISF are typically equipped with AK-type rifles. They generally wear black uniforms, whereas regular police officers are usually identified by blue uniforms. In practice, however, some personnel reportedly wear military camouflage, civilian clothing or face-covering garments. Sources consulted by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs attributed these variations to factors such as limited funding for uniforms and the incomplete integration of certain armed groups into the security apparatus.¹⁵⁶ Official insignia are also reportedly not

¹⁵² Open sources refer to the merger of the police and 'public security forces/public security agencies', but do not further specify which sub-units are included; therefore 'other police units' cannot be identified more precisely. See for instance: Al Mayadeen, *Syria overhauls Interior Ministry to 'tackle cybercrime, arms spread'*, 24 May 2025, [url](#)

¹⁵³ Dutch MFA, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, January 2026, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁵⁴ Syria expert: 14; SNHR: 7, 10

¹⁵⁵ Syria expert: 22; TDA: 2

¹⁵⁶ Dutch MFA, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, January 2026, [url](#), pp. 12–13

displayed consistently, while different labels appear on uniforms and vehicles, including “Police”, “Internal Security Forces”, and “Order Restoration Forces”. Civilians wearing fluorescent vests marked “Police” while directing traffic have also been observed in Damascus.¹⁵⁷

Against this background, the structure, hierarchy, and division of responsibilities within the security apparatus reportedly remain unclear, including for ordinary citizens, civil society actors, and human rights organisations, and it is often difficult to distinguish between regular police officers and other internal security actors when visiting police stations.¹⁵⁸

5.1.2. Functions, conduct and accountability

According to SNHR, available information indicates that the ISF constitute a key actor in maintaining internal stability and implementing security policies. They are deployed at checkpoints and official facilities across several areas and are responsible for addressing murder, theft, and breaches of public order.¹⁵⁹

Recruitment practices have resulted in a heterogeneous composition, including individuals with varying levels of professionalism, ideological orientation and competence.¹⁶⁰

Sources reported efforts to professionalise and regularise the ISF, including improvements in discipline, vetting procedures, code of conduct, organisational structure, and deployment patterns.¹⁶¹ The Ministry of Interior has introduced a new organisational structure, drafted a new internal security law awaiting parliamentary approval, and published a code of conduct, while training courses are being organised for officers and personnel, with the aim of promoting more accountable and rights-respecting security practices.¹⁶²

In Damascus, increased recruitment, more standardised uniforms, more regular police-style appearances and vehicles, and fewer armed young men travelling in pick-up trucks have been observed.¹⁶³ According to two consulted sources, these developments reflect partial improvement in professionalism and institutional organisation at the structural level, although the process remains ongoing and uneven across areas and personnel.¹⁶⁴

SNHR also stated that available information indicates a relative improvement in discipline and adherence to legal procedures, including detention operations carried out on the basis of judicial warrants.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁷ TDA: 5–6

¹⁵⁸ TDA: 5–6

¹⁵⁹ SNHR: 6

¹⁶⁰ STJ: 20

¹⁶¹ Omran: 30; Syria expert: 15; TDA: 2

¹⁶² Omran: 31

¹⁶³ TDA: 2

¹⁶⁴ Omran: 30; Syria expert: 15

¹⁶⁵ SNHR: 9

The authorities are continuing vetting processes for personnel recruited after the fall of the former government, a process requiring time, resources, and intelligence information.¹⁶⁶ At the same time, STJ considered that concerns regarding accountability, capacity and ideological influence reportedly persist, and that the security forces are primarily based on Sunni Arab ideology.¹⁶⁷

ISF personnel consist of individuals from a variety of policing and military backgrounds. The forces were reported by the Dutch MFA to include police officers trained under the former HTS administration in Idlib, former police officers who had defected from the previous government, as well as former members of HTS, the Syrian National Army (SNA) and other armed groups.¹⁶⁸ Representation of minority groups in the ISF remains limited.¹⁶⁹

According to the consulted Syria expert, treatment of civilians by the ISF has improved compared to earlier periods, particularly with regard to enforced disappearances associated with checkpoints, which occur less frequently. However, treatment varies depending on the security personnel involved, and enforced disappearances are said to continue to occur occasionally. Minorities also continue to report concerns about their safety.¹⁷⁰

Members of the ISF are reportedly dismissed from service in cases of misconduct. For example, in July 2025, the Internal Security Command (ISC) in Daraa Governorate announced the dismissal of at least 200 personnel. The dismissals were linked to allegations of misconduct, including extortion and intimidation.¹⁷¹

Security forces have also reportedly failed in some cases to prevent or respond adequately to incidents, including attacks on foreign diplomatic premises. According to STJ, killings and kidnappings in some areas have not been followed by credible investigations.¹⁷²

According to the Syrian NGO The Day After (TDA), only limited overall improvements have taken place, and major challenges persist, including weak professionalism, insufficient discipline, inadequate resources, poor respect for human rights, and limited adherence to rule-of-law principles.¹⁷³

5.1.2.1. Regional variations

According to TDA, the situation of the ISF differs substantially across Syria and cannot be described as uniform, with conditions in Damascus differing from those in Homs, Hama, the

¹⁶⁶ Omran: 30

¹⁶⁷ STJ: 20

¹⁶⁸ Dutch MFA, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, January 2026, [url](#), pp. 11–12

¹⁶⁹ Syria expert: 18

¹⁷⁰ Syria expert: 16

¹⁷¹ Dutch MFA, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, January 2026, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁷² STJ: 21–22

¹⁷³ TDA: 4

coastal region, the northeast, and Deir ez-Zor.¹⁷⁴ STJ noted that the effectiveness of law enforcement varies by location.¹⁷⁵

SNHR described the ISF in Daraa Governorate as being in a transitional phase marked by efforts to reconstitute the institution, while continuing to face weak organisational structures, shortages of qualified personnel, and overlapping mandates with local forces, limiting their ability to fully enforce security.¹⁷⁶

In Damascus, police stations reportedly vary in professionalism. According to TDA, more professional officers have been recruited, although improvements remain uneven, with some stations being relatively professional, while many others still exhibit serious deficiencies, including unclear hierarchies, limited capacity, and weak skills in drafting and filing reports and handling claims.¹⁷⁷

5.1.3. Recruitment, vetting and training

According to the consulted Syria expert, large-scale recruitment into the security forces took place following the fall of the former government, initially involving training periods of approximately 20 days. This led to concerns regarding inadequate vetting and training, including the incorporation of individuals affiliated with the former government into the General Security. Subsequently, recruitment procedures were revised, with training periods extended to between three and six months and more extensive background checks introduced.¹⁷⁸

According to Omran Center for Strategic Studies, vetting processes for personnel recruited include screening for ideological extremism. Individuals assessed as having extremist views are rejected or removed from service. Previous religious instruction courses for recruits provided by the interim government were cancelled and replaced by guidance materials tailored separately for Muslim and Christian recruits, with the Muslim material focusing on conduct and treatment of others in accordance with general Islamic principles rather than Islamic doctrine.¹⁷⁹

According to the Dutch MFA report, the training at domestic academies was relatively short and basic. Several hundred cadets graduated from these academies in the period May-December 2025. Efforts to professionalise the ISF included training programmes abroad. More than 1,000 police officers received specialised training in Qatar and more than 800 in Saudi Arabia in 2025. In addition, approximately 300 Syrians, mainly military personnel but also some police officers, underwent training at two bases in Türkiye in September 2025.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁴ TDA: 1

¹⁷⁵ STJ: 22

¹⁷⁶ SNHR: 8

¹⁷⁷ TDA: 3

¹⁷⁸ Syria expert: 19–20

¹⁷⁹ Omran: 30, 32, 34

¹⁸⁰ Dutch MFA, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, January 2026, [url](#), p. 12

The Ministry of Interior signed a cooperation protocol with the Turkish Gendarmerie Command in May 2026, which aims at strengthening specialised security training and qualification programmes. The cooperation includes training in criminal investigations, crime scene analysis, and police dog handling, as well as broader police training and exchange of expertise with Turkish security institutions.¹⁸¹

Recruitment into the ISF continues, with notable interest among the population, both through official channels and direct approaches to recruitment centres.¹⁸² Recruitment from minority communities, including Christians, Alawites, and Druze, has also been encouraged, and some local recruitment has taken place in specific areas. In predominantly Alawite areas in Latakia, police stations were staffed by local personnel from the same community, while Druze recruitment was reported in Suweida and Jaramana in the Damascus countryside. Christian recruits may be deployed in Christian areas to provide security services within their own communities.¹⁸³ Despite these developments, minority representation overall remains limited.¹⁸⁴

5.2. Judiciary system

5.2.1. Structure and functioning

No major structural changes in the legal system have reportedly taken place since the fall of Assad, and civil and criminal courts continue to operate largely within the framework of the previous system.¹⁸⁵ The Counterterrorism Court, which under the former government had been used in cases against perceived political opponents, was reportedly abolished under the new government.¹⁸⁶

Certain reforms and administrative changes have nevertheless been introduced in most governorates, including dismissal of some judges, facilitation of legal procedures, and improvements in the conduct of judicial processes. Civil courts have also introduced modifications such as assigning judges according to case type or regional context.¹⁸⁷ In October 2025, the Ministry of Justice revoked at least 287,000 rulings issued by the former government's counterterrorism and military courts, including rulings based on charges used against individuals participating in protests and other forms of expression.¹⁸⁸

However, there is limited evidence of comprehensive restructuring regarding institutional structure, functions, or capacity. The measures introduced were not regarded by SNHR as

¹⁸¹ SANA, *Syrian–Turkish coordination expands through specialized security cooperation framework*, 12 May 2026, [url](#)

¹⁸² Syria expert: 21; SNHR: 11

¹⁸³ Omran: 33; Syria expert: 21

¹⁸⁴ Syria expert: 18, 21

¹⁸⁵ Syrian lawyer: 1, 4

¹⁸⁶ Syrian lawyer: 3; Amnesty International, *The State of the World's Human Rights; Syria 2025*, 21 April 2026, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷ SNHR: 12, 14

¹⁸⁸ Amnesty International, *The State of the World's Human Rights; Syria 2025*, 21 April 2026, [url](#)

constituting fundamental reform, and concerns related to timeliness and effectiveness reportedly persist.¹⁸⁹

5.2.2. Judges and personnel

Most judges and court personnel reportedly remain from the former system, although some judges were excluded due to perceived loyalty to the former government. The transitional government is gradually seeking to replace former judges with new appointments, but capacity constraints mean that many existing judges and court staff remain in place.¹⁹⁰

Initially, some newly appointed judges lacked formal legal training and instead had religious (sharia) training. Since then, more legally trained judges have gradually been appointed.¹⁹¹

5.2.3. Parallel and informal mechanisms

Sources indicated the existence of parallel and informal dispute-resolution mechanisms operating alongside the formal judicial system in certain areas.¹⁹² These parallel systems of mediation include local councils or informal bodies,¹⁹³ typically composed of local notables, tribal leaders or other respected community figures who mediate disputes and seek negotiated settlements.¹⁹⁴

These mechanisms are reportedly present across different parts of Syria.¹⁹⁵ Sources cited parts of the Damascus suburbs, Damascus, Aleppo, and areas controlled by Turkish-backed armed groups as examples of areas where such mechanisms exist.¹⁹⁶

Such mechanisms have historically been used to resolve a wide range of disputes, including criminal, civil, family, inheritance, and personal-status matters. Many communities have continued to rely on these mechanisms for decades and they remain active despite changes in social and legal structures.¹⁹⁷ According to STJ, they vary in effectiveness and are not uniformly established across the country.¹⁹⁸

Informal local religious committees reportedly handle marriage-related and other civil matters governed by sharia principles, and have in some cases been preferred due to their ability to provide faster resolutions than the formal judicial system.¹⁹⁹

¹⁸⁹ SNHR: 13–14

¹⁹⁰ Syrian lawyer: 2

¹⁹¹ Syrian lawyer: 5

¹⁹² STJ: 23–24; Syrian lawyer: 6

¹⁹³ STJ: 23

¹⁹⁴ New Arab, *مجالس الصلح بديل للمحاكم في سورية* [Reconciliation councils as an alternative to courts in Syria], 12 November 2025, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵ New Arab, *مجالس الصلح بديل للمحاكم في سورية* [Reconciliation councils as an alternative to courts in Syria], 12 November 2025, [url](#)

¹⁹⁶ Syrian lawyer: 6; STJ: 23

¹⁹⁷ Aljazeera, *المحاكم العشائرية بسوريا.. عدالة مستمرة رغم ظروف الحرب* [Tribal courts in Syria: Justice continues despite the war], 3 March 2019, [url](#); STJ: 23

¹⁹⁸ STJ: 24

¹⁹⁹ Syrian lawyer: 6

It remains, however, unclear whether these arrangements operate in a systematic manner.²⁰⁰ At the same time, legal and social experts interviewed by the New Arab have noted that these mechanisms may not provide the same procedural safeguards as the formal judiciary and may, in some cases, place pressure on parties to accept compromises outside the legal framework.²⁰¹

5.3. Authorities' handling of civilian disputes

5.3.1. Use of the police and judicial system

According to SNHR, available information indicates that individuals frequently turn to the police and judiciary to resolve private disputes and seek protection, and some improvement has taken place compared to the previous period. Authorities demonstrate willingness to address civilian disputes and protection cases, although limited resources and institutional capacity may affect the effectiveness and timeliness of responses.²⁰²

A Syrian lawyer stated that general trust in the police and judiciary exists among parts of the population, including among some Kurds living in Damascus and Aleppo. The transitional government reportedly seeks to build public trust by prioritising and addressing public concerns, although minority groups, particularly Druze in Suweida governorate, continue to express low trust in state institutions and rely more heavily on community-based systems.²⁰³

In Kobane and Afrin, security and justice are administered by Kurdish forces and under the autonomous administration's (DAANES) legal framework.²⁰⁴

5.3.2. Handling of domestic and family violence cases

SNHR noted that courts continue to handle private disputes, including domestic and family violence cases, through formal legal procedures, although proceedings may at times be slow and complex.²⁰⁵

According to SNHR, available information indicates variation in how the police handle domestic and family violence cases. While some information suggests that such cases are treated seriously and that protection measures may be provided, particularly in cases involving child abuse, other information indicates that the police at times favour amicable settlements between the parties rather than formal legal action.²⁰⁶ A Syrian lawyer similarly stated that cases involving violence against women are generally treated seriously by the authorities. Alleged perpetrators are typically questioned and both parties are called in to provide statements. Some cases are resolved through signed agreements in which the perpetrator

²⁰⁰ STJ: 23

²⁰¹ New Arab, *مجالس الصلح بديل للمحاكم في سورية* [Reconciliation councils as an alternative to courts in Syria], 12 November 2025, [url](#)

²⁰² SNHR: 15, 19

²⁰³ Syrian lawyer: 7–8

²⁰⁴ Syrian lawyer: 7

²⁰⁵ SNHR: 18

²⁰⁶ SNHR: 16

commits not to repeat the abuse. Victims were reported to be more likely to stay with trusted relatives than to be accommodated in formal shelters.²⁰⁷

In cases involving physical violence, the public prosecution is responsible for investigations, while the police may intervene and document incidents. In cases involving threats without physical violence, individuals are still required to submit a complaint to the prosecutor.²⁰⁸

5.3.3. Regional variations

The handling of civilian disputes varies, however, depending on the location and the security environment.²⁰⁹ In areas characterised by widespread weapon possession and limited security presence, police may prioritise other security issues, including investigating assassinations and pursuing groups linked to Assad’s government, and domestic violence cases may be given lower priority.²¹⁰

Furthermore, in areas such as Homs and Latakia, police reportedly fail in some cases to investigate civilian disputes and criminal acts, including killings and kidnappings affecting Alawite civilians. In contrast, such incidents are investigated in Daraa Governorate.²¹¹

5.3.4. Corruption and personal connections

According to consulted sources, corruption and influence over judicial proceedings persist, although to a lesser extent than previously. While bribery was reportedly widespread and overt under the former government, it is now less frequent, more concealed, and involving larger sums, often paid in foreign currency (USD).²¹²

According to STJ, access to assistance from security forces, for instance in family disputes involving honour-related violence, depends significantly on personal connections (wasta). Individuals with connections within the security apparatus are more likely to receive assistance, while lack of such connections may discourage individuals from approaching the authorities, which may undermine trust in the security forces.²¹³

²⁰⁷ Syrian lawyer: 10–11

²⁰⁸ Syrian lawyer: 9–10

²⁰⁹ SNHR: 16–17; STJ: 25

²¹⁰ SNHR: 17

²¹¹ STJ: 25

²¹² SNHR: 20; Syrian lawyer: 12

²¹³ STJ: 26

6. Opposition to the interim government

Freedom of expression and the situation of individuals critical of the authorities have improved compared to the period under the Assad government, according to consulted sources, with further improvements reported between 2025 and 2026, although informal red lines remain.²¹⁴

6.1. Red lines

The situation regarding political freedoms and opposition activity nevertheless remains complex, according to consulted sources, with limits on criticism of the government characterised as fluid, context-dependent and less clearly defined than under the former government, and varying across areas.²¹⁵

The red lines are reportedly topic-dependent, with sensitive issues including sectarian matters, minority rights and the actions of the security forces, while greater tolerance is observed for criticism related to economic issues such as electricity supply and pricing. The consulted Syria expert considered criticism targeting specific individuals in positions of authority more likely to lead to repercussions.²¹⁶

A Syrian human rights organisation assessed that, in general, ordinary citizens are aware of the red lines and tend to adapt their behaviour accordingly, including through self-censorship due to perceived risks of harassment or legal consequences.²¹⁷ For example, some individuals are reportedly reluctant to access online forums critical of the new authorities.²¹⁸

6.2. Profiles of critics and regional variations

6.2.1. Ethno-religious background

Some sources indicated that both the red lines for criticism and the possible adverse consequences of expressing criticism depend partly on an individual's ethno-religious background, with minorities reportedly acting more cautiously and facing greater risks when criticising the authorities. The sources further assessed that Alawites, Druze and Kurds face greater risks than Sunni Arabs when expressing criticism, with Alawites being particularly fearful and cautious about expressing criticism. Variations across areas are furthermore related more to ethno-religious composition than to urban–rural differences.²¹⁹

There have been cases of Alawites being imprisoned since December 2024 for protesting against the new authorities. This included two recent cases involving young Alawite men who had criticised the authorities online and were subsequently detained. In contrast, Sunni Arabs who criticised the authorities online were reportedly summoned and reminded of the

²¹⁴ STJ: 30; Syrian human rights organisation: 28; Syrian journalist: 1; Syrian media organisation: 1; Syria expert: 34

²¹⁵ Syrian media organisation: 1, 4–5; TDA: 8–9, 17; Syria expert: 34; SNHR: 28

²¹⁶ Syria expert: 34

²¹⁷ Syria expert: 37; STJ: 31

²¹⁸ Syrian human rights organisation: 32

²¹⁹ Syria expert: 34–35, 37; TDA: 17

importance of supporting the authorities in order to protect the rights of Sunni Arabs. Several such cases were reportedly observed.²²⁰

However, SNHR indicated that ethnic or religious background does not generally affect how criticism of the authorities is treated. The organisation nevertheless noted that in certain local environments or individual cases, sectarian, ethnic, or regional background may influence the treatment of individuals and the level of scrutiny applied to them, particularly where such background is associated with a perceived political orientation or current or former affiliations linked to the conflict period.²²¹

Similarly, a Syrian media organisation assessed that an individual's ethno-religious background does not in itself determine how a person critical of the Syrian government is treated by the authorities. At the same time, the source did not exclude the possibility of sectarian or ethnically motivated treatment occurring in individual cases. The source attributed such incidents to the actions of individual actors or groups rather than to a systematic government policy and noted that state institutions include officials and employees from various communities, including Kurds, Druze and Alawites.²²²

The Syrian media organisation assessed that many of the most prominent critical voices against the current authorities are Sunni Muslims. This is linked to the fact that many former opposition supporters lived in opposition-held areas or were themselves part of the opposition and therefore consider themselves partners in the new administration. Many reportedly remain critical of President Ahmed al-Sharaa due to concerns that he could return to his earlier ideological orientation prior to his assumption of power. These groups therefore tend to criticise government decisions and statements promptly when they perceived mistakes.²²³

6.2.2. High-profile and low-profile critics

Sources differed as to whether high-profile critics are treated differently from low-profile critics. Some sources stated that there is no clear indication that prominent figures are targeted differently from less prominent critics.²²⁴ Other sources noted, however, that high-profile individuals with large audiences are more likely to attract attention than those with smaller audiences, although outcomes reportedly vary depending on status and connections. According to the consulted Syria expert, high-profile individuals may in some cases be released more quickly than others because the ill-treatment of prominent figures is more likely to attract negative attention.²²⁵

²²⁰ Syrian human rights organisation: 33

²²¹ SNHR: 31

²²² Syrian media organisation: 8

²²³ Syrian media organisation: 9–10

²²⁴ SNHR: 30; Syrian media organisation: 11

²²⁵ Syria expert: 36; TDA: 14

6.2.3. Journalists

With regard to journalists, the Syrian NGO The Day After (TDA) was not aware of specific cases in which journalists had been directly targeted for published criticism, whereas STJ reported isolated cases of journalists facing repercussions, including arrest, in Damascus, Aleppo, and Tartous, although such cases were not described as widespread.²²⁶ Amnesty International reported that in July 2025 journalist Nour Suleiman was prosecuted after posting online comments concerning reported abductions of Alawite women and girls as well as other alleged attacks affecting the Alawite community, and she was accused of “spreading false news”.²²⁷ She was, however, later released, as she had been summoned without a judicial warrant, a procedure that the Damascus Public Attorney reportedly considered unlawful.²²⁸

In addition, a Syrian human rights organisation noted reports of journalists and media workers being detained while the authorities sought to clarify their media affiliations. The source referred to cases in which journalists were held for periods of up to several weeks before being released after their affiliations had been established.²²⁹

6.2.4. Regional differences

In addition to ethno-religious composition, the security situation in an area affects civic space and the limits of criticism. Syria analyst Haid Haid noted in an article in Al Majalla that geography plays a role in shaping civic space and in defining the boundaries of what is possible, tolerated, or sanctioned. According to the analyst, areas perceived as more secure have allowed relatively greater public engagement, whereas areas characterised by insecurity, fear or sectarian tensions have generally seen more constrained civic activity.²³⁰

For example, Suweida was characterised as having had a relatively open civic environment prior to the outbreak of violence in July 2025, with residents able to organise freely. In contrast, insecurity, including kidnappings, revenge killings and sectarian tensions, was reported in areas such as Homs to limit civic activity.²³¹

6.3. Possible consequences for individuals criticising the authorities

6.3.1. Repercussions by the authorities for criticism

The consulted sources were generally not aware of recent cases in which individuals had been arrested, detained, imprisoned, prosecuted, or otherwise subjected to judicial or security

²²⁶ TDA: 15; STJ: 32

²²⁷ Amnesty International, *The State of the World's Human Rights; Syria 2025*, 21 April 2026, [url](#)

²²⁸ SANA, *Damascus Judiciary affirms legal measures against Nour Suleiman despite her Release*, 31 July 2025, [url](#)

²²⁹ Syrian human rights organisation: 30

²³⁰ Al Majalla, *Syria's civic space opens...but not for everyone*, 19 February 2026, [url](#)

²³¹ Al Majalla, *Syria's civic space opens...but not for everyone*, 19 February 2026, [url](#)

measures solely for criticising the new authorities, expressing political opinions, opposing the government, or participating in demonstrations.²³²

Similarly, sources were not aware of cases in which ordinary individuals faced consequences solely for posting criticism on social media, although the authorities were reported to monitor online activity. Cases in which individuals faced problems with the authorities due to online criticism were described by sources as very limited.²³³

In some cases, criticism reportedly results in replies or contact from official entities seeking to clarify their position or address the issue raised in order to remove the underlying cause of the criticism. Individuals may also be summoned, although such summonses are generally described as related to follow-up or mediation rather than punishment for the criticism itself.²³⁴

Sources assessed that the authorities' relatively limited reactions to criticism reflected both political calculation and limited capacity. The absence of widespread detention or prosecution was partly attributed to a lack of intent to pursue all cases and partly to limited capacity to monitor and respond to the large volume of criticism, particularly online criticism. The authorities therefore reportedly prioritise which cases to react to, while international attention was also assessed by sources to limit direct state action.²³⁵

At the same time, isolated cases involving legal or administrative consequences for criticism were reported, including arrests, legal complaints on charges such as "incitement against the state", and enforced disappearances. Such cases were, however, not described by a Syria expert as systematic or widespread and were reported to occur less frequently than under the Assad government. Some individuals detained in this context were reportedly released after short periods.²³⁶ Legislation allowing prosecution for speech-related offences reportedly remains in place.²³⁷

A Syrian media organisation described the consequences of criticism of the authorities as difficult to assess due to limited transparency and challenges in verifying claims of detention for expressing opinions. The source referred to allegations that individuals had been imprisoned because of their views but stated that documented information on such cases was lacking. The source further noted that political prisoners or prisoners of conscience detained during the period in which Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) controlled northwest Syria reportedly remain detained in Harem prison in Idlib, although no estimate of the number of detainees was available.²³⁸

²³² SNHR: 27; Syrian media organisation: 3; Omran: 40; Syrian human rights organisation: 27

²³³ TDA: 14; STJ: 33

²³⁴ SNHR: 28

²³⁵ TDA: 16; SNHR: 29; Syrian media organisation: 13; STJ: 33

²³⁶ Syria expert: 30

²³⁷ Amnesty International, *The State of the World's Human Rights; Syria 2025*, 21 April 2026, [url](#)

²³⁸ Syrian media organisation: 5–6

6.3.2. Repercussions by non-state actors for criticism

Sources furthermore underlined that reactions to criticism are often initiated by private individuals or actors supportive of the government rather than by the authorities themselves. Legal complaints, harassment, and intimidation are therefore reported to occur through pro-government actors rather than through direct government action.²³⁹

Harassment and intimidation of government critics are reported both online and offline, primarily through coordinated and often anonymous social media campaigns by pro-government supporters, reportedly aimed at discouraging dissent and issuing threats.²⁴⁰ Individuals who criticise the Syrian president or document sensitive incidents, including by photographing restricted areas, face online harassment and discrediting campaigns by internet actors affiliated with or supportive of the new authorities²⁴¹

Physical intimidation and violence in public spaces are reportedly less frequent, although such incidents continue to occur, particularly in connection with demonstrations critical of the government. Sources indicated that government supporters or individuals close to the authorities have in some cases been involved in confrontations with critics, including physical intimidation and altercations. Occasional cases were furthermore reported in which critics of the authorities were assassinated by unknown perpetrators; the authorities reportedly attributed such incidents to remnants of the Assad government.²⁴²

A Syrian journalist assessed that it remains unclear whether actors targeting government critics operate on instructions from the authorities or on their own initiative, although some act independently of the authorities. Such actors reportedly include both unidentified individuals and known figures, including journalists and former activists associated with the Syrian uprisings who support the new Syrian authorities. Furthermore, the journalist assessed that the organisation and coordination of these actors remain unclear, and the authorities reportedly do not to intervene in cases where pro-government actors call online for harassment or attacks.²⁴³

6.3.3. Consequences of participating in public protests

One source indicated that the authorities seek to contain public dissent while tolerating criticism that does not evolve into broader public mobilisation. The source noted that the authorities consistently react when criticism develops into visible public action, such as demonstrations or sit-ins, and that attempts to organise activities in public space generally trigger some form of response.²⁴⁴ Other sources, however, indicated that adverse consequences experienced by critics participating in demonstrations or other forms of public

²³⁹ Syria expert: 31, 33; Syrian journalist: 1; Syrian media organisation: 13

²⁴⁰ Syrian journalist: 3

²⁴¹ Syrian human rights organisation: 31

²⁴² Syrian journalist: 3; Syrian media organisation: 14; Syrian human rights organisation: 29

²⁴³ Syrian journalist: 2

²⁴⁴ TDA: 9, 13, 16

protest generally stem from harassment or intimidation by non-state actors supportive of the authorities rather than from direct action by the authorities themselves.²⁴⁵

An example of intimidation and harassment by non-state pro-government actors was a demonstration held in Damascus on 17 April 2026 called the “Law and Dignity” protest. The demonstration, attended mainly by civil society activists, journalists, and other non-governmental actors, focused on socio-economic and political demands, including opposition to privatisation of public institutions and calls for improved living conditions and reform.²⁴⁶

Participants in this demonstration reportedly faced online harassment, verbal confrontations, physical intimidation, and in some cases physical assaults by pro-government supporters. Some demonstrators were attacked before police and security forces intervened to separate the groups, calm tensions, and prevent further escalation.²⁴⁷ Organisers, supporters, and prospective participants were furthermore subjected to intimidation and threats prior to the protest through an extensive social media campaign conducted by public figures close to the government and allegedly pro-government accounts. Organisers were accused of links to the former Assad government, while one video circulating online showed an armed individual threatening demonstrators. The individual was arrested, although no information was available regarding possible charges or prosecution.²⁴⁸ According to TDA, the campaign discouraged some individuals from attending the protest.²⁴⁹

A Syrian media organisation considered the authorities’ protection of the demonstration significant compared to earlier periods in Syria, while a Syria expert noted that the protest took place without official permission and was not forcibly dispersed.²⁵⁰ Haid Haid argued in an opinion piece published in Al Majalla that security forces did not intervene decisively until after protesters had been physically assaulted and that pro-government supporters had already attempted to intimidate demonstrators before the attacks began.²⁵¹

One source furthermore stated that lawyers supporting the sit-in faced pressure and threats from the government-appointed leadership of the Syrian Bar Association, including warnings that government supporters would attack participants.²⁵²

²⁴⁵ Syrian journalist: 1, 3; Syria expert: 31–33; Syrian media organisation: 3

²⁴⁶ Syria expert: 32; Syrian media organisation: 2; Syrian journalist: 4; TDA: 9; Al Majalla, *Syrian authorities should better protect protestors*, 21 April 2026, [url](#)

²⁴⁷ Syria expert: 32; Syrian media organisation: 3; Syrian journalist: 4; TDA: 12; Al Majalla, *Syrian authorities should better protect protestors*, 21 April 2026, [url](#)

²⁴⁸ Syrian journalist: 4; Al Majalla, *Syrian authorities should better protect protestors*, 21 April 2026, [url](#)

²⁴⁹ TDA: 10

²⁵⁰ Syrian media organisation: 3; Syria expert: 32

²⁵¹ Al Majalla, *Syrian authorities should better protect protestors*, 21 April 2026, [url](#)

²⁵² TDA: 11

In early May 2026, the Syrian Ministry of Interior issued a decree regulating procedures for obtaining authorisation for peaceful protests.²⁵³ At the time of writing, DIS had no information as to whether or how the decree had been implemented.

²⁵³ The decree stipulates that public protests and assemblies require prior authorisation through the relevant governorate, with applications reviewed by a competent committee within specified deadlines. If no decision is issued within five days of the application's registration, the protest licence is considered automatically approved. The decree further states that licensed demonstrations must be protected by the authorities, while organisers are responsible for maintaining order and ensuring compliance with the licence terms. It prohibits participants from carrying weapons and authorises the Ministry to disperse demonstrations that exceed the scope of their licence or involve disorder. Gatherings held without a licence, or in breach of licence conditions, are classified as unlawful and may result in criminal penalties under the Penal Code. Syrian Observer, *Interior Ministry Issues Decree Regulating Licensing Procedures for Peaceful Protests*, 5 May 2026, [url](#)

7. Impact of the timing of departure from Syria on treatment upon return

Sources generally did not identify systematic state-level discrimination or adverse treatment by the authorities against returnees based on the timing of their departure from Syria during the conflict. Sources were not aware of cases in which individuals who left Syria at a later stage of the conflict, including from government-controlled areas, were questioned, prosecuted, or otherwise subjected to repercussions by the authorities upon return because of perceived support for the former government.²⁵⁴ Many Syrians were furthermore reported to have returned without being stopped or questioned on this basis.²⁵⁵

At the same time, sources indicated that perceptions and suspicions related to the timing and circumstances of departure may arise at the community level. Individuals who left Syria later during the conflict, particularly from government-controlled areas, may be perceived as having been sympathetic to the former government or as “silent supporters”. Some individuals who had been able to travel to and from Syria during the conflict were furthermore reported to have been subjected to social suspicion or informal accusations, with such perceptions potentially creating tensions within families and local communities.²⁵⁶

Sources indicated that possible risks related to the timing of departure were more likely to stem from local dynamics, including personal disputes, family feuds, or accusations by community members, rather than from systematic government policies. In this regard, discussions among Syrians about whether the current authorities may view individuals who left the country late in the conflict with suspicion were described as reflecting perceptions rather than documented practices, as no concrete cases of repercussions against such returnees had been reported.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ STJ: 34; Syria expert: 38, 40; Syrian media organisation: 22; SNHR: 32

²⁵⁵ Syrian media organisation: 23

²⁵⁶ Syria expert: 38–39; SNHR: 32

²⁵⁷ STJ: 34; Syria expert: 40

8. Possibility to settle in other areas than one's home area

There are no formal legal restrictions preventing Syrian citizens from residing in areas other than their place of origin.²⁵⁸ Syrians are generally free to settle anywhere in the country without being required to obtain official approval. This differs from the situation under the former government, when security approvals were required in some cases.²⁵⁹ Settlement outside one's home is common,²⁶⁰ including for economic reasons such as seeking employment opportunities in Damascus.²⁶¹

In practice, however, social and security-related factors influence settlement patterns.²⁶² Access to housing often depends on local trust networks, familiarity, and perceptions of security risk.²⁶³ Landlords may prefer tenants from the same locality or social background, and individuals from outside a community may face hesitation or distrust, particularly in socially cohesive or ethno-religiously homogeneous neighbourhoods.²⁶⁴

Members of certain groups may encounter difficulties securing housing in areas dominated by other communities.²⁶⁵ For instance, due to tensions between Kurdish and Arab communities, Kurds are, according to STJ, generally unlikely to settle in Arab-dominated areas such as Raqqa, including Tel Abyad, and Deir ez-Zor.²⁶⁶

The consulted Syria expert, however, assessed that difficulties in accessing housing are more often linked to perceptions of an individual's financial situation than to sectarian discrimination, although the source did not rule out that members of minority groups and single women may face difficulties renting housing.²⁶⁷

At the same time, these dynamics vary across Syria.²⁶⁸ In major cities such as Damascus and Aleppo, settlement across different areas is generally possible, although localised tensions may exist in specific neighbourhoods.²⁶⁹

²⁵⁸ STJ: 27; Syria expert: 23; Syrian lawyer: 13

²⁵⁹ STJ: 27

²⁶⁰ Syria expert: 26

²⁶¹ Syria expert: 26

²⁶² STJ: 28; Syria expert: 24–25; Syrian lawyer: 13

²⁶³ STJ: 28

²⁶⁴ STJ: 28; Syria expert: 24–25

²⁶⁵ STJ: 28; Syria expert: 24–25

²⁶⁶ STJ: 28

²⁶⁷ Syria expert: 25

²⁶⁸ STJ: 28; Syria expert: 24–25

²⁶⁹ STJ: 28

According to STJ, many returnees settle in areas other than their place of origin, often due to destruction of housing during the conflict. No significant patterns of conflict related to resettlement have been reported in Aleppo Governorate.²⁷⁰ At the same time, returns to Homs Governorate are more limited due to extensive destruction and lack of habitable housing.²⁷¹

Some sources further noted that patterns of settlement may also be shaped by local security conditions and community relations. In areas characterised by ethnic or sectarian tensions, individuals may prefer to settle in locations where they have family, social connections, or community support.²⁷²

²⁷⁰ STJ: 29

²⁷¹ Syria expert: 28, Syrian Dialogue Center, *Housing in Syria: A Chronic Crisis Exacerbated by War*, 21 February 2026, [url](#)

²⁷² STJ: 28; Syria expert: 24

9. Possible consequences for individuals with previous conflicts with IS

Several sources in early 2026 indicated that the security environment in Syria had become increasingly favourable to renewed IS activity, particularly in the country's northeast. This was attributed to the weakening of the security structures previously maintained by the SDF, the fragmentation of local security arrangements, and instability following clashes between the Syrian transitional government and Kurdish-led forces.²⁷³

IS remains present in Syria, particularly in the Badia desert region extending across parts of Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, Homs, Hama and Tadmur (Palmyra), where the group continues to operate through underground cells rather than territorial control.²⁷⁴ The level of IS activity fluctuates over time, with periods of increased and decreased operational activity.²⁷⁵ The group has continued to carry out targeted attacks, primarily against Syrian security forces, government personnel, and persons perceived to be affiliated with the SDF.²⁷⁶

The geographical reach of IS is, however, limited. According to STJ, IS retains the capability to target individuals in areas where it maintains a presence, particularly in eastern desert areas in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor. By contrast, the group is unlikely to operate effectively in other areas such as Aleppo city due to the strong security presence of government forces and the influence of Türkiye in the area, or in governorates such as Latakia.²⁷⁷

The Syrian human rights organisation assessed that a Syrian who left areas previously controlled by the Islamic State, such as Deir ez-Zor, due to a personal conflict with the group would not face abuse or be targeted by the group upon return from abroad. In the source's assessment, IS generally does not have the capacity or the intent to target such individuals.²⁷⁸

Neither STJ nor the Syrian media organisation was aware of documented cases of returnees to Syria being harmed or targeted by IS due to previous conflicts with the group prior to their departure from the country.²⁷⁹

²⁷³ War on the Rocks, *Islamic State Containment Is Collapsing in Syria*, 19 March 2026, [url](#); SANA, *Syrian security forces arrest 12 ISIS members in eastern Syria*, 15 March 2026, [url](#); Reuters, *Islamic State claims two attacks on Syrian army, announces 'new phase' of operations*, 21 February 2026, [url](#)

²⁷⁴ STJ: 15; Syrian media organisation: 41

²⁷⁵ STJ: 15

²⁷⁶ Syrian human rights organisation: 25; Syrian media organisation: 41

²⁷⁷ STJ: 17

²⁷⁸ Syrian human rights organisation: 26

²⁷⁹ STJ: 18; Syria media organisation: 24

10. Situation of Yazidis in Syria

Sources noted that limited information is available on the current situation of Yazidis because of the small size of the community and the fact that many Yazidis remain displaced or have left Syria.²⁸⁰

The Yazidi community in Syria is described as very small, numbering only a few thousand individuals and primarily concentrated in parts of Hasakah governorate and other areas of northeast Syria, including areas currently or previously controlled by the SDF.²⁸¹ Afrin historically hosted the largest Yazidi population in Syria, although many Yazidis reportedly left following the Turkish incursion in 2018. It remains unclear how many have since returned, although documented cases of return by previously displaced Yazidis have been reported.²⁸²

Sources generally described the situation of Yazidis in Syria as relatively stable and did not identify reports of widespread violations, direct targeting, or systematic discrimination by the current Syrian authorities.²⁸³ Yazidis are generally treated with respect by both the population and the transitional authorities and are not reported to face harassment, abuse, or discriminatory treatment in cities such as Damascus and Aleppo, including with regard to obtaining official documents and other public services.²⁸⁴

According to a Syrian media organisation, the current Syrian government treats Yazidis as part of the broader Kurdish file.²⁸⁵ Two sources assessed that Yazidis are not viewed by the current authorities as a threat to them because they have not actively opposed the government and have not been involved in the Syrian conflict to the same extent as some other groups.²⁸⁶ A consulted Syrian journalist further noted that Yazidis often receive sympathy from local communities due to the abuses they suffered at the hands of IS during the conflict.²⁸⁷

Yazidis are generally reported to be able to practise their religion in Syria and to maintain their places of worship and religious rites.²⁸⁸ Yazidis have reportedly been able to celebrate religious holidays in both Afrin and northeast Syria.²⁸⁹ This is despite the fact that Yazidi religion is, according to SNHR, not officially recognised by the Syrian state, and Yazidis are often registered

²⁸⁰ Wilgenburg: 26–27; Syria expert: 53; TDA: 18

²⁸¹ Wilgenburg: 26; Syria expert: 53; Syrian journalist: 6

²⁸² Wilgenburg: 26; SNHR: 45

²⁸³ Syrian human rights organisation: 34; Syrian media organisation: 15–17; Syrian journalist: 8–9; SNHR: 39, 42–43

²⁸⁴ Syrian lawyer: 14–15; Syrian human rights organisation: 34

²⁸⁵ Syrian media organisation: 15

²⁸⁶ Syrian media organisation: 15; Syrian journalist: 9

²⁸⁷ Syrian journalist: 7

²⁸⁸ Wilgenburg: 27; Syrian media organisation: 19; Syrian journalist: 8; SNHR: 41

²⁸⁹ Syrian journalist: 8

under another religion, particularly Islam, in official documents,²⁹⁰ and that most Muslims do not regard Yazidis as “People of the Book”.²⁹¹

Wladimir van Wilgenburg referred to incidents involving desecration or destruction of Yazidi shrines in Syria. However, the source underlined that these incidents occurred in the past, including around 2018, rather than being a recent development.²⁹²

A Syrian lawyer noted that reports of negative attitudes towards Yazidis, including insulting language and inadequate treatment, were geographically limited to Turkish-controlled areas. However, the source emphasised that such incidents primarily reflected negative attitudes held by individual communities or persons towards Yazidis rather than systematic discrimination against the group.²⁹³

Two other sources indicated likewise that Yazidis may face challenges in certain areas, particularly Afrin.²⁹⁴ According to the consulted Syria expert, reports from Afrin suggest possible restrictions on religious practice, although details remain unclear.²⁹⁵ One source assessed that extremist elements affiliated with the new authorities may pose a risk to Yazidis in parts of Syria, including through harassment or attacks on places of worship.²⁹⁶ However, another source noted that although some radical religious figures may hold negative views of Yazidis, this did not appear to result in substantial discrimination or harassment.²⁹⁷

A Syrian media organisation noted that Yazidis are generally not identifiable by name, dress, or appearance, and that their names are often similar to common Syrian, Sunni, or Kurdish names. According to the source, it is generally not possible to identify a person as Yazidi unless the individual discloses their religious affiliation.²⁹⁸

Regarding state protection, SNHR noted that the authorities are generally willing to provide protection if requested by Yazidi individuals. However, no documented cases were identified by the source in the reporting period, either of Yazidis being subjected to violence requiring protection or of Yazidis seeking protection from the authorities.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁰ SNHR: 40–41, 43

²⁹¹ Wilgenburg: 29; “Ahl al-Kitāb, in Islamic thought, those religionists—Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians, as well as the imprecisely defined group referred to as Sabians—who are possessors of divine books (i.e., the Torah, the Gospel, and the Avesta), as distinguished from those whose religions are not based on divine revelations. The Prophet Muhammad gave many privileges to Ahl al-Kitāb that are not to be extended to heathens.”, Britannica, [url](#)

²⁹² Wilgenburg: 30

²⁹³ Syrian lawyer: 15

²⁹⁴ Syria expert: 54; Syrian human rights organisation: 35

²⁹⁵ Syria expert: 54

²⁹⁶ Syrian human rights organisation: 35

²⁹⁷ TDA: 18

²⁹⁸ Syrian media organisation: 20

²⁹⁹ SNHR: 44

11. “Westernisation”

The consulted sources indicated that Syrians returning from abroad have generally not been subjected to harassment, abuse, or discriminatory treatment by local communities or the authorities due to behaviour, appearance, dress, or lifestyle perceived as indicative of “westernisation”.³⁰⁰ Monitoring, investigations, and field inquiries conducted by SNHR across several governorates, including direct contact with returnees, have not identified documented cases of harassment or discriminatory practices linked to personal appearance, social behaviour, or habits acquired during residence abroad. Testimonies gathered during these inquiries further indicated an absence of restrictions or discriminatory practices by civil institutions, security actors, or within the local social environment in relation to such issues.³⁰¹

SNHR stated that available information also indicates that local communities generally accept returnees regardless of their appearance or behaviour, and that the authorities do not interfere in personal choices or lifestyles. Habits acquired during residence abroad—whether in neighbouring or European countries—are likewise not regarded as evidence of “westernisation” leading to harassment or discrimination.³⁰² A Syrian human rights organisation underlined that the Syrian authorities had not issued regulations governing people’s dress.³⁰³

On the other hand, available information on this issue was described as limited by a Syrian media organisation. Rather than “westernisation” being a source of division between returnees and those who had remained in Syria, the source pointed to a social divide between residents who considered themselves victims of the conflict and some returnees, who in certain cases may be viewed negatively for having left Syria during the war. According to the source's assessment, this divide may contribute to reduced social acceptance of returnees in some poor communities heavily affected by the conflict, although it had not generally resulted in violence.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁰ Syrian human rights organisation: 36; SNHR: 46, 48–50; STJ: 40

³⁰¹ SNHR: 46–49

³⁰² SNHR: 50

³⁰³ Syrian human rights organisation: 36

³⁰⁴ Syrian media organisation: 52

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Annex 1: Meeting minutes

Online meeting with Syrians for Truth and Justice, 8 April 2025

About the source

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) is non-profit, non-governmental human rights organisation established in 2016. It documents and monitors human rights violations committed across Syria. Its work includes collecting testimonies, recording incidents such as arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and torture, and maintaining a database of documented violations. The organisation has published numerous reports on the human rights situation in Syria.

In addition to documentation, STJ engages in evidence collection aimed at supporting accountability and potential legal processes. It also implements capacity-building activities for local communities and activists, including training on documentation practices, evidence collection, cybersecurity, advocacy, and legal awareness.

Security situation in Aleppo Governorate

- 1. The security situation in Aleppo Governorate has improved in recent weeks (April 2026) compared to previous months. Earlier periods were characterised by armed clashes, which resulted in significant civilian harm, including displacement of tens of thousands of individuals, arrests, enforced disappearances, and fatalities.*
- 2. Government forces have consolidated control over most of the governorate following the withdrawal of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) from Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah neighbourhoods in Aleppo city in January 2026.*
- 3. Recent developments include the return of displaced populations to Afrin. Two organised return convoys have already reached their destinations to Afrin, and a third convoy is planned. Returnees include among others individuals originally displaced from Afrin. In addition, many residents of previously contested neighbourhoods in Aleppo city such as Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah have reportedly been able to return to their homes.*
- 4. Security conditions differ between urban and rural areas in Syria, including in Aleppo Governorate. Rural areas are generally less secure and subject to weaker government control. Cities, including Aleppo and Damascus, are comparatively more secure due to a stronger presence of government security forces.*
- 5. In Aleppo city, there had previously been frequent reports of targeted killings and kidnappings, often involving individuals perceived to have links to the former government. These incidents reportedly occurred on a near-weekly basis in Aleppo during 2025. However, such incidents have significantly decreased recently. The security situation in Aleppo has generally improved compared to last year.*

Freedom of movement in Aleppo Governorate

6. *Freedom of movement in Syria has improved substantially compared to the period under the former government. The extensive checkpoint system previously associated with harassment and extortion is no longer in place.*
7. *While movement is not entirely unrestricted, civilians are generally able to travel between different parts of Syria, including routes between northeastern Syria, Damascus, Aleppo, Afrin, and Azaz. Movement to Suweida remains restricted due to ongoing tensions.*
8. *Movement patterns are influenced by security considerations. Travel is more common during daytime, particularly in rural areas, due to security concerns such as the presence of weapons and general instability. In Aleppo city, nighttime movement is generally possible, although isolated security incidents may still occur.*

Security situation in Homs Governorate

9. *The security situation in Homs Governorate is described as particularly severe, especially for minority groups such as Alawites, Christians, and Shia. The source assessed that Homs is currently among the most unstable areas in Syria.*
10. *The source assessed the security situation in Alawite-dominated areas in Homs to be generally unstable. Most attacks occur in Alawite-dominated areas in Homs, with the aim of driving Alawite populations towards the coastal areas.*
11. *Frequent incidents are reported, including killings, kidnappings, and injuries, occurring on an almost daily basis. Women are also targeted. These incidents are primarily deliberate and targeted and are attributed to sectarian motives rather than opportunistic crime.*
12. *While the situation in coastal areas such as Latakia has improved compared to 2025, when mass killings occurred, conditions in Homs have not shown similar improvement.*
13. *Criminal activity, including smuggling, exists in Homs Governorate particularly in border areas near Lebanon. However, most documented incidents in Homs city are not described as conventional criminality but rather as sectarian violence.*

Freedom of movement in Homs Governorate

14. *Freedom of movement in Homs Governorate varies significantly between population groups. Sunni populations are generally able to move more freely, whereas minorities, particularly Alawites and Shia, face serious risks. The source assessed that Homs represents one of the most difficult environments for these groups. Transport and movement in the governorate are affected by local sectarian tensions, particularly in areas dominated by minority communities.*

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According to the source, these risks do not prevent individuals from leaving their homes altogether for work or education; however, they result in a high degree of caution in everyday movement. Individuals from these groups may adjust their behaviour accordingly, including limiting non-essential travel and taking precautions when moving in public spaces. Restrictions on movement are thus driven primarily by security concerns and patterns of violence rather than formal measures imposed by the authorities. The source further noted differences between urban and rural areas, with urban areas generally presenting fewer challenges to freedom of movement than rural areas.

The Islamic State (IS)

- 15. IS remains present in Syria, particularly in the Badia desert region spanning areas between Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, Homs, Hama, and Palmyra. The level of activity fluctuates, with periods of increased and decreased operational presence.*
- 16. During earlier clashes between SDF and government forces in January 2026, IS elements were reported to be more active, and individuals identified as foreign fighters were observed in areas such as Afrin. Their origin and subsequent movements remain unclear.*
- 17. Regarding targeting returnees from abroad, who were in conflict with IS prior to their departure, the source assessed that IS retains the capability to target individuals in areas where it maintains a presence, particularly in the eastern desert areas of Syria in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor. However, its operational reach is geographically limited. For example, it is considered unlikely that IS could target individuals in areas such as Latakia. In Aleppo city, the source considered it unlikely that IS could operate effectively due to strong security presence and control, including influence from Turkish actors.*
- 18. The source had not received reports of IS targeting returnees, who had been in conflict with them.*

Internal Security Forces

- 19. The internal security forces and army are described as structurally fragmented. These institutions consist of various groups integrated under a unified hierarchy, but internal cohesion remains limited.*
- 20. Recruitment practices have resulted in a heterogeneous composition, including individuals with varying levels of professionalism, ideological orientation, and competence. The source considered that issues related to accountability, capacity, and ideological influence persist, noting that the army and security forces are primarily based on Sunni Arab ideology.*
- 21. In some cases, security forces have failed to prevent or respond adequately to incidents, including attacks on foreign diplomatic premises.*

22. *The effectiveness of law enforcement varies by location. In some areas, security forces respond to criminal incidents, while in others, particularly in Homs and Latakia, serious violations such as killings and kidnappings have not been followed by credible investigations.*

Authorities' handling of civilian disputes

23. *Parallel systems of governance have emerged in certain areas, including parts of Damascus suburbs and Aleppo. These systems involve local councils or informal bodies addressing civil disputes, such as property issues. However, the source indicated that it is too early to determine whether these arrangements operate in a systematic manner.*
24. *These mechanisms operate alongside formal institutions and, in some cases, provide dispute resolution. Their effectiveness varies, and they are not uniformly established across the country.*
25. *In areas such as Homs and Latakia, civilian disputes and other criminal activities are not investigated by the police. For instance, killings and kidnappings of Alawites are reportedly not investigated. In contrast, such cases are investigated in the Daraa area, indicating that practices vary depending on the location.*
26. *Access to protection from security forces, for instance in family disputes involving honour-related violence, depends significantly on personal connections (wasta). Individuals with connections within the security apparatus are more likely to receive assistance. This dynamic does not necessarily involve direct financial corruption but reflects networks of influence. In the absence of such connections, individuals may be reluctant to seek assistance. This situation undermines people's trust in the security forces.*

Possibility to settle in other areas than one's home area

27. *There are no formal legal restrictions on where Syrian citizens may reside within Syria. Individuals are generally free to live in any area without requiring official approval, unlike under the former government, when security approvals were required.*
28. *However, access to housing is influenced by local social and security considerations. Landlords may refuse to rent to individuals from different regions or ethnic backgrounds due to a lack of trust or perceived risk. In some areas, this may result in members of certain groups encountering difficulties in securing housing in areas dominated by other communities. For instance, due to tensions between Kurdish and Arab communities, Kurds are generally unlikely to settle in Arab-dominated areas such as Raqqa (including Tel Abyad) and Deir ez-Zor. However, this pattern is not uniform across the country; in major cities such as Damascus and Aleppo, such dynamics tend to be more localised and limited to specific neighbourhoods.*
29. *Many returnees settle in areas other than their place of origin, often due to housing destruction. No significant patterns of conflict related to resettlement were reported in Aleppo.*

Opposition to the interim government

30. *Freedom of expression has improved compared to the former government but remains limited by informal “red lines.”*
31. *The source assessed that individuals are generally aware of these boundaries and exercise self-censorship. The red line depends on the topic. Sensitive topics include sectarian issues, minority rights, and actions of security forces. There is greater tolerance for criticism related to economic issues, such as electricity and pricing.*
32. *Some isolated cases of journalists facing repercussions, including arrest, have been reported in Damascus, Aleppo and Tartous, though such cases are not widespread.*
33. *The authorities are assessed to have limited capacity to systematically monitor online activity. The number of cases in which individuals have faced issues with the authorities due to posting critical content online has so far been very limited.*

Impact of the timing of departure from Syria on treatment upon return

34. *There have been discussions among Syrians regarding whether the current authorities may view individuals who left the country at a later stage of the conflict with suspicion, possibly due to perceived affiliations with the former government. However, these discussions appear to reflect perceptions rather than documented practices, as no concrete cases of repercussions against such returnees have been reported.*

Transportation and Infrastructure

35. *Flight connections are functioning to some extent. Road travel between Syria and Turkey is active, including bus routes connecting areas such as Aleppo to Hatay and Gaziantep in Turkey.*
36. *Domestic bus services operate between major cities, including Homs, Damascus, and Aleppo.*
37. *Air travel has been disrupted by the conflict, although there are indications that flights may resume or expand, including potential connections involving Erbil.*

Mandatory Self-Defence Duty

38. *Recruitment to Mandatory Self-Defence in the Self-Defence Forces (HXP) in SDF-controlled areas has reportedly been suspended. The source was not able to specify exactly when this suspension took effect but assessed that it likely occurred following the agreement with the government.*

Possible consequences for individuals with previous conflicts with the PKK or SDF (YPG/YPJ)

39. The source referred to [a reported and documented case](#) of a Kurdish Syrian man with Swedish citizenship, who died in 2026 while in the custody of security forces affiliated with the DAANES, after being arrested in October 2025. However, no concrete reason for his arrest or formal charges against him appears from the case.

“Westernisation”

40. The source had heard of one case reported a few months earlier involving the sister of a colleague, who had been subjected to verbal harassment due to wearing shorts. The source had not heard of other cases in which Syrians returning from abroad had been subjected to harassment or ill-treatment by local communities or the authorities due to behaviour or appearance perceived as inappropriate or indicative of “westernisation”.

Online meeting with Wladimir van Wilgenburg, 21 April 2025

About the source

The source is a Dutch journalist and analyst specialising in Kurdish affairs, Syria, Iraq, and broader Middle Eastern politics. He is particularly known for his work on Kurdish political movements, the conflict in Syria and Iraq, and security dynamics involving non-state actors.

Security situation in northeast Syria

1. The security situation in northeast Syria has become calmer since the agreement concluded between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Syrian government. Large-scale clashes have largely subsided, and attention has shifted to negotiations concerning the integration of the SDF into new state structures, including the allocation of positions, and the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The source also referred to recent visits by Ilham Ahmed (a prominent Syrian Kurdish politician and one of the key civilian leaders of the DAANES) and Mazloum Abdi (the commander-in-chief of SDF) to Damascus for discussions with Ahmed al-Sharaa.
2. Isolated incidents continued to occur, however. These included reports of arrests in Afrin and the killing of one individual in Sarrin near Kobane. Moreover, recently drones stroke close to US bases in Syria. However, The last remaining US troops in Syria left their base in Hasakah on 15 April.
3. There were also incidents involving tensions around Kurdish symbols and flags in March. During Newroz celebrations, one Kurdish individual removed a flag, which was followed by attacks on Kurdish civilians celebrating the occasion. The individual who removed the flag was arrested, but

no arrests were reportedly made in connection with attacks on those celebrating or with incidents involving the burning of Kurdish flags. The source assessed that the transfer of the arrested individual to Damascus contributed to a reduction in tensions. A further incident was reported in southern Qamishli, where an Arab tribal leader allegedly fired at a Kurdish flag used by the PYD in Rojava. That individual was also reportedly arrested.

4. *Moreover, tensions remain in some Arab tribal areas where there is dissatisfaction with the continued existence of nominal Kurdish authority of some areas. The source referred to tensions in Arab tribal areas in Hasakah and Kobane, including areas already under full government control, which includes the incident where an individual fired at a Kurdish flag in Qamishli.*
5. *The source noted that developments in northeast Syria currently receive limited media attention due to the wider regional focus on the conflict involving Iran. Reporting is therefore limited, and much of the available information circulates through social media platforms.*

Status of the DAANES

6. *The administrative and security structures in northeast Syria are currently being integrated into those of the Syrian government, and the administration no longer functions as it did under earlier, more consolidated SDF control over a larger area. This integration process is ongoing, gradual and not yet complete. As part of the integration process, new appointments have been made, including a mayor in Kobane and other local positions.*
7. *In general, the situation remains vague and in transition, as illustrated by the appointment of an SDF commander as deputy defence minister and another as governor of Hasakah. In Kobane, the Asayish (Kurdish internal security service) are being integrated into the internal security services.*
8. *As part of the 29 January agreement between the SDF and the Syrian government, the Syrian government is gradually increasing its control over border crossings such as the Semalka border crossing, and the al-Yarubiyah border crossing is expected to reopen.³⁰⁵ There have also been discussions regarding the possible reopening of the Nusaybin–Qamishli crossing.*
9. *The source found it difficult to determine whether the DAANES still exists, as its remaining structures are being integrated into Syrian government institutions. The DAANES' governance is largely confined to Hasakah and Kobane, where it functions as a remnant of earlier governance structures rather than a fully functioning separate administration.*

Mandatory Self-Defence Duty

10. *The obligatory self-defence duty previously applied in SDF-controlled areas is no longer being implemented, particularly since the January 2026 conflict. It has not been formally abolished, but in practice it is no longer enforced and can therefore effectively be regarded as suspended. The source also noted that the Facebook page previously used to provide updates on the self-*

³⁰⁵ See also <https://www.pukmedia.com/EN/Details/81172> ; ed.

defence duty had been inactive since 2024, which in the source's view suggested that recruitment had already begun to decline in 2024.

Recruitment to the SDF

- 11. The source had not seen recent reports on new recruitment to the SDF and considered the issue dependent on the unresolved process of integration of SDF into the Syrian army, which remains slow and ongoing. No formal disbanding of the SDF has been announced, but the future structure and number of fighters remain under discussion.*
- 12. Recruitment to the SDF, insofar as it still occurs, is voluntary.*
- 13. The source stressed that distinctions between the SDF and the PKK are often unclear and depend on perspective. Türkiye is described as viewing the SDF and the PKK as identical, while the SDF itself presents itself as distinct from the PKK.*
- 14. The source considered that many local residents do not clearly distinguish between the PKK and the SDF, often perceiving them as part of the same broader grouping, in contrast to the KDP. In local political understandings, positions are frequently reduced to support for either Barzani-aligned or Öcalan-aligned politics. As a result, critics of the SDF may refer to all associated forces simply as the PKK.*
- 15. This lack of distinction affects how claims about recruitment are described. When individuals state that the PKK recruited them, they may in some cases be referring to other structures, including the SDF or related groups.*

Distinction between different positions within SDF

- 16. Within the SDF, the source described a distinction between cadres and other fighters. The cadres are individuals trained in PKK camps in the mountains; they typically occupy senior or leadership roles and are generally unmarried and without children. Ordinary SDF fighters (YPG and YPJ members) from Syria are permitted to marry and have families, and are not described as having undergone PKK mountain training.*

Recruitment to the Revolutionary Youth Movement and PKK

- 17. The source further distinguished SDF recruitment from the obligatory self-defence duty, which is a short-term military service, and from joining the PKK in the mountains, which was characterised as a longer-term commitment.*
- 18. Some individuals from Syria have joined the PKK in the mountains. This recruitment is often carried out through the Revolutionary Youth Movement (Ciwanên Şoreşger / Jowanna Shorashger in Kurdish).*

19. *Whether such recruitment is considered voluntary depends on perspective, particularly that of the family. When parents do not consent to their children joining the group, the recruitment may be perceived as kidnapping, even if the young person agrees.*
20. *The source believed that the Revolutionary Youth Movement likely remains active in areas still under nominal Kurdish control. The Revolutionary Youth Movement is reported to still have offices in some Kurdish cities and has not been subject to disbandment in the current negotiations, which focus on the SDF rather than youth structures. The exact nature of the movement is ambiguous and not well understood by many, including whether it should be regarded primarily as a military group, a youth group, or a protest movement.*

Possible consequences for individuals with previous conflicts with the PKK or SDF (YPG/YPJ)

21. *The source had not heard of cases in which returnees who had evaded self-defence duty were arrested or imprisoned upon return to SDF-controlled areas. The source linked this to the fact that the self-defence duty is no longer being enforced.*

Freedom of movement in northeast Syria

22. *The source considered that movement between different areas has become easier as integration has progressed. Travel between Hasakah province and Kobane has again become possible. In the past, Kobane had been cut off due to siege-like conditions, but the source assessed that this de facto siege has now been lifted.*
23. *Checkpoints still exist in the region. In areas still under SDF control, Kurdish checkpoints remain, while in Raqqqa, Deir ez-Zor, and government-controlled parts of Hasakah province, the checkpoints are no longer Kurdish but government-controlled.*

Semalka border crossing and access to northeast Syria

24. *It is now possible to cross through the Semalka border crossing; the Syrian government reportedly no longer objects to people using this route. Nevertheless, the source considered that entering through Damascus may still be preferable in order to avoid possible future problems with the Syrian authorities.*

Flights to Qamishli Airport

25. *The source had not seen information indicating that flights to Qamishli airport had resumed. Although there had previously been discussion about reopening the airport, the source assessed that more time would be needed. The source also noted that only a limited number of companies are currently flying to Damascus.*

Situation of Yazidis in Syria

26. *The source stated that he was not following the Yazidi situation closely and that limited information was available, given that the Yazidi community in Syria is very small and*

concentrated in specific areas of Hasakah province and in Afrin. Afrin was described as having had the largest Yazidi community in Syria, although many Yazidis reportedly left following the Turkish incursion in 2018. It was unclear how many have since returned. The source also referred to the existence of a Yazidi House in Afrin and indicated that some Yazidis remained in the area prior to the 2026 conflict.

27. *It is possible to practice the Yazidi religion in Syria. However, the source stressed that information is limited as many Yazidis are still displaced or have gone abroad.*
28. *The source stated that whether Yazidis are considered Kurds depends on whom one asks, but assessed that in Syria this is less contested than in Iraq. In the source's understanding, there is no major debate in Syria regarding the Kurdish identity of Yazidis, whereas such debates are more prominent in Iraq.*
29. *Most Muslims do not regard Yazidis as People of the Book (Christians, Jews, Muslims), and linked this broader pattern of exclusion to the targeting of Yazidis by IS and other jihadist actors, particularly in Iraq.*
30. *In Syria, the source referred to some incidents involving desecration or destruction of Yazidi shrines, but assessed that these incidents occurred in the past, including in or around 2018, rather than being a recent development.*

Online meeting with a Syria expert, 23 April 2025

About the source

The source is a Syria expert affiliated with a Syrian-focused organisation engaged in documentation and investigative reporting on Syria. The source has previously held a non-resident fellowship at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy.

Freedom of movement in Aleppo Governorate

1. *Freedom of movement in Aleppo Governorate has improved compared to earlier periods. Previous roadblocks linked to clashes involving the SDF in in January 2026 have been lifted. Some areas in the eastern and northern countryside were previously restricted but have since reopened.*
2. *Two attacks on government vehicles in Aleppo Governorate were reported and are assessed to likely be linked to IS activity, although responsibility was not officially claimed.³⁰⁶ Aside from these incidents, the situation on main roads was described as generally stable.*
3. *Checkpoints remain present on highways and main roads connecting cities and towns. At these checkpoints, vehicles are typically inspected for weapons or smuggled goods. ID checks are conducted selectively. Families are less likely to be subjected to thorough ID checks, whereas*

³⁰⁶The source referred to two links related to these incidents [url 1](#); [url 2](#)

groups consisting mainly of men are more likely to be checked. Near border areas, inspections tend to be more thorough.

4. *Within Aleppo city, checkpoints are limited. Approximately three checkpoints remain in Kurdish-majority neighbourhoods, primarily aimed at preventing armed individuals from entering and causing unrest. Additional checkpoints exist on roads leading to the airport, where checks focus on weapons and explosives. Temporary checkpoints may also be established at night to address issues such as drug trafficking or illicit activities; at these checkpoints, men's IDs are checked, whereas women's IDs are generally not.*
5. *An isolated incident during Newroz involved harassment of Kurdish individuals at a roadblock in Afrin, reportedly linked to tensions elsewhere in northern Syria. No similar incidents were reported subsequently.*
6. *Overall, movement within Aleppo Governorate was described as generally possible without major obstacles.*

Freedom of movement in Homs Governorate

7. *Freedom of movement in Homs is more restricted compared to Aleppo, due to regular security incidents and sectarian tensions.*
8. *Treatment at checkpoints varies significantly depending on location, the ethno-religious background of checkpoint personnel, and the perceived ethno-religious background of travellers. Although ethno-religious affiliation of travellers is not indicated on ID cards, it is commonly inferred from the place of origin recorded on the card, as well as from visible markers such as dress (e.g. hijab) or accent.*
9. *Homs is divided into security sectors, and experiences of freedom of movement differ accordingly. In northern sectors, Alawite and Christian residents reportedly face more frequent scrutiny and negative treatment at checkpoints. In contrast, other sectors, particularly those with better relations between local communities and security commanders, were described as less restrictive.*
10. *Reported practices at checkpoints include thorough vehicle inspections, questioning about travel purpose, and ID checks. In some cases, individuals have reportedly been subjected to physical searches or removed from vehicles. The source referred to instances of verbal harassment, intrusive questioning, and body searches.*
11. *Some individuals reportedly adapt their behaviour to avoid attention. For example, women from minority backgrounds, such as Alawite women, wear headscarves to avoid being identified as non-Sunni when passing checkpoints.*
12. *Movement patterns are affected by these conditions, although the extent to which individuals tolerate such treatment varies from person to person. Some individuals reportedly avoid non-essential travel, particularly at night, try to blend in during the day, and attempt to minimise exposure to checkpoints. In certain neighbourhoods, especially those predominantly inhabited by*

Alawite or Shia populations, access points have been reduced, leaving only one entry and exit route controlled by checkpoints.

Internal Security Forces

- 13. The structure of internal security forces has undergone changes since the fall of the former government. Initially, a unified structure referred to as “General Security” was used, a term also employed in Idlib and opposition-held Northwest Syria, and which remained in use at least until September 2025. Over time, a more differentiated structure has emerged, and the term “internal security forces” is now used instead of “General Security”.*
- 14. Currently, there are distinct police stations and specialised departments within the Ministry of Interior, including units responsible for checkpoints, narcotics, and other functions. This development reflects an increased level of institutional organisation compared to the earlier transitional phase.*
- 15. The source assessed that there has been some improvement in professionalism at the structural level. However, performance and conduct vary significantly depending on the area and the individuals involved.*
- 16. Treatment of civilians was described as somewhat improved compared to earlier periods, particularly regarding major violations such as enforced disappearances linked to checkpoints, which reportedly occur less frequently. However, treatment varies depending on the security personnel involved. Incidents of enforced disappearances still occur occasionally, and minorities are reported to remain concerned about their safety.*
- 17. Differences were also noted between forces under the Ministry of Interior and those under the Ministry of Defence. Checkpoints operated by the Ministry of Defence are more likely to be staffed by individuals from former opposition armed groups. These personnel may not be local to the area, and their behaviour varies depending on their background and previous affiliations. Some have reportedly treated people poorly or acted more harshly, while others are described as maintaining better relations with the local population.*
- 18. In contrast, Ministry of Interior personnel include newly recruited individuals, including both men and women, although representation of minority groups remains limited. They also include, however, individuals from former opposition armed groups, particularly among the commanders.*
- 19. Following the fall of the former government, large-scale recruitment into security forces took place, initially with short training periods of approximately 20 days. This led to concerns about inadequate vetting and training, including cases where individuals affiliated with the former government were incorporated into the General Security.*
- 20. Subsequently, recruitment procedures were reportedly revised. Training periods were extended to between three and six months, and more thorough background checks were introduced.*
- 21. Recruitment continues, and there is interest among the population in joining these forces. However, it is not only a question of whether individuals want to join, but also whether they are*

accepted. Representation of minority groups remains limited, although some local recruitment has occurred in specific areas. For example, in predominantly Alawite areas in Latakia, police stations are reportedly staffed by local personnel from the same community. Some recruitment of Druze individuals has also been reported in Suweida, as well as in the Druze-majority city of Jaramana in the Damascus countryside.

22. Forces officially designated as “order restoration forces” (quwwat hizf al-nizam قوات حفظ النظام in Arabic) are present and operate in practice as anti-riot units. These units are deployed primarily during large public events, such as demonstrations or sporting events, including the recent demonstration in Damascus on 17 April 2026. Their role includes crowd control and separation of groups. Their presence outside such events appears limited.

Possibility to settle in other areas than one’s home area

23. There are no formal legal restrictions preventing individuals from settling in areas other than their place of origin.
24. In practice, however, social factors influence settlement patterns. Individuals from outside an area may prefer to settle in mixed neighbourhoods rather than ethno-religiously homogeneous ones, and in some areas, there may be mistrust towards outsiders. Landlords may prefer tenants they know personally or who come from the same locality. Individuals from outside a community may face hesitation or distrust, particularly in more socially cohesive neighbourhoods. In Damascus, settlement across different backgrounds is generally possible due to the city’s diversity. In Aleppo, settlement is also considered feasible.
25. The source assessed that difficulties in accessing housing are often linked to familiarity with and trust in a person’s financial situation rather than sectarian discrimination. However, minority individuals or women renting alone may face additional difficulties.
26. Settlement outside one’s home area is described as common, particularly for economic reasons, for example individuals settling in Damascus for employment opportunities.

Conditions for return to Aleppo and Homs

27. Returns to Aleppo have taken place, including from neighbouring countries and among internally displaced persons. However, the scale of returns is difficult to quantify.
28. Returns to Homs are more limited due to extensive destruction and reduced habitable areas. The level of destruction in Homs is significantly higher relative to the size of the city than in Aleppo.

Opposition to the interim government

29. The source initially noted that he may not have heard of all cases where individuals have faced repercussions for criticising the authorities.
30. Cases were reported in which individuals faced legal or administrative consequences for criticism of the authorities. These include arrests and legal complaints for charges such as “incitement against the state”, as well as cases of enforced disappearances. However, they are not described

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as systematic or widespread, and occur less frequently than under the Assad government. Some individuals detained in this context have reportedly been released after short periods.

31. *The source underlined that reactions to critics are usually not carried out directly by the government; instead, legal complaints may be filed by private individuals supportive of the government rather than initiated by the authorities themselves.*
32. *Another example of such reactions to criticism by apparently non-state pro-government actors is public demonstrations. The protest in Damascus on 17 April 2026 reportedly took place without official permission and was not forcibly dispersed by the authorities. However, participants were subjected to harassment, including online attacks and, in some cases, physical confrontations with pro-government individuals.*
33. *Consequences for participation in such activities thus appear to stem more from societal actors than direct state intervention, although legal avenues may still be used. There may also be forms of informal pressure at the community level. Individuals expressing critical views may face threats, social pressure, or attempts by others within their community to initiate legal action against them.*
34. *While general criticism is more tolerated than before, criticism targeting specific individuals in positions of authority is more likely to lead to consequences. However, the source assessed that red lines governing permissible criticism are less clearly defined than under the former government. The boundaries are also context-dependent, including the ethno-religious background of the person expressing their opinion and the reaction of individuals or groups who may feel targeted.*
35. *In general, individuals from minority backgrounds, —particularly Alawites, Druze, and Kurds— face greater risks when expressing criticism compared to Sunni Arabs. Nevertheless, the source referred to a case involving a Sunni Arab journalist who was reportedly detained and subjected to enforced disappearance for several months, with no information available regarding charges or location.*
36. *High-profile individuals are more likely to attract attention and face consequences, although outcomes may vary depending on their status and connections. For example, a high-profile individual might more easily attract attention but be released sooner than a low-profile individual, as authorities may be cautious about negative attention linked to the ill-treatment of a high-profile person.*
37. *Ordinary citizens do usually know the red lines and moderate their behaviour due to perceived risks, including potential harassment or legal consequences.; for example, Alawites would be very cautious about expressing criticism of the authorities.*

Impact of the timing of departure from Syria on treatment upon return

38. *The source did not identify systematic state-level discrimination against returnees based on the timing of their departure from Syria. However, at the community level, perceptions and suspicions may arise.*

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39. *Individuals who left later during the conflict, particularly from government-controlled areas, may be perceived as having been sympathetic to the former government, so-called “silent supporters”. Such perceptions can lead to tensions within communities or families.*
40. *The source emphasised that risks for returnees are more likely to stem from local dynamics, including personal disputes, family feuds, or accusations by community members, rather than from systematic state policies.*

Security situation in northeast Syria

41. *The source had limited first-hand knowledge of northeast Syria but provided an overview based on secondary information.*
42. *The integration process between SDF structures and government forces is ongoing but progressing slowly.*
43. *Tensions have arisen in relation to arrests conducted by either SDF or government forces, sometimes leading to protests or confrontations.*
44. *The source noted cases of deaths in detention on both sides, including one case in Deir ez-Zor involving government detention and another involving SDF detention.*
45. *Overall, the integration process is described as incomplete and influenced by both local dynamics and broader political considerations.*

Freedom of movement in northeast Syria

46. *Movement between major cities in northeast Syria and from Damascus is generally possible, although checkpoints remain.*
47. *Some individuals reportedly feel apprehensive when crossing checkpoints, particularly if they are not from the area or are returning after a long absence. Arab travellers may feel concerned when passing SDF-controlled checkpoints, while Kurdish individuals may feel apprehensive when encountering government-controlled checkpoints.*
48. *Despite these concerns, the source assessed that roads are open and relatively safer than in previous periods. No systematic pattern of obstruction or targeting was identified.*

Recruitment in SDF-controlled areas

49. *To the source’s knowledge, there has been no new recruitment to either the self-defence forces or the SDF since the agreement at the end of January 2026.*
50. *However, individuals already enrolled in the mandatory self-defence forces are reportedly still serving, although some reportedly left during earlier clashes, particularly among Arab recruits, while Kurdish members have generally remained.*

51. *Isolated cases of recruitment of minors were reported, attributed to the Revolutionary Youth Movement. One recent case involved a 16-year-old girl who was reportedly abducted and later released following pressure. The source described such cases as involving ideological influence, and as distinct from formal SDF recruitment. The source noted that when parents do not consent to their children joining such groups, they may perceive the recruitment as “forced” or as “kidnapping,” even if the young person joined voluntarily.*

Presence of PKK-linked elements

52. *The source assessed that individuals affiliated with PKK structures remain present within SDF-affiliated forces, particularly among non-Syrian cadres and within units such as the YPJ. These elements have not been fully integrated into state structures and continue to operate within SDF frameworks.*

Situation of Yazidis in Syria

53. *The source had limited information on the current situation of the Yazidi population in Syria. The community was described as very small, numbering only a few thousand individuals.*
54. *Reports from Afrin suggest that Yazidis may face restrictions on religious practice, although details remain unclear.*

Online meeting with a Syrian human rights organisation, 9 April 2025

Security situation in Aleppo Governorate

1. *Crime rates across governorates in Syria have generally increased following the overthrow of the Assad government in December 2024.*
2. *The Syrian government is nominally in control of Aleppo Governorate; however, in practice, its control remains incomplete. This is illustrated by the continued possession of weapons by tribes, clans, and families in the area, which are not fully subject to the state authority. Clashes between these groups have been reported, sometimes resulting in fatalities, although the underlying reasons remain unclear. Such incidents, including targeted killings, occur both in Aleppo city, including the Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah neighbourhoods, and in rural areas of the governorate.*
3. *In Aleppo Governorate, individuals with perceived ties to the former Assad government were subjected to attacks. In addition, Kurds living in the Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah neighbourhoods who are perceived to be affiliated with the SDF, were reported to face a risk of targeted attacks by government forces. The source noted, however, that while arrests of Kurds affiliated with the SDF had been reported in the past, no recent reports of such arrests had been received. In Aleppo city, Kurdish residents without links to armed Kurdish factions were generally not reported to face direct security threats.*

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4. *There are though concerns regarding the presence of undisciplined and poorly trained members of the security forces, some of whom may be foreigners. (for example, Egyptians) and who may perceive all Kurds as being affiliated with or supportive of the SDF.*
5. *In Aleppo Governorate, individuals perceived to have ties to the former Assad government, as well as Kurds living in the Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah neighbourhoods who are perceived to be affiliated with the SDF, were reported to face a risk of targeted attacks. The source noted, however, that while arrests of Kurds affiliated with the SDF had been reported in the past, no recent reports of such arrests had been received. Kurdish residents without links to armed Kurdish factions were generally not reported to face direct security threats.*
6. *In the Kobani countryside, there are reports of tribal gunmen robbing and killing civilians, as well as documented cases of looting and burning of homes. These incidents are attributed to the limited control exercised by the Syrian authorities over such groups, some of which are reportedly loyal to Turkey. Officially, these groups are part of the Syrian authorities' security forces; however, many were previously affiliated with the Turkish-backed armed opposition coalition known as the Syrian National Army (SNA). While they maintain a formal affiliation with the state, they are not fully under its control.*
7. *In Aleppo Governorate, residents of Shiite villages such as Nubul, Zahra and Farayyah were reported to have been subjected to mistreatment (attacks and assaults) by local armed groups. The source noted, however, that no such incidents had been reported during the preceding three months. Nevertheless, Shiite internally displaced persons (IDPs) from these villages had not fully returned since the fall of the Assad government. The source referred to an incident in which a Shiite family returning to Syria from Lebanon was detained at the border and subjected to ill-treatment by the Syrian authorities. The reasons for the detention remained unclear.*

Security situation in Homs Governorate

8. *In Homs Governorate, there have been several reported cases of Alawite inhabitants being threatened and subjected to violence by tribal groups that have been able to act with impunity. Most reported assassinations of Alawites in Syria in recent months (i.e. spring 2026) have taken place in Homs Governorate.*
9. *Some members of tribal groups are reportedly affiliated with the security forces, and witnesses have observed security force vehicles involved in killings and abuses. It remains unclear whether such acts are committed as part of tribal disputes or constitute retaliatory violence against Alawites for events during the Syrian conflict under the Assad government.*
10. *Reports indicate that Shiites in Homs have likewise been subjected to harassment and violence, and that their places of worship have also been targeted.*

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11. *Homs was described as a governorate where radical Muslim clerics preach hate speech against Alawites and Shiites. While such clerics are at times restrained or stopped by the authorities, they are at other times able to preach without interference from the Syrian authorities.*
12. *The Islamic State has not recently targeted civilians in Homs Governorate. IS has threatened to kill public sector employees in the desert area (Badia) in the cities of Sukhna and Tadmur (Palmyra).*

Freedom of movement in Aleppo and Homs governorates

13. *There are no general restrictions on freedom of movement in Aleppo or Homs governorates. While checkpoints are present in both governorates, they are not permanent, and no harassment or identity checks of individuals passing through these checkpoints have been reported.*
14. *However, this general situation may not apply to all groups in Homs Governorate, where individuals from the Alawite community may be subjected to physical assault and humiliations at checkpoints*
15. *If an individual is arrested at a checkpoint, treatment may vary: in some cases, checkpoint personnel act in a disciplined manner and conduct questioning in accordance with procedures laid down by the Syrian authorities. In other cases, where personnel are less disciplined, individuals may risk being detained for an unspecified period unless family members or friends initiate a social media campaign to advocate for their release, to which the authorities are reportedly responsive. As an example, the referred to an incident involving three Kurdish men who were travelling by bus from Hasakah governorate through Homs. They were stopped at a checkpoint after photos of SDF fighters or martyrs were found on their phones. Their families were only able to secure their release through negotiations with Syrian security forces.*
16. *As of April 2026, flights operate between Aleppo Airport and Türkiye.*
17. *The main form of intercity transportation in Syria is by bus.*

Conditions for return to Homs and Aleppo governorates

18. *Those who are able and have the opportunity to return from neighbouring countries are doing so. Individuals who do not have housing or property to return to, or who lack sufficient financial resources, are generally not returning.*
19. *In Homs Governorate, returnees are predominantly Sunni Muslims, reflecting the fact that the majority of those who fled the area during the conflict were Sunni.*

20. *Syrians facing unemployment in Türkiye are returning to Aleppo, while those who remain employed generally do not return, primarily due to the poor state of the Syrian economy despite improvements in the security situation.*
21. *Due to the level of destruction in Homs and Aleppo governorates, rent prices are high. Wages in Syria are generally low relative to housing costs, which in many cases exceed incomes.*
22. *Individuals who own housing in Homs but fled during the conflict and have since settled in areas such as Afrin are reportedly unwilling to return due to the extent of destruction and the economic situation in the governorate. However, the source noted that, as of April 2026, returns to both the city of Homs and rural areas of the governorate have been observed.*

Security situation in Hasakah Governorate

23. *There have been no reported major security incidents in Hasakah governorate since the ceasefire agreement between the SDF and the Syrian government on 29 January 2026. However, the source does not consider the security situation in the governorate to be stable, as criminal activity persists, partly due to the widespread possession of weapons among local tribes and clans. In addition, conflicts occur between different clans, as well as within individual clans or families, which at times result in shootings in towns and villages. Moreover, minor incidents can escalate into riots or security-related clashes, as illustrated by the Nowruz-related unrest in Qamishli and Hasakah city, where the removal of a Syrian flag from a building reportedly triggered rioting and clashes in Kurdish-majority areas. According to the source, such escalation is partly linked to heightened sensitivities among the local population, as the authorities have presented the agreement between the SDF and the government as a victory for the Syrian government, which has contributed to increased tensions in the area.*

Freedom of movement in Hasakah Governorate

24. *There is freedom of movement between cities in northeast Syria, including Qamishli, Hasakah, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, Kobani, Amuda, Derik (al-Malikiyah), Shaddadi and Tabqa, as well as from these areas to Damascus. However, a lack of effective command and control over government security forces in these areas occasionally disrupts travel. In early April 2026, a bus travelling from Kurdish-controlled areas in Hasakah to Damascus was stopped at a checkpoint, where passengers were reportedly subjected to ill-treatment by security personnel.*

Possible consequences for individuals with previous conflicts with the Islamic State (IS)

25. *The Islamic State in Syria no longer controls any territory and operates through underground cells. The group has carried out targeted attacks against specific individuals, in particular members of the Syrian security forces and persons perceived to be affiliated with the SDF.*
26. *According to the source, a Syrian who left areas previously controlled by the Islamic State, such as Deir ez-Zor, due to a personal conflict with the group would not face abuse or be targeted by*

the group upon return from abroad. The source assessed that the IS does not have the capacity or the intent to target such individuals.

Opposition to the interim government

- 27. The source is not aware of any reports of critics of the new Syrian authorities being prosecuted before Syrian courts.*
- 28. In the source's assessment, the situation of individuals critical of the Syrian authorities has improved compared to that under the Assad government, as the new authorities seek to demonstrate to Western countries that they are capable of tolerating public criticism. Restrictions on freedom of expression was thus assessed to be less severe than under the Assad government.*
- 29. There had reportedly been occasional cases in which critics of the authorities were assassinated by unknown perpetrators. The authorities attributed such incidents to remnants of the Assad government.*
- 30. There have also been reports of detention of journalists and media workers, as the authorities sought to clarify their media affiliations. The source referred to a case in which a member of a media organisation was detained for a couple of weeks but was released after the authorities established the individual's affiliation. There have also been cases of journalists being held for a few weeks while the authorities sought to determine their media affiliations*
- 31. There have also been cases of individuals who have been critical of the Syrian president or documented sensitive incidents in Syria (e.g. photographing restricted areas) being subjected to online harassment and discrediting campaigns by internet actors affiliated with or supportive of the new authorities, though not by the authorities themselves*
- 32. Some ordinary Syrians are reportedly afraid to access online forums that are critical of the new authorities.*
- 33. There have reportedly been cases of Alawites being imprisoned since December 2024 for protesting against the new Syrian authorities. The source also referred to two recent cases involving young men of Alawite background who had criticised the authorities online and were subsequently detained. In contrast, Sunni Arabs who criticise the authorities online are reportedly summoned and reminded of the importance of supporting the authorities in order to protect the rights of Sunni Arabs. The source indicated that there have been several such cases.*

Situation of Yazidis in Syria

- 34. There are very few Yazidis in Syria. The source is not aware of any reports of attacks or abuses against Yazidis by the new authorities, which the source attributed to concerns that such actions*

would attract significant international attention. The source assessed that Yazidis returning to cities such as Damascus or Aleppo would not face harassment or abuse. Yazidis are also reported not to openly display their religious identity in public.

35. However, the source considered that some extremist elements affiliated with the new authorities may pose a risk to Yazidis by harassing them or targeting their places of worship in specific areas of Syria, including Afrin and parts of southwestern and southeastern Syria.

“Westernisation”

36. The source had not received reports of cases in which Syrians returning from abroad had been subjected to harassment or ill-treatment by local communities or the authorities due to behaviour or appearance (e.g. clothing, not wearing a hijab, etc.) perceived as inappropriate or interpreted as indicative of “westernisation”. The source underlined that the Syrian authorities had so far not issued any regulations governing people’s dress.

Possible consequences for individuals with previous conflicts with the PKK or SDF (YPG/YPJ)

37. The source had not heard of cases in which ordinary Syrian citizens had been targeted by the PKK or SDF (YPG/YPJ) upon return to Syria due to conflicts with these groups prior to leaving the country.

Online meeting with a Syrian lawyer, 9 April 2025

About the source

The source is a Syrian lawyer working in Damascus.

Judiciary system

- 1. No major structural changes have taken place in the legal system since the fall of Assad.*
- 2. Most judges at all levels remain from the previous system, although some have been excluded due to perceived loyalty. The transitional government is seeking to replace former judges with new appointments, but capacity constraints mean that many existing judges and court staff from the former government remain in place.*
- 3. The terrorism-related court has been abolished under the new government.*
- 4. Civil and criminal courts continue to operate with personnel largely from the former system.*
- 5. Initially, some of the judges appointed to fill vacant positions lacked formal legal training and were instead religious scholars (sharia-trained), but more legally trained judges are gradually being appointed.*

6. *The source confirmed the existence of parallel informal local religious committees in some areas handling disputes, including Sharia-related matters such as marriage and civil cases, and assessed that these are often preferred due to their ability to provide faster resolutions than the formal judicial system. Such mechanisms are widely used in areas controlled by Turkish-backed armed groups, but are also present in other areas, even in Damascus.*
7. *In the source's assessment, general trust in the police and judiciary exists among parts of the population. This also applies to Kurds living in Damascus and Aleppo; however, Kobane and Afrin are exceptions. In Kobane, there is no Syrian police or judicial system, as security is provided by Kurdish forces and justice is administered under the autonomous administration's (DAANES) legal framework.*
8. *The source reported that the transitional government aims to build public trust by prioritizing and addressing public concerns. However, minority groups, particularly Druze in Suweida area, reportedly have low trust and rely more on community-based systems.*

Authorities' handling of civilian disputes

9. *In cases of physical violence, the public prosecution is responsible for investigations, and the police may intervene and document cases.*
10. *In cases involving threats only, individuals are required to lodge a complaint with the prosecutor. Victims are more likely to be placed in the care of trusted relatives rather than accommodated in formal shelters.*
11. *Cases involving violence against women are generally treated seriously by the authorities. The alleged perpetrator is typically questioned, and both parties are called in to provide statements. In some cases, the matter is resolved through signed agreements in which the perpetrator commits not to repeat the abuse.*
12. *Corruption (bribery) was previously widespread and overt, but is now described as less frequent in the court system more concealed and involving higher sums, often paid in foreign currency (USD).*

Possibility to settle in other areas than one's home area

13. *Legally, Syrians may reside anywhere in the country. However, People are generally more likely to resettle in areas not affected by internal conflict.*

Situation of Yazidis in Syria

14. *Yazidis are generally treated with respect by the population and the transitional authorities.*
15. *The only exception in this regard is in areas controlled by Turkish-backed armed groups, where Yazidis may face negative attitudes and inadequate treatment, including derogatory language. However, the source emphasised that this treatment is primarily attitudinal, not systematic, and geographically limited to Turkish-controlled areas. In cities such as Damascus and Aleppo, Yazidis generally do not face discriminatory treatment or negative attitudes, including with*

regard to receiving services from the authorities such as obtaining official documents from the authorities.

Online meeting with Omran Center for Strategic Studies, 30 April 2025

About the source

Omran Center for Strategic Studies is a Syrian think tank and research institution established in November 2013 in Istanbul. The center focuses on political and developmental issues in Syria and the wider region. It produces reports, policy briefs, and analytical studies on the Syrian conflict, governance, and regional dynamics.

Security situation in Aleppo Governorate

- 1. A major military operation took place in Aleppo in January 2026, in the Sheikh Maqoud and Ashrafiyah neighbourhoods. The operation followed repeated rocket attacks launched by SDF-affiliated forces towards other neighbourhoods in Aleppo. The Syrian leadership subsequently decided to carry out a military operation against these forces. After approximately one week, the area was cleared of SDF fighters. Some fighters were sent to areas in eastern Aleppo, while others surrendered their weapons and received amnesty. The source assessed that the operation was conducted successfully and that civilians were provided with safe passages to leave the area. The authorities reportedly published maps identifying military locations that would be targeted, allowing civilians to evacuate beforehand. After the operation, SDF forces reportedly launched drones from East Aleppo for two or three days. This led the Syrian government to prepare another military operation against the SDF.*
- 2. Since the January operation, no major security incident comparable to the fighting in Sheikh Maqoud and Ashrafiyah was reported. The current security situation in Aleppo was described as generally good, but not stable. The source emphasised that Syria remains a post-conflict country in which weapons continue to circulate among segments of the population, and in which extrajudicial killings still occur. There are still former Assad-affiliated actors, including former Shabiha members, in Aleppo, who have not been arrested by the government. Some of these individuals may have been incorporated into the internal security forces, possibly due to insufficient background checks or limited available information on their prior activities.*
- 3. Tribal structures in Aleppo may also contribute to future instability. The source considered that tribal tensions or conflicts could potentially arise, although no specific recent tribal conflict was identified.*
- 4. The security situation in Aleppo city and rural areas was described as broadly similar, but the source noted that many villages have also been destroyed by military operations between 2012 and 2024.*
- 5. As regards the situation in Kobane/Ain al-Arab, the city was described as an almost entirely Kurdish city. Government security forces have not entered the city. Under the agreement between the Syrian government and the SDF, internal security personnel in Kobane are to be from the city itself. Government commanders have reportedly entered Kobane several times to*

verify that arrangements are proceeding as intended.

6. *While the general security situation was described as relatively good, the source noted significant problems related to services and reconstruction. Electricity is not available around the clock, and electricity prices have increased, which has caused frustration among the population.*
7. *Reconstruction in Aleppo city remains limited. Many damaged buildings require joint action by all owners or residents, which is difficult due to unclear property boundaries, lack of funds and unresolved administrative issues. In rural areas, reconstruction is easier because people are more familiar with their properties, and houses are often smaller, typically one or two floors.*
8. *Several neighbourhoods in eastern Aleppo remain heavily damaged and are not suitable for residence. Some buildings damaged during the conflict, particularly by bombardment in 2016, have become structurally weak and may collapse. The source referred to an incident involving the collapse of a structurally weakened building, resulting in fatalities.*

Freedom of movement in Aleppo Governorate

9. *Main roads and highways are generally considered safe during daytime; however, night-time travel—especially after midnight and on rural roads—is avoided by some due to concerns about theft, kidnapping, and armed groups seeking financial gain. Some IS members or criminal groups may operate in rural areas. More than ten members of the military and customs authorities were reportedly killed by IS-affiliated actors in Aleppo and Idlib, including in Atarib, during 2025 and the first half of 2026.*
10. *Inside Aleppo city, the source had not observed checkpoints during recent visits. Checkpoints are present around the city, at its entrances, on the highway between Aleppo and Hama, and along routes connecting Aleppo with Damascus and other areas.*
11. *In general, people do not face problems passing through checkpoints, and checks do not take much time. The checkpoint personnel may check vehicles, ask for ID cards, or inspect car trunks, but such procedures are not applied systematically at every checkpoint. The source considered that the purpose of the checkpoints is to increase security in the city and on highways.*
12. *Public buses operate between Damascus and Aleppo.*

Security situation in Homs Governorate

13. *The situation in Homs was described as more complex than Aleppo due to the presence of Alawite neighbourhoods and former members of the Assad army and Shabiha. Some residents in these neighbourhoods previously served in the former army or were involved in violations against civilians during the conflict. This has led to revenge attacks in Homs by individuals who know or believe that specific persons committed violations against their family or property. Some of these killings have occurred in Homs since January 2026. These are generally committed by individuals rather than organised state actors. The source considered that the government faces difficulty arresting all former army or Shabiha members suspected of crimes, as doing so could risk renewed conflict. At the same time, the authorities need evidence before arresting individuals and sending them to court. Without evidence, cases would fail in court.*

14. *According to the source, the security situation in Homs cannot be meaningfully assessed solely on the basis of an urban–rural distinction. Rather, it varies between neighbourhoods and localities, and is influenced by local community composition and dynamics.*
15. *In Wadi al-Nasara, a valley area in western Homs Governorate located between the city of Homs and the Lebanese border in the Ansariyah mountain range, there have been tensions with nearby areas, including al-Hosn. The source linked this partly to the role of a former militia figure from Wadi al-Nasara who cooperated with the Assad army and targeted al-Hosn during the conflict. This person is now reportedly in Canada, but tensions remain between these two communities. Overall, however, the situation in Wadi al-Nasara is calm. The internal security forces try to manage disputes between these communities, often through mediation rather than strictly through legal procedures.*
16. *In northern Homs, the situation was described as relatively calm despite the presence of both Sunni Muslims and Alawites. The situation in Talbiseh (a large town just north of Homs city) and al-Rastan (a city and district center located between Homs and Hama) is calm. However, in al-Houla, a small agricultural region in northwestern Homs Governorate, tensions between Alawite and Sunni communities persist due to events dating back more than ten years.*
17. *In southern Homs, no incidents were reported, as the area is sparsely populated with few towns or villages.*

The Islamic State (IS)

18. *IS remains active in Homs Governorate, with its activities concentrated in desert areas, whilst the source was not aware of any IS activity in the city of Homs.*
19. *IS cells are present near some villages, and the Ministry of Interior has conducted operations against IS cells in Homs, Aleppo, and Idlib.*
20. *IS remains active in the Badia area, including areas near Tadmur, although activity is not constant. IS targets vulnerable individuals and groups and may carry out attacks to signal its continued fight against the government or to generate revenue. The source had no information that IS had recently targeted ordinary civilians in Homs. IS activity is mainly directed towards government or security-related targets.*
21. *The source had no information on cases in which individuals with prior conflicts with IS left Syria, later returned, and were subsequently targeted.*
22. *IS remains active in Homs Governorate, with its activities primarily concentrated in desert areas (Badia), including areas near Tadmur, although such activity is not constant. According to the source, there was no information indicating IS presence in the city of Homs. IS cells are reportedly present near some villages, and the Ministry of Interior has conducted operations against such cells in Homs, as well as in Aleppo and Idlib.*
23. *IS was assessed to primarily target government and security-related actors, as well as groups perceived as not aligning with the organisation. According to the source, the organisation may also target Alawites in order to incite sectarian tensions and place the state in a difficult position. As an example, the source referred to an attack involving an explosive device targeting*

an Alawite mosque in Homs on 25 December 2025. The source further noted that IS may carry out attacks to signal its continued opposition to the government or to generate revenue. The source had no information indicating that IS had recently targeted ordinary civilians in Homs.

24. *Furthermore, the source was not aware of any cases in which individuals with prior conflicts with IS left Syria, returned at a later stage, and were subsequently targeted.*

Freedom of movement in Homs Governorate

25. *Road travel in Homs Governorate is generally possible during the day, but night-time travel is often avoided unless necessary. The source explained that the situation is relatively safe during the day, while at night checkpoints outside Alawite neighbourhoods prevent outsiders from entering in order to protect these neighbourhoods from possible attacks.*
26. *Checkpoints are present around Homs. Procedures at checkpoints vary depending on location, personnel, and available security information. Some checkpoints may request ID cards, while others do not. The checks are generally described as manageable unless an individual has specific issues, such as an unresolved criminal case, lack of settlement papers as a former member of the old security or military structures, or other security-related issues.*
27. *Public buses operate between Homs and Damascus.*

Security situation in Hasakah Governorate and northeast Syria

28. *The security situation in Hasakah governorate was described as fragile, with incomplete integration of the SDF into government forces and ongoing disagreements between the two sides, although some progress has been made. The source assessed that Hasakah cannot currently be considered stable, and that further time is needed to resolve these issues and clarify control arrangements.*
29. *Some Arab residents attempting to enter Hasakah or Qamishli have been stopped at SDF checkpoints and turned back. In one case, a pregnant woman reportedly died after being denied access to hospital care by SDF personnel at a checkpoint. The incident reportedly occurred two to three months prior to the interview (April 2026).*

Freedom of movement in northeast Syria

30. *Checkpoints are present in northeast Syria, and incidents at SDF checkpoints—where individuals may be prevented from passing—reportedly continue to occur frequently. In the source's assessment, SDF personnel at such checkpoints sometimes act to signal their continued presence and control over the area.*
31. *The source did not know of comparable incidents involving Kurdish civilians being prevented from passing through government checkpoints. Government checkpoints are not widespread in Kurdish-majority areas; instead, there are police stations and some joint checkpoints involving government police and Asayish/SDF personnel.*

32. *Travel from Damascus to major cities in northeast Syria is generally possible for ordinary civilians, particularly for people originally from the area who are travelling to visit family or return to their own city or village.*
33. *The source assessed that residents from northeast Syria feel more comfortable travelling in rural areas, as they are familiar with the villages, routes, and local networks. By contrast, individuals from outside the region may feel less secure. The source was not aware of specific recent incidents on rural routes but assessed that instability, possible IS presence, and unresolved SDF–government tensions render the area sensitive.*

Internal Security Forces

34. *The source assessed that the Internal Security Forces have improved in terms of discipline, vetting, code of conduct, behaviour and structure, although this remains an ongoing process requiring more time. These forces were established from a weak starting point after the fall of the former government. Initially, many people were recruited without adequate vetting. Some former members of Assad-era security structures, including the National Defence Forces, initially joined the new security forces. The authorities are now conducting a vetting process for personnel recruited after the fall of the former government. This process was assessed to require time, resources and intelligence information.*
35. *The internal security forces have published a code of conduct, and training courses are being organised for officers, non-commissioned officers and other personnel. The government has drafted a new internal security law, which is awaiting approval by parliament. The Ministry of Interior has also introduced a new organisational structure and is seeking to develop a more professional security system aimed at promoting more accountable and rights-respecting security practices.*
36. *Previous religious instruction courses for recruits were cancelled several months earlier. A new guidance department has produced two sets of materials: one for Muslim recruits and one for Christian recruits. The source explained that the Muslim material does not focus on Islamic doctrine or belief, but on conduct and treatment of others in accordance with Islamic principles.*
37. *The Ministry of Interior is encouraging recruitment from minority communities such as Christians. Christian recruits may be deployed in Christian areas in order to provide security services within their own communities. Christians, Alawites and Druze have joined the internal security forces, although the source did not have figures.*
38. *The source assessed that reports suggesting ideological elements within the internal security forces act independently of government instructions are not entirely accurate. The authorities reportedly conduct vetting for ideological extremism, and individuals with extremist views are rejected or sent home. The source considered that reports circulating on social media may provide a partial or incomplete account of events, and may not accurately reflect the full context in which they occurred.*
39. *The source noted that the current authorities previously governed Idlib, where the population was more homogeneous, whereas Damascus and other cities contain people from many sects and religions. The security forces therefore need time to adapt to a more diverse society. In Damascus, the source observed that people are generally not questioned by the internal security*

forces about their clothing, hijab or behaviour.

Opposition to the interim authorities

40. *The source was not aware of cases in which individuals had been arrested solely for expressing political opinions or for opposing the government. According to the source, criticism of the government on Facebook reportedly occurs without necessarily leading to consequences. When protests take place, government forces are described as, in general, seeking to protect them.*

Online meetings with a Syrian media organisation, 29 and 30 April 2026

About the source

The source is a Syrian media and training organisation that publishes journalism on developments in Syria. Its coverage addresses Syrian politics, society, and the Syrian diaspora. It produces news reports, investigations, interviews, and multimedia content in English and Arabic.

The organisation was founded in 2013 and initially operated from Amman, Jordan, with support from the Global Peace and Development Charitable Trust. After approximately eight years, it registered as a non-profit organisation in Germany and is now based in Berlin. From this location, it continues to report on Syria and on countries hosting Syrian refugees.

Opposition to the interim government

1. *The source described political freedoms and opposition activity in Syria as a complex issue. Formally, such freedoms are provided for in the current constitutional framework, and both local and international media operate in the country. The source considered that the period following the fall of the Assad government differs significantly from the Assad period, particularly with regard to the possibility of public criticism and protest. According to the source, this development represents an improvement, in that individuals now have greater scope to express criticism of the Syrian authorities than was the case under the Assad government.*
2. *The source referred to a recent demonstration in Damascus against the current government, which took place on 17 April 2026. The protest concerned socio-economic demands, including opposition to the privatisation of public institutions and demands for improved living conditions and economic conditions. The source stated that the authorities protected the demonstration, which the source considered significant compared to earlier periods in Syria.*
3. *The source was not aware of recent cases in which private individuals had been arrested, prosecuted, detained, or imprisoned solely for participating in demonstrations or for criticising the current authorities. During a recent demonstration in Damascus, police and security forces reportedly acted to protect protesters. However, the source indicated that some government supporters criticised and confronted demonstrators. There were verbal disputes and some minor physical altercations between government supporters and protesters, after which the police or security forces intervened to calm the situation and separate the groups.*
4. *The source assessed that there is no clearly defined red line for criticism of the new authorities. As an example, the source noted that some persons have referred to the president as “al-Julani” to diminish his status and remind others of his jihadist past. However, such statements have not resulted in arrests, the president reportedly does not wish to be referred to by this name.*

5. *At the same time, the source emphasised that the situation remains complex, noting a distinction between publicly observable developments and possible practices occurring outside public view. The source referred to claims that some individuals have been imprisoned on the basis of their opinions but stated that he had not seen a documented list of such cases. He identified two main challenges: first, that these claims are difficult to verify; and second, that there is a lack of transparency, including limited access for international actors to investigate and assess whether individuals are being detained for expressing their views.*
6. *However, the source noted that political prisoners or prisoners of conscience detained during the period when Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) controlled Northwest Syria remain in detention in Idlib, specifically in Harem prison, although the source did not have an estimate of the number of these persons.*
7. *The source also referred to a prisoner exchange between Druze leadership in Suweida and the Syrian government, during which approximately 25 persons were released by the government. The government reportedly considered these persons to have been fighters involved in confrontations with the authorities, whereas Druze activists claimed that they were civilians detained due to their sectarian identity or their opinions. The source did not endorse either version but noted that Druze in Jaramana and other areas around Damascus have expressed criticism without being arrested.*
8. *The source assessed that an individual's ethno-religious background does not, in itself, determine how a person critical of the Syrian government is treated by the authorities. It was noted that state institutions include officials and employees from various communities, including Kurds, Druze, and Alawites. At the same time, the source did not exclude the possibility that sectarian or ethnically motivated treatment may occur, given that the current administrative and institutional environment in Syria is characterised by a degree of disorder. The source attributed such incidents to the actions of individual actors or groups rather than to a systematic government policy. The source explained that both the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior include personnel with backgrounds in former armed opposition groups, and that some individuals within these structures may act on their own initiative in their interactions with minority communities.*
9. *Available information suggests that the most visible and vocal expressions of criticism against the authorities within government-controlled areas originate predominantly from Sunni individuals. This was linked to the fact that many former opposition supporters lived in opposition-held areas or were themselves part of the opposition and did not fear Bashar al-Assad despite bombardment and violence against their communities. These groups regard themselves as having made sacrifices for freedom and as partners in the new Syrian administration. At the same time, many of them were previously opposed to Ahmed al-Sharaa when he was known as al-Julani, and they remain concerned that he may return to his earlier ideological orientation.*
10. *For this reason, these actors criticise government decisions and statements quickly and continuously when they perceive mistakes. The source gave the example of demonstrations in Jobar and al-Qaboun in eastern Damascus, two heavily destroyed neighbourhoods. Residents demonstrated because they considered that they had sacrificed their homes for freedom and the revolution. They criticised the government, and particularly the governor of Damascus, for*

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approaching reconstruction as an investment opportunity rather than addressing the humanitarian dimension and the needs of displaced or affected residents. The authorities allow such expression, but this does not necessarily mean that they meet the protesters' demands.

11. *So far, there is no clear distinction in treatment between high-profile critics and ordinary citizens.*
12. *However, the source personally assessed that a public demonstration against al-Sharaa could generate fear, not necessarily of the government itself, but of individuals surrounding or supporting the government unofficially.*
13. *In the source's assessment, it is not primarily the authorities themselves that deter individuals from criticising the government. The source noted that the government is aware of scrutiny from Europe, the United States, and international human rights organisations, which may constrain direct state action. The greater concern is rather the risk of harm from unofficial government supporters, in cases where accountability may be unclear.*
14. *There have been cases in which government supporters or persons close to the government have been involved in confrontations with critics, including physical altercations, while the source was not aware of cases in which security forces fired on demonstrators.*

Situation of Yazidis in Syria

15. *The current Syrian government treats Yazidis as part of the broader Kurdish file. Yazidis have not protested against the current government and are not viewed as having acted against it. In the source's assessment, Yazidis continue to be affected by fear due to previous abuses they experienced, but they do not currently face specific problems with the authorities in Syria.*
16. *Yazidis are treated similarly to the broader Kurdish community, which comprises several religious groups, including Muslims, Christians, and Yazidis. There is no separate government policy specifically targeting Yazidis for discrimination.*
17. *The Syrian government reportedly treats Kurds in Afrin well, and many Kurds have returned to the area following previous unrest. At the same time, the source noted that while violations may occur, they are not considered to be systematic in nature, in contrast to the period when the area was under the control of Syrian opposition groups, including factions of the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army.*
18. *Kurdish celebrations, including Newroz in March, have been held in Damascus, Afrin, and Aleppo. The source considered this significant, as such celebrations had been prohibited by the former government. Kurdish is taught in Kurdish-majority areas as a secondary language, similar to English or French in Syrian schools, but not as the primary language of instruction.*
19. *Yazidis, like other small religious minorities in Syria such as Murshidis and Ismailis, may practise their religion. There has been no specific official declaration concerning Yazidi religious practice or a particular Yazidi celebration.*
20. *The source considered that the situation of Yazidis is sometimes exaggerated in international media. Yazidis are not easily identifiable by name, dress or appearance. Their names are often*

similar to common Syrian, Sunni or Kurdish names. Unless a Yazidi person discloses their religious affiliation, it is generally not possible to identify them as Yazidi.

21. *The source added that, in the current Syrian context, identities may be interpreted differently depending on political circumstances. As an example, the source referred to his own Kurdish-associated family name and explained that if he were to protest against the government, some might interpret this as political opposition, while others might attribute it to Kurdish identity. This illustrates the broader ambiguity surrounding identity, politics and public perception in Syria.*

Impact of the timing of departure from Syria on treatment upon return

22. *The source had not heard of cases in which Syrians who left the country late in the conflict were suspected by the authorities of supporting the Assad government upon return because of the timing of their departure.*
23. *The source stated that many Syrians have returned without being stopped or questioned on this basis.*

Possible consequences for individuals with previous conflicts with IS

24. *The source was not aware of any cases of returnees to Syria being harmed by IS due to prior conflicts with the group. This assessment was based on the source's own knowledge and information from other sources.*

Security situation in Aleppo Governorate

25. *The source distinguished between the period following the agreement between the Syrian government and the SDF and the period after the SDF's withdrawal from Aleppo. After the agreement, problems continued in Sheikh Maqsoud and Aleppo. However, after the SDF left the area and fighting ended, the situation became largely calm.*
26. *There are allegations that civilians from Sheikh Maqsoud remain detained by the Syrian authorities due to suspicion of affiliation with the SDF. However, the source noted that these allegations have not been documented. It is also unclear whether the persons concerned were civilians or affiliated with SDF armed structures.*
27. *Since the SDF withdrawal from Aleppo, there have been no reported security incidents between the SDF and the government in Aleppo. The SDF has not announced attacks against the government in Aleppo after the agreement.*
28. *Targeted Killings continue to occur, but they are mostly directed at security personnel. These incidents are generally attributed to IS-linked actors or criminal groups. Targeted killings of persons affiliated with the former Assad government continue to occur across Syria, including in Aleppo, although they are more frequent in Homs, Latakia and Hama. The number of such killings has decreased since the beginning of 2026 compared to 2025, when many such incidents were reported.*
29. *The decline is partly linked to the Syrian government beginning to prosecute and punish perpetrators of killings against Alawites and persons affiliated with the former government.*

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Arrests have taken place in connection with violence on the coast and in Homs, including arrests of persons aligned with the current government who incited crimes against persons affiliated with the former Assad government.

30. *According to the source, some security actors may turn a blind eye to certain retaliatory acts against individuals perceived to have been involved in crimes under the former government, partly in response to public pressure. However, the source did not consider this to reflect an official political policy. In this regard, the source noted that the authorities have also reportedly sought to protect individuals accused of serious crimes linked to the former government, for instance Fadi Saqr, who has been associated with crimes committed in the Tadamon neighbourhood.*
31. *The source further noted that the current Syrian authorities do not exercise full control over all affiliated factions and military elements, due in part to factional and regional loyalties. This limits the authorities' ability to fully control the security situation, while they also appear reluctant to confront actors within their own ranks.*
32. *Weapons remain present in Aleppo Governorate, including among families, clans and tribes. The source noted that tribal areas exist across the country and that armed disputes between families and tribes are not new. Such incidents occurred under the Assad government, during the conflict, and continue to occur today.*
33. *Armed disputes involving families, clans or tribes occur mainly in rural Aleppo rather than in Aleppo city.*

Freedom of movement in Aleppo Governorate

34. *Movement in Aleppo Governorate is generally possible. Public transport is available and inexpensive within Aleppo, between Aleppo city and its suburbs, and between cities. International journalists working with the Syrian media organisation also use public transport between Damascus, Aleppo and other locations, rather than private vehicles.*
35. *Checkpoints in Aleppo Governorate are generally temporary and security-related. They may be established in connection with specific security operations and removed once the operation ends. In Aleppo city, there are generally no permanent checkpoints. At temporary checkpoints, attention is often directed towards young men moving late at night. Many such checkpoints are more common between the coastal areas and other governorates than in Aleppo.*

Security situation in Homs Governorate

36. *The source described Homs Governorate as highly complex due to its sectarian composition, including Sunnis, Shia, Alawites and Christians. Homs is also geographically important because it serves as a gateway to the Syrian desert, where IS cells are present.*
37. *The sectarian composition of Homs has been a long-standing issue. Under the Assad government, different neighbourhoods in Homs were associated with different communities, including Alawite and Sunni areas. The destruction in the city reflects, to some extent, these earlier patterns of control and displacement. Many residents of Homs left during the conflict, particularly due to opposition-related displacement.*

38. *Revenge incidents occur in Homs, though not on a large scale. These incidents primarily affect persons affiliated with the former Assad government, especially Alawites. The source clarified that Alawites are the main group affected by such killings, but not the only group. Civilians, including women and children, may also be targeted, including relatives or children of former Assad government officers, despite not themselves being responsible for past violations. Such killings are carried out by local individuals, including persons associated with the former opposition. Such killings occurred more frequently in 2025. Since the beginning of 2026, they have reportedly decreased but have not stopped.*
39. *Targeted Killings occur more often in rural Homs than in Homs city. This is particularly the case in northern rural Homs and southern rural Hama, where there are connected Alawite-majority areas.*
40. *The source emphasised that although targeted killings are sometimes presented as purely sectarian in nature, such cases can be complex. Some incidents may involve tribal or family disputes, economic disagreements, or personal conflicts that are later framed as sectarian. As an example, the source described a case in Homs in which an individual killed an entire family and wrote sectarian slogans at the crime scene. Subsequent investigation reportedly indicated that the crime stemmed from a personal dispute and that sectarian language had been used to obscure the motive.*
41. *IS cells remain present in eastern Homs, particularly in the Badia and around Tadmur. Most IS operations target security forces and the new government. However, the source stated that IS has also carried out attacks intended to create sectarian tension, referring to the bombing of the Mar Elias Church in Damascus as an example.*

Freedom of movement in Homs Governorate

42. *There are no restrictions on movement in Homs Governorate, and public transport is available throughout the governorate, including between Homs city and rural areas, as well as between Homs and Damascus. However, there are more checkpoints in Homs than in Aleppo, particularly on the Damascus–Homs route.*
43. *The authorities are currently establishing entry points or “gates” to Homs. The source stated that these are not currently understood as a measure to isolate Homs, but there is concern among some people that the governorate could become separated from others.*
44. *Minorities, including Alawites, Shia and Christians, are able to move around in Homs. Christians move freely, and Alawites also move between Homs city and rural Homs. However, Alawites reportedly experience fear due to previous incidents. This does not mean that they do not go to work or school; rather, they are more cautious in their daily movements.*
45. *Communities in the city of Homs are partly mixed and people often have no practical alternative but to pass through areas associated with other communities. For example, a Sunni resident travelling between two Sunni areas may have to pass through an Alawite area. Although there are Alawite-majority, Christian-majority and Sunni-majority areas, the city is mixed to a certain extent. In rural areas, an Alawite person may be able to avoid entering Sunni villages, whereas this may not be possible in urban neighbourhoods, particularly when dealing with state institutions.*

46. *There are more checkpoints in Homs than in other governorates. The source did not have exact locations but stated that many are in the north-eastern part of the governorate towards Hama. Checkpoints are more active in carrying out controls when security incidents occur. People are particularly cautious about moving at night in the Homs–Hama–coast triangle.*

Recruitment in northeast Syria

47. *Mandatory self-defence service is no longer in place; i.e. no new conscription takes place, while those already conscripted continue their service until completion. Similarly, there is no new recruitment to the SDF, and existing fighters remain in place.*
48. *However, the Revolutionary Youth Movement (Ciwanên Şoreşger) continues to recruit young people, including minors. There are reports of forced recruitment of both males and females by the organisation. Based on past experience, some of these individuals would later be recruited into the Kurdish forces, including SDF or PKK.*
49. *The military aspect of the agreement between the Syrian government and the SDF regarding integration of the SDF into government forces remains suspended and has not yet been implemented. Administrative integration has taken place to some extent, including the appointment of a governor for Hasakah from the SDF side, but military integration has not yet occurred.*

PKK presence in Syria

50. *The source described the issue of the PKK in Syria as complex. The PKK has declared a halt to confrontation with Türkiye, but PKK cadres in Syria have reportedly opposed to the agreement.*
51. *The source did not have information on the current presence and activities of the PKK in Syria.*

“Westernisation”

52. *Regarding whether Syrians returning from abroad have been subjected to ill-treatment by local communities or authorities due to perceived “westernisation,” the source indicated that available information on this topic is limited. However, a social divide exists between residents, who view themselves as victims of the conflict, particularly in certain poor communities heavily affected by it, and returnees, who in some cases may be perceived negatively for having left during the war. While this has not generally resulted in violence, it may contribute to reduced social acceptance of returnees.*

Online meeting with The Day After, 22 April 2025

About the source

The Day After (TDA) is a Syrian non-governmental group founded in 2013 in Brussels. It operated for several years out of Türkiye and, earlier this year, established an office in Damascus, where most staff are now based. The NGO's purpose is to encourage gradual democratic change in Syria and to help ordinary citizens participate in public life. Its activities focus especially on human rights education, civic engagement, and giving people safe ways to contribute to local decision-making.

Internal Security Forces

1. *The situation of the internal security forces differs significantly across Syria and cannot be described as uniform. For instance, conditions in Damascus differ from those in Homs, Hama, the coastal region, the northeast, and Deir ez-Zor.*
2. *In Damascus, some improvements have been observed since last year. These include increased recruitment, greater visible discipline, more standardised uniforms, and changes in deployment patterns. Armed young men moving in the streets in pick-up trucks are reportedly seen less frequently than before. Instead, more regularised vehicles and more standard police-style appearances have become visible. During protests over living conditions in Damascus on 17 April 2026, which escalated into unrest, the so-called Order Restoration Forces (quwwat hizf al-nizam قوات حفظ النظام in Arabic), were deployed with helmets, uniforms, and equipment suited to crowd control and separation of groups.*
3. *At police-station level in Damascus, more professional officers have reportedly been recruited. However, this improvement is uneven. Some stations are described as relatively professional, while many others still show serious deficiencies. Complaints reportedly concern unclear hierarchy, lack of capacity, and poor professional skills, including in drafting and filing reports and handling claims.*
4. *Overall, the source considered that only slight improvements have taken place and that major challenges remain, including weak professionalism, lack of discipline, insufficient resources, poor respect for human rights, and inadequate knowledge of and adherence to rule-of-law principles.*
5. *The distinction between the different branches of the security apparatus is unclear, including for ordinary citizens and, to some extent, for civil society actors. Human rights organisations are aware that several categories of security actors exist, but even for them the structure, hierarchy, and precise functions remain unclear. What is clearly recognisable is the traffic police, which have been more visible in the streets. However, the source recently observed civilians wearing fluorescent vests marked “police” while organising traffic, despite being dressed in jeans and T-shirts.*
6. *When visiting police stations, it is often difficult to distinguish between regular police officers and other internal security actors. Different labels appear on vehicles and uniforms, including “police” and terms referring to Order Restoration forces or internal security forces. The exact structure, hierarchy, and division of tasks are not clear.*
7. *The General Security Service (Amn al-Aam أمن العام in Arabic) was one of the original security forces deployed when the current authorities came to power. It has been deployed from the beginning to provide internal security, distinct from the army. The force is now in a transitional phase, possibly being transformed into police, Order Restoration forces or Counter-Terrorism forces, but that the process remains unclear.*

Opposition to the interim government

8. *The source considered the limits on criticism of the government to be fluid and context-dependent, and to differ by location.*

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9. *Recent developments indicate that the authorities set red lines in practice and react strongly when criticism becomes visible in public space. As an example, the source referred to a sit-in in Damascus on 17 April, the day of Syrian independence. The organisers published around 20 demands covering socio-economic and some political issues, including electricity prices, privatisation of hospitals, and reform-related demands.*
10. *Before the sit-in took place, an extensive social-media campaign reportedly targeted the organisers and supporters of the protest. Public figures close to the government and allegedly pro-government social-media accounts accused the organisers of being remnants of the former Assad government and threatened them. This campaign reportedly discouraged many potential participants from attending the protest.*
11. *The source also referred to pressure exerted on lawyers who supported the sit-in. Members of the Syrian Bar Association were reportedly summoned by the government-appointed union leadership and threatened with consequences if they continued to support the sit-in, participated in it, or documented violations related to it. These lawyers were told that government supporters would be sent to attack participants.*
12. *During the sit-in, government loyalists reportedly attacked some protesters before internal security forces intervened. The source considered it as an indication that threats made on social media were later reflected in events on the ground.*
13. *It was the source's assessment that the authorities react consistently when criticism moves into public action such as demonstrations or sit-ins. Every time there is an attempt to organise activity in the street, this reportedly leads to some form of reaction.*
14. *By contrast, the source was not aware of ordinary individuals facing consequences merely for posting criticism on Facebook or Instagram, although the source believed that the authorities do monitor the internet and social media. To the source's knowledge, such online criticism had not generally resulted in arrest or prosecution. The source assessed that the profile of the person matters: high-profile individuals with large audiences are more likely to be targeted than individuals with only a few followers.*
15. *The source did not know of specific cases of journalists being targeted directly for published criticism, but stated that journalists do face challenges without specifying what these challenges entail.*
16. *The source assessed that the authorities' relatively limited reactions to criticism are shaped both by limited capacity and political calculation. In the source's assessment, the authorities cannot target or arrest everyone who criticises them, partly due to limited capacity compared to the former government and partly because they prioritise which criticism to respond to. However, they do show intent to control public dissent and tolerate only criticism that does not translate into broader public mobilisation.*
17. *The red lines differ across areas. The source considered that these differences are driven less by whether an area is urban or rural and more by its ethno-religious composition. In Sunni-majority areas, the situation is broadly similar in both rural and urban settings, and people are freer to express their criticism. By contrast, minority areas are more constrained, with more limited*

space for expression, particularly in Alawite areas. Alawites in particular are more fearful regarding what they say online and in public.

Situation of Yazidis in Syria

18. *The source considered that no substantial information was available on the situation of Yazidis in Syria. However, in the source's assessment, Yazidis are generally not perceived as a major issue in larger cities such as Damascus. The source considered that some radical religious figures may hold negative views, but that this does not appear to constitute a major issue. More broadly, the source assessed that ordinary people tend to be more tolerant of other components of Syrian society than political and religious leaders.*

Possibility to settle in other areas than one's home area

19. *In Damascus, the source did not consider internal settlement by people from different parts of Syria to be a major problem. The city was described as containing people from all over Syria. Aleppo was also described as a place where settlement across backgrounds is not a major issue.*
20. *In Homs, the situation is more restrictive. Christians and Alawites are not able to live everywhere.*
21. *Druze were also described as facing increased challenges following recent events in al-Suweida. A Druze person seeking to rent a flat in Damascus or Aleppo might face some difficulties, and in some areas it could be almost impossible. As an example, the source assumed that it would be almost impossible for a Druze person to rent accommodation in the conservative, mostly Sunni neighbourhood of al-Midan in Damascus.*
22. *The source assessed that settlement options for Sunni Arabs also depend on the area and on ethno-religious compatibility. As an example, the source assumed that if a Sunni Arab sought to rent a flat in a Christian neighbourhood in Damascus, this might be difficult due to the incidents which the Christians neighbourhood experienced during the last year. The source therefore considered that difficulty in settlement is not limited to minorities, but that minorities face the greatest constraints and insecurity. The source considered that, in general, people are more likely to settle in areas inhabited by those of a similar ethno-religious background.*

Freedom of movement in Homs, Aleppo and northeast Syria

23. *In the city of Homs, the sectarian killings of Alawites, reported to occur every few days, affect their ability to move freely. As a result, Alawites tend to limit movement outside their neighbourhoods to a minimum. Women, in particular, prefer to move accompanied by men. When leaving their areas, Alawites reportedly try to conceal their identity as much as possible.*
24. *In Aleppo, the source had not heard of similar incidents and did not report equivalent movement-related restrictions.*
25. *Regarding northeast Syria, the source referred to reports from Deir ez-Zor of insecurity and random killings following the withdrawal of previous Kurdish authorities. The source considered that this affects freedom of movement there as well.*

Online meeting with a Syrian journalist, 29 April 2026

About the source

The source is a journalist working for a Syrian media outlet.

Opposition to the interim government

1. *Regarding the authorities' reaction to critics of the government, the overall situation has reportedly improved in 2026 compared to 2025. According to the source, the government does not directly target individuals who criticise it. However, harassment and intimidation of critics are reported to be widespread and are carried out by actors described as government supporters.*
2. *It remains unclear whether these actors operate on instructions from the Syrian authorities or on their own initiative, although the source assessed that some of these individuals act independently of the authorities. Individuals that conduct this type of harassment include both unidentified individuals but also known figures, such as journalists and former activists associated with Syrian uprisings who are supportive of the new Syrian authorities. The organisation and direction of these actors remain unclear, and authorities generally do not intervene when pro-government actors call for harassment or attacks online.*
3. *Harassment and intimidation occur both online and offline, but are more prevalent on social media, where they primarily take the form of coordinated campaigns by pro-government supporters aimed at creating fear, discouraging dissent, and issuing threats, often anonymously. Physical intimidation and violence in public spaces are less frequent but do occur, particularly in connection with demonstrations not aligned with the government. But the amount of physical intimidation from pro-government supporters varies from protest to protest.*
4. *As an example of how this type of intimidation and harassment unfolds in practice, the source referred to a demonstration in Damascus on 17 April 2026, known as the "Law and Dignity" protest, which was attended mainly by civil society activists, journalists and other non-governmental and civil society actors. Prior to the demonstration, in the week leading up to it, a social media campaign sought to intimidate participants, including a video showing an armed individual threatening demonstrators; this individual was reportedly arrested by the authorities, although the outcome of the arrest remains unknown, i.e. if the individual behind the threats was formally charged or prosecuted by the Syrian authorities. Moreover, at the beginning of the demonstration, some participants were physically attacked and beaten by pro-government supporters before security forces arrived. The security forces then intervened and separated the groups, preventing further escalation.*
5. *Reactions to critics of the authorities may be influenced by public attention, including coverage on social media. According to the source, cases that gain significant visibility online may affect how the authorities or their supporters respond. As an example, the source referred to the civil society and women's rights activist, Hiba Ezzideen Al-Hajji (also known as Hiba Ezzideen), who in 2025 was subjected to a large-scale campaign by supporters of the new Syrian authorities in Idlib. Following a Facebook post on 20 April 2025, in which she spoke out against forced marriages, she was targeted by an extensive smear campaign led by a journalist involving death threats and calls for violence. A judicial investigation was subsequently opened against her.*

However, according to the latest available information, the case ended without any penalties or rulings being issued against her, as stated on her personal Facebook account.

Situation of Yazidis in Syria

- 6. Most Yazidis in Syria are located in areas that were previously or currently controlled by the SDF, particularly in northeast Syria.*
- 7. Yazidis are generally met with sympathy by the local population due to the abuses they previously suffered at the hands of IS earlier in the conflict. Some Yazidis are present in Afrin, but their number there is limited compared to northeast Syria.*
- 8. Yazidis have been able to practise religious holidays in both Afrin and northeast Syria. The source had no information indicating that Yazidis are discriminated or mistreated by the Syrian authorities because of their religion.*
- 9. In the source's assessment, Yazidis are not generally regarded as a threat because they have not been a party to the Syrian conflict in the same way as other groups, such as Kurds, Alawites or others who have been more directly involved in the conflict.*

Security situation in Aleppo Governorate

- 10. The Syrian government controls Aleppo Governorate, with the exception of the Kobane/Ain al-Arab area. After the ceasefire agreement between the government and the SDF in January 2026, no major clashes or major security incidents were reported in Aleppo Governorate, and the source had not registered or been informed of any major security episode in the governorate.*
- 11. However, attacks against individuals perceived to have been part of or affiliated with the former government continue to occur in Aleppo. The perpetrators in such cases tend to be unknown. The source also recalled at least one IS attack against internal security forces personnel under the the Ministry of Interior, which were manning a checkpoint in Aleppo Governorate in the period.*

Security situation in Homs Governorate

- 12. The government controls Homs Governorate, except for the area around Al-Tanf in eastern part of the province that had been under the control of opposition forces affiliated with the international coalition, in particular the United States. These former opposition forces have now been intergraded into the forces under the Ministry of Defence.*

Freedom of movement in Aleppo Governorate

- 13. Checkpoints are widespread in Aleppo Governorate, partly due to IS activity. They do not generally restrict civilian movement and are primarily aimed at addressing security concerns, including the detection of weapons.*

Freedom of movement in Homs Governorate

- 14. Freedom of movement exists in Homs Governorate, but the context differs from Aleppo due to sectarian divisions and tensions between communities. Some individuals choose to limit their*

movement because of fear of revenge attacks. This is not the result of formal restrictions imposed by the security authorities, but rather due to personal and community-level security concerns. The groups most cautious about movement are Alawites and Shia. The source clarified that this does not mean that individuals from these groups do not leave their homes for work, education or other purposes. Rather, they are more careful about where they go and how they move.

Written responses from Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), 5 and 15 May 2026

About the source

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), established in 2011, is a non-governmental human rights organisation that monitors and documents human rights violations and casualties in Syria. It is registered and operates outside Syria, often described as being based in Europe, including the United Kingdom. SNHR compiles and analyses data, which it disseminates through reports and submissions to international actors, including United Nations human rights mechanisms such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and Special Rapporteurs. Its data are frequently used by international bodies as a source of information.

Freedom of movement in Aleppo and Homs governorates

- 1. Freedom of movement within the governorates of Aleppo and Homs is largely available, both within the main cities and in surrounding neighbourhoods and rural areas. People are generally able to move with relative freedom using various means of transportation, including private cars, motorcycles, and public transport, although some variation exists between areas depending on the security situation and the availability of services.*
- 2. Public buses operate regularly between Damascus and the governorates of Homs and Aleppo, departing from main bus stations. Fares vary depending on destination and distance.*
- 3. According to available information, no notable or recurring security incidents targeting civilians on roads within the two governorates have been recorded during the current period. The security situation on the roads appears to have improved compared to previous periods.*
- 4. Available information indicates a reduction in the number of security checkpoints previously described as unnecessary within cities and along main roads, contributing to improved traffic flow. Where checkpoints remain, checks are generally limited to verifying identities or vehicles in cases of suspicion or in connection with security circulars. No notable incidents involving civilians at these checkpoints have been recorded.*
- 5. Available information indicates a noticeable improvement in freedom of movement within the governorates of Aleppo and Homs compared to 2025. This is attributed to the expansion of transport routes, increased availability of buses, a reduction in the number of security checkpoints, and a general improvement in the security situation.*

Internal Security Forces

6. *Available information indicates that the Internal Security Forces currently constitute a key actor in maintaining internal stability and implementing security policies. They are deployed at checkpoints and official facilities across several areas and are responsible for controlling the overall security situation, particularly with regard to murder, theft, and breaches of public order.*
7. *According to available information, the Internal Security Forces have undergone ongoing restructuring and institutional modernisation efforts. These developments are reported to have contributed to improved organisational readiness and enhanced operational effectiveness at the local level, despite ongoing challenges related to capabilities and the broader operating environment.*
8. *However, the situation differs in certain areas, such as Daraa governorate, where the Internal Security Forces are undergoing a transitional phase marked by efforts to reconstitute the institution. Despite these efforts, the forces continue to face challenges, including weak organisational structures, a shortage of qualified personnel, and overlapping mandates with local forces, which limit their ability to fully enforce security.*
9. *Available information indicates a relative improvement in discipline and adherence to legal procedures, including changes in arrest practices, with some detention operations reportedly carried out on the basis of warrants issued by the judiciary.*
10. *Personnel reportedly undergo internal courses covering professional qualifications and methods for interacting with civilians. In addition, specialised departments, such as “Road Security” and “Public Relations”, have been established to provide direct services and follow up on complaints.*
11. *There is reportedly notable interest in joining the Internal Security Forces, both through official channels and by directly approaching relevant centres and divisions.*

Judiciary system

12. *Available information indicates that the judicial system in most governorates has undergone changes, ranging from limited measures—such as the dismissal of a number of judges and the facilitation of certain legal procedures—to reports of more significant improvements in the conduct of judicial processes.*
13. *However, there is limited information on whether comprehensive restructuring has taken place in terms of structure, functions, or institutional capacity.*
14. *Civil courts have reportedly undergone certain modifications, such as assigning judges according to case type or regional context. Nevertheless, these measures are not regarded as constituting fundamental change, and issues related to timeliness and effectiveness remain.*

Authorities' handling of civilian disputes

15. *Available information indicates that individuals frequently turn to the police and the judiciary to resolve private disputes and request protection, with a noticeable improvement recorded*

compared to the previous period. However, some cases continue to be resolved through tribal mediation or individual settlements outside the legal framework.

- 16. Available information indicates variation in how police handle private disputes, including cases of domestic or family violence. Some information suggests that such cases are addressed seriously and that protection is provided, particularly in cases involving child abuse. However, other sources indicate that the police at times favour amicable solutions between the parties rather than taking formal legal action.*
- 17. In certain areas characterised by widespread presence of weapons and a limited security presence, the police reportedly deal cautiously with family disputes, prioritising other security files such as assassinations and pursuit of groups linked to Assad's government. As a result, cases of domestic violence may be given lower priority.*
- 18. Available information indicates that courts generally handle private disputes, including cases of domestic or family violence, through formal legal procedures, although proceedings may at times be slow and complex. Such cases are reportedly processed more seriously, particularly when the victim is a woman or a child.*
- 19. Available information indicates that there is a willingness among the authorities to address such cases. However, limited resources and capacity may affect the effectiveness and timeliness of the response in some instances.*
- 20. There is no precise data on the prevalence of bribery. However, a noticeable decline in use of bribe is recorded compared to the previous period, although reports of corruption and attempts to influence the course of certain cases persist.*

Possibility to settle in other areas than one's home area

- 21. Available information indicates that there are no explicit legal obstacles preventing Syrians from settling in areas other than their area of origin. However, certain administrative and regulatory challenges may arise, including procedures related to the purchase and sale of real estate, the regulation of lease contracts, and obtaining residence deeds. These challenges do not amount to a legal prohibition but may affect the ease of settlement.*
- 22. "Residence deed" (sanad iqama, *سند إقامة* in Arabic) refers to local administrative requirements or documentation used to establish a person's place of residence or to regulate certain civil transactions. The residence deed is used in a number of administrative and service-related procedures, such as registering lease contracts, certain real estate transactions, obtaining official documents, or enrolling in schools and local services. This may include a registered lease contract, a utility bill in the person's name, or a document issued by the mukhtar or the municipality confirming place of residence. Available information does not indicate any legal prohibition preventing Syrians from relocating to or settling in areas other than their area of origin. However, some local administrative or social difficulties may arise in certain areas, such as the reservations of some landlords or local communities regarding renting housing to persons coming from other areas, although these cases do not amount to legal restrictions or official policies preventing settlement or movement within the country.*

23. *The impact of ethnic or religious background on the ability to settle in other areas appears to be limited. While some individuals may prefer to relocate to areas with a similar social or sectarian composition, available information does not suggest that ethno-religious background constitutes a barrier to settlement. In this regard, no cases have been identified indicating that, for instance, Kurds or Yazidis face difficulties in settling in other governorates solely on the basis of their ethnic or religious background, particularly given the presence of diverse communities in several areas.*
24. *With regard to returnees, available information indicates that a number of returnees settle in areas other than their place of origin, particularly when return is not feasible due to destruction or inadequate infrastructure in their home areas. In such cases, an increase in population density has been observed in locations where relatively adequate housing is available.*

Possible consequences for individuals with previous conflicts with the Islamic State (IS)

25. *According to available information, no documented cases have been verified of ordinary Syrian persons being targeted by the IS upon their return to Syria due to previous disputes with the organisation.*
26. *Information indicates that the organisation still possesses active cells in some areas, particularly in the eastern or rural areas, and it may have the capacity to carry out limited targeting operations or attacks aimed at creating a state of chaos.*

Opposition to the Transitional Government

27. *According to available information, no punitive measures have been documented against individuals because they expressed criticism, meaning that no cases of arrest, harassment, or security or judicial prosecution have been recorded as a result of criticism of the new authorities.*
28. *There are no clear red lines, meaning that some criticism may be met with replies or contact from official entities in order to clarify their position or address the issue that prompted the criticism. In some cases, individuals may be summoned; however, this usually happens in the context of following up on the issue or attempting to resolve it, rather than as a punitive measure for the criticism itself.*
29. *The absence of recorded cases of detention or prosecution in response to criticism of the authorities may be attributed to a combination of factors, including a lack of intent to pursue such cases, as well as limited capacity to monitor and respond to the high volume of criticism, particularly on social media.*
30. *According to available information, there is no clear indication that prominent figures are targeted to a different extent than less prominent critics.*
31. *Information indicates that ethnic or religious background does not generally affect how criticism of the authorities is treated. However, in certain local environments or individual cases, sectarian, ethnic, or regional background may influence the treatment of individuals and the level of scrutiny applied to them, particularly where such background is associated with a*

perceived political orientation or current or former affiliations with political, military, or security entities linked to the conflict period

Impact of the timing of departure from Syria on treatment upon return

32. *Available information indicates that some individuals who were able to travel to and from Syria during the conflict have been subject to social suspicion or informal accusations. However, no information has been received to suggest that such individuals have been prosecuted by the new authorities or have faced problems upon return.*

Freedom of movement in northeast Syria

33. *Information indicates that travel from Damascus to the main cities in northeast Syria is still possible, and that regular bus transportation has continued without interruption since the fall of the former government. During Bashar al-Assad's rule, incidents of crossing closures and ambushes targeting buses travelling between areas were at times recorded; however, such incidents are no longer reported.*
34. *At present, according to available information, movement remains possible through regular transportation services. However, the main challenges relate to infrastructure and crossing conditions rather than to systematic security measures. Among the most notable challenges is the limited number of bridges available for crossing, with the Raqqa Bridge being one of the principal crossing points. Individuals travelling from areas of Deir ez-Zour may also face risks associated with the use of temporary earthen bridges, which have reportedly collapsed on several occasions. According to available information, approximately one month ago, one such bridge collapsed while a bus travelling to al-Hasakah Governorate was crossing it.*
35. *Available information indicates a noticeable decrease in security incidents in northeast Syria, particularly in Raqqa, while some incidents continue to be reported in al-Hasakah and Deir ez-Zor, including the targeting of oil tankers and other limited attacks in certain areas.*
36. *Checkpoints are deployed at city entrances and along major road intersections, where suspicious vehicles are inspected, identities are verified, and checks are conducted for the possession of weapons or the existence of circulars against individuals or vehicles. In some areas, arrests are reportedly carried out on the basis of official judicial warrants.*
37. *There is daily and regular travel movement from Damascus to the main cities in northeast Syria.*
38. *Available information indicates that travel has become easier over the past two months (February and March 2026), following steps related to the implementation of integration. However, some concerns remain, particularly regarding the risk of arrest or enforced disappearance at certain SDF checkpoints, especially in Hasakah and its surrounding areas.*

Situation of Yazidis in Syria

39. *Available information indicates that Yazidis in Syria are generally living in relatively stable conditions as of April–May 2026, with no reports of widespread violations or direct targeting during the period under assessment.*

40. *The Yazidi religion is not officially recognised, and Yazidis are often registered under other religions, particularly Islam, in official documents.*
41. *Nevertheless, Yazidis have their own places of worship and practise their religious rites and rituals, and freedom of worship appears to be guaranteed in practice, despite the absence of official legal recognition of their religion.*
42. *Societal discrimination against Yazidis is reportedly very limited, with no reports of widespread harassment or discriminatory practices at the societal level.*
43. *According to available information, no cases of violations, restrictions, or direct targeting of Yazidis by the new Syrian authorities have been recorded. However, some forms of official discrimination persist, particularly with regard to the lack of official recognition of their religion and the requirement in practice to register under another religion in official documents.*
44. *Information indicates that the authorities, in most cases, show willingness to provide protection if a Yazidi person resorts to them and requests protection from violence. However, according to available information, no specific cases have been recorded or documented, either of Yazidi persons being subjected to violence requiring them to seek protection or of Yazidi persons resorting directly to the authorities and requesting protection.*
45. *According to available information, Yazidis are able to return to and settle in their areas of origin without notable restrictions. Documented cases of return have been reported, including individuals who were previously displaced alongside residents of the Afrin area during earlier waves of displacement and later returned to their original areas.*

“Westernisation”

46. *Following monitoring, investigation, and field inquiries, including direct contact with Syrians who had returned from abroad across several Syrian governorates, no cases were identified of returnees being subjected to harassment, abuse, or discriminatory practices linked to personal appearance, lifestyle, dress, or social behaviour perceived as connected to residence abroad or to what is described as “westernisation.”*
47. *The verification process included inquiries into the conduct of both civil and security-related institutions, as well as the local social environment. The testimonies gathered consistently indicated an absence of restrictions or discriminatory practices related to these aspects.*
48. *Available information further indicated that returnees generally go about their daily lives normally within the local community, with no reports of harassment linked to appearance, social background, or lifestyles associated with residence outside Syria.*
49. *Based on the monitoring and direct inquiries conducted, no documented cases of this kind were identified in the areas covered across most governorates during the period under review.*
50. *Available information indicates that local communities generally accept returnees regardless of their appearance or behaviour, and that the authorities do not interfere in their personal choices*

or lifestyle. Habits acquired during residence abroad — whether in neighbouring or European countries — are likewise not regarded as evidence of “westernisation” warranting harassment or discrimination.

Possible consequences for individuals with previous conflicts with the PKK or SDF (YPG/YPJ)

51. *Available information indicates that some Syrians travelling to or returning from Erbil have been subjected to measures by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), including temporary detention, security screening, and inspection of mobile phones. Individual complaints have also been recorded concerning theft during some of these inspections.*

Annex 2: Terms of Reference

- 1. Situation in Aleppo and Homs governorates**
 - 1.1. Security situation
 - 1.2. Freedom of movement
 - 1.3. Conditions for return
- 2. Judiciary and security institutions**
 - 2.1. Internal Security Forces/Internal Security Command
 - 2.2. Court system
 - 2.3. Authorities' handling of private disputes
- 3. Possibility to settle in other areas of Syria**
 - 3.1. Prevalence of legal barriers to settle outside a person's area of origin
 - 3.2. Impact of ethnic and religious background on the possibility to settle in other areas
 - 3.3. Prevalence of returnees settling in other areas than their home area
- 4. Previous conflict with Islamic State (IS)**
 - 4.1. Prevalence of targeting by IS due to previous conflicts
- 5. Opposition to the interim government**
 - 6.1. Treatment of individuals critical of the interim government
- 6. Impact of the timing of flight from Syria under Bashar al-Assad on treatment by the new authorities upon return**
- 7. Security situation in Hasakah Governorate**
 - 7.1. General security situation
 - 7.2. Recent developments and incidents affecting civilians
- 8. Freedom of movement in NES**
 - 8.1. General freedom of movement
 - 8.2. Access to and from NES from government-controlled areas of Syria and from KRI
- 9. Recruitment and Mandatory Self Defence Duty**
 - 9.1. Mandatory Self-Defence Duty in HXP
 - 9.2. Recruitment to SDF (YPG/YPJ) and PKK
- 10. Previous conflict with PKK and SDF (YPG/YPG)**
 - 10.1. Prevalence of targeting by PKK and SDF due to previous conflict

11. Yazidis in Syria

- 11.1. Freedom to practice Yazidi religion in Syria
- 11.2. Treatment of Yazidis by the authorities
- 11.3. Treatment of Yazidis by Syrian society

12. “Westernisation”

- 12.1. Treatment by the authorities and the society upon return as a result of being perceived as “westernised”