Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Syria: Returnees after fall of Al-Assad regime

Version 1.0

July 2025

Contents

Executive summary **4**
Assessment **5**
About the assessment 5
1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals 5
1.1 Credibility 5
1.2 Exclusion 6
2. Convention reason(s) 6
3. Risk 6
3.1 Risk from the state 6
4. Protection 7
5. Internal relocation 8
6. Certification 8
Country information **9**
About the country information 9
7. Limits on reporting, disinformation and misinformation 9
7.1 Disinformation and misinformation 9
8. Treatment of returnees by former Al-Assad regime 10
9. Fall of the Al-Assad regime and establishment of new government 11
9.1 Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) 11
9.2 Opposition offensive leading to fall of regime 12
9.3 Interim authorities 12
9.4 Announcement of new government (29 March 2025) 13
10. Returnees since the fall of the Al-Assad regime 14
10.1 Total number as of 8 January 2025 14
10.2 Total number as of 13 March 2025 14
10.3 Total number as of 27 March 2025 15
10.4 Total number as of 8 May 2025 15
10.5 From Turkey 15
10.6 From Lebanon 16
10.7 From Jordan 17
10.8 From Iraq 18
11. Flights to Damascus 18
12. Interim authorities' treatment of and attitude towards opponents of the former Al-Assad regime and returnees 19
12.1 Treatment of returnees 19
12.2 Treatment of opponents of the former Al-Assad regime 20

Research methodology **21**
Terms of Reference **22**
Bibliography **23**
Sources cited 23
Sources consulted but not cited 24
Version control and feedback **26**
Feedback to the Home Office 26
Independent Advisory Group on Country Information 26

Executive summary

On 8 December 2024, the regime of Bashar Al-Assad fell, bringing an end to over 50 years of Al-Assad family rule. An Islamist rebel group called Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) led by Ahmad Al-Sharaa, commenced the 11-day offensive which culminated in the toppling of Al-Assad. Ahmad Al-Sharaa is now the de facto leader of Syria, and figures affiliated with HTS occupy the major positions in the new government.

In the 2012 country guidance case of case of KB (Failed asylum seekers and forced returnees) Syria CG UKUT 00426 (IAC), the Upper Tribunal (UT) held that:

'… in the context of the extremely high level of human rights abuses currently occurring in Syria, a regime which appears increasingly concerned to crush any sign of resistance, it is likely that a failed asylum seeker or forced returnee would, in general, on arrival face a real risk of arrest and detention and of serious mistreatment during that detention as a result of imputed political opinion. That is sufficient to qualify for refugee protection.'

The country information in this note indicates that there are 'very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence' to depart from these findings.

As a result of the change in government, opponents of the former Al-Assad regime are unlikely to be at risk upon return to Syria solely on that basis. A person is also unlikely to be at risk simply by virtue of being a failed asylum seeker or returnee. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.

As of 15 May 2025, over 500,000 Syrians had returned to the country, mostly from neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Damascus airport is now also operational for international flights. CPIT was unable to find any reports of the new Syrian authorities subjecting returnees to mistreatment, arrest or detention. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.

Back to Contents

Assessment

Section updated: 7 June 2025

About the assessment

This section considers the evidence relevant to this note – that is the country information, refugee/human rights laws and policies, and applicable caselaw – and provides an assessment of **whether**, **in general**:

- a person faces a real risk of persecution/serious harm by the Syrian Government on return as a result of having left Syria
- a claim, if refused, is likely or not to be certified as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers **must**, however, consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

Sources cited in the country information may refer interchangeably to Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS), or the interim or de facto government or authorities. Within this assessment, we use the (new) Syrian government and, since 8 December 2024 they are considered the controlling party of the state or a substantial part of the territory of the State (for the purposes of Article 1(A)(2) of the Refugee Convention).

Back to Contents

1. Material facts, credibility and other checks/referrals

1.1 Credibility

1.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

1.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants).

1.1.3 Decision makers must also consider making an international biometric data-sharing check, when such a check has not already been undertaken (see Biometric data-sharing process (Migration 5 biometric data-sharing process)).

1.1.4 In cases where there are doubts surrounding a person's claimed place of origin, decision makers should also consider language analysis testing, where available (see the Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis).

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

Back to Contents

1.2 Exclusion

1.2.1 Under the Al-Assad regime, human rights violations were systematic and widespread. Civilians also suffered human rights abuses at the hands of other parties to the conflict.

1.2.2 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons to apply one (or more) of the exclusion clauses. Each case must be considered on its individual facts.

1.2.3 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).

1.2.4 For guidance on exclusion and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instruction on Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33(2) of the Refugee Convention, Humanitarian Protection and the instruction on Restricted Leave.

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

Back to Contents

2. Convention reason(s)

2.1.1 Actual or imputed political opinion.

2.1.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of an actual or imputed Refugee Convention reason.

2.1.3 In the absence of a link to one of the 5 Refugee Convention reasons necessary for the grant of asylum, the question is whether the person will face a real risk of serious harm to qualify for Humanitarian Protection (HP).

2.1.4 For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention grounds, see the Asylum Instruction, Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

Back to Contents

3. Risk

3.1 Risk from the state

3.1.1 As a result of the change in government, opponents of the former Al-Assad regime are unlikely to be at risk upon return to Syria solely on that basis. A person is also unlikely to be at risk simply by virtue of being a failed asylum

seeker or returnee. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.

3.1.2 On 8 December 2024, opposition forces entered Damascus and declared the end of the regime of President Bashar Al-Assad. Since then, a new interim government – and subsequently a new government – has been ruling Syria (Fall of Al-Assad regime and establishment of new government).

3.1.3 In the country guidance case of KB (Failed asylum seekers and forced returnees) Syria CG UKUT 00426 (IAC), heard on 6-7 March and 7 August 2012 and promulgated on 20 December 2012, the Upper Tribunal (UT) held:

'… in the context of the extremely high level of human rights abuses currently occurring in Syria, a regime which appears increasingly concerned to crush any sign of resistance, it is likely that a failed asylum seeker or forced returnee would, in general, on arrival face a real risk of arrest and detention and of serious mistreatment during that detention as a result of imputed political opinion. That is sufficient to qualify for refugee protection. The position might be otherwise in the case of someone who, notwithstanding a failed claim for asylum, would still be perceived on return to Syria as a supporter of the Assad regime.' (Paragraph 32)

3.1.4 The country information in this note indicates that there are 'very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence' to depart from these findings.

3.1.5 Available information indicates that, as of 15 May 2025, over 500,000 Syrians had returned to the country, mostly from neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. They have returned to different parts of the country, with UNHCR indicating that the most common areas of return are Aleppo, Raqqa and Daraa. Though most returnees have entered Syria by land, several airlines have started operating commercial flights to Damascus from Jordan, Qatar, Turkey and the UAE (see Returnees since the fall of the Al-Assad regime, Flights to Damascus).

3.1.6 CPIT was unable to find information indicating that returnees have faced mistreatment at the hands of the Syrian government. CPIT was also unable to find information indicating that the Syrian government have arrested, detained or questioned returnees. The release of tens of thousands of political prisoners is evidence of the new government's stance towards opponents of the former Al-Assad regime. With the significant media interest in Syria and the intense scrutiny of the new government's actions and policies, it is reasonable to assume that mistreatment of returnees would be reported (see Interim authorities' treatment of and attitude towards opponents of the former Al-Assad regime and returnees).

3.1.7 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

Back to Contents

4. Protection

4.1.1 In general, a person who has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, is unlikely to be able to obtain effective protection.

4.1.2 For further guidance on assessing state protection, see the Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

Back to Contents

5. Internal relocation

5.1.1 In general, a person who has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state is unlikely to be able to internally relocate.

5.1.2 For further guidance on internal relocation and factors to consider, see the Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

Back to Contents

6. Certification

6.1.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

6.1.2 For further guidance on certification, see Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 (clearly unfounded claims).

Back to Contents

Country information

About the country information

This section contains publicly available or disclosable country of origin information (COI) which has been gathered, collated and analysed in line with the research methodology. It provides the evidence base for the assessment which, as stated in the About the assessment, is the guide to the current objective conditions.

The structure and content follow a terms of reference which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to the scope of this note.

This document is intended to be comprehensive but not exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned this does not mean that the event did or did not take place or that the person or organisation does or does not exist.

The COI included was published or made publicly available on or before **16 May 2025**. Any event taking place or report published after this date will not be included.

Decision makers must use relevant COI as the evidential basis for decisions.

Back to Contents

7. Limits on reporting, disinformation and misinformation

7.1 Disinformation and misinformation

7.1.1 On 3 January 2025, Deutsche Welle (DW) reported that:

> 'A deluge of false or misleading information about Syria has flooded social media. Local and international actors are exploiting preexisting divisions to advance their own aims, experts say …
>
> '"…[Misinformation and disinformation] has markedly increased since the fall of the Assad regime," confirmed Zouhir Al-Shimale, a researcher and communications manager for Syrian fact-checking organization, Verify-Sy. "…various factions - both local and international - are now leveraging disinformation to strengthen their positions, delegitimize rivals and further their own agendas…"…
>
> 'Partially or completely untrue social media posts likely originate from a variety of sources…
>
> '… Syrians are likely publishing false posts on social media either accidentally because they believe them to be true and don't have tools to verify them, or to further their own personal agendas or concerns…
>
> '"The Russian and Iranian information manipulation apparats have been operating at full capacity," Marcos Sebares Jimenez-Blanco, a fellow at the German Marshall Fund, wrote in a mid-December briefing. "[They are] seeking to shape the narrative surrounding developments in Syria...." '[1]

7.1.2 On 21 January 2025, the Middle East Institute noted that 'Many of these rumors are impossible to verify, while others are quickly disproven by fact-checking organizations like Verify-Sy.'[2]

7.1.3 On 26 December 2024, Middle East Eye noted that 'Several social media accounts sympathetic to the ousted president are pumping out

[1] Deutsche Welle, How fake news campaigns could push Syria back to civil war, 3 January 2025
[2] MEI, Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria, 21 January 2025

disinformation aimed at stoking sectarian fear'[3]. On 31 January 2025, Context News (which is 'powered by the Thomson Reuters Foundation Newsroom') cited Ruslan Trad, a researcher at the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensics Lab as explaining that 'Assad loyalists were "waging a war of information" on WhatsApp, which is immensely popular in Syria. "Unverified reports from Syria are still shared in sizable group chats and channels, creating the impression of anarchy,".'[4]

7.1.4 The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP) published an article on 30 January 2025 entitled 'Truth in Transition: Disinformation in Post-Assad Syria'. They noted 'Sectarian-based disinformation exploiting the experiences of Syria's minorities is among the most damaging. It not only fuels sectarian divides but also discredits legitimate accounts of human rights violations. While acknowledging the real violations that have occurred during security operations, it should be emphasized that disinformation harms victims most by distorting their stories and creating public skepticism.'[5]

7.1.5 The TIMEP article also includes specific examples involving Christians, Shias, and Alawites. See the respective CPINs for these.

7.1.6 On 10 March 2025, Verify-Sy tweeted to say that 'Amid the unfolding events on the Syrian coast on March 8, manipulation in Syria's online space has reached staggering levels. Fake news, miscontextualized content, and outright disinformation have spread like wildfire. Here's what our team debunked'[6].

7.1.7 See fact-checking website Verify-Sy for further information on mis- and disinformation in Syria, as well as information on false and misleading media stories.

Back to Contents

8. Treatment of returnees by former Al-Assad regime

8.1.1 In April 2024, the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) published a report entitled 'Country Guidance: Syria'. The report, based on a range of sources, stated:

'Several reports documented violations against returnees based on interviews with returnees and their relatives, namely unlawful or arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, including rape and sexual violence, and enforced disappearance. These also took place in Damascus, the Damascus area and the international airport. The UN also observed that the Syrian authorities routinely denied Syrians return to their places of origin, most notably in formerly besieged areas that had been retaken by the Syrian armed forces. Some sources stated that some groups of returnees were denied access to a particular area of origin, because of their ethnicity, religion and/or political orientation.

'More recently, the UNCOI [United Nations Commission of Inquiry], described cases of returnees from abroad to GoS [Government of Syria] areas who were either extorted, arrested, detained, conscripted, tortured, or

[3] MEE, Disinformation stokes Alawi unease as Assad loyalists pursued in Syria, 26 December 2024
[4] Context, Digital discord: online disinformation sowing discontent in Syria, 31 January 2025
[5] TIMEP, Truth in Transition: Disinformation in Post-Assad Syria, 30 January 2025
[6] X/Twitter, (@VeSyriaE), Post on X dated 10 March 2025 @ 11:47AM.

forcibly disappeared. Numerous arrests of returnees were also reported at the Syrian-Lebanese border (notably at the al-Masnaa border crossing), including of individuals returning from Lebanon under a voluntary repatriation scheme after agreeing to security settlements with the GoS. Further concentrations of arrests of returnees, including persons who were wanted for opposition to the GoS, draft evasion or defection from the Syrian military, were reported at the Syrian-Turkish border, especially at the Kasab border crossing.

'Returnees from abroad were arrested for a variety of reasons, most frequently on broad accusations of "terrorism", often based on the claim that a relative was affiliated with the political or armed opposition, because the returnee originated from an area previously held by the opposition, for their alleged participation in protests or political opposition groups in the early days of the Syrian uprising, or for purportedly criticising Syria. There were also cases of returnees being arrested for the purpose of exacting bribes in exchange for their release.'[7]

Back to Contents

9. Fall of the Al-Assad regime and establishment of new government

9.1 Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS)

9.1.1 A BBC article entitled 'Who are the rebels in Syria?', published on 30 November 2024 and updated on 8 December 2024, stated:

'HTS was set up under a different name, Jabhat al-Nusra, in 2011 as a direct affiliate of al-Qaeda. The leader of the self-styled Islamic State (IS) group, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was also involved in its formation. It was regarded as one of the most effective and deadly of the groups ranged against President Assad. It was proscribed as a terrorist group by the UN, the US, Turkey and other countries – and it remains so.

'But al-Jolani [whose real name is Ahmad Al-Sharaa] publicly broke ranks with al-Qaeda, dissolved Jabhat al-Nusra and set up a new organisation, which took the name Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) when it merged with several other similar groups a year later. There were doubts at the time – and some still remain – over whether HTS had completely renounced its links with al-Qaeda. But its message in the past week and a half has been one of inclusiveness and a rejection of violence or revenge. The group has in the past been involved in internecine conflict with other rebel and opposition groups.'[8]

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

Back to Contents

[7] EUAA, Country Guidance: Syria (Pages 18 – 19), 15 April 2024
[8] BBC, Who are the rebels in Syria?, updated 8 December 2024

9.2 Opposition offensive leading to fall of regime

9.2.1 In the early morning of Sunday 8 December 2024, opposition forces (also referred to as rebels) entered Damascus and declared the end of the regime of President Bashar Al-Assad, who fled to Russia. The fall of Damascus was the culmination of an 11-day offensive which started in north-west Syria. Faced with little resistance from the regime, rebels took control of the cities of Aleppo, Hama, and Homs. Meanwhile, other opposition groups gained control of the city of Deir Ezzor in the east of the country, while the regime also relinquished control of the southern cities of Daraa and Suwayda [9] [10].

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

Back to Contents

9.3 Interim authorities

9.3.1 On 10 December 2024, Al Jazeera reported:

'Syrian fighters who toppled President Bashar al-Assad have appointed Mohammed al-Bashir as the country's caretaker prime minister.

'Al-Bashir, who headed the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham-led de facto government in Idlib province, will lead a transitional Syrian government until March 1, 2025, he said on Tuesday in a televised statement.

'… Al-Bashir headed the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG) in Idlib province before the 12-day lightning offensive swept into Damascus, toppling longtime leader al-Assad and ending more than half a century of al-Assad family rule.

'Al-Bashir has close ties to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) – the group that led the Damascus takeover – which is tied to the SSG he headed.

'The SSG, with its own ministries, departments, judicial and security authorities, was set up in the northwest bastion of Idlib in 2017 to assist people in the rebel-held area who were cut off from government services.

'… The SSG has begun rolling out assistance in Aleppo, the first major city to fall from government hands after opposition forces began their offensive.

'… HTS's leader Ahmed al-Sharaa, also known as Abu Mohammed al-Julani, met outgoing Prime Minister Mohammed Ghazi al-Jalali on Monday to discuss the transition to a caretaker government.'[11]

9.3.2 On 21 December 2024, Al Jazeera published an article entitled 'Syrian authorities appoint HTS figures as foreign, defence ministers' which stated:

'Syria's new rulers have appointed a foreign and defence minister, the official Syrian news agency SANA [Syrian Arab News Agency] reports, as they seek to build international relations two weeks after Bashar al-Assad was ousted.

[9] Al Jazeera, What happened in Syria? How did al-Assad fall?, 8 December 2024
[10] Sky News, How the rebel assault unfolded in Syria…, 8 December 2024
[11] Al Jazeera, Syrian fighters name Mohammed al-Bashir as…, 10 December 2024

'The ruling General Command on Saturday named Asaad Hassan al-Shaibani as foreign minister, SANA said. A source in the new administration told the Reuters news agency that this step "comes in response to the aspirations of the Syrian people to establish international relations that bring peace and stability".

'Murhaf Abu Qasra was named defence minister in the interim government, an official source told Reuters. Abu Qasra, who is also known by the nom de guerre Abu Hassan 600, is a senior figure in the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) group, …

'Al Jazeera's Resul Serdar, reporting from Damascus, said Abu Qasra and al-Shaibani were "very much close" to HTS leader Ahmed al-Sharaa. "This is raising questions whether HTS is forming its own government or Syria's government," he noted.

"So far, 14 ministers have been appointed, and all of them are close allies or friends of al-Sharaa."'[12]

9.3.3 On 3 February 2025, Etana, an 'independent organisation' which 'serves as a civil and diplomatic service for Syrians who want to live with freedom, dignity and justice'[13], published an article which stated:

'On Wednesday, 29th January, Syria's interim authorities confirmed Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) leader Ahmad al-Shara'a (formerly known by his nom de guerre Abu Muhammad al-Jolani) as interim president of Syria and approved several other unilateral decisions related to interim governance, including the dissolution of parliament and formation of a HTS-led council tasked with reviewing the now-annulled Assad-era constitution. Despite the lofty optics of al-Shara'a's ascension to the presidency, the move effectively cements one of the immediate post-Assad political realities: al-Shara'a has in fact acted as the de facto leader of the country since Bashar al-Assad fled the country in early December last year. Potentially more consequential is the HTS directive dissolving parliament, the constitution and the Ba'ath Party, effectively consolidating control of Syria in the hands of HTS-led authorities for the time being and potentially giving them greater powers to shape the future fabric of the Syrian state long after the end of the now-extended interim period in mid-2025.'[14]

Back to Contents

9.4 Announcement of new government (29 March 2025)

9.4.1 On 30 March 2025, Middle East Eye (MEE) published a report entitled 'Syria reveals new religiously diverse interim government' which stated:

'Syria has revealed the line-up of its new interim government, which includes members of religious minorities and early veterans of the 2011 uprising against Bashar al-Assad.

'Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa announced 23 new ministers on Saturday [29 March 2025], composing a government intended to rule for five years before a constitution is settled and elections are held.

[12] Al Jazeera, Syrian authorities appoint HTS figures as…, 21 December 2024
[13] Etana, About us, undated
[14] Etana, Syria Update #16, 3 February 2025

'Yarub Badr, a member of the Alawite religious community to which Assad belongs, was named transportation minister, while Amgad Badr, who is Druze, and Hind Kabawat, a Christian, were announced to lead the agriculture ministry and social affairs and labour ministry, respectively.

'"We are witnessing the birth of a new phase in our national process, and the formation of a new government today is a declaration of our common will to build a new state," Sharaa said in a speech during the ceremony announcing the government.

'"We will seek to rehabilitate industry, protect national products and create an encouraging environment for investment in all sectors. We will also strive to reform the monetary situation, strengthen the Syrian currency and prevent manipulation."'[15]

9.4.2 For more information see the articles published by Al Jazeera and CNN.

Back to Contents

10. Returnees since the fall of the Al-Assad regime

NOTE: The maps in this section are not intended to reflect the UK Government's views of any boundaries.

10.1 Total number as of 8 January 2025

10.1.1 A report published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on 10 January 2025 ('the UNHCR report') stated:

'As of 8 January [2025], UNHCR estimates that more than 125,000 Syrians have returned in the one month following the change in government, primarily to Aleppo, Ar-Raqqa and Dar'a. This is based on a triangulation of information from both outside and inside Syria, including official government data, and includes Syrians refugees who are registered with UNHCR as well as other groups of Syrians.

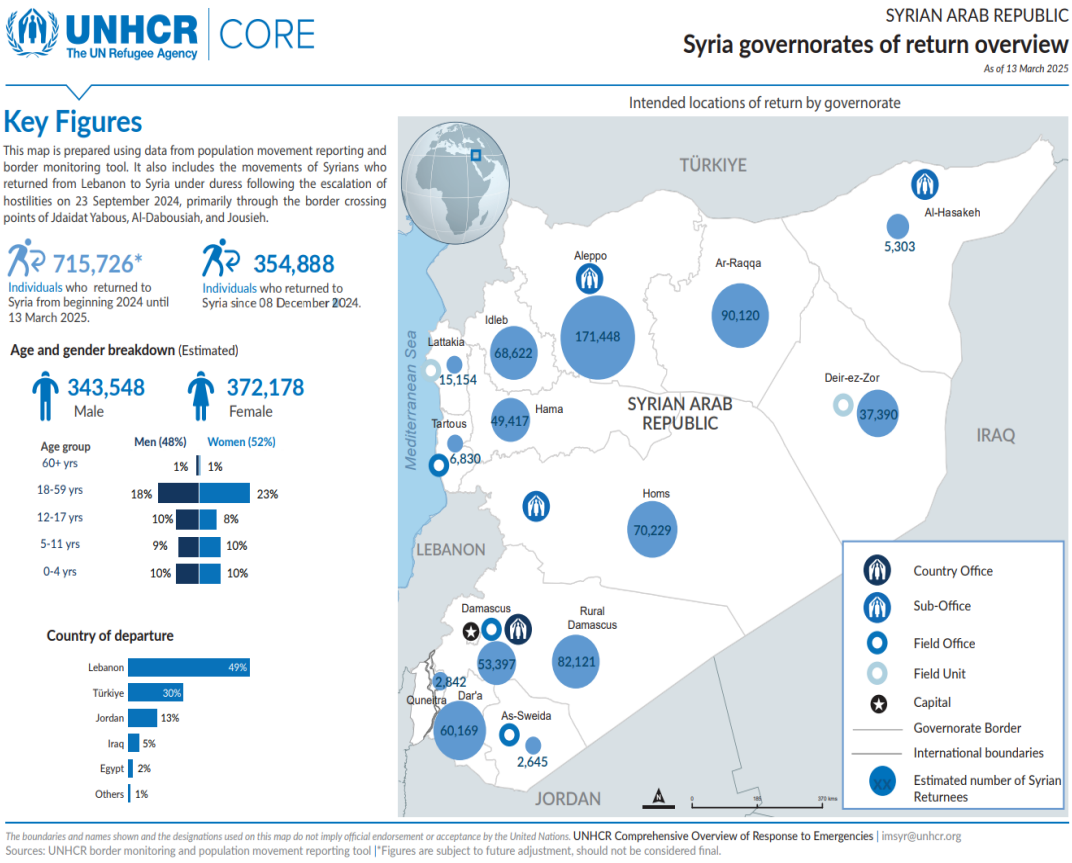
'Of the 1.1 million people internally displaced by the escalation of hostilities at the end of November, approximately 627,000 people remain newly displaced, 75% of whom are women and children. Meanwhile, nearly 523,000 people have returned to their areas of origin, mainly in Hama and Aleppo governorates.'[16]

Back to Contents

10.2 Total number as of 13 March 2025

10.2.1 UNHCR's updated report recorded 354,888 returnees to Syria since 8 December 2024[17], broken down as follows

[15] MEE, Syria reveals new religiously diverse interim government, 30 March 2025
[16] UNHCR, UNHCR Regional Flash Update #9 – Syria Situation Crisis… (Page 2), 10 January 2025
[17] UNHCR, UNHCR Syria: Syria governorates of return overview- 13 March 2025, 16 March 2025



Back to Contents

10.3 Total number as of 27 March 2025

10.3.1 UNHCR's updated report '… estimates that 371,900 Syrians have crossed back into Syria from neighboring countries since 8 December 2024. This brings up the total of 732,700 Syrian individuals that have crossed back into Syria since the beginning of 2024. As with previous weeks, most refugee returnees continue to cross from Lebanon, followed by Türkiye, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.'[18]

Back to Contents

10.4 Total number as of 8 May 2025

10.4.1 An infographic published by UNHCR stated that as of 15 May 2025, 501,126 individuals had returned to Syria since 8 December 2024. Of this figure, 47% returned from Lebanon, 33% returned from Turkey, 13% returned from Jordan, 5% from Iraq and 2% from Egypt[19].

Back to Contents

10.5 From Turkey

10.5.1 On 9 January 2025, Hurriyet Daily News, a Turkish news site that describes itself as the 'leading news source for Turkey and the region'[20], published an article entitled 'Turkish interior minister visits border crossing with Syria' which stated:

[18] UNHCR, Regional Flash Update #20 (Page 2), 27 March 2025
[19] UNHCR, Syria governorates of return overview as of 15 May 2025, 16 May 2025
[20] Hurriyet Daily News, Home Page, undated

'Some 52,662 Syrian refugees residing in Türkiye have returned to their homeland since the regime's downfall, [interior minister] Yerlikaya told reporters during the visit.

'Yerlikaya noted that this figure included 41,000 individuals comprising family units, with the remainder being single returnees.

'Highlighting the challenges posed by Syria's infrastructural deficiencies, Yerlikaya underscored Türkiye's initiative labeled as "pioneer migrants." This program allows one family member to conduct up to three round trips prior to permanent resettlement, enabling them to assess living conditions.'[21]

10.5.2 On 10 January 2025, Al-Monitor, a US-based media service that covers the Middle East[22], published an article entitled 'As Turkey eases ban, Syrian refugees can now visit before deciding to return'. It stated:

'Since 2023, Turkish authorities have effectively prevented Syrians who travel home from returning to Turkey after Syrians visiting their homeland during religious holidays sparked a backlash among the Turkish public, intensifying anti-refugee sentiments in Turkey.

'Turkey hosts the world's largest refugee population, including nearly 3 million registered Syrians who fled the civil war. The number of unregistered Syrians is unknown but is estimated to be around 5 million.

'While the fall of the Syrian regime and its longtime dictator Bashar al-Assad on Dec. 8 [2024] empowered more Syrians to travel to their hometowns to check on their homes, many were afraid to do so because of the no-return rule.

'Under the new measure, one adult from each Syrian family will be allowed to enter and exit Turkey up to three times within a six-month period.

'"Under the instructions of our president, we have also given it a name: pioneer immigrant," Yerlikaya said Thursday.

'"When a breadwinner or an adult member of the family applies to us as a pioneer immigrant, we grant permission on the same day," he said.

'The move aims to help Syrian families make needed arrangements and address issues before the families return to live, Yerlikaya added.'[23]

10.5.3 The UNHCR report stated 'On 9 January [2025], Minister of Interior Ali Yerlikaya visited Cilvegözü / Bab al Hawa border crossing where he announced that 52,622 people have voluntarily returned to Syria from Türkiye since 8 December [2024]. The Minister noted that the voluntary return process is carried out in accordance with national and international law, with UNHCR witnessing the process.'[24]

Back to Contents

10.6 From Lebanon

10.6.1 The UNHCR report stated:

'Three official border crossings remain open between Lebanon and Syria,

[21] Hurriyet Daily News, Turkish interior minister visits border crossing with Syria, 9 January 2025
[22] Al-Monitor, Who We Are, undated
[23] Al-Monitor, As Turkey eases ban, Syrian refugees can now visit before…, 10 January 2025
[24] UNHCR, UNHCR Regional Flash Update #9 – Syria Situation Crisis… (Page 2), 10 January 2025

with the Masnaa official border crossing in Bekaa being the only crossing open for vehicle traffic. Movements continue on a daily basis at a low but steady rate with approximately 1,000-1,500 crossings per day at the official border crossings, mostly through Masnaa. Irregular and often pendular movements continue to take place through unofficial crossing points; while numbers are more difficult to quantify, these crossings are more likely to be shorter visits to and from Syria.'[25] The report did not say how many of the crossings were into Syria as opposed to into Lebanon, nor did it provide estimates of the number of people who have permanently returned to Syria from Lebanon.

Back to Contents

10.7 From Jordan

10.7.1 The UNHCR report stated:

'While the total number of Syrians crossing from Jordan to Syria is significantly higher [than 5,100], at least some 5,100 Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR returned to Syria in December 2024, most of them following the fall of the Assad regime. This brings the total number of registered refugees returning from Jordan in 2024 to some 17,200, representing a significant increase compared to previous months in 2024 as well as to previous years. The number of refugee returns in December 2024 surpassed the total number of returns in all of 2023, which numbered some 4,400. UNHCR is aware that the daily average of registered refugees returning in January 2025 has increased. Many refugees returning from Jordan to Syria originate from Dar'a, though an increasing proportion originate from other areas in Syria, especially Homs. Refugees returned from urban and rural areas of Jordan primarily.

'In December, 64% of those returning were men/boys and 36% were women and girls. Of these, 36% were complete family units, meaning that all members of the family were traveling back together. Children (both boys and girls) represent around 27% of total returnees throughout the month, and elderly around 5% of returnees.

'Notable numbers of buses from Queen Alia International Airport in Amman are transporting passengers to the Syrian border. The passengers arrived predominantly from Europe, with some coming from the Gulf. Most of the passengers are Syrians who hope to visit their family and friends inside Syria temporarily.'[26]

10.7.2 On 11 January 2025, 'independent English-language daily'[27] the Jordan Times reported:

'A total of 52,406 Syrians have voluntarily returned home from the Kingdom [of Jordan] since rebels outsed Bashar Al Assad on December 8 [2024], according to the Ministry of Interior.

'In its latest figures, the ministry said that a total of 1,053 registered Syrian refugees have voluntarily returned home from camps, while the number of Syrian returnees outside camps reached 10,262, bringing the total number of

[25] UNHCR, UNHCR Regional Flash Update #9 – Syria Situation Crisis… (Page 3), 10 January 2025
[26] UNHCR, UNHCR Regional Flash Update #9 – Syria Situation Crisis… (Page 3), 10 January 2025
[27] The Jordan Times, About us, undated

refugee departures through the Jaber crossing with Syria to 11,315.

'In total, 52,406 Syrians, including refugees and non-refugees, have left Jordan through the Jaber border crossing with Syria, some from other countries before continuing their journey to Syria, the government-owned Al Mamlaka TV reported, citing ministry's figures.

'… According to official figures, Jordan is home to around 1.3 million Syrians, including nearly 660,000 refugees registered [with the] UNHCR, out of more than 5 million Syrian refugees in Jordan and neighboring countries.'[28]

Back to Contents

10.8 From Iraq

10.8.1 The UNHCR report stated:

'An estimated 2,000 Syrians permanently returned from Iraq since 8 December [2024], including 159 Syrians registered with UNHCR. These returns occurred through both the Peshkabour border crossing, located between Syria and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), and the Al-Qaim border crossing in Federal Iraq.

'Over the past week, UNHCR has noted a slight decrease in the number of registered Syrian refugees returning through Peshkabour. The overall numbers remain low, with an average of 7 Syrian refugees returning daily. Most Syrian refugees who have returned over the last week have returned to Al-Hassakeh, followed by Aleppo, with returnees citing the improved security situation and the high cost of living in KR-I as the main reasons for their return.'[29]

Back to Contents

11. Flights to Damascus

11.1.1 On 23 January 2025, London-based news site[30] The New Arab published an article entitled 'Which international airlines have resumed flights to Syria?' which stated:

'After international flights resumed at Damascus International Airport earlier this month for the first time since the ousting of Bashar al-Assad, commercial trips have started again following the halting of operations last month due to the former regime's overthrow.

'State news agency SANA previously confirmed the resumption of international flights, quoting Ashhad al-Salibi, head of the General Authority of Civil Aviation and Air Transport, who stated that the country's main airport in Damascus was ready to restart operations.

'… Commercial flights between Turkey and Syria resumed on Thursday after a 13-year hiatus

'A Turkish Airlines flight from Istanbul to Damascus carried 345 passengers, including Turkish Airlines CEO Bilal Eksi and Turkish officials.

[28] The Jordan Times, 52,406 Syrians return home since Assad fall…, 11 January 2025
[29] UNHCR, UNHCR Regional Flash Update #9 – Syria Situation Crisis… (Page 4), 10 January 2025
[30] The New Arab, About Us, undated

'"The first Turkish Airlines passenger plane landed at Damascus International Airport after a hiatus of some 13 years, with Syrian passengers on board," SANA reported.

'… Turkish Airlines plans to operate three flights per week to Damascus.

'Qatar Airways was the first international airline to announce the resumption of flights to Damascus, commencing operations on 7 January.

'Qatar, which had suspended flights 13 years earlier due to its opposition to Assad's regime, has now re-established this route.

'A Syrian Airlines flight to Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates on the same day became the first international commercial flight from Damascus since Assad's overthrow on 8 December.

'Earlier this month, a Royal Jordanian Airlines test flight landed in Damascus, marking the first international commercial arrival post-Assad.

'The airline will officially resume regular flights on 31 January, operating four times weekly and connecting Damascus to over 45 destinations across Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, and the Gulf.

'By April 2025, Royal Jordanian plans to increase the frequency of daily flights.

'Additionally, Wizz Air Abu Dhabi is monitoring developments in Syria closely. The ultra-low-cost carrier told Emirati news outlet The National that it is evaluating the potential demand for flights into the country.'[31]

Back to Contents

12. Interim authorities' treatment of and attitude towards opponents of the former Al-Assad regime and returnees

12.1 Treatment of returnees

12.1.1 On 13 January 2025, Hurriyet Daily News reported:

'Syria's new administration anticipates the return of 14 million refugees to the country within two years, amidst intensifying efforts to foster stability and appeals for the alleviation of international sanctions.

'… "I am confident that 14 million Syrians will return to their country in two years. Only around 1 to 1.5 million will remain [abroad]," Syria's new ruler Ahmad al-Sharaa said, speaking to Dubai-based documentary filmmaker and YouTube content creator Joe HaTTab in a video.

'Describing the new administration's goal as "victory without vengeance," he supported reconciliation efforts and an amnesty policy for those who switched allegiances after the regime's fall.

'In tandem with these developments, Syria resumed its passport issuance operations on Jan. 13 [2025], marking a critical step in facilitating the return of its diaspora and restoring state functionality.'[32]

12.1.2 CPIT was unable to find information about the authorities' treatment of returnees since the fall of the Al-Assad regime in the sources consulted (see

[31] The New Arab, Which international airlines have resumed flights to Syria?, 23 January 2025
[32] Hurriyet Daily News, Syria expects mass refugee return as revival efforts step up, 13 January 2024

Bibliography).

Back to Contents

12.2 Treatment of opponents of the former Al-Assad regime

12.2.1 On 10 December 2024, the Associated Press published an article about the freeing of political prisoners after the fall of the Al-Assad regime which stated:

'As the insurgents [rebel forces led by HTS] swept across Syria in just 10 days to bring an end to the Assad family's 50-year rule, they broke into prisons and security facilities to free political prisoners and many of the tens of thousands of people who disappeared since the conflict began back in 2011.

'… Videos shared widely across social media showed dozens of prisoners running in celebration after the insurgents released them, some barefoot and others wearing little clothing. One of them screams in celebration after he finds out that the government has fallen.

'… Tens of thousands of detainees have so far been freed, said Rami Abdurrahman of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based pro-opposition war monitor.

'… Over the past 10 days, insurgents freed prisoners in cities including Aleppo, Homs, Hama as well as Damascus.[33]

12.2.2 For more information see the CPIN Syria: Alawites and Actual or Perceived Assadists.

Back to Contents

[33] Associated Press, Syrian rebels free prisoners from Assad's notorious…, 10 December 2024

Research methodology

The country of origin information (COI) in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the Common EU [European Union] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information (COI), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2024. Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources

Commentary may be provided on source(s) and information to help readers understand the meaning and limits of the COI.

Wherever possible, multiple sourcing is used and the COI compared to ensure that it is accurate and balanced, and provides a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of the issues relevant to this note at the time of publication.

The inclusion of a source is not, however, an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote.

Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the Bibliography.

Back to Contents

Terms of Reference

The ‘Terms of Reference’ (ToR) provides a broad outline of the issues relevant to the scope of this note and forms the basis for the country information.

The following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- Fall of Al-Assad regime
  - How the regime fell
  - Who replaced the regime
- Returnees
  - Number of returnees
  - Countries from which Syrians are returning
  - Treatment of returnees by new authorities
  - Treatment of returnees by former Al-Assad regime

Back to Contents

Bibliography

Sources cited

Al Jazeera,

Syrian authorities appoint HTS figures as foreign, defence ministers, 21 December 2024. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Syrian fighters name Mohammed al-Bashir as caretaker prime minister, 10 December 2024. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Syrian president al-Sharaa unveils transitional government, 30 March 2025. Accessed: 31 March 2025

What happened in Syria? How did al-Assad fall?, 8 December 2024. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Al-Monitor,

As Turkey eases ban, Syrian refugees can now visit before deciding to return, 10 January 2025. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Who We Are, undated. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Associated Press, Syrian rebels free prisoners from Assad's notorious dungeons who celebrate in Damascus streets, 10 December 2024. Accessed: 25 February 2025

BBC, Who are the rebels in Syria?, updated 8 December 2024. Accedssed: 23 January 2025

CNN, Syria swears in new transitional government months after Assad's removal, 30 March 2025. Accessed: 31 March 2025

Context, Digital discord: online disinformation sowing discontent in Syria, 31 January 2025. Accessed: 4 February 2025

Deutsche Welle (DW),

Syria [main page], undated. Accessed: 9 January 2025

How fake news campaigns could push Syria back to civil war, 3 January 2025. Accessed: 4 February 2025

European Union Agency for Asylum, Country Guidance: Syria, 15 April 2024. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Etana,

About us, undated. Accessed: 25 February 2025

Syria Update #16, 3 February 2025. Accessed: 25 February 2025

Hurriyet Daily News,

Home Page, undated. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Syria expects mass refugee return as revival efforts step up, 13 January 2024

Turkish interior minister visits border crossing with Syria, 9 January 2025. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Italian Institute for International Political Studies,

About the Institute, undated. Accessed: 23 January 2025

The End of Assad: A New Chapter in Syrian History, 8 December 2024. Accessed: 9 January 2025

Middle East Eye (MEE),

Disinformation stokes Alawi unease as Assad loyalists pursued in Syria, 26 December 2024. Accessed: 4 February 2025

Syria reveals new religiously diverse interim government, 30 March 2025. Accessed: 31 March 2025

Middle East Institute (MEI), Security in Alawite regions in post-Assad Syria, 21 January 2025. Accessed: 28 January 2025

Sky News, How the rebel assault unfolded in Syria – from Idlib to Damascus, 8 December 2024. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP),

About us, undated. Accessed: 23 January 2025

A Post-Assad Syria: Navigating the Transition Ahead, 19 December 2024. Accessed: 9 January 2025

Truth in Transition: Disinformation in Post-Assad Syria, 30 January 2025. Accessed: 4 February 2025

The Jordan Times,

About us, undated. Accessed: 15 January 2025

52,406 Syrians return home since Assad fall – Interior Ministry, 11 January 2025. Accessed: 15 January 2025

The New Arab,

About Us, undated. Accessed: 25 February 2025

Which international airlines have resumed flights to Syria?, 23 January 2025

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),

UNHCR Regional Flash Update #9 – Syria Situation Crisis (10 January 2025), 10 January 2025. Accessed: 15 January 2025

UNHCR Syria: Syria governorates of return overview- 13 March 2025, 16 March 2025. Accessed: 18 March 2025

Regional Flash Update #20, 27 March 2025. Accessed: 31 March 2025

Syria governorates of return overview as of 15 May 2025, 16 May 2025. Accessed: 19 May 2025

X,

(@VeSyriaE), Profile. Accessed: 10 March 2025

(@VeSyriaE), Post on X dated 10 March 2025 @ 11:47AM. Accessed: 10 March 2025

Back to Contents

Sources consulted but not cited

Al Jazeera, First Syria flight takes off from Damascus airport since Assad's downfall,

18 December 2024. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Arab News,

The Syrian refugees in a post-Assad era, 27 December 2024. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Turkiye to reopen Syria border post for returning refugees: Erdogan, 9 December 2024. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Daily Sabah, More than 52,000 'pioneer' refugees return to Syria from Turkiye, 9 January 2025. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Duvar English, About 1,700 refugees return to Syria daily, Turkish Interior Ministry says, 31 December 2024. Accessed: 15 January 2025

European Country of Origin Information Network, Syrian Arab Republic – Information collection on development regarding the fall of president Assad, undated. Accessed: 15 January 2025

House of Commons Library, Syria after Assad 2024/25: Consequences and next steps, 19 December 2024

International Organisation for Migration,

Responding to Syria at a Time of Need; Statement by IOM Chief, 20 December 2024. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Urgent and Sustained Global Support Needed to Build on New Dawn says IOM Chief Visiting Syria, 17 December 2024. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Inter Press Service, UN Commits to Supporting Syria in Political Transition, Adapting Humanitarian Support, 20 December 2024. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Middle East Eye, Lebanon's Syrian refugees turn their eyes to home after fall of Assad, 20 December 2024. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Migration Policy Institute, The Complicated Reality of Syrians' Returni, 19 December 2024. Accessed: 15 January 2025

The New Humanitarian, Syrians begin to return to destroyed homes. Will others follow?, 19 December 2024. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Sky News,

How Syrian rebels overthrew the Assad Regime in just over a week, 9 December 2024. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Who is Syrian rebel leader Abu Mohammed al Jolani and what are his links to al Qaeda?, 9 December 2024. Accessed: 15 January 2025

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR Preparedness and Response – Voluntary Return of Syrian Refugees (January – June 2025), 17 December 2024. Accessed: 16 January 2025

United Nations News, Over 115,000 Syrians have returned home since end of Assad dictatorship, 2 January 2025. Accessed: 15 January 2025

Back to Contents

Version control and feedback

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **1.0**
- valid from **14 July 2025**

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – Start of section

The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

Back to Contents

Changes from last version of this note

First version.

Back to Contents

Feedback to the Home Office

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance. We welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the Country Policy and Information Team.

Back to Contents

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support them in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information
Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration
1st Floor
Clive House
70 Petty France
London
SW1H 9EX
Email: chiefinspector@icibi.gov.uk

Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the gov.uk website.

Back to Contents