



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Syria: Religious minorities (excluding Alawites)

Version 2.0

11 February 2026

Executive summary

In general, Christians and Shia Muslims (excluding Alawites) are unlikely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from state or non-state actors. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise. Since coming to power in December 2024, the new government has engaged with Christian and Shia community leaders and has provided security for religious sites and festivals. While there are reports of attacks, harassment and discrimination by both state and non-state actors, the frequency and severity of these incidents do not suggest that there is a generalised risk to Christians and Shia Muslims.

In general, the Druze are likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from state and non-state actors. Between March and July 2025, several episodes of violence took place involving Druze militias, government forces, and Bedouin armed groups. Reports indicate that government forces and Bedouin armed groups subjected hundreds of Druze civilians to severe human rights abuses in Suweida in July 2025. Major clashes have not taken place since July 2025, but tensions remain high. Anti-Druze sentiment has increased since the violence began, leading to discrimination, harassment and attacks against Druze in various parts of the country.

Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to obtain protection. Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from a non-state actor, they are unlikely to be able to obtain protection from the state.

Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to internally relocate to escape that risk. Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from non-state or rogue state actors, they may be able to internally relocate to escape that risk, depending on their individual circumstances.

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.

All cases must be considered on their individual facts, with the onus on the person to demonstrate they face persecution or serious harm.

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Assessment

Section updated: 14 January 2026

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 from state or non-state actors because they are Christian, Druze, or Shia Muslim
- the state (or quasi state bodies) can provide effective protection
- internal relocation is possible to avoid persecution/serious harm
- 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.

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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 one 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](#)).

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- 1.1.5 The information in this section has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use only.
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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 (see the CPIN [Syria: Security situation](#)).
- 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](#).

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2. Convention reason(s)

- 2.1.1 Actual or imputed religion and/or race.
- 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. For further guidance on the 5 Refugee Convention grounds, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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3. Risk

3.1 Christians

- 3.1.1 In general, Christians are unlikely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from state or non-state actors. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise.
- 3.1.2 Reliable population data for Christians in Syria is not available, but sources provided rough estimates ranging from 300,000 to 579,000. The Christian population has declined significantly since the start of the civil war due to

migration, with one source estimating that the population was 2.1 million in 2011. Syria's Christians belong to various denominations, including a number of different Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches. There are Christian communities in cities and rural areas across the country. According to one source, the majority of Syria's Christians are located in Damascus and the surrounding areas (see [Population numbers and locations](#)).

- 3.1.3 Following the toppling of the Al-Assad regime in December 2024, many Christians were concerned for their freedom and safety due to uncertainty about the new Islamist-led government. However, the government has stated that it will ensure their safety, and President Ahmad Al-Sharaa has positively engaged with Christian leaders. In addition, the government appointed a Christian woman, Hind Kabawat, as Minister of Social Affairs and Labour (see [Treatment by the state](#)).
- 3.1.4 Security forces have made efforts to provide security for Christians. For example, they enhanced security in Christian neighbourhoods around Christmas 2024 and Easter 2025, and they foiled an attempted bombing of a church near Tartus in July 2025. However, attacks have taken place. The most severe attack involved a suicide bomber from a Daesh-aligned group targeting a church in Damascus in June 2025, killing dozens and injuring over 60. After the attack, Christian community leaders criticised the authorities for ignoring persistent threats and minor incidents that had taken place in the months leading up to the attack, such as vandalism of Christian symbols and cemeteries. Despite the government's assurances to the Christian community, some Christians remain wary of it (see [Treatment by the state](#), [Treatment by non-state actors](#) and [Christians' perceptions of their safety under the new government](#))).
- 3.1.5 Sources also reported other attacks targeting Christians, including murders, kidnappings, robberies, and arson, with a significant proportion of these incidents taking place in Homs governorate. However, some of the attacks were motivated by reasons other than religion. For example, some victims were reportedly targeted due to perceived affiliation with the former Al-Assad regime or – in the case of kidnappings for ransom – perceived wealth. In those cases, it was unclear to what extent the victims' religion was a relevant factor in their targeting. According to one source, government-affiliated personnel operating outside government control were behind several attacks. Another source reported an incident where government-affiliated personnel shaved the heads of several Christian young men and subjected them to beatings and sectarian insults, apparently as punishment for interacting with women in public. However, a different source indicated that the perpetrators were not affiliated with the government and that only one Christian was involved. Overall, the number and frequency of attacks are not sufficient for there to be a generalised risk to Christians (see [Treatment by the state](#) and [Treatment by non-state actors](#)).
- 3.1.6 There are reports of Christians facing verbal harassment in some areas. One source indicates that Christians in Syria's coastal areas have faced harassment from government personnel for wearing crosses, while another source states that checkpoint personnel have harassed Christians traveling between governorates. In addition, sources report an increase in Islamist preachers proselytising in Christian-majority neighbourhoods of Damascus,

using loudspeakers and posters to encourage residents to convert to Islam and women to wear the hijab. In May 2025, leaflets appeared in Hama city insulting and threatening the Christian community, and an armed group marched through a nearby town chanting about Islam (see [Treatment by the state](#) and [Treatment by non-state actors](#)).

- 3.1.7 At least 7 Christians were killed in the March 2025 violence against Alawites in Syria's coastal areas. However, sources indicate that, unlike Alawites, Christians were not specifically targeted on the basis of their religion (see [March 2025 violence in coastal areas](#) and the CPIN [Syria: Alawites and actual or perceived Assadists](#)).
- 3.1.8 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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3.2 Druze

- 3.2.1 In general, Druze are likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm from state and non-state actors.
- 3.2.2 Reliable population data for the Druze in Syria is not available, but sources estimate that they make up about 3% of the total population, which equates to approximately 750,000. Roughly half of the world's Druze population is in Syria, with most others in Lebanon and Israel. In Syria, they primarily live in Suweida governorate in the south, but there are also Druze communities near Damascus and in Aleppo and Idlib governorates in the northwest (see [Population numbers and locations](#)).
- 3.2.3 Sources indicate that most Druze remained neutral during the civil war and that Suweida witnessed significantly less fighting and destruction than many other parts of the country. The Druze community in Suweida had a degree of autonomy under the Al-Assad regime. This autonomy increased during 2025. At the time of writing, a union of Druze militias called the National Guard, led by Sheikh Hikmat Al-Hijri, control most of Suweida governorate, including the city of Suweida. Al-Hijri declared a temporary autonomous government in Suweida in August 2025 which is administered separately from the central Syrian government (see [Governance status of Suweida](#)).
- 3.2.4 Between March and July 2025, multiple episodes of violence took place involving Druze militias, government forces, and various non-state armed groups that were predominantly Bedouin groups. March and April 2025 saw several clashes in suburbs of Damascus. The most severe escalation during that period, which resulted in 130 deaths, was sparked by a widely circulated fake audio recording of a Druze cleric insulting the Prophet Muhammad. Local community leaders signed a de-escalation agreement with government officials on 29 April 2025, but minor clashes broke out between Druze and Bedouin armed groups in Suweida and Daraa governorates in early May (see [Clashes between Druze militias, government forces and Bedouin groups](#)).
- 3.2.5 Sources did not report further clashes until July 2025, when violence in Suweida resulted in 1,000–2,000 deaths. The abduction of a Druze merchant on the Damascus-Suweida highway on 13 July 2025 led to intense sectarian fighting between Sunni Muslim Bedouin tribal groups and Druze militias. On 15 July 2025, government forces deployed to Suweida, before withdrawing

the next day after intense Israeli airstrikes (see paragraph 3.2.7). Druze militias then attacked Bedouin groups in the countryside, leading them to call in reinforcements from across the country, with up to 50,000 men from about 40 clans reportedly converging on Suweida in support of their fellow Bedouins. On 19 July 2025, a ceasefire came into force, but minor clashes continued until 22 July 2025 (see [Clashes between Druze militias, government forces and Bedouin groups](#)).

- 3.2.6 On 13 November 2025, new clashes broke out in western Suweida governorate between the National Guard and government forces, involving heavy weapons and lasting several hours. Minor confrontations had reportedly been taking place regularly in the months leading up to this incident. One source reported two further clashes in western Suweida in December 2025. However, severe fighting has not taken place since July 2025 (see [Clashes between Druze militias, government forces and Bedouin groups](#)).
- 3.2.7 Israel intervened in both the April-May 2025 clashes and the July 2025 clashes under the pretext of protecting the Druze. Israeli airstrikes targeted non-state armed groups as well as government forces and military bases. In the context of the April-May clashes, the Druze community reportedly rejected Israel's claim to be their protector. However, following the July clashes, some Druze waved Israeli flags during a demonstration demanding self-determination. There are also reports that, since July, Israel has continued to support Druze armed groups, encouraging them to unify, paying the salaries of an estimated 3,000 fighters, and providing military supplies (see [Clashes between Druze militias, government forces and Bedouin groups](#)).
- 3.2.8 Druze civilians suffered serious human rights abuses during the clashes. In April and May 2025, government forces arbitrarily arrested several Druze civilians, with some reportedly dying under torture. During the July 2025 clashes, sources indicate that government forces and Bedouin armed groups committed severe human rights violations against Druze civilians, including hundreds of extrajudicial killings. In particular, on 15-16 July 2025, government and allied forces executed unarmed civilians, including staff at a hospital. Fighters also humiliated Druze religious men by shaving off their culturally significant moustaches. They abducted over 100 Druze women and girls, raping and executing a number of them. According to UN experts, the scale of violence indicates that there was a targeted campaign against the Druze, fuelled by hate speech portraying them as Israeli allies (see [Treatment by the state and state-affiliated forces](#)).
- 3.2.9 Shortly after the violence subsided, the government formed a committee to investigate human rights abuses alleged to have taken place during the July violence. In September 2025, the committee announced the detention of an unspecified number of government forces' personnel suspected of committing abuses, and in November 2025 it announced that the investigation was still ongoing. In October 2025, a UN delegation entered Suweida to investigate alleged human rights abuses. The government authorised their entry after initially refusing access on the basis of security concerns. No further information about these two investigations was available at the time of writing (see [Accountability for human rights abuses](#)).
- 3.2.10 Since July 2025, unidentified armed men have conducted several attacks on

Druze civilians. In October 2025, for example, gunmen opened fire on a van near a Druze village in Idlib, killing 3 people. Also in October 2025, gunmen killed 2 Druze civilians traveling on a bus from Damascus to Suweida. In November 2025, armed men kidnapped a Druze doctor and community leader from his home in Damascus, demanded a ransom, and killed him (see [Treatment by non-state actors](#)).

3.2.11 The events of March-July 2025 led to an increase in discrimination against the Druze. This included a significant rise in anti-Druze sentiment and hate speech on social media, with posts often accusing them of being affiliated with Israel. In addition, sources reported anti-Druze protests in Homs and Hama, as well as an exodus of Druze students from universities in Homs, Damascus, Latakia and Hama due to hostility towards them (see [Treatment by non-state actors](#)).

3.2.12 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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3.3 Shia Muslims (excluding Alawites)

- 3.3.1 In general, Shia Muslims (excluding Alawites) are unlikely to be at risk of persecution or serious harm from state or non-state actors. The onus is on the person to demonstrate otherwise. For an assessment of the risk faced by Alawites, see the CPIN [Syria: Alawites and actual or perceived Assadists](#).
- 3.3.2 Excluding Alawites, Shia Muslims in Syria consist of Twelver Shias and Ismailis. Reliable population statistics are not available, but sources provided some rough figures. One source estimates that the number of Ismailis is about 250,000, another source estimates that the number of Twelver Shias is between 200,000 and 300,000, and a third source estimates the total number of non-Alawite Shias (i.e., Ismailis and Twelver Shias taken together) to be about 750,000 (see [Population numbers and locations](#)).
- 3.3.3 Ismailism is considered an offshoot of Shia Islam. The majority of Syria's Ismailis live in Salamiyah, with smaller communities living in Masyaf, Qadmus and Latakia. Twelver Shias, who follow the mainstream version of Shia Islam, mostly live in and around Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs (see [Population numbers and locations](#)).
- 3.3.4 The Syrian National Ismaili Council, a civil institution based in Salamiyah which oversees Ismaili community affairs, was not affiliated with pro-regime military groups during the civil war. Following the overthrow of the regime in December 2024, the Council quickly developed positive relations with the new government. It cooperates with the government in various ways, including by operating volunteer security forces that work alongside local police in both Salamiyah and Qadmus (see [Treatment by the state](#)).
- 3.3.5 Unlike the Ismaili Council, some Twelver Shia leaders strongly supported the Al-Assad regime and had close ties to Iran, which is ruled by Twelver Shia clerics. Iran formed militias in Syria made up of local Shia Muslims, as well as deploying foreign Shia militias such as Hezbollah. These militias fought alongside the regime against rebels and insurgent groups. They also sought to protect the Sayyidah Zainab shrine (an important Shia religious site in Damascus), with many fighters and their families living in the area around the

shrine during the civil war. One source indicated that having ties to Hezbollah or Iran can put people at risk of arrest or property confiscation by security forces in the new Syria (see [Relationship with Al-Assad regime and Iran](#) and the CPIN [Syria: Alawites and actual or perceived Assadists](#)).

- 3.3.6 Following the fall of the Al-Assad regime in December 2024, tens of thousands of Twelver Shias – mostly from the Damascus area – fled to Lebanon, reporting social media harassment as well as looting, arson and threats by unidentified armed men. However, some returned after their fears decreased. Several months after the fall of the regime, residents of the Sayyidah Zainab area noted that the new government was providing security for Shia shrines and mosques there. The authorities foiled an attempted Daesh bomb attack on the Sayyidah Zainab shrine in January 2025 (see [Treatment by non-state actors](#) and [Treatment by the state](#)).
- 3.3.7 Since December 2024, a Syrian human rights monitoring website has reported dozens of individual attacks targeting Shia Muslims, including killings and kidnappings. In some cases, the attackers were reportedly members of, or affiliated with, government forces. However, most incidents were attributed to ‘unidentified gunmen’ or ‘unidentified armed groups’. In most cases, the source did not specify the motives for the attacks, but it described some attacks as ‘sectarian’ (i.e., motivated by religion) and others as being motivated by the victims’ alleged links to the former Al-Assad regime. The source did not say whether the victims were Twelver Shias or Ismailis, but the vast majority of incidents took place in areas with no significant Ismaili community, which suggest that they were likely to be Twelver Shias. Overall, the number and frequency of attacks are not sufficient for there to be a generalised risk to Twelver Shias (see [Treatment by the state](#) and [Treatment by non-state actors](#)).
- 3.3.8 As well as violent attacks, sources reported incidents involving discrimination and intimidation of Twelver Shias. In February 2025, authorities arrested a Shia religious leader in Damascus, together with his son and escort, releasing them after less than two hours. The authorities did not give a reason for the arrests, but sources noted that the religious leader had criticised the government’s treatment of Shias in a recent sermon. After his release, he reassured the Shia community that the issues had been resolved and reaffirmed his support for the new government. One source reported that, two days later, government forces stormed a mosque where the same religious leader held a position and vandalised offices and Shia religious symbols. However, CPIT was unable to find any other sources that corroborate this report and cannot confirm its accuracy. Two anti-Shia protests took place in the Sayyidah Zainab area, one in October 2025 and another in November 2025, which saw demonstrators chant threatening anti-Shia slogans. In December 2025, unidentified perpetrators vandalised Shia cemeteries in a village in Homs (see [Treatment by the state](#) and [Treatment by non-state actors](#)).
- 3.3.9 Sources reported very few attacks on Ismailis by unidentified or state-affiliated gunmen, but pro-Assad Alawite groups killed two Ismaili security volunteers and an Ismaili Council member in Qadmus in February and March 2025. They were attacked because they were collaborating with the new government (see paragraph 3.3.4 and [Treatment by non-state actors](#)).

3.3.10 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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4. Protection

- 4.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to obtain protection.
- 4.1.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from a rogue state actor and/or a non-state actor, they are unlikely to obtain protection from the state.
- 4.1.3 For further guidance on assessing state protection, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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5. Internal relocation

- 5.1.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 5.1.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from a non-state or rogue state actor, they may be able to relocate to escape that risk, depending on their individual circumstances. For further information see the CPIN [Syria: Internal relocation](#).
- 5.1.3 For further guidance on internal relocation and factors to consider, see the Asylum Instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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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 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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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 [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 **23 December 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.

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7. Legal context

7.1.1 In December 2025, the House of Commons Library published a report entitled 'Syria one year after Assad: Religious minorities' which stated:

'In March 2025 a constitutional declaration was issued. It will be in place for five years, at which point elections are planned.'

'The declaration describes Islam as the "main source of legislation" and that the president must be a Muslim (the interim president, Ahmad al-Sharaa, is a Sunni Muslim).

'Analysts have noted concerns from minorities that the constitution refers to protecting the three "heavenly religions" (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and not for explicitly mentioning other faiths.'

'... However, while freedom of religion and belief is not more expressly defined, the Lebanon-based Carnegie Middle East Center think tank notes that under the declaration, Syria will implement "all rights" in the international treaties it has signed. This includes freedom of religion and belief.'¹

7.1.2 An unofficial automated translation of the constitutional declaration is available on the website [ConstitutionNet](#).

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8. Christians

8.1 Population numbers and locations

8.1.1 Demographic data for Syria is generally considered unreliable as a result of population displacement and other conflict-related reasons^{2 3}. The numbers in

¹ House of Commons Library, [Syria one year after... \(Constitutional declaration\)](#), 11 December 2025

² USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria](#) (section I), 26 June 2024

³ MRG, [Syria](#) (Communities), January 2025

this section should therefore be seen as rough estimates.

8.1.2 Minority Rights Group (MRG) describes itself as ‘the leading human rights organization working with ethnic religious and linguistic minorities, and indigenous peoples worldwide’⁴. MRG’s profile of Syria, updated in January 2025, stated:

‘Prior to the disruption following the Arab Spring [in 2010], Greek Orthodox Christians and Greek Catholics were concentrated in and around Damascus, Latakia and the neighbouring coastal region. Syriac Orthodox Christians were located mainly in the Jazira region, Homs, Aleppo and Damascus, and Syrian Catholics in small communities mainly in Aleppo, Hasaka and Damascus. Historically, there was also a small community of Maronite Christians, mainly in the Aleppo region.’⁵

8.1.3 In July 2025, the European Union Agency for Asylum published a COI report on Syria (the July 2025 EUAA report) which stated, citing various sources:

‘Before the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Christian communities constituted approximately 10% of the country’s population. The civil war led to widespread displacement and emigration among Christian communities, many of whom moved to Lebanon or the Western countries, particularly to Europe. There is no official data on the current number of Christians remaining in Syria, with some estimates suggesting a decline to 2% or approximately 300,000.

‘Syrian Christian denominations comprise several churches, such as Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, Armenian Apostolic, Syrian Catholic, Maronite, Protestant, Nestorian, Latin, and Chaldean ... Armenian Christians of various denominations were largely residing in Aleppo, with some communities found in Damascus and the Jazira region.’⁶

8.1.4 Other sources provided different estimates of the number of Christians in the country. Open Doors, an NGO which supports Christians in over 70 countries⁷, estimated in January 2025 that the number of Christians is 579,000⁸. In October 2025, Catholic charity⁹ Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) published an article which stated: ‘... [A]round 2.1 million Christians lived in Syria in 2011 dropping to around 540,000 in 2024, according to estimates by ACN.’¹⁰

8.1.5 In December 2025, the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) published a COI report entitled ‘Syria: Situation of Certain Groups’ (the December 2025 DIS report). It cited an interview with a high-profile Christian church leader in Damascus: ‘... [Aleppo] is not a major Christian centre, hosting around 3,000 Christian families compared with about 20,000 families in Wadi al-Nasara in Homs Governorate. The majority of Syria’s roughly 300,000 Christians is

⁴ MRG, [Who we are](#), no date

⁵ MRG, [Syria](#) (Communities), January 2025

⁶ EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (page 52), 7 July 2025

⁷ Open Doors, [How we help](#), no date

⁸ Open Doors, [World Watch List 2025: Syria Comprehensive Country...](#) (page 2), 20 January 2025

⁹ ACN, [Our Mission](#), no date

¹⁰ ACN, [The Church is dying – We are not heading towards...](#), 29 October 2025

8.2 Treatment by the state

8.2.1 In June 2025, human rights organisation¹² Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) published a report on torture in post-Assad Syria which stated:

‘... [A] video recorded in the city of Mhardeh in Hama province on 30 April 2025, shows General Security officers shaving the heads of several young Christian men while directing sectarian insults at them – including calling them “Christian pigs” – allegedly for interacting with women. Media sources, including the al-Modon website, reported that this incident was not isolated but part of a broader pattern of similar abuses. These included cases in Damascus, where young men were detained merely for being seen with women in public, without any formal legal justification. According to al-Modon, other documented cases involved teenage boys having their hair forcibly shaved in the street for allegedly harassing girls in the Rukn al-Din neighborhood.¹³ The Al-Modon article did not specify the religion of the young men and teenage boys in Damascus¹⁴.

In relation to the incident in Mhardeh, the Al-Modon article reported that the victims were one Christian man and one Muslim man¹⁵, rather than the ‘several young Christian men’ reported by STJ. Syriac Press, which also reported on the incident, only mentioned one Christian man being attacked¹⁶. The sources provided differing information about the perpetrators. STJ stated that they were ‘General Security officers’, Al-Modon indicated that they were not official government forces but young men wearing military uniforms, and Syriac Press referred to them as members of the government’s ‘Internal Security Forces’. Syriac Press reported that unspecified ‘security forces’ saved the Christian man before the attackers could harm him further, and Al-Modon reported that an ‘official patrol’ intervened and arrested one of the attackers, while the others escaped.

8.2.2 The July 2025 EUAA report stated, citing various sources:

‘After the fall of the Assad government, Christian communities expressed concerns about religious freedom, safety, and the ability to practice their faith openly. Additional concerns have been linked to limited inclusion in shaping the new constitution and potential restrictions on societal freedoms, such as interim government’s move to close bars in Damascus in March 2025, which was reversed within a week. In the new government, Hind Kabawat, Christian and a woman, was appointed as minister of social affairs and labour.

‘... In Damascus, the government forces reportedly provided security for the [Easter 2025] festivities. However, as noted by the head of a community committee at the Armenian church to The New York Times, it was unclear whether Christians throughout Syria experienced the same level of freedom

¹¹ DIS, [Syria: Situation of Certain Groups](#) (page 37), 11 December 2025

¹² STJ, [About STJ](#), no date

¹³ STJ, [Torture Persists: Testimonies and Indicators...](#) (page 14), 26 June 2025

¹⁴ Al-Modon, [Hama: Assault on young man accused...](#) (translated by member of CPIT), 1 May 2025

¹⁵ Al-Modon, [Hama: Assault on young man accused...](#) (translated by member of CPIT), 1 May 2025

¹⁶ Syriac Press, [Christian young man subjected to...](#) (translated by member of CPIT), 30 April 2025

to celebrate Easter as those in Damascus, where the new government's support for Easter celebrations might have been aimed at projecting an image of tolerance to journalists and visitors.¹⁷

- 8.2.3 The same source also stated: 'In the Christian neighbourhood of Bab Touma in Damascus, local volunteers have stepped in to compensate for the limited police presence, protecting the area from theft and proselytising by Salafist groups.'¹⁸
- 8.2.4 In October 2025, the EUAA published a response to a COI query on Syria (the October 2025 EUAA COI response). Citing an article written by Gregory Waters for the Atlantic Council, it stated: 'Several Christians living in coastal areas reported harassment by government soldiers for wearing crosses or fighters rejecting treatment from female nurses. Declining violence and the reopening of roads to Tartous and Homs since March 2025 have since eased tensions.'¹⁹
- 8.2.5 In December 2025, The Washington Institute (TWI), a US-based think tank that aims to 'advance a balanced and realistic understanding of American interests in the Middle East'²⁰, published an article 'Christians in the New Syria: Accepted, But At-Risk' (the December 2025 TWI article). It stated:

'Since the fall of the regime, the [Christian] community continues to be an engaged partner with the transitional authorities. Christian leader[s] met with al-Sharaa as early as late December 2024 and included representatives from many denominations: Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholics, Armenian Catholics, Maronite, National Evangelical, and Latin. This engagement has continued throughout the first year of the transition, including the recent visit in late October 2025 by al-Sharaa with Patriarch John X Yazigi, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, at the Patriarchate. Both reaffirmed each other's duties toward one another in safeguarding Syrian Christianity and supporting the state.'²¹

- 8.2.6 The December 2025 TWI article also stated:

'The Syrian government was swift and united in condemning the Damascus church attack. In addition to appropriate statements from top political and religious officials, civil defense units quickly assessed the damage at the site, while Damascus Governor Maher Marwan (al-Sharaa's brother-in-law) and Social Affairs Minister Hind Kabawat (a Christian herself) visited the church and met with neighborhood residents. Al-Sharaa also offered condolences over the phone to Greek Orthodox Archbishop Romanos al-Hannat. While Syria's government viewed the steps it took as sufficient, many Christians and other minorities suspect that Damascus was somehow complicit in the attack. Such beliefs are prevalent even after the government visibly enhanced security in Christian neighborhoods in general and around churches during Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter.'²²

¹⁷ EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (pages 52 – 53), 7 July 2025

¹⁸ EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (page 22), 7 July 2025

¹⁹ EUAA, [COI Query: Syria – Major human rights, security, and...](#) (page 37), 1 October 2025

²⁰ TWI, [Our Mission & History](#), no date

²¹ TWI, [Christians in the New Syria: Accepted, But At-Risk](#), 9 December 2025

²² TWI, [Christians in the New Syria: Accepted, But At-Risk](#), 9 December 2025

For information on the Damascus church attack, see paragraph 8.3.9.

8.2.7 The December 2025 DIS report stated, citing various sources:

‘According to a high-profile church leader, the authorities continued to refer to the incidents [attacks on churches and revenge attacks and kidnappings of Christians] as “individual, isolated incidents” and have not taken measures to prevent future incidents; for example, the government has not taken any measures to secure areas in which Christians live and where there are churches since the explosion, except for heightening security around that specific church.

‘... The high-profile Christian church leader had not heard of cases where Christians have been targeted at checkpoints, travelling from one governorate to another, except for Christians being subject to harassment. According to the high-profile Christian church leader, it is therefore not safe for Christians to travel and pass through checkpoints across Syria. In general, not many Christians travel from one governorate to another. The church leader personally feels safe because he has very good connections with the authorities and because his respected, religious position grants him a degree of protection. For ordinary Christians without such status, however, travel from one governorate to another across Syria is not safe.’²³

8.2.8 The same source also stated:

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

‘... In Wadi al-Nasara, efforts by the local church to secure government protection for the area have failed. Despite the government’s approval to recruit 200 local volunteers into the government forces, the authorities never followed through on the agreement. According to a high-profile Christian leader, as a result, this predominantly Christian region remains without effective government protection.’²⁴

For details of the September 2025 attacks in Homs governorate, see paragraphs 8.3.7 and 8.3.8.

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8.3 Treatment by non-state actors

8.3.1 The July 2025 EUAA report stated, citing various sources: ‘In December 2024, several incidents involving attacks on Christian symbols were reported. The new government condemned these attacks and attributed them to “unknown individuals.” There were no reported incidents of violence during the 2025 Easter celebrations.’²⁵

8.3.2 Citing a report by The Syrian Observer, an online news service that covers

²³ DIS, [Syria: Situation of Certain Groups](#) (pages 35 – 37), 11 December 2025

²⁴ DIS, [Syria: Situation of Certain Groups](#) (page 36), 11 December 2025

²⁵ EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (page 53), 7 July 2025

Syria²⁶, the same source stated:

‘At the end of March 2025, the Syrian Observer reported on increased religious proselytisation in public spaces, often referred to as “calls to Islam”. They included posters and street preaching promoting modest dress and broadcasting of religious messages with loudspeakers. Vehicles promoting Islam reportedly toured Christian-majority neighbourhoods of Damascus like Bab Touma, Bab Sharqi, Qassa, and Dweila. Responding to a Christian cleric’s complaint, authorities condemned the actions as “unofficial” and “individual”, claiming arrests were made and encouraging further reports – though another car was seen again in Dweilaa some days later.’²⁷

8.3.3 In July 2025, STJ published a report on Syria’s religious landscape after the fall of the Al-Assad regime which stated:

‘In Damascus and its surroundings, proselytizing activities have escalated, particularly in neighbourhoods with a Christian majority such as al-Qassaa, al-Qishla, Bab Touma, and Dwel’aa. Starting in mid-January 2025, preaching cars and street preachers began roaming the streets, addressing passersby, both men and women, inviting them to embrace Islam and urging women to wear the hijab. This behavior has sparked significant sectarian tension in these areas.

‘An imam from a mosque in the Bab Touma area confirmed these incidents, noting that many of those involved in these activities are preachers from various nationalities, including Chechens, Turkmens, and Egyptians. They claim to be affiliated with the official proselytizing office authorized by the new government and possess official licenses. The imam explained,

“These individuals carry an ancient, ignorant mentality; they accuse people of disbelief, stop women in the streets to place coverings on their heads, or order them to wear proper Islamic dress, which provokes widespread anger and resentment in the area.”

‘He added that these groups did not stop at harassment but also personally threatened him and some worshippers, saying,

“They told me: “We will fight these apostates and infidels, whether Christians or others”.”²⁸

8.3.4 The July 2025 EUAA report stated, citing various sources:

‘In early May 2025, a group of unidentified men attacked an alcohol shop in the predominantly Christian town of Rablah in Al-Qusayr district of Homs, assaulting a young man, looting the shop, and directing insults and threats at the town’s Christian residents.

‘In mid-May 2025, the media outlet Syriac Press reported two incidents concerning Christians in Hama governorate. On 15 May, a car owned by a Christian family was set on fire in Hemto [Syriac name for Hama²⁹] town, with leaflets threatening and insulting Christians left at the scene. Three days later, in the predominantly Christian town of Maharda, northwest of Hemto, an armed group reportedly marched throughout the streets chanting “Our

²⁶ The Syrian Observer, [About us](#), no date

²⁷ EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (page 53), 7 July 2025

²⁸ STJ, [A Critical Examination of Syria’s Religious Landscape After...](#) (page 8), 24 July 2025

²⁹ Syriac Press, [Syrian Observatory for Human Rights: Tribal gunmen assault...](#), 27 October 2025

eternal leader is Prophet Muhammad,” which was interpreted by many Christian residents as a deliberate act of intimidation.³⁰

8.3.5 In July 2025, the National Catholic Reporter (NCR), which describes itself as a ‘credible independent voice in Catholic journalism’³¹, reported on attacks against Christians that took place in the context of the wider violence against the Druze in Suweida (see [Clashes between Druze militias, government forces and Bedouin groups](#)). In an article entitled ‘Houses destroyed, church burnt: New wave of violence against Syrian Christians’, it stated:

‘The southern district of Sweida, a predominantly Druze region with a substantial Christian population, has witnessed horrific attacks causing deaths and injuries to civilians, religious officials, and on churches and other buildings the week of July 13 [2025] ... The Greek Melkite Church of St. Michael in the Sweida village of Al-Sura was attacked and set ablaze by unknown assailants, according to witness accounts made to the pontifical charity Aid to the Church in Need on July 15.

‘... In another recorded incident, 38 homes belonging to Christian families were destroyed by fire, leaving numerous families homeless, according to ACN [Aid to the Church in Need]. As a result, some 70 people were forced to take refuge in a church hall in Shahba, where they are fearful, living in precarious circumstances.’³²

8.3.6 The same source also stated:

‘Elsewhere in western Syria, Syrian security forces in cooperation with residents of the village of Al-Kharibat, near Tartus, thwarted an attempted bombing of the Maronite church of Mar Elias and arrested three terrorists.

‘Residents, along with security forces, reacted July 13, 2025, as they found an old vehicle loaded with over 40 pounds of explosives as well as flyers, slogans, and extremist symbols parked near the church. Although the suspects were arrested, the Christian community is terrified of future attacks, according to ACN.’³³

8.3.7 In September 2025, Christian news outlet Asia News, which describes itself as a ‘news agency promoted by the PIME [Pontifical Institute of Foreign Missions] missionaries’³⁴, reported:

‘On Tuesday evening [2 September 2025] ... Chorbishop Michel Naaman..., vicar general of the Syriac Catholic archdiocese of Homs, Hama and Al-Nabek, was robbed at gunpoint outside his home in an incident that “nearly cost him his life”.

‘The clergyman lives in Zaidal, a predominantly Christian village about seven kilometres from the city of Homs. Local sources report that two masked men stopped him, claiming to be members of a militia calling itself “General Security”. They threatened him with weapons, stole his golden cross, along with other personal effects, and left undisturbed after the attack.

‘Chorbishop Naaman said that he was surprised by the armed men when he

³⁰ EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (page 54), 7 July 2025

³¹ NCR, [About Us](#), no date

³² NCR, [Houses destroyed, church burnt: New wave of violence...](#), 18 July 2025

³³ NCR, [Houses destroyed, church burnt: New wave of violence...](#), 18 July 2025

³⁴ Asia News, [About us](#), no date

arrived home. Pressed against a wall, he was threatened with a gun. Along with the cross, which he had had for more than 50 years, they took other personal effects, like his keys and phone, leaving him frightened and shaken.³⁵

The ‘General Security Service’ (also referred to as ‘General Security forces’ or simply ‘General Security’) is a government security force serving under the Ministry of Interior³⁶. The source did not specify whether the ‘General Security’ militia that the attackers claimed to be members of is connected to this government security force.

8.3.8 In September 2025, Syriac Press, a news outlet covering ‘events related to the Syrian-Aramean-Assyrian-Chaldean people’³⁷, published an article entitled ‘Christian areas in the countryside of Hmoth (Homs) face increasing threats’ which stated:

‘Last Monday [15 September 2025], a violent robbery targeted a family consisting of a mother and her two daughters, with the assailants seizing gold and cash. The following day, a young man, Alaa Faeq Jrous, was kidnapped, tortured, and left with a fractured skull while \$10,000 [7,456 GBP]³⁸ was stolen from him. On Wednesday [17 September], several parishioners’ homes came under gunfire, though fortunately no one was injured.

‘The violence escalated on Thursday [18 September] when a masked group stormed the home of Salim Wakim, a local parishioner. Inside were three women, an elderly man, and a 13-year-old child. The attackers set the house ablaze, and the fire spread to the upper floor, reducing the building to ashes. Miraculously, the family members survived the ordeal.³⁹

The source did not provide any further details about the perpetrators of these attacks.

8.3.9 The October 2025 EUAA COI response stated, citing various sources:

‘Occasional minor incidents across the country highlight the threat from armed extremist Sunni groups operating beyond government control, according to Gregory Waters. Between April and June [2025] these incidents include an attempted arson of a church in Damascus (6 April), the burning of a Christian family’s car in Hama along with threatening leaflets (17 May), and gunfire directed at a church in Homs (8 June).

‘In June, a suicide bomber attacked the Greek Orthodox Mar St. Elias Church in Damascus, killing at least 27 people and injuring more than 60. While authorities initially blamed ISIL [Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant], the lesser-known group Saraya Ansar al-Sunna (SAS), ideologically aligned with ISIL and notorious since February for targeting religious minorities, claimed responsibility the following day. The attack was described by SAS as a response to the government’s ban on unapproved proselytization attempts in the neighbourhood. In the aftermath of the attack, Christian leaders and community members were calling for stronger protection and

³⁵ Asia News, [Homs: Armed men attack and rob Syrian Catholic prelate](#), 5 September 2025

³⁶ EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (page 20), 7 July 2025

³⁷ Syriac Press, [About](#), no date

³⁸ Xe.com, [1 USD to GBP – Convert Us Dollars to British Pounds](#), accessed 9 January 2025

³⁹ Syriac Press, [Christian areas in the countryside of Hmoth \(Homs\) face...](#), 20 September 2025

accountability, citing that threats and incidents recorded in the months prior such as vandalism of cemeteries and religious symbols were largely ignored by authorities.⁴⁰

8.3.10 A BBC News article published in November 2025 covered the killings of two Christians in Homs governorate on 1 October 2025. It stated:

‘The killer came by night – a masked man on a motorbike who struck without warning and then sped away ... the victims were Christians – Wissam and Shafiq Mansour, cousins who were both 39, and were as close as brothers. As they chatted with a friend over coffee and cigarettes, they were hit by a hail of bullets ... The killings happened in the village of Anaz in Wadi al-Nasara, or the Valley of the Christians – an area of rolling hills in rural Homs province in western Syria. Locals say the gunman came from the direction of a nearby Sunni Muslim village.

‘Sitting a short distance from [one of the victims] Wissam’s coffin, his father George, railed against the authorities, saying Christians in the valley had been left defenceless.

“Guns were taken from us but left in the hands of a rival (Sunni) village,” he said. “We want to carry arms against them. They don’t know anything about religion or love or peace. Today it’s Wissam, tomorrow it could be anyone.”

‘Many in the valley are feeling vulnerable these days. Before the regime fell, they backed Assad, and he backed them. Many Christian communities looked to him for protection. Wissam was part of a pro-Assad militia, defending his village. Some locals say that’s why he was targeted.

‘... The killings in the Valley of the Christians are ... unsolved.’⁴¹

8.3.11 On 4 November 2025, Syriac Press reported on several incidents involving Christians. The report, which did not specify whether the victims were attacked because of their religion, stated:

‘In Hmoth (Homs), truck driver Nabil Najjar was ambushed by three unidentified assailants on Monday [3 November 2025] morning. They stole his vehicle and its cargo of olives, along with his phone and money, before abandoning him near a railway line about five kilometers from Sadad town.

‘Separately, in the Hemto (Hama) countryside, there was an attempted kidnapping of jeweler Mazen Sankari last Friday [31 October], followed by another failed attempt to abduct a 15-year-old boy from Mhardeh town on Saturday [1 November].’⁴²

8.3.12 On 11 November 2025, Open Doors published an article entitled ‘Threatening messages left at two churches in Syria’ which stated:

‘... [T]hreatening messages were left at two churches, heightening fear amongst believers.

“Christian infidel, there is no deity but God, after St Elias Dweila, it’s St Elias Maared’s turn,” said the message on the wall surrounding the compound of St Elias Church in Maared Saidnaya ... , located 30km north east of the

⁴⁰ EUAA, [COI Query: Syria – Major human rights, security, and...](#) (page 37), 1 October 2025

⁴¹ BBC News, [‘Killed because they are Alawites’: Fear among...](#), 10 November 2025

⁴² Syriac Press, [Wave of kidnappings targets Christians and Alawites across...](#), 4 November 2025

capital Damascus.

‘The words – which are believed to have been written towards the end of last week – refer to the devastating suicide bomb attack on Saint Elias Church in Dweilla, Damascus, on 22 June [2025] that killed 22 believers.

‘It comes a week after a similarly threatening words were left on the walls of St Cyrillos Church in Damascus by a man who was caught on camera.

“There will be no polytheists left in Syria by God’s will. Our meeting is near, you pigs of the cross,” wrote the message ... There was also a non-recognisable phrase that started with the Shahada (the Islamic declaration of faith): “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger.”

‘... After he wrote the offensive words on the walls, he tried to damage a statue of Mary using a stone he brought with him.’⁴³

8.3.13 The December 2025 TWI article stated:

‘While the Christian community has generally been safe security-wise since the fall of the regime, there have also been a number of larger incidents. These are definitely dynamics to be concerned about. However, within certain online circles they have been turned into fabricated stories about a genocide against Christians, which is simply not true. This is one example where disinformation campaigns have warped outsiders’ understanding of the reality on the ground. That does not mean the local community or those outside of Syria should not raise awareness and advocacy if there are legitimate issues, but pushing claims of genocide for political reasons is detrimental.’⁴⁴

8.3.14 The same source mentioned several incidents of targeting of Christians:

‘[W]hen there was a massacre against Druze in Sweida in mid-July [2025], the Greek Melkite Church of St. Michael in the village of al-Sura was attacked and set ablaze ... [T]here was also the following: during Christmas 2024, the burning of a Christmas tree by foreign fighters; on February 17, a group of youth destroyed crosses in a cemetery in rural Homs; on April 6, assailants attempted to burn down a church in Damascus; on May 17, the car of a Christian family in Hama city was burned, and threatening leaflets were left in the area; and on June 8, a church in Homs city was shot at.

‘In addition, the Christian community has been a huge target for the Islamic State (IS) since the fall of the regime. According to the Syrian Ministry of Interior, IS suspects confessed that they were planning to conduct a car bombing attack against a church in Maaloula on New Year’s Day. Most notable was the June 22 suicide attack targeting the Mar Elias Greek Orthodox church in the Damascus neighborhood of Dweila, killing at least twenty-five people and injuring sixty-three – the largest attack against Syria’s Christian community since 1860. It was claimed by a shadowy group called Saraya Ansar al-Sunnah, which is an IS front group.’⁴⁵

8.3.15 Citing an interview with a high-profile church leader in Damascus, the December 2025 DIS report stated: ‘Moreover, Christians are still being

⁴³ Open Doors, [Threatening messages left at two churches in Syria](#), 11 November 2025

⁴⁴ TWI, [Christians in the New Syria: Accepted, But At-Risk](#), 9 December 2025

⁴⁵ TWI, [Christians in the New Syria: Accepted, But At-Risk](#), 9 December 2025

kidnapped on a daily basis in Wadi al-Nasara in rural Homs. A high-profile Christian church leader assumed, however, that they are not being kidnapped because they are Christians but because they have money, as it is not only Christians who are being kidnapped.⁴⁶

8.3.16 Citing interviews with nonprofit journalism organisation Syria Direct and a high-profile church leader in Damascus, the same source stated: 'Apart from the two attacks on churches in Damascus, attacks on churches have been very limited. In addition, individual revenge attacks and kidnappings by unidentified groups have been recorded, and some Christians have been accused of being affiliated with the former government.'⁴⁷

8.3.17 Citing interviews with an international organisation and a church organisation in Damascus, the same source stated:

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

'According to a Church organisation, Christians are currently not exposed to significant security threats in their daily lives. The confrontations that Christians encounter are mainly verbal in nature. For example, Christians have faced varying degrees of provocation, including posters, slogans, and street-level campaigns organised by armed radical religious groups. These groups, which do not always operate under government control, have at times entered Christian neighbourhoods – such as in Damascus – carrying Qurans and calling on residents to convert to Islam and for women to wear the hijab.'⁴⁸

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8.4 March 2025 violence in coastal areas

8.4.1 The July 2025 EUAA report stated, citing various sources:

'In March 2025, Christians were caught in the crossfire during attacks on Alawites in the coastal region. AFP [Agence France-Presse] journalists were able to confirm at least seven obituaries shared on social media, including for a man and his son reportedly shot while travelling to Latakia, four family members killed in their home "in an Alawite-majority neighbourhood of the city", and the father of a priest killed in Baniyas. Following the attacks on Alawites, local fears have reportedly grown due to the new authorities' inability to ensure protection. As noted by several sources, after the attacks, Christians in predominantly Christian areas of Damascus formed volunteer groups to defend their neighbourhoods against looting and to protect Christian religious sites from potential attacks.'⁴⁹

8.4.2 The October 2025 EUAA COI response stated:

⁴⁶ DIS, [Syria: Situation of Certain Groups](#) (page 36), 11 December 2025

⁴⁷ DIS, [Syria: Situation of Certain Groups](#) (page 35), 11 December 2025

⁴⁸ DIS, [Syria: Situation of Certain Groups](#) (pages 36 – 37), 11 December 2025

⁴⁹ EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (page 54), 7 July 2025

‘The UNCOI [United Nations Commission of Inquiry] investigated gross human rights violations carried out in March 2025 in 16 locations across Latakia, Tartus, Homs, and Hama governorates, focusing on areas primarily populated by the Alawite minority. It “did not find any evidence of Christian communities having been targeted during the attacks in March” documented in the report. Other sources noted that the several Christians killed in the March violence in the coastal areas were not targeted because of their religious identity.’⁵⁰

8.4.3 The December 2025 TWI article stated:

‘... [D]uring the Coastal massacre against Alawites in March [2025], disinformation filtered into some Western and Israeli online echo chambers that morphed into false reports about a massacre against Christians. A few Christians were indeed killed, but it was more a circumstance of being at the wrong place at the wrong time. Most of the victims killed during the Coastal massacre were Alawites and Sunnis. Christian churches in Latakia even put out a joint statement urging individuals not to be swayed by rumors.’⁵¹

8.4.4 For further information on the March 2025 violence against Alawites in coastal areas, see the CPIN [Syria: Alawites and actual or perceived Assadists](#).

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8.5 Christians’ perceptions of their safety under the new government

8.5.1 The July 2025 EUAA report stated:

‘In interviews to media outlets, various Christian figures highlighted a sense of uncertainty and fear. In March 2025, Syrian Orthodox theologian Assad Elias Kattan noted to Deutsche Welle fears of Islamisation and described the political transition as chaotic and the security situation outside Damascus as “not always stable.” The same month, writer and researcher Roger Asfar told the Syrian Observer that the threat to the Christian presence in Syria was increasing under the new government, as Christians faced “diminishing freedoms and growing religious and societal pressure”, with no signs of improvement in their situation.

‘As noted by the head of the Armenian church’s executive committee in an interview with the New York Times, many Armenians were considering leaving Syria due to fear about the future. Similarly, in May 2025, a Catholic priest in Aleppo noted to Vatican News that Christians remained cautious and wished to ensure that the right of every community “to live in dignity” would be respected.’⁵²

8.5.2 The October 2025 EUAA COI response stated:

‘Conditions for Christian communities in Syria vary, with religious and community leaders holding sharply divided views. According to field work carried out by researcher Gregory Waters, Christians’ views of the transitional government often hinge on their familiarity with Sunnis.

‘In Latakia, centuries of coexistence have fostered close ties between the two communities, even with conservative Sunni fighters. Christian

⁵⁰ EUAA, [COI Query: Syria – Major human rights, security, and...](#) (pages 36 – 37), 1 October 2025

⁵¹ TWI, [Christians in the New Syria: Accepted, But At-Risk](#), 9 December 2025

⁵² EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (pages 53 – 54), 7 July 2025

communities more isolated from Sunnis show greater distrust of the new government. In towns surrounded by Alawite villages like Mashta Hilou and Wadi Ayoun, east of Safita (Tartous governorate), Christian priests and activists are wary, fearing growing Sunni religious influence. Distrust of the local authorities is fuelled by unclear laws, petty crime and sidelining of Christian civil society groups by the local authorities. In contrast, in Suqaylabiyah (Hama governorate) and Latakia local officials engage often with the Christian communities.⁵³

8.5.3 Citing an interview with a high-profile Christian church leader in Damascus, the December 2025 DIS report stated:

‘Security conditions also vary by region and are influenced by both local and external actors. Aleppo is considered relatively safe by Christians, which is – according to a high-profile church leader – due to the stabilising role of Türkiye and the presence of Turkish intelligence forces. Damascus, affected by Gulf influence, is viewed as less safe by Christians than Aleppo but more secure than Homs. Homs – both city and rural areas – records the highest number of kidnappings, reportedly linked to its mixed population of Alawites, Ismailis, and Christians.’⁵⁴

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9. Druze

9.1 Population numbers and locations

9.1.1 Demographic data for Syria is generally considered unreliable as a result of population displacement and other conflict-related reasons the conflict^{55 56}. The numbers in this section should therefore be seen as rough estimates.

9.1.2 MRG’s profile on the Druze, updated in March 2018, stated:

‘The Druze constitute around 3 to 4 per cent of the population and are the third largest religious minority in Syria. They are located primarily in Jabal Druze (also known as Jabal al-Arab or Jabal Hawran) on the south-western border abutting Jordan, but with significant communities on the Golan (Jawlan), seventeen villages in Jabal al-A’la, roughly midway between Aleppo and Antioch in the north-west, and four villages just south of Damascus.’⁵⁷

9.1.3 The July 2025 EUAA report stated, citing various sources:

‘The Druze ... constituted 3% of Syria’s pre-war population, accounting for a population of approximately 700,000. Historically, they have been concentrated in the southern governorate of Sweida, with smaller communities near Damascus.’⁵⁸

9.1.4 In July 2025, Sky News published an article entitled ‘Who are the Druze and who are they fighting in Syria?’ which stated: ‘The Druze religious sect is an offshoot of Ismailism, a branch of Shiite Islam. About half of the roughly one million Druze worldwide live in Syria, with most others in Lebanon and Israel,

⁵³ EUAA, [COI Query: Syria – Major human rights, security, and...](#) (page 36), 1 October 2025

⁵⁴ DIS, [Syria: Situation of Certain Groups](#) (page 37), 11 December 2025

⁵⁵ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria](#) (section I), 26 June 2024

⁵⁶ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria](#) (section I), 26 June 2024

⁵⁷ MRG, [Druze in Syria](#), updated March 2018

⁵⁸ EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (page 48), 7 July 2025

including the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.⁵⁹

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⁵⁹ Sky News, [Who are the Druze and who are they fighting in Syria?](#), 20 July 2025

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9.3 Under the Al-Assad regime

9.3.1 In March 2020, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), which is now called the EUAA, published a report on Syria which stated, citing various sources:

‘According to MRGI [Minority Rights Group International], the majority of the Druze avoided taking sides in the Syrian conflict, remaining neutral. Another source stated that in the wake of the conflict in Syria, the Druze split to three categories: those who supported the Syrian opposition, those who remained loyalist to the GoS [Government of Syria], and those who maintained neutrality; the latter constituted the majority of the Druze population.

‘The Syrian Observer stated that the Druze refused to be conscripted in the SAA [Syrian Arab Army] and joined local militias instead. Although the GoS turned a blind eye to those militias, the Syrian President called upon Druze men to join the SAA.⁶⁰

9.3.2 In December 2024, The Conversation, an ‘independent source of news analysis and informed comment written by academic experts’⁶¹, published an article which stated: ‘The Druze, historically marginalized in Syria due to their beliefs that combine elements of Islam with pre-Islamic beliefs, found a degree of protection under the Assad regime in return for Druze support.’⁶²

9.3.3 A December 2024 BBC News article stated:

‘Many Druze were loyal to the Assad regime, who they believed would protect minorities.

‘But opposition grew steadily during the war, and there were frequent protests in recent years.

‘The latest started in Suweida’s central square in August 2023 and continued

⁶¹ The Conversation, [Who we are](#), no date

⁶² The Conversation, [Why Syria’s reconstruction may depend on the fate ...](#), 18 December 2024

until the day the regime fell.

‘Activist Wajiha Al-Hajjar believes that the protests were not brutally cracked down on like others in Syria, because Assad wanted to show the world and his foreign allies that he was protecting minorities.

“They did try to suppress our protest but in a different way – not through weapons or shelling, but by depriving us of passports and civil rights, and access to official documents. It became difficult to leave Suweida and a kind of siege was imposed,” she said.⁶³

9.3.4 In November 2025, the International Crisis Group (ICG), an organisation which provides ‘independent analysis and advice on how to prevent, resolve or better manage deadly conflict’⁶⁴, published a report entitled ‘Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida’ (the November 2025 ICG report). It stated:

‘The Druze, a religious minority concentrated in Suweida, had maintained a cautious détente with the Assad regime throughout the civil war – partly because the regime claimed to be protecting minorities from the excesses of Sunni Islamist groups. But the Druze also sought to preserve a degree of local autonomy. A series of protests starting in 2023, referred to as the “Druze uprising”, were sparked by economic decline and desire for a greater say in governance. These paved the way for armed Druze factions, in effect, to take control of the province, though with nominal regime oversight, roughly a year before the final rebel push toward Damascus in December 2024. The Druze factions joined this offensive as it gathered speed.’⁶⁵

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9.4 Governance status of Suweida

9.4.1 The October 2025 EUAA COI response stated, citing various sources:

‘Druze militias maintained control of central, southern, and eastern Sweida, while transitional government forces maintain control in Sweida’s northern and western countrysides. According to Enab Baladi [a non-profit independent Syrian media organisation]⁶⁶, as of mid-September 2025 the government controlled more than 30 villages in Sweida’s eastern and northern countryside, while local Druze factions controlled most of the governorate, including the capital.

‘... On 6 August [2025], a committee led by Druze Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri declared the formation of a “temporary” autonomous government in Sweida governorate. Its Supreme Legal Committee appointed an executive body, security officials, and ministerial heads to administer the province independently from the transitional government.

‘On 23 August, about 30 factions in Sweida unified under the National Guard Forces (NGF), pledging allegiance to Druze spiritual leader Sheikh Hikmat al-Hajri who is recognised as the legitimate representative of the community. The NGF stated its priorities as maintaining internal security, preserving stability, and combating lawlessness and crime across the governorate. The

⁶³ BBC News, [Syria's minorities seek security as country charts new future](#), 22 December 2024

⁶⁴ ICG, [Who we are](#), no date

⁶⁵ ICG, [Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from ...](#) (pages 13 – 14), 26 November 2025

⁶⁶ Enab Baladi, [About us](#), no date

newly formed NGF comprises several Druze militias, ... The Men of Dignity militia, which had previously been open to cooperating with the Syrian transitional government, rejected government control over Sweida following atrocities committed against Druze civilians in July. Hijri praised the formation of the “National Guard” and the “Supreme Legal Committee”, claiming these bodies now serve as the security, military, political, and legal structures of Sweida governorate.

‘Both the “National Guard” and “Supreme Legal Committee” in Sweida include several former officers from the Assad era. Brigadier General Jihad Ghoutani, who served as an artillery commander for Assad since his promotion in 2019 and participated in battles across Syria, is part of the Sweida “National Guard”. The “Supreme Legal Committee” initially appointed former Assad intelligence officer Brigadier General Shakib Ajoud Nasr, who was responsible for political security in Tartous, as head of internal security on 6 August. However, Nasr was replaced by a Suwaydawi judge [i.e., a judge from Suweida] on 12 August.’⁶⁷

9.4.2 The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) is a ‘group of non-partisan, non-profit organisations’⁶⁸ that is ‘dedicated to safeguarding democracy and human rights by reversing the rising global tide of polarisation, extremism and authoritarianism’⁶⁹. In November 2025, the ISD published a report entitled ‘How violence in southern Syria fuelled anti-Druze hate and online misinformation’ (the November 2025 ISD report) which stated: ‘The clashes in Suweida have amplified increasing mistrust and resistance to the Syrian government among the Druze. Many in Suweida now prefer autonomy in a federal system, while a minority call for separatism.’⁷⁰

9.4.3 The November 2025 ICG report stated:

‘The political effects of the July crisis linger. After reversing his previous interest in finding a viable compromise with Damascus, Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri moved toward explicitly calling for Israeli protection and asking for Druze self-determination. The confrontation with government troops has generated broad popular support for these positions among Druze in Suweida, sidelining those willing to cooperate with Damascus and support the state’s monopoly of violence. Under al-Hijri’s auspices, a number of Druze leaders have come together in a de facto governing body in Suweida named the Supreme Legal Committee, while all the armed Druze factions have consolidated under the umbrella of a “national guard”, also supported by al-Hijri. Meanwhile, the space for Suweida’s vibrant civil society has narrowed, with reports that elements aligned with al-Hijri have tried to intimidate his critics.’⁷¹

9.4.4 In December 2025, London-based ‘non-partisan’ news outlet⁷² The New Arab published an article which stated:

‘The broader political environment in Suweida remains fractured. The region has long maintained a distinct relationship with central authority, and the

⁶⁷ EUAA, [COI Query: Syria – Major human rights, security, and...](#) (pages 13 – 14), 1 October 2025

⁶⁸ ISD, [Independence and Ethics](#), no date

⁶⁹ ISD, [About Us](#), no date

⁷⁰ ISD, [How violence in southern Syria fuelled anti-Druze hate and online...](#), 28 November 2025

⁷¹ ICG, [Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from ...](#) (page 29), 26 November 2025

⁷² The New Arab, [About Us](#), no date

transition away from Assad-era structures has intensified internal divisions.

‘Rival clerics, armed groups, community notables, and smuggling networks all compete for influence, with no single actor exercising full control.

‘The National Guard, aligned with al-Hijri, has emerged as one of the most powerful factions. Critics accuse it of operating as an unaccountable parallel security structure – detaining rivals, enforcing loyalty, and using coercion to consolidate its influence. Supporters argue it fills a security vacuum at a time when state institutions remain weak.’⁷³

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9.5 Clashes between Druze militias, government forces and Bedouin groups

9.5.1 The July 2025 EUAA report stated, citing various sources:

‘In early March 2025, clashes erupted between members of the Jaramana Shield Brigade, a local Druze militia, and security forces in Jaramana city [a suburb of Damascus], killing at least one officer.

‘Another outbreak of violence in Jaramana at the end of April 2025 between Sunni and Druze armed men reportedly resulted in at least 30 fatalities, including security forces who were attacked when intervening to end the fighting, according to the Syrian Ministry of Interior. Fighting started with an attack by an unidentified armed group on a GSS [General Security Service] checkpoint at the entrance of Jaramana city on 29 April 2025, and was reportedly sparked by an audio clip circulating on social media that allegedly featured a Druze cleric making Islamophobic remarks. In a video clip, the cleric later rejected any connection to the audio recording. Fighting ended the same day after an agreement was reached between government and Jaramana community representatives.

‘However, new clashes erupted the following day in Ashrafiyah Sahnaya, a town south-west of Damascus with a Druze majority. According to Etana Syria, members of the Liwa’ al-Zubair (the Zubair Brigade), a group of fighters based in Rural Damascus and with historical links to Deir Ez-Zor, attacked Druze groups, who in some cases received support from Druze fighters arriving from Sweida. More than 100 people, including both civilians and militia members, were reportedly killed in these clashes.

‘... In response to the clashes, MoD [Ministry of Defence] and the General Security Forces deployed their forces to Sahnaya and Ashrafiyah Sahnaya, while Druze militias also mobilised their fighters. According to ISW [Institute for the Study of War], government efforts to contain the violence helped to restrain retaliatory killings. It was also reported that some Druze fighters joined the government forces in fighting against Sunni extremists, which, as noted by ISW, reflects “the complexity of the situation and diversity of the actors involved.” The government made several arrests on 30 April 2025. In the clashes, people were reportedly killed, including 88 Druze fighters, 14 civilians, and 32 members of MoI and MoD and affiliated paramilitary units. Moreover, hundreds of people were displaced from the affected suburbs of Damascus.

⁷³ The New Arab, [Second Druze cleric dies after detention in Suweida, ...](#), 3 December 2025

‘... An agreement was eventually negotiated [on 29 April⁷⁴] between the transitional government and community and religious leaders aimed to de-escalate the situation, although implementation was reportedly challenging, according to an analysis by the Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies.

‘... At the beginning of May 2025, clashes between the Druze and Bedouin groups were reported in the western countryside of Sweida, as well as in neighbouring Dara'a governorate. Mortar strikes on Haran, Al-Thaala, Rasas, and Ara villages left one civilian dead and eight injured, causing dozens of families, mostly women and children, to flee to safer areas.

‘... In the context of the sectarian violence which erupted in late April [2025] between the Druze and local Sunni groups in Sweida and Rural Damascus, Israel escalated its military involvement, carrying out airstrikes against the Syrian interim government under the pretext of protecting the Druze minority. This justification was firmly rejected by Syria's Druze community, which condemned the strikes as violations of sovereignty. Israeli airstrikes targeted military sites in Rural Damascus, Dar'a, Latakia, western Hama and in Damascus near the Presidential Palace.⁷⁵

9.5.2 The October 2025 EUAA COI response stated, citing various sources:

‘... [T]here have been long standing tensions between Bedouin and Druze in Sweida over land and money disputes. On 11 July 2025, a robbery on the Damascus-Sweida highway allegedly driven by competition over smuggling routes, lead [sic] to retaliatory kidnappings and clashes that escalated into the widely reported July violence.

‘In July, violence escalated sharply after intense clashes erupted on 13 July between Druze militias and Bedouin tribal fighters in Sweida. The conflict intensified between 14-16 July amid the deployment of Syrian transitional government forces in Sweida and Israeli airstrikes targeting Syrian security sites, including in Damascus. On 15 July, Israel launched airstrikes on transitional government armoured columns, citing commitments to protect Druze civilians amid reports of summary executions by government forces. The next day, Israel escalated by striking the Syrian army headquarters and areas near the presidential palace in Damascus, deterring a full-scale assault on Druze factions in Sweida.

‘On 16 July, government forces withdrew from Sweida governorate. The same day, Druze militias attacked Bedouins in the Sweida countryside, resulting in “mass killings, looting, and forced displacement”, prompting Bedouin leaders to call in reinforcements from across Syria. Bedouin tribes from across Syria began mobilising in large numbers to aid their brothers, with up to 50,000 individuals from some 40 clans reportedly called up and converging on Sweida, according to local monitors. Around 200 tribal fighters were massing at the entrance of the Sweida city on 17-18 July. Dozens of armed clans, including groups from Hama and Aleppo governorates, either sent fighters or declared their intent to join the battle.

‘On 17 July, Interim President al-Sharaa accused Druze fighters of breaching the truce that had led to the government's withdrawal and accused Israel of seeking to destabilise Syria. On 18 July, U.S. Envoy Tom Barrack

⁷⁴ Enab Baladi, [Agreement between government and elders of Jaramana to...](#), 29 April 2025

⁷⁵ EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (pages 172, 50, 52, 88), 7 July 2025

announced a ceasefire between Israel and Syria, supported by Türkiye, Jordan, and other regional actors. Despite sporadic violence, a renewed truce in Sweida was declared on 19 July, with further troop deployments to stabilise the area.

‘Talks between Israel and Syria took place in Paris on 26 July, facilitated by the U.S. Although minor skirmishes continued between 20-22 July, major fighting subsided. Hundreds of casualties were reported among security forces, Druze fighters, and civilians. There were reports of extrajudicial killings, mass displacement and damage to critical infrastructure including water, electricity, and telecommunications networks. Sources assessed that over 1,000 people were killed in the violence including Druze and Bedouin civilians, members of the transitional government’s security forces, local and tribal armed groups.

‘... According to two senior Druze figures interviewed by Reuters, since the escalation in July 2025 Israel has supported efforts to unify divided Druze factions and delivered military supplies. Furthermore, Israel has been providing salaries for an estimated 3,000 Druze militia fighters, according to senior Druze figures and a Western intelligence source. These claims could not be verified independently by the source, and Israel authorities had not provided any comment.⁷⁶

- 9.5.3 The same source also stated: ‘In August [2025], hundreds protested in Sweida and other areas demanding self-determination for the Druze minority, marking the largest demonstrations since July’s deadly clashes. Some waved Israeli flags in gratitude for Israel’s support during the mid-July fighting between Druze militias, tribal groups, and government forces.’⁷⁷
- 9.5.4 Citing the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR – an ‘independent human rights organization’⁷⁸) and the Syrian Observatory of Human Rights (SOHR – an ‘independent and impartial UK-based human rights organisation’⁷⁹), the October 2025 EUAA COI response stated:

‘During the reference period of this query (June – September 2025), SNHR documented 1,402 fatalities across Syria. Most of them were recorded in the governorate of Sweida (1,013) and occurred in the context of the violence which involved between Druze, Bedouin and government forces in July 2025. It remains unclear how many of the 1,013 were civilians, with the source noting that this figure includes civilians, government security forces, and members of local armed groups. SNHR also documented at least 984 individuals including civilians being injured in Sweida in the context of the violence in July. By comparison, SOHR documented 1,990 individuals killed in the July 2025 violence in Sweida, including 765 Druze civilians executed by the transitional government’s security forces and 725 mostly Druze residents (including 167 civilians) who were killed in clashes.’⁸⁰

- 9.5.5 The same source also stated, citing various sources:

‘Despite a fragile ceasefire, tensions in Sweida continued, with 33 clashes

⁷⁶ EUAA, [COI Query: Syria – Major human rights, security, and...](#) (pages 11 – 12), 1 October 2025

⁷⁷ EUAA, [COI Query: Syria – Major human rights, security, and...](#) (page 36), 1 October 2025

⁷⁸ SNHR, [About us](#), no date

⁷⁹ SOHR, [About Us](#), no date

⁸⁰ EUAA, [COI Query: Syria – Major human rights, security, and...](#) (page 23), 1 October 2025

and shelling incidents recorded by Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) in August involving Druze factions, government forces, and Bedouin militias. As of end of August [2025], the ceasefire agreed on 19 July in Sweida has largely continued to hold despite instances of sporadic clashes in the area. In September, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) assessed that although hostilities have largely subsided, the situation in Sweida and its surrounding areas remains volatile.⁸¹

9.5.6 The November 2025 ISD report stated: ‘Several hundred civilians, both Druze and Bedouin, were kidnapped, with the majority reportedly still in captivity.’⁸²

9.5.7 The same source also commented on the role of social media and misinformation in escalating the clashes:

‘International organisations expressed concern that social media played a key role in further stoking tensions between communities during the violence. For example, a UN report from 21 August [2025] claimed that “hateful rhetoric on social media portraying Druze as traitors and infidels to be killed, and calling for the abduction and enslavement of Druze women.

‘... Online discourse around the violence in Suweida was polluted by misinformation. Online misinformation played a key role in inciting violence, according to local fact-checking groups. Despite analysing dozens of posts each week, these organisations said that this only represented a small portion of the total volume of misinformation. Misleading videos and photos often included images from other conflicts, such as the Syrian civil war or Israeli military actions following the 7 October attacks. As of November 2025, examples of such misinformation were still online with thousands of likes.’⁸³

9.5.8 In November 2025, Euronews, an ‘impartial and independent’ news outlet providing ‘global multilingual news with a distinctly European perspective’⁸⁴, published an article entitled ‘Clashes erupt between Druze and Syrian government forces in Suwayda’ which stated:

‘Violent clashes erupted on Thursday [13 November 2025] night in western Suwayda governorate between the newly formed Druze National Guard and Syrian government General Security forces, involving heavy weapons and drones in the most significant escalation in the region in months.

‘The fighting lasted for hours and included mutual targeting of contact lines using drones, mortars and heavy machine guns, the sources said. No information was available on any changes to control maps.

‘The National Guard, founded by Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, a Druze leader, blamed government forces for the escalation.

‘The town of al-Majdal “was subjected to a large-scale attack that lasted for more than an hour, through several axes, using heavy and medium weapons and attack drones,” the National Guard said in a statement.

‘His forces “valiantly repelled the attempt, inflicting heavy losses on the

⁸¹ EUAA, [COI Query: Syria – Major human rights, security, and...](#) (page 13), 1 October 2025

⁸² ISD, [How violence in southern Syria fuelled anti-Druze hate and online...](#), 28 November 2025

⁸³ ISD, [How violence in southern Syria fuelled anti-Druze hate and online...](#), 28 November 2025

⁸⁴ Euronews, [About us](#), no date

attacking forces in terms of equipment and personnel.”

‘The state-run Syrian News Agency quoted a security source as saying “outlaw groups are targeting with mortars and heavy machine guns the towns of Wolga, Tal al-Aqra, Tal Hadid and al-Mazraa in rural Sweida.” There was no immediate official comment from the General Security Service or the Syrian government.

‘The almost daily skirmishes that have continued for months escalated into large-scale clashes.⁸⁵

9.5.9 In December 2025, Enab Baladi reported several clashes between Druze militias and government forces in the western countryside of Suweida⁸⁶.

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9.6 Treatment by the state and state-affiliated forces

9.6.1 The October 2025 EUAA COI response stated, citing various sources:

‘A STJ [Syrians for Truth and Justice] investigation into human rights violations committed in Sahnaya, Ashrafiyat Sahnaya, and Jaramana (Rural Damascus), as well as the village of al-Sawara al-Kubra in northern Sweida, during April and May 2025, documented several cases in which Druze civilians were arbitrarily arrested or forcibly disappeared by security forces, often without warrants or notification to families. According to testimonies, the authorities in some cases denied detainees’ existence, with later reports revealing deaths under torture.

‘Retaliatory kidnappings between Druze and Bedouin groups in Sweida in July 2025 sparked heavy clashes and the intervention of transitional government forces under the MoI and MoD. Sources reported that government forces, as well as Druze and Bedouin groups, committed abuses.

‘According to UN experts, sectarian clashes, initially sparked by looting and retaliatory attacks between Bedouin and Druze communities, escalated into widespread violence involving local militias, Syrian transitional authorities’ forces, and allied armed groups. Attacks on the villages of Ta’ara, Al Doura, and Al Douweira reportedly involved heavy artillery, machine guns, and looting, leaving around 1,000 dead, including at least 539 identified Druze civilians (39 women and 21 children). Reports indicate that 196 people, among them eight children and 30 women, were extrajudicially executed, while more than 33 villages were burned.

‘Amnesty International documented evidence that government and allied forces carried out extrajudicial executions of Druze civilians on 15-16 July in Sweida, supported by verified videos showing armed men in uniform executing unarmed people in homes, a square, a school, and a hospital. Amnesty International documented that government and allied forces executed 46 Druze people (44 men and 2 women) and staged mock executions of two elderly individuals on 15-16 July in Sweida, in locations including homes, a school, a hospital, a ceremonial hall, and a public square.

‘On 15-16 July Druze civilians were subjected to sectarian slogans, and

⁸⁵ Euronews, [Clashes erupt between Druze and Syrian government forces...](#), 14 November 2025

⁸⁶ Enab Baladi, [Four killed in clashes between Syrian Interior Ministry...](#), 23 December 2025

religious men were humiliated, including by the forcible shaving of their culturally significant moustaches. The source verified evidence showing executioners wearing varied attire, including camouflage, plain clothes with military vests, black uniforms linked to security forces, and some with “General Security” insignia. Most lacked identifiable insignia, though videos showed them riding Mol-marked trucks and operating together before executions at the national hospital. At least four wore black patches with the Islamic declaration of faith, a symbol associated with ISIL, although ISIL did not claim responsibility for any attacks.

‘UN experts pointed to the reported abduction of at least 105 Druze women and girls by armed groups linked to the Syrian transitional government, with 80 still missing. Some released women cannot return home due to security concerns. In at least three documented cases, Druze women were reportedly raped before being executed. A total of 763 people, including women, remain unaccounted for. Amnesty International received credible reports of abductions by Druze armed groups and Bedouin fighters between 17-19 July and was investigating the incidents.

‘According to UN experts, the scale of violence, including massacres, widespread looting, and extortion indicates a targeted campaign against the Druze minority, fuelled by hate speech portraying them as Israeli allies.’⁸⁷

9.6.2 The October 2025 EUAA COI response also stated, citing various sources:

‘The roads linking Dar'a and Sweida governorates have seen a sharp increase in armed attacks, kidnappings, and robberies. Civilians and merchants are frequently targeted, heightening security concerns and disrupting transportation and trade between the two governorates. Since mid-August, the eastern countryside of Dar'a, near the Sweida border, has witnessed multiple killings and kidnappings of civilians from Sweida, including humanitarian workers. The attacks were attributed to unidentified perpetrators and to Bedouin tribes from Sweida who are demanding the release of their people detained by Druze armed groups in Sweida.’⁸⁸

9.6.3 In November 2025, the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI), a ‘nonpartisan Philadelphia-based think tank dedicated to strengthening US national security and improving American foreign policy’⁸⁹, published an article which stated:

‘In July 2025, government forces and allied tribal mobilizations stormed the Druze-majority province of Suwayda after clashes between some local Druze and Sunni Bedouin tribes. What began as skirmishes quickly escalated into one of the bloodiest incidents of the post-Assad era, leaving anywhere from 1,000 to 2,000 Druze civilians dead. The violence triggered Israeli intervention, with airstrikes targeting government and tribal militia positions – and even the Ministry of Defense and an area near the presidential palace – in central Damascus. Disturbing footage of executions and abducted Druze women circulated online, echoing crimes perpetrated by the Islamic State (ISIS) against non-Muslim minorities in the preceding years. Dozens of Sunni Bedouins were also killed and hundreds displaced

⁸⁷ EUAA, [COI Query: Syria – Major human rights, security, and...](#) (pages 34 – 36), 1 October 2025

⁸⁸ EUAA, [COI Query: Syria – Major human rights, security, and...](#) (page 13), 1 October 2025

⁸⁹ FPRI, [About](#), no date

as a result of the clashes in Suwayda.

‘The Suwayda tragedy underscored the depth of the minority crisis facing the new Syria. Officially, the government blamed “rogue elements,” but mounting evidence – including CCTV footage showing uniformed personnel participating in executions – has cast doubt on that narrative. President Ahmed al Sharaa’s praise for tribal mobilizations amid the violence only worsened perceptions of state complicity.’⁹⁰

Using the sources consulted (see [Bibliography](#)), CPIT did not find any other information indicating that 2,000 Druze civilians died in the violence. Other sources provided lower figures (see paragraph 9.5.4).

9.6.4 The December 2025 DIS report stated:

‘The Druze have been subjected to severe violence, displacement, and discrimination. Clashes between the Druze and both government and tribal forces in 2025 resulted in thousands of deaths and an extensive siege, leaving Suweida in crisis. Although a ceasefire followed, violence and kidnappings against Druze civilians continue, and deep mistrust towards the authorities persists. The community remains fearful, marginalised, and largely unprotected.’⁹¹

9.6.5 Citing interviews with international organisations and a Syrian human rights organisation, the same source stated:

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

‘The prevailing mistrust towards state authorities also influences how members of the Druze community perceive the prospect of seeking protection from the government. An international organisation noted that, in principle, Druze individuals can request protection from the authorities against violence like any other Syrian citizen. However, sources indicate that Druze – similar to Syrians from other backgrounds – generally lack confidence in the authorities’ ability or willingness to provide effective protection, due to widespread impunity and the absence of accountability.’⁹²

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9.7 Treatment by non-state actors

9.7.1 In June 2025, the DIS published a COI report on Syria. Citing a Syrian journalist, the report stated: ‘In areas such as Jaramana and Sahnaya, tensions persist. Residents are sometimes accused of supporting Israel, which affects their daily lives and freedom of movement, especially when travelling to districts such as Bab Toma in Damascus.’⁹³ The source did not

⁹⁰ FPRI, [Syria’s Fragile Transition and the Enduring Minority Question](#), 10 November 2025

⁹¹ DIS, [Syria: Situation of Certain Groups](#) (page 1), 11 December 2025

⁹² DIS, [Syria: Situation of Certain Groups](#) (page 30), 11 December 2025

⁹³ DIS, [Syria: Security situation](#) (page 14), 19 June 2025

explain the relevance of Bab Toma district.

9.7.2 Commenting on events that took place between March and April 2025, the July 2025 EUAA report stated, citing various sources:

‘The new government denied responsibility for the [April and May 2025] violence attributing it to “outlaws.” Simultaneously, anti-Druze sentiment surged on social media, with widespread accusations of their support of Israel and the Assad regime and the “calls to massacre them.” The government and media “either remained silent or issued weak statements” against anti-Druze hate speech.

‘Anti-Druze hostility reportedly spread across the country. In Hama, protestors reportedly chanted anti-Druze slogans, while in Homs, a university protest included calls for violence against the Druze, prompting many students to return to Druze-majority areas. Syria Direct reported that Druze students were evacuated from universities in Homs, Damascus, Latakia, and Hama, with thousands returning to Sweida amid fears of further reprisals. In response, Minister of Higher Education Marwan Jamil al-Halabi issued a directive prohibiting “sectarian rhetoric” on university campuses.

‘In mid-May 2025, members of a local armed group linked to Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri-affiliated Joint Operations Room reportedly intercepted a bus carrying students returning from Sweida to their universities, citing security concerns.

‘... According to researcher Rabeh Ghadban, many Druze perceive the clashes not as “isolated incidents”, but as a part of broader pattern of sectarian hostilities and “a continuation of extremist ideologies” of [the] Syrian president. He also noted that in the absence of effective state protection, the Druze continued to rely on local militias to patrol streets, resolve disputes, and repel attacks. At the beginning of May 2025, Etana Syria noted that, Druze factions remained “on high alert” in Sweida.’⁹⁴

9.7.3 The October 2025 EUAA COI response stated, citing various sources:

‘Human Rights Watch assessed that the clashes between the Druze-led and the Bedouin armed groups [in July 2025] fuelled sectarian hate speech and heightened the risk of reprisals against Druze communities nationwide. According to UN experts, Druze survivors, including students in Damascus, Homs, Aleppo, and Latakia, continue to face harassment and live in fear for their safety. According to a Syrian Christian activist, some Druze students have been expelled from the universities and one was killed.’⁹⁵

9.7.4 On 22 October 2025, the Associated Press reported:

‘The small Druze minority in Syria’s northern Idlib province was shaken by an apparently targeted shooting that killed three members of their community this week.

‘The attack came in the wake of clashes in another area of Syria months earlier in which Druze communities were targeted, and amid heightened sectarian tensions and calls by some Druze groups for secession.

‘No group claimed responsibility for the attack in Idlib Tuesday evening, in which unidentified gunmen on motorcycles opened fire on a van near the

⁹⁴ EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (pages 51 – 52), 7 July 2025

⁹⁵ EUAA, [COI Query: Syria – Major human rights, security, and...](#) (page 35), 1 October 2025

Druze village of Kafr Maris, killing two women and a man.

‘Idlib is a Sunni-majority province that was the birthplace of the Islamist former insurgent group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which led last year’s offensive that unseated Syria’s former autocratic leader, President Bashar Assad.

‘... At the funeral Wednesday [22 October 2025] for the victims, one of their uncles, Rafiq Ahmad, said the Druze in Idlib had in recent months faced false accusations of being affiliated with Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri, a Druze spiritual and political leader in the southern Sweida province with affiliated militias that have clashed with pro-government forces.

‘Ahmad said his nephew and nieces had taken the van to a dentist appointment in a neighboring town Tuesday and were returning when the gunmen opened fire on them.

“If they had wanted to rob the van they would have made a checkpoint and stopped it to rob it, but they intended to kill and to intimidate and scare the people here and maybe to make them leave this country,” he said.

‘Ahmad said there had also been recent incidents of robbery and intimidation and that olive farmers in the area were afraid to go to their orchards. He called on the state to arrest the killers and to put checkpoints around the Druze villages for their protection.

‘Abdelrahman Ghazal, a local government official, said authorities are “taking the necessary procedures” to identify and prosecute the perpetrators of the deadly shooting, and are installing more checkpoints and security cameras in the area.⁹⁶

9.7.5 Reporting on the same incident, The New Arab stated: ‘... [A relative of the victims] said Syrian security forces deployed heavily around the area following the attack and conducted field investigations, setting up temporary checkpoints ... in an attempt to pursue the perpetrators.’⁹⁷

9.7.6 On 29 October 2025, UAE-based news outlet⁹⁸ The National reported:

‘Gunmen in Syria have killed two Druze people on a bus travelling from Damascus to the sect’s heartland of Sweida, ... The incident on Tuesday [28 October 2025] undermined a US-brokered deal last month to reconcile the Syrian government with the Druze, ...

‘The Suwayda24 news network identified the victims as Aya Salam, a college student, and Kamal Abdul Baqi, the conductor on the bus, who was in his 40s. Under the US-brokered agreement reached on September 16 [2025] the Syrian government committed to ensuring the “the safe and free movement of citizens and trade” along the route, which links Druze in the capital with their southern heartland on Sweida.

‘The bus, carrying 30 passengers, left from the Damascus suburb of Jaramana. It had travelled only 15 kilometres to Najha when two masked gunmen in black stopped it and opened fire, Suwayda 24 reported. There was no comment from Syrian authorities.

‘Rayyan Maarouf, a researcher at the network who interviewed survivors,

⁹⁶ Associated Press, [Druze community in Syria’s Idlib province on edge...](#), 22 October 2025

⁹⁷ The New Arab, [Three Druze civilians killed after passenger van...](#), 22 October 2025

⁹⁸ The National, [About us](#), no date

said the gunmen asked the bus driver where it was going, and to identify the passengers. When they ascertained all the passengers were Druze, they fired at the bus.

‘... An intermittent bus service between Damascus and Sweida started this month but Mr Maarouf said passengers have to give reasons for visiting either the central authorities or the Druze administration in Sweida loyal to Mr Al Hijri. This means that only humanitarian cases, or those who attend school outside Sweida, are allowed to proceed.’⁹⁹

9.7.7 On 10 November 2025, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), an organisation that works to ‘defend, uphold and promote the right to freedom of religious or belief in over 20 countries’¹⁰⁰, reported:

‘CSW is saddened by news of the death of the Syrian Druze community leader Dr Hamza Shaheen, who was abducted from his family home in Deir Ali near Damascus on 27 October [2025].

‘CSW sources report Dr Shaheen was kidnapped by masked armed men who stormed his house and shouted abuse before taking him with them. The kidnappers subsequently called Dr Shaheen’s family several times and demanded a significant ransom whilst repeatedly refusing to provide evidence that he was still alive.

‘Security forces arrested the kidnappers on 4 November [2025], upon which they confessed that Dr Shaheen had died due to severe mistreatment he had suffered whilst in captivity.’¹⁰¹ The source did not provide further information on the identity of the kidnappers, nor did it specify whether Dr Shaheen was targeted on the basis of his religion.

9.7.8 The November 2025 ISD report stated:

‘The violence in Suweida triggered an increase in hate speech and rhetoric targeting the Druze community ... ISD collected 34.03K mentions on X [formerly Twitter] on a query for terms related to anti-Druze discourse between 1 March 2025 and 1 September 2025. Spikes in online hate and anti-Druze rhetoric correlated with major events such as the ceasefire agreement and Israeli strikes in Syria.

‘... Anti-Druze rhetoric was amplified by international voices online. Accounts geolocated in Saudi Arabia accounted for 24% of mentions, followed by Syria with 15% and the United States with 7%. Effectively, anti-Druze mentions geolocated to the United States and Saudi Arabia (31%) accounted for over double the mentions geolocated to Syria. This reflects the significant role of international Arabic-language voices in driving online anti-Druze hate.’¹⁰²

9.7.9 Commenting on the main anti-Druze narratives, the same source stated:

‘ISD analysts reviewed the most shared posts in the anti-Druze hate query to determine the primary anti-Druze hate narratives. The most common by far were claims that the Druze are Israeli agents, frequently referencing examples of Druze within Israel. Of the top 100 posts, 68 included outright

⁹⁹ The National, [Killing of Syrian Druze bus passengers undermines...](#), 29 October 2025

¹⁰⁰ CSW, [Our Work](#), no date

¹⁰¹ CSW, [Druze doctor dies from severe mistreatment after abduction](#), 10 November 2025

¹⁰² ISD, [How violence in southern Syria fuelled anti-Druze hate and online...](#), 28 November 2025

hate or broader anti-Druze narratives. Of those, 26 (38.2%) portrayed the Druze as agents of Israel, 19 (27.9%) portrayed them as traitors, 8 (11.8%) portrayed them as infidels/non-Muslims, 4 (5.9%) called for a boycott of all Druze - including outside of Suweyda - and 3 (4.4%) claimed that the Druze were not indigenous to Syria. 10 (14.7%) included dehumanising language, i.e. comparing Druze to pigs or dogs. The discourse often involved calls for collective punishment, which is a war crime. The remaining posts were either 1) descriptive reporting, 2) counter-speech defending the Druze, 3) criticisms of Sunnis, Bedouins, or the government citing anti-Druze violence, or 4) criticisms of specific Druze individuals and groups, such as Druze spiritual leader Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri and 'al-Hijri militants'.¹⁰³

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9.8 Accountability for human rights abuses

9.8.1 In September 2025, Reuters reported:

'Syria has interrogated and detained members of its defence and interior ministries suspected of committing abuses against civilians in the predominantly Druze province of Sweida in July [2025], the committee investigating the violence has said.'

'Syria appointed a committee to investigate the violence on July 31. Its spokesperson Ammar Izzdein told Syrian and regional media outlets on Tuesday night that members of both the interior and defence ministries had been questioned and referred to the judiciary over their suspected involvement in abuses.'

'Izzedin declined to say how many personnel were detained, but said they were Syrian nationals who carried out the atrocities in an individual capacity.'¹⁰⁴

9.8.2 In October 2025, a delegation from the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry arrived in Suweida to investigate alleged human rights abuses that took place in July. The government authorised the visit after initially refusing entry on the basis of security concerns¹⁰⁵.

9.8.3 In November 2025, Turkish state-owned news outlet¹⁰⁶ Anadolu Agency reported:

'A Syrian [government] committee investigating violent events in the southern Suwayda province said Sunday that its probe is still ongoing to uncover the full truth, ensure justice for victims, and prevent future violations. Judge Hatem al-Nassaan, who heads the committee, told a press conference in Damascus that the committee convened a public briefing "in fulfilment of its legal duty to uncover the truth, establish responsibility, and guarantee justice for victims and those affected."'¹⁰⁷

9.8.4 CPIT was unable to find further information about accountability for human rights abuses committed in Suweida in the sources consulted (see [Sources](#))

¹⁰³ ISD, [How violence in southern Syria fuelled anti-Druze hate and online...](#), 28 November 2025

¹⁰⁴ Reuters, [Syria detains defence, interior ministry members suspected of...](#), 3 September 2025

¹⁰⁵ Syriac Press, [UN Independent Commission of Inquiry arrives...](#), 2 October 2025

¹⁰⁶ Anadolu Agency, [About Us](#), no date

¹⁰⁷ Anadolu Agency, [Syrian committee says Suwayda probe ongoing...](#), 16 November 2025

10. Shia Muslims (excluding Alawites)

10.1 Note on Alawites

10.1.1 Alawism is generally considered an offshoot of Shia Islam¹⁰⁸. However, the information in this section is exclusively about non-Alawite Shia Muslims. For information on Alawites, see the CPIN [Syria: Alawites and actual or perceived Assadists](#).

10.2 Population numbers and locations

10.2.1 Demographic data for Syria is generally considered unreliable as a result of population displacement and other conflict-related reasons^{109 110}. The numbers in this section should therefore be seen as rough estimates.

10.2.2 MRG's profile on Isma'ilis in Syria, updated in March 2018, stated:

'The Isma'ilis are considered an offshoot of Shi'a Islam, and the split with the mainstream Shi'ism occurred over the recognition of the Seventh Imam.

'... Since the times of the Ottoman Empire, most of them [the Isma'ilis] can be found in the south of Salamiyah. A few thousand Isma'ilis also live in the mountains west of Hamah and several thousand in al-Ladhiqiyah ... Most Isma'ilis live in Salamiya, east of Hama, with smaller communities around Masyaf and Qadmus in the southern part of the coastal mountain range.'¹¹¹

10.2.3 In June 2024, the United States Department of State (USSD) published a report on religious freedom in Syria which stated that 'Twelver Shia Muslims generally live in and around Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs.'¹¹²

10.2.4 In December 2024, Deutsche Welle (DW) published an article which stated that 'Shia Muslims ... make up around 3% of Syria's population [approximately 750,000]'¹¹³.

10.2.5 MRG's profile on Syria, updated in January 2025, stated: '... Isma'ili Muslims have lived for the most part in the coastal mountain range, south of the main Alawi [Alawite] areas. Twelver Shi'as live in a handful of communities near Homs and to the west and north of Aleppo.'¹¹⁴

10.2.6 In March 2025, Amwaj, a UK-based news site covering the Middle East¹¹⁵, published an article entitled 'Inside story: Syria's Shiites face uncertain fate in future dominated by Sunni Islamists' (the March 2025 Amwaj article) which stated: 'Less than 1% of Syrians are thought to be Twelver Shiites.'¹¹⁶

10.2.7 In April 2025, Al-Estiklal, an 'Arabic e-newspaper'¹¹⁷, published an article

¹⁰⁸ DW, [Syria's Alawite community: Once feared, now living in fear?](#), 28 December 2024

¹⁰⁹ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria](#) (section I), 26 June 2024

¹¹⁰ USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria](#) (section I), 26 June 2024

¹¹¹ MRG, [Isma'ili Shi'a in Syria](#), updated March 2018

¹¹² USSD, [2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria](#) (section I), 26 June 2024

¹¹³ DW, [Syria's ethnic and religious groups explained](#), 18 December 2024

¹¹⁴ MRG, [Syria](#) (Communities), January 2025

¹¹⁵ Amwaj, [About](#), no date

¹¹⁶ Amwaj, [Inside story: Syria's Shiites face uncertain fate in future...](#), 10 March 2025

¹¹⁷ Middle East Monitor, [Activists: Saudi Arabia, UAE influenced Twitter to...](#), 7 May 2019

entitled 'Syria's Shia after Assad: Keeping Ties with Iran or Embracing the New Government?' (the April 2025 Al-Estiklal article) which stated: 'Statistical reports estimate that as of 2011, Syria's Shia population ranged between 200,000 and 300,000, excluding the Alawite sect.'¹¹⁸

10.2.8 The July 2025 EUAA report stated, citing various sources:

'The Ismailis (Isma'ilis) are an offshoot of Shia Islam with a population in Syria estimated at around 250,000. They are concentrated in and around the cities of Masyaf and Salamiyah in Hama governorate and Qadmus, in Tartous governorate. Salamiyah, which has the highest concentration of Ismaili, is home to the Syrian National Ismaili Council, and has emerged as a key centre of local governance in eastern Hama following the Assad's ouster.'¹¹⁹

10.2.9 In December 2025, English-language Lebanese news site¹²⁰ L'Orient Today published an article entitled 'The Ismailis, the quiet and unexpected winners in new Syria' (the December 2025 L'Orient Today article) which stated: 'Numbering only a few tens of thousands in a country of over 20 million, the Ismailis – a religious community mainly based in central Syria – have long been known for their discretion, which is a necessity given their status as a tiny minority.'¹²¹

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10.3 Relationship with Al-Assad regime and Iran

10.3.1 The March 2025 Amwaj article stated:

'Central to the logic and rhetoric of this [Iran's] regional alliance network was the defense of Shiite holy sites, claimed as a principal justification for the Iranian presence alongside Lebanese Hezbollah and a constellation of Iraqi Shiite militias. This ultimately led to the creation of Syrian Shiite armed groups, largely composed of working-class individuals, who were actively involved in the repression of rebel-held civilian areas and combat against insurgent groups. Many local Shiites also gained employment as truck drivers, chauffeurs for foreign military figures and workers in Iranian projects. This economic empowerment came with other privileges, as they obtained official identification cards that allowed them to pass through checkpoints without difficulty.'

'... Iran strengthened its economic, religious and cultural influence in Syria ... The area surrounding the Sayyidah Zainab mausoleum became an epicenter for these policies. While it was home to just 800 people in 1960, it has now grown into a major hub of religious tourism with approximately 280,000 residents. Following the outbreak of civil conflict in 2011, the area additionally became a fortified stronghold sheltering the families of foreign Shiite fighters.'¹²²

10.3.2 The April 2025 Al-Estiklal article stated:

'After the Syrian uprising broke out in 2011 and Iran, along with Lebanon's

¹¹⁸ Al-Estiklal, [Syria's Shia After Assad: Keeping Ties with Iran or...](#), April 2025

¹¹⁹ EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (pages 47 – 48), 7 July 2025

¹²⁰ L'Orient Today, [Who we are](#), no date

¹²¹ L'Orient Today, [The Ismailis, the quiet and unexpected winners in...](#), 7 December 2025

¹²² Amwaj, [Inside story: Syria's Shiites face uncertain fate in future...](#), 10 March 2025

Hezbollah, intervened militarily, prominent Syrian Shia figures – supported by Tehran – played a key role in promoting Shia doctrine across the country.

‘Iran’s role was not limited to religious influence. It also succeeded in forming local Shia militias to support Assad’s forces in their battles against the opposition at the time.

‘With Assad gone, Syria’s Shia community is rethinking its ties to Iran – distancing itself from efforts to use them as pawns in operations aimed at undermining the country’s new security establishment.

‘... Syria is home to several sacred Shia sites, most notably the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab, daughter of Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib, located south of Damascus.

‘When Iran intervened militarily in Syria in 2012 to support Assad’s crackdown on the uprising that erupted on March 18, 2011, it used the slogan “Zaynab will not be taken captive twice.” The phrase became a rallying cry for tens of thousands of Shia fighters from Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan who traveled [sic] to Syria to “defend” the shrine.

‘... The ousted Assad regime officially recognized the Shia sects in 2011 as legitimate religious authorities, later including them in the Fatwa Council – until it was dissolved in 2022.

‘This recognition encouraged Syrian Shia to form armed factions in support of Assad’s forces, especially in areas like Homs and the towns of Nubl and el-Zahraa in Aleppo’s countryside, which became strongholds of Iranian influence for years. Tehran armed local fighters, paid salaries, and deployed foreign Shia militias and IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] personnel to their villages.

‘Syrian Shia clerics also played a key role in supporting Assad’s military machine before his downfall.’¹²³

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10.4 Treatment by the state

10.4.1 Since the fall of the Al-Assad regime in December 2024, SOHR has reported dozens of attacks targeting Shia Muslims, including killings and kidnappings. In some instances, SOHR reported that perpetrators were members of, or affiliated with, government forces. However, most incidents were attributed to ‘unidentified gunmen’ or ‘unidentified armed groups’ (see [Treatment by non-state actors](#)). In most cases, SOHR did not specify the motive for each attack. However, it described some attacks as ‘sectarian’ (i.e., motivated by religion), and indicated that some victims were targeted due to their alleged links to the former Al-Assad regime. The source did not specify whether the victims were Twelver Shias or Ismailis, but the vast majority of incidents took place in areas with no significant Ismaili community, which suggests that the victims were likely to be Twelver Shias. For details on specific incidents, see the [SOHR website](#).

10.4.2 The April 2025 Al-Estiklal article stated:

‘Dr. Bashir Baalbaki, who lives near the Sayyida Zaynab shrine, told the

¹²³ Al-Estiklal, [Syria’s Shia After Assad: Keeping Ties with Iran or...](#), April 2025

same source that conditions in Shiite-populated areas – Sayyida Zaynab and al-Amin neighborhoods in Damascus, Nubl and el-Zahraa in the north, and Busra al-Sham in the south – are steadily improving.

‘He noted that some of those who fled after the fall of the Assad regime are now returning home, and that most incidents are isolated and being addressed by the authorities. While Syrian state security guards are stationed at the Sayyida Zaynab shrine, they do not manage the site, which continues to receive Shiite pilgrims from Syria and abroad.

‘Baalbaki also mentioned that Syrian security forces coordinate in advance with shrine officials before conducting house raids targeting suspected collaborators with Hezbollah or Iranian entities.

‘According to Baalbaki, Syrian security forces have confiscated properties – including homes and centers – that were registered under Iranian organizations. “Syrian Shiites today understand that any ties to Hezbollah or the Iranians come at a deadly cost. Those who remain in Syria know that the previous era is over, and there’s no going back,” he added.¹²⁴

10.4.3 On 22 February 2025, SOHR reported:

‘Security forces in Damascus assaulted civilians and worshippers at Al-Mustafa Mosque – Sidi Miqdad – Al-Mustafa Complex (Al-Andalus neighborhood) in Babbila in Rif Dimashq [Rural Damascus], after they had refused to hand over the mosque keys and vacate the premises. Security forces also vandalized offices and religious images inside the mosque.

‘It is worth noting that Al-Mustafa Mosque is the only mosque in the neighborhood. It was built around 25 years ago with Shia funding and support and does not fall under the jurisdiction of the Syrian Ministry of Endowments.

‘Earlier today, SOHR sources reported that Security forces in Damascus enforced a decision to terminate Adham Al-Khatib from his religious duties at Al-Mustafa Mosque – Sidi Miqdad – Al-Mustafa Complex (Al-Andalus neighborhood) in Babbila on February 20 [2025]. The decision was met with public rejection.

‘Meanwhile, Sheikh “Al-Khatib” called for residents to hold prayers at the mosque and affirm its ownership by the Shia community, with a Shia cleric leading the prayers.

‘In this context, General Security vehicles equipped with machine guns were deployed around the mosque and entered the mosque by force to perform prayers, crowding out Shia worshippers and removing Shia religious images and symbols from the mosque.

‘Members of the Shia community oppose the decision, arguing that Shia endowments are not subject to the Ministry of Endowments in matters of appointing or dismissing imams. They maintain that such decisions fall under the authority of the religious leadership office.

‘On February 19 [2025], SOHR sources reported that Security services arrested “Sheikh Adham Al-Khateeb,” the representative of Shiite community

¹²⁴ Al-Estiklal, [Syria’s Shia After Assad: Keeping Ties with Iran or...](#), April 2025

in Syria, shortly after having arrived in his office in Sayeda Zeinab neighbourhood in Damascus. Security services also arrested his son and escort and took the three men to a security centre for no charges. This has triggered a state of broad resentment among people of Shiite community.

‘Individuals close to the Sheikh suggested that the arrest of the man was attributed to the speech he gave during the past Friday prayer when he criticized the indifference by security services regarding the complaints by Shiite community following the illegal seizure of their houses and forcing them to evacuate their houses without taking any personal properties, as well as security services’ misdealing with the escalating kidnappings.

‘Meanwhile, relevant authorities have issued no official statements explaining the reasons behind arresting the three people, while Shiite people called for the immediate release of the Sheikh or explaining the reasons behind detaining him.’¹²⁵

According to a separate SOHR article and an article published by Beirut-based pan-Arab media outlet Al Mayadeen¹²⁶, the three individuals were released less than two hours after their arrest^{127 128}. The Al Mayadeen article also reported that, after his release, Sheikh Adham Al-Khateeb issued a statement in which he reassured the Shia community that the issues had been resolved and reaffirmed his support for the new government.

Aside from the SOHR report, CPIT was unable to find any other information that corroborates the incident at Al-Mustafa Mosque in the sources consulted ([Bibliography](#)).

10.4.4 The March 2025 Amwaj article stated:

‘Security forces of the new government and local Sunnis now control access to Sayyidah Zainab. The shrine’s director, Dib Krayem, told Amwaj.media that in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Assad, “Fear prevailed as armed groups from Sunni suburbs attempted to seize the mausoleum’s treasures.” However, Krayem noted that interim government forces now “ensure our community’s safety.” Many local Shiite residents also privately relayed that, to their surprise, relations with security forces in the area are better than expected. Pilgrimages have resumed, bringing worshippers from as far afield as Iraq and Pakistan.’¹²⁹

10.4.5 The July 2025 EUAA report stated, citing various sources:

‘Salamiyah, which has the highest concentration of Ismaili, is home to the Syrian National Ismaili Council, and has emerged as a key centre of local governance in eastern Hama following the Assad’s ouster. The Ismaili Council, historically unaffiliated with armed groups or regime military leaders, played a crucial mediating role in facilitating the peaceful handover of the area to HTS [Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham] on 4 December 2024. Since then, the Council has taken on administrative duties, supported civil engagement, operated a volunteer security force alongside local police, and formed a joint

¹²⁵ SOHR, [Rif Dimashq: Security Forces assault civilians and...](#), 22 February 2025

¹²⁶ Al Mayadeen, [About us](#), no date

¹²⁷ Al Mayadeen, [Released representative of Syria’s Shiite community...](#), 19 February 2025

¹²⁸ SOHR, [Nearly two hours after having been arrested: Security services...](#), 19 February 2025

¹²⁹ Amwaj, [Inside story: Syria’s Shiites face uncertain fate in future...](#), 10 March 2025

civilian-military security committee to address violations.

‘In the coastal city of Qadmus (Tartous governorate) similar cooperation has developed. According to local Ismailis, volunteers have helped bolster understaffed government police units, receiving small arms support and administrative backing from both the new HTS-aligned leadership and the Assad regime-era mukhtar.

‘... Ismailis were not represented in the transitional government announced in late March.’¹³⁰

10.4.6 The December 2025 L’Orient Today article stated:

‘... [A] year after Bashar al-Assad’s fall, this [the Ismaili] community appears to have emerged stronger from the regime change. Despite ongoing sectarian tensions across the country, particularly in the northeast, in Hassakeh and along the coast, the Ismaili stronghold of Salamiya (in Hama Governorate) has remained largely calm, maintaining a stable relationship with the new authorities under President Ahmad al-Sharaa.

‘... During the Syrian revolution, the Ismailis largely stayed out of the armed conflict, though they participated in demonstrations. After the fall of the Assad regime, however, they were quick to take steps closer to the new authorities.

“When the rebel forces advanced toward the regions of Salamiya and Masyaf, an agreement was reached between the fighters and the Ismaili Supreme Council to allow a peaceful transfer of power,” Orwa Darwish, editor-in-chief of Syria Today and a member of the Ismaili Supreme Council, told L’Orient-Le Jour.

‘A year later, the integration of the Ismailis into the new Syria appears to have been successful, particularly compared with other Shiite communities, such as the Alawites and Twelvers Shia. Under the electoral law, Salamiya is a separate electoral district, ensuring the Ismailis stable parliamentary representation of at least two MPs.

“In general, our interactions with the government and security forces are very positive,” Hashem (whose first name has been changed), a resident of Salamiya, told L’Orient-Le Jour.

‘... Darwish noted, however, that the residents of Salamiya remain cautious, fearing a repeat of the scenarios seen on the coast or in Sweida. “There are many armed Sunni tribes in the region. Until the new authorities prove themselves, this will remain a source of concern for the inhabitants,” he added.’¹³¹

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10.5 Treatment by non-state actors

10.5.1 In December 2024, Saudi Arabian English-language newspaper¹³² Arab News published an article (originally published by Reuters) entitled ‘Syrian Shiites and other minorities flee to Lebanon, fearing Islamist rule’ which stated:

¹³⁰ EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (page 48), 7 July 2025

¹³¹ L’Orient Today, [The Ismailis, the quiet and unexpected winners in...](#), 7 December 2025

¹³²Arab News, [About Us](#), no date

‘Tens of thousands of Syrians, mostly Shiite Muslims, have fled to Lebanon since Sunni Muslim Islamists toppled Bashar Assad, fearing persecution despite assurances from the new rulers in Damascus that they will be safe, a Lebanese official said.

‘At the border with Lebanon, where thousands of people were trying to leave Syria on Thursday, a dozen Shiite Muslims interviewed by Reuters described threats made against them, sometimes in person but mostly on social media.‘... Elham, a 30-year-old nurse, said she had been waiting at the crossing for days without food or water with her 10-day-old niece and two-year-old son.

‘A Shiite from Damascus, she said she fled to rural areas when the government fell. When she returned, she found her house looted and torched. She and others said that armed, masked men raided their homes and ordered them at gunpoint to leave, or be killed.

“They took our car because they said it’s theirs. You daren’t say a word. We left everything and fled.”

‘... In parts of Syria’s north, however, some residents who fled when HTS went on the offensive in late November [2024] said they now felt confident to return.¹³³

10.5.2 In March 2025, ‘non-profit news organization’¹³⁴ Religion Unplugged published an article entitled ‘Syrian Shia Refugees In Lebanon Battle Mounting Hardships’ which stated:

‘Mohamed Hassan, a 30-year-old Syrian Shiite, arrived at the Lebanese-Syrian border shortly after the collapse of Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad’s regime in December, joining tens of thousands of fellow Shiites in a desperate human chain ... Hassan had received a deluge of threatening messages on his social media accounts following Assad’s ouster. Many of these messages, laced with insults such as “Your kind are dogs, infidels,” arrived from unknown sources and demanded his death simply because of his sectarian identity. Living alone in Damascus’ Bab Sharqi area while his family resided abroad for years, he felt isolated in the face of rising threats ... “It wasn’t just me,” he said. “Every Shiite I knew was getting these messages, ordering us to hide or be slaughtered. When your neighbors stop answering their doors, and the streets fill with whispers, you don’t think; you run.”¹³⁵

10.5.3 In March 2025, US-based think tank The Century Foundation, which describes itself as ‘progressive’ and ‘independent’¹³⁶, published a report entitled ‘Cross-Border Shuffle: Refugee Movement Between Lebanon and Syria after Assad’ which stated:

‘On December 9 [2024], basically overnight, nearly 90,000 people entered Baalbek-Hermel’s northernmost Hermel district through unofficial crossing points from Syria’s Homs governorate.

‘... Humanitarians told the author that these newly arrived Syrians are

¹³³ Arab News, [Syrian Shiites and other minorities flee to Lebanon, fearing...](#), 13 December 2024

¹³⁴ Religion Unplugged, [About](#), no date

¹³⁵ Religion Unplugged, [Syrian Shia Refugees In Lebanon Battle...](#), 10 March 2025

¹³⁶ The Century Foundation, [About](#), no date

largely, but not entirely, Shia Muslims. Many come from Homs, as well as areas on the Syrian coast, Aleppo, and Damascus. New arrivals have told humanitarians that they fled to Lebanon because they feared the country's new authorities, because they received direct threats, or because violence – torching houses, for example – was drawing closer to their homes.¹³⁷

10.5.4 Since the fall of the Al-Assad regime in December 2024, SOHR has reported dozens of attacks targeting Shia Muslims, including killings and kidnappings. SOHR attributed most of these incidents to 'unidentified gunmen' or 'unidentified armed groups'. In most cases, SOHR did not specify the motive for each attack. However, it described some attacks as 'sectarian' (i.e., motivated by religion), and indicated that some victims were targeted due to their alleged links to the former Al-Assad regime. The source did not specify whether the victims were Twelver Shias or Ismailis, but the vast majority of incidents took place in areas with no significant Ismaili community, which suggests that the victims were likely to be Twelver Shias. For details on specific incidents, see the [SOHR website](#).

10.5.5 In January 2025, Al Jazeera reported:

'Syrian authorities have foiled an attempt by ISIL (ISIS) fighters to blow up a revered Shia shrine in a Damascus suburb, state news agency SANA has reported.

'Intelligence and security forces "succeeded in thwarting an attempt by ISIL to carry out a bombing inside the Sayyida Zeinab shrine", a source within Syria's intelligence agency told SANA on Saturday, adding that several people have been arrested.

"The General Intelligence Directorate is utilising all its resources to confront all attempts to target the Syrian people in all their diversity," the intelligence official told SANA.¹³⁸

10.5.6 The July 2025 EUAA report stated:

'Since December 2024, SJAC [Syria Justice and Accountability Centre] has documented targeted revenge killings of male individuals allegedly linked to the Assad regime's military or intelligence services. These killings, reportedly carried out by unidentified armed men, are based on the victims' alleged affiliation with the Assad regime and roles in past violations rather than their sectarian affiliation. Victims have included individuals from Sunni, Alawite, and Shia communities and were reportedly targeted for both formal roles in the intelligence and security of the former government or for being informants. These targeted attacks have occurred across multiple governorates including Aleppo, Dar'a, Damascus, Deir Ez Zor, Homs, Hama, and Latakia.'¹³⁹

10.5.7 The same source also indicated that Saraya Ansar Al-Sunnah, a 'radical Sunni militant Jihadist group which emerged in late January 2025 and is ideologically aligned with ISIL', has 'vowed to target Alawites, Shia Muslims, and loyalists of the former Assad government.'¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ The Century Foundation, [Cross-Border Shuffle: Refugee...](#), 31 March 2025

¹³⁸ Al Jazeera, [Syrian intelligence says it thwarted ISIL attempt to blow up Shia ...](#), 11 January 2025

¹³⁹ EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (page 35), 7 July 2025

¹⁴⁰ EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (page 36) 7 July 2025

10.5.8 Commenting on the Ismaili community in Syria's coastal areas (see paragraph 10.4.5), the same source stated, citing an article written by Gregory Waters for the Atlantic Council:

'However, their collaboration with the new authorities has drawn violent backlash from pro-Assad Alawite factions. In late February and early March [2025], attacks killed three Ismaili volunteers and officials [two security volunteers and one Ismaili Council member]. During the March uprising in the coastal areas, Ismailis in Qadmus protected interim government forces from insurgents and negotiated their safe exit, actions that led to further threats from loyalist communities.'¹⁴¹

10.5.9 On 11 October 2025, SOHR reported:

'Sectarian and security tensions erupted in the vicinity of Al-Saiydh Zeinab in Rif Dimashq around 1:00 a.m. last night. This followed a gathering of young men from Al-Bahdaliyah and Al-Thaynabiyyah areas, who headed toward Al-Fatimiyyah Street in the centre of the area.

'According to reliable SOHR sources, the protesters, belonging to Bedouin tribes and others, removed their shirts and chanted sectarian slogans containing offensive language targeting Shiite religious figures and anti-Shiite slogans such as: "free [sic], free Syria, Shiites, get out!" we have come with slaughter.'

'Syrian security forces intervened to disperse the protesters, who scattered into alleyways and side streets. However, some regrouped after the withdrawal of the security forces, fired shots into the air and organized a second demonstration on Al-Fatimiyyah Street, the main street in the town, before the crowd dispersed again and headed back toward Al-Bahdaliyah.

'In the middle of the night, some individuals wandered around on motorcycles shouting and threatening the exit of members of the Shiite community, insulting Imam Ali and Al-Saiydh Zainab and breaking shops, prompting security forces to intervene, contain the situation and protect civilians.'¹⁴²

10.5.10 On 10 November 2025, SOHR reported:

'SOHR activists have reported alarming sectarian tension in Rif Dimashq, as an imam spearheaded a public incitement campaign against residents of the Shiite community in Hujayrah town in Sayeda Zeinab area. The campaign coincided with night demonstrations calling for expulsion of Shiite residents from the area.

'The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has documented this serious escalation through video footage showing angry demonstrators and growing tension in the region, amid rising concerns about potential civil strife undermining the fragile social cohesion in Damascus and Rif Dimashq.

'According to SOHR sources, the imam played a major role in fuelling sectarian hatred and inciting residents to counter the "Shiite expansion," as he described. Those actions have triggered fears about spread of tension

¹⁴¹ EUAA, [Syria: Country Focus](#) (page 48), 7 July 2025

¹⁴² SOHR, [Rif Dimashq: Sectarian and security tensions erupt in...](#), 11 October 2025

and resurgence of sectarian division in south Damascus region.¹⁴³

10.5.11 Several sources reported that armed groups vandalised cemeteries in a Shia-majority village in Homs countryside on 16 December 2025^{144 145 146}. The sources provided differing information about those responsible for the attacks. Rights Monitor Syria, a 'dedicated initiative committed to the monitoring, documentation, and reporting of human rights violations in Syria'¹⁴⁷, stated: 'The acts of vandalism were attributed to takfiri [i.e., Muslims who declare other Muslims to be 'non-believers'¹⁴⁸] groups linked to the interim authority "Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham," [i.e., the new government] without confirmed information regarding the identity of the individuals who carried out the acts.'¹⁴⁹ Hawar News Agency, which is 'affiliated with the Kurdish administration of northeast Syria'¹⁵⁰, described the perpetrators as '[g]roups loyal to the Syrian Interim Government'¹⁵¹. SOHR, meanwhile, described them as 'unidentified individuals'¹⁵². Rights Monitor and Hawar News Agency did not provide any additional information explaining why their sources believed the perpetrators were linked to the government.

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¹⁴³ SOHR, [Sectarian strife in Rif Dimashq: Imam leads campaign...](#), 10 November 2025

¹⁴⁴ Hawar News Agency, [Attack on graves, cemeteries in al-Hazmiya...](#), 16 December 2025

¹⁴⁵ Rights Monitor Syria, [Vandalism of the al-Hazmiya Village Cemetery...](#), 17 December 2025

¹⁴⁶ SOHR, [Video: Tombstones in Shiite cemetery in Homs countryside...](#), 17 December 2025

¹⁴⁷ Rights Monitor Syria, [About Us](#), no date

¹⁴⁸ Counter Extremism Project, [Takfir](#), no date

¹⁴⁹ Rights Monitor Syria, [Vandalism of the al-Hazmiya Village Cemetery...](#), 17 December 2025

¹⁵⁰ Committee to Protect Journalists, [Essam Abdullah](#), no date

¹⁵¹ Hawar News Agency, [Attack on graves, cemeteries in al-Hazmiya...](#), 16 December 2025

¹⁵² SOHR, [Video: Tombstones in Shiite cemetery in Homs countryside...](#), 17 December 2025

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](#).

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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:

- Legal context surrounding freedom of religion
- Demography, population and geographic locations for:
 - Christians
 - Shia Muslims (excluding Alawites)
 - Druze
- Situation for these religious minority groups since fall of Al-Assad regime, including:
 - Treatment by state actors
 - Treatment by non-state actors

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Version control and feedback

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **2.0**
- valid from 11 February 2026

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 only.

Official – sensitive: Not for disclosure – End of section

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Changes from last version of this note

Both the COI and Assessment sections have been updated.

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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](#).

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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:

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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](#).

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