

Country – capital	Syrian Arab Republic - Damascus
Population	Total population 20.4 million (est. 2021). Ethnic groups: Arab ~50%, Alawite ~15%, Kurd ~10%, Levantine ~10%, other ~15%. ¹
Geography	Middle East, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, between Lebanon and Turkey ²
Languages – official / lingua franca	Arabic (official), Kurdish, Armenian and other local languages ³
Writing system	Arabic (from right to left)
Education and literacy	Education is free at all levels and compulsory up to 9 th grade (6 yrs primary and 3 yrs lower secondary school). In 2004, the literacy rate of >15 years was estimated at 81 % (88 % for men and 74 % for women. ⁴ However, the 11-year conflict has caused a steep decline in school attendance and quality of education. Many schools were damaged or destroyed, many teachers left the country or were killed. ⁵ Between 2010 and 2018 the enrolment rate for 5–17 age group decreased from 85% to 61%. Children also drop out because of child labour, child marriage, and violence. ⁶ Almost one-third of those enrolled do not make it to the end of primary school. ⁷
Religions	Muslim 87% (official; includes Sunni 74% and Alawi, Ismaili, and Shia 13%), Christian 10% (might be less due to Christians fleeing the war), Druze 3% ⁸
Conflict history and overview	Syria's civil war began as part of the protests which swept through the region in 2011. Peaceful rallies against the rule of President Bashar al-Assad quickly spiralled into a devastating armed conflict that has displaced more than half of the country's pre-war population. ⁹ The terrorist group Islamic State (IS), having captured vast territories in 2013 and terrorising the population, was pushed back by US-led coalition forces. In the years 2019-2020, 2323 violent incidents took place, mainly in Idlib and Aleppo, by Russian and Syrian forces, with >10,250 civilian deaths and injuries. ¹⁰ A devastating offensive by Syrian government forces in the northwest (Idlib) led to 960,000 new displacements in 2019. ¹¹
Humanitarian situation	Life expectancy at birth: 72 yrs (2019) ¹² Population below poverty line: 82.5% (2014 est.) ¹³ in need of humanitarian aid: 14.6 million people, esp. in north-west ¹⁴ Syria is a complex humanitarian and protection emergency characterized by over 10 years of ongoing fighting with long-term consequences, widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure (incl. hospitals), economic collapse, contamination by explosives, and the largest number of IDPs in the world. ¹⁵
Human rights situation	Flagrant human rights violations and war crimes by all sides in the conflict (the Syrian-Russian military alliance, opposition and terrorist groups): bombings on civilians, hospitals and schools, killings and kidnappings, rapes and tortures, unlawful detention, sexual violence against women, incl. forced abortion. Religious minorities such as Yezidis, Druze, Christians, Shia are subject to violence and discrimination. ¹⁶
Situation of women FGM – early marriages	Maternal mortality rate: 31 deaths per 100,000 live births (2017) ¹⁷ Child marriages: a growing problem in Syria and neighbouring countries ¹⁸ FGM: some anecdotal evidence of the practice but no data on % ¹⁹
Situation of LGBTI	"Unnatural sexual intercourse" is punishable with 3 years prison. Law enforcement occurs. Authorities and non-state actors target, arrest and harass, torture and rape LGBTI persons, individually and in groups, at checkpoints and in detention. ²⁰
Asylum / migration / internally displaced persons (IDPs)	IDPs within Syria: 6.6 million (31-12-2020), of which 1.8 million new in 2020. ²¹ Many refugees stay in neighbouring countries. Malta Syrian sea arrivals: 2020 unknown, in 2021 136 (16% of total) Syrian asylum applicants in Malta: 2020 unknown, 2021: 178 (15% of total)

- ¹ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria>
- ² <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria>
- ³ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria>
- ⁴ <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/sy>
- ⁵ https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/02_2020_EASO_COI_Report_Syria_Socio_economic_situation_Damascus_City.pdf
- ⁶ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/31205/9781464814013.pdf>
- ⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/syria/education>
- ⁸ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria>
- ⁹ <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/syria>
- ¹⁰ <https://aoav.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Explosive-Violence-Monitor-2020-V3-single-pages.pdf>;
https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2021_07_EASO_COI_Report_Syria_Security_situation.pdf
- ¹¹ <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/syria>
- ¹² <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN?locations=SY>
- ¹³ <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria>
- ¹⁴ <https://www.unocha.org/syrian-arab-republic/about-ocha-syria>
- ¹⁵ <https://www.unocha.org/syrian-arab-republic/about-ocha-syria>
- ¹⁶ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/syria>; <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/syria/>
- ¹⁷ <https://knoema.com/atlas/Syrian-Arab-Republic/Maternal-mortality-ratio>
- ¹⁸ <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/articles/child-marriage-and-the-syrian-conflict-7-things-you-need-to-know/>
- ¹⁹ <https://www.28toomany.org/continent/middle-east/>
- ²⁰ <https://ilga.org/state-sponsored-homophobia-report>; <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/syria#71e738>
- ²¹ <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/syria>

© BDE 2022

This factsheet was compiled by Adri van den Berg for BDE. Adri worked for many years as a Country of Origin Information (COI) researcher, her final post before retiring being with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in Malta.