# Country Factsheet

# Syria

December 2024, update from April 2022

**NB: Due to the recent events in Syria, the below information may change rapidly and is highly time-sensitive.**

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|---|---|
| **Country – capital** | Syrian Arab Republic - Damascus[1] |
| **Population** | Total population 23.9 million (est. 2024). Ethnic groups: Arab ~50%, Alawite ~15%, Kurd ~10%, Levantine ~10%, other ~15%.[2] |
| **Geography** | Middle East, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, between Lebanon and Turkey[3] |
| **Languages** | Arabic (official), Kurdish, Armenian and other local languages[4] |
| **Writing system** | Arabic (from right to left) [5] |
| **Education and literacy** | Education is free at all levels and compulsory up to 9th grade (6 yrs primary and 3 yrs lower secondary or middle school).[6] In 2015, the literacy rate was estimated at 86.4 % (92% men and 81% women).[7] The 13-year conflict has caused a steep decline in school attendance and quality of education. Many schools damaged or destroyed, many teachers left the country or were killed.[8] In 2023, 6.4 million children needed education aid, of whom 2.4 million out-of-school children. Needs are acute in the north-west as a result of ongoing insecurity and the February 2023 earthquake.[9] |
| **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%.[10] |
| **Conflict history and overview** | Syria's civil war began in 2011 with large-scale protests against President Bashar al-Assad, developing into a devastating armed conflict that displaced more than half of the country's pre-war population. By 2020, Assad controlled about 60% of the territory, while the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) controlled Idlib, the Kurdish-dominated, US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces parts of the east, and the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army in the north.[11] <br> On 28-11-2024, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and allies launched a rapid, massive offensive ("Deterrence of Aggression") on Aleppo and rapidly moved towards Hama, Homs and finally Damascus, overthrowing the Assad-government on 8-12-2024. An interim (until March 2025) transitory government had been formed, led by the former HTS-ruler of Idlib, Mohamed al-Bashir.[12] Israeli forces bombed Syrian military strategic infrastructure, and Turkey bombed Kurdish targets in north Syria. [13] |
| **Humanitarian situation** | Life expectancy at birth: 74.8 yrs (2024).[14] Population below poverty line: 82.5% (2014 est.). [15] About 14.6 million people need humanitarian aid, esp. in the north-west.[16] Widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure (incl. hospitals, schools), economic collapse, contamination by explosives, and large number of IDPs are reported. [17] A 2023 earthquake in the north, and recent Israeli bombings of Lebanon, led to new movements of displaced Syrians.[18] The situation after Assad's fall is very volatile.[19] |
| **Human rights situation** | Flagrant human rights violations and war crimes were reported in 2022 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, sexual violence against women, incl. forced abortion. Religious minorities such as Yezidis, Druze, Christians, Shia were subject to violence and discrimination. [20] |
| **Situation of women FGM – early marriages** | Maternal mortality rate: 30 deaths per 100,000 live births (2020).[21] Child marriages are increasing in Syria, esp. girls, due to poverty.[22] FGM: no recent data.[23] |
| **Situation of LGBTI** | "Unnatural sexual intercourse" is punishable with 3 years prison. Authorities and non-state actors target, arrest, harass, torture and rape LGBTI persons.[24] |
| **internally displaced persons (IDPs)/ Asylum / migration in Malta** | IDPs within Syria: 7.2 million (June 2024).[25] 6.2 million refugees in neighbouring countries. The Libanon crisis (Sept. 2024) made 320,000 Syrians returning to Syria. [26] Syrian sea arrivals: in 2021 136 (16% of total), in 2022 124 (28%), in 2023 33 (9%).[27] Syrian refugees and asylum seekers in Malta: [28] <table><tr><td>year</td><td>Refugees (UNHCR mandate)</td><td>Asylum seekers</td></tr><tr><td>2021</td><td>1918</td><td>412</td></tr><tr><td>2022</td><td>1988</td><td>361</td></tr><tr><td>2023</td><td>2191</td><td>203</td></tr><tr><td>2024 (jan-jun)</td><td>2307</td><td>189</td></tr></table> |

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1 https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria
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3 https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria
4 https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria
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22 https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/articles/child-marriage-and-the-syrian-conflict-7-things-you-need-to-know/
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28 https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download?data_finder%5BdataGroup%5D=displacement&data_finder%5Bdataset%5D=population&data_finder%5BdisplayType%5D=totals&data_finder%5BpopulationType%5D%5B%5D=REF&data_finder%5BpopulationType%5D%5B%5D=ASY&data_finder%5BpopulationType%5D%5B%5D=IDP&data_finder%5BpopulationType%5D%5B%5D=OIP&data_finder%5BpopulationType%5D%5B%5D=STA&data_finder%5BpopulationType%5D%5B%5D=HST&data_finder%5BpopulationType%5D%5B%5D=OOC&data_finder%5Byear__filterType%5D=range&data_finder%5Byear__rangeFrom%5D=2018&data_finder%5Byear__rangeTo%5D=2024&data-finder=on&data_finder%5Bcoo__displayType%5D=custom&data_finder%5Bcoo__country%5D%5B%5D=185&data_finder%5Bcoo__country%5D%5B%5D=185&data_finder%5Bcoa__displayType%5D=custom&data_finder%5Bcoa__country%5D%5B%5D=132&data_finder%5Bcoa__country%5D%5B%5D=132&data_finder%5Byear__%5D=&data_finder%5Bcoo__%5D=&data_finder%5Bcoa__%5D=&data_finder%5Badvanced__%5D=&data_finder%5Bsubmit%5D=

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, now EUAA) in Malta.