4.12.5. Access to education

> Following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, this document has been reviewed and updated. Please consult 'Interim Country Guidance: Syria (2025)'

COMMON ANALYSIS
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COI summary

Article 29 of the Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic stipulates that education is 'a right guaranteed by the state, and it is free at all levels' and that it 'shall be compulsory until the end of basic education state'. Education is mandatory up to the 9th grade (between the ages of 6 and 15), which comprises six years of primary school and three years of lower level secondary school [Damascus 2020, 3.6, p. 32]. For a child to be enrolled in formal education and to register for national exams, civil documentation is required [Damascus 2022, 2.6, p. 32; see also 4.12.6. Lack of documentation].

The GoS is the main provider of education in most areas of Syria, with the support of international NGOs and UN agencies in some areas. Schools providing primary and secondary education, including UNRWA and private schools, are under the supervision of the Syrian Ministry of Education. Public primary and secondary school is free and one source reported that 'no child is denied access based on his or her area of origin or ethnic background'. In some areas of the northeast of Syria, the 'self-administration' provides most education, such as in Raqqa and parts of Deir Ez-Zor, Aleppo, and Hasaka [Damascus 2020, 3.6, p. 34-35]. Because they are based on the Kurdish curriculum instead of the GoS' school curriculum, Kurdish graduation certificates are not recognised in other parts of the country, therefore limiting the access of pupils to higher education [Targeting 2022, 5.2.1, p. 62].

The conflict caused a decline in access to education. Sources stated that IDP children would be facing problems in accessing education, and the same was reported for children living in northern Idlib. In arrival locations, absorption capacity was overstretched for both IDP and host communities [Targeting 2020, 12.3, pp. 95-96]. Moreover, Syrian girls and women were denied access to education because of the harmful attitudes and customs (e.g. child marriage) exacerbated by the conflict. Movement restrictions have also affected the access to education for girls in Syria [Situation of women, 1.2.8, p. 39].

The devastating impact of the prolonged conflict, the economic constraints and widespread poverty across the country are factors hindering access to education as the children are compelled to work to support their households. In 2023, UNICEF reported on the increase in the number of children engaged in child labour and child marriage. It assessed that 2.4 million children were out of school and that another 1.6 million children were at risk of dropping out. [Country Focus 2023, 1.4, p. 41]

Children with disabilities experience additional barriers to education due to restriction of movement, lack of tailored learning programmes and proper educational facilities. [Country Focus 2023, 1.4, p. 43]

Moreover, one in three schools in Syria were reportedly no longer used for educational purposes as they have been ‘destroyed, damaged, continue to shelter displaced families or are being used for military purposes’. For the year 2022, the UN verified 13 attacks on schools resulting from ground shelling, air strikes and live ammunition, which were mainly attributed to GoS and affiliated forces and unidentified perpetrators. Schools were also being used for military purposes, particularly by the YPG/YPJ. No confirmed attacks on educational facilities were reported between January and May 2023. [Country Focus 2023, 1.4, p. 42]

In north-western Syria, the devastating earthquakes of February 2023 also resulted in massive damage to school infrastructure. It was estimated that 54 % of schools and 37 % of teaching and learning spaces were affected by the earthquake in that area. [Country Focus 2023, 1.4, p. 43]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

The general deficiencies in the educational system as a consequence of the ongoing conflict cannot as such be considered persecution, as they are not the result of an actor’s deliberate actions. However, in the case of deliberate restrictions on access to education, it should be assessed whether it amounts to persecution.

The denial of documentation, which also may hinder access to basic education, may be linked to originating from a (former) opposition-held territory (see also 4.12.6. Lack of documentation).

What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: identification documents, gender (girls are at a higher risk), perception of traditional gender roles in the family, socio-economic situation of the child and the family, being in an IDP situation, area of origin and residence, etc.

Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Where well-founded fear of persecution is substantiated, the individual circumstances of the child should be taken into account to determine whether a nexus to a reason for persecution can be substantiated. For example, in the case of denied identity documentation due to origin from an opposition-held territory, (imputed) political opinion may apply.

See other topics concerning children:

- 4.12.1. Violence against children: overview
- 4.12.2. Child recruitment
- 4.12.3. Child labour and child trafficking
- 4.12.4. Child marriage
- *4.12.5. Access to education*
- 4.12.6. Lack of documentation