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1.3.5. Women

For detailed information on women in Syria, see section 13. Women of the EUAA COI report Syria: Targeting of individuals (September 2022).

☐ (a) General overview of violations against women

According to a SNHR, at least 29 064 women have been killed in Syria between March 2011 and November 2024, and 11 268 women were held in detention or forcibly disappeared when the report was released.220 In the period of 1 January to 27 December 2024, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented conflict-related incidents having killed 92 women across Syria.221 Reports of killing of women by armed actors continued in the reference period222 and women also continued to be victims of other violations including deaths by unexploded ordnance223 and killings by unknown perpetrators.224 In February 2025, SOHR reported on an increased number of kidnapping cases of women and girls.225

The crisis in Syria has had a disproportionate impact on women leading to risks of violence, negative coping mechanisms, limited access to services,226 an increased vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV),227discrimination, and limited access to medical care and legal redress.228 Women and girls were disadvantaged when accessing humanitarian aid229 and disproportionally affected by food insecurity.230

(b) Legislative developments and policies affecting women

Sources indicate that there is no clarity yet on the situation of women in Syria under the HTS authorities at the time of drafting of this report.231 New foreign minister Assaad al-Shibani claimed that the authorities would 'fully support' women's rights232 and Ahmed al-Sharaa's promised to continue women's education.233 As of 1 January 2025, three women have been appointed to official positions under the new government in Syria.234 The first woman to be appointed was Aisha al-Dibs as the head of the Women's Affairs Office.235 On 30 December 2024, the new authorities appointed the first female governor of the Syrian central bank, Maysaa Sabrine, previously working as the bank's deputy governor.236 On 31 December 2024, Muhsina al-Mahithawi, from the Druze minority, was appointed as the first female governor for the province of Sweida.237

At the national level, the governance approach of the transitional administration remains unclear, particularly regarding women's rights and representation. Obaida Arnout, a government spokesperson, suggested that women's inherent characteristics make them unsuitable for certain roles in governance, while Aisha al-Dibs, the newly appointed Minister for Women, voiced opposition to working with civil society organisations that disagree with her views. Al-Dibs further attributed rising divorce rates to a previous government program and pledged to avoid similar initiatives.239

Policies targeting women's public engagement have extended to plans for gender segregation on public and private buses in Damascus. In January, the General Company for Internal Transport, 'Zajal Transport,' announced that gender-segregated transportation would be implemented in the capital within days, following earlier trials in Idlib, Aleppo, Hama, and Homs.240

Concerning the work of female judges, Obaida Arnout stated that this needs to be studied 'by experts',241 leaving the situation of female judges unclear.242 In January 2025, it was reported that Shadi al-Waisi, the Minister of Justice in the current administration, was seen in two videos overseeing the execution of two women sentenced for 'corruption and prostitution' in the Idlib area243 in 2015.244 In Homs, visual signs promoting gender segregation appeared on buses.245 In Damascus, posters displaying 'conditions of the Shariah-compliant hijab' were seen in public spaces.246 According to Al-Dibs, however, the government will not impose any dress code on Syrian women.247 In an interview from 25 December 2024, Ahmed al-Sharaa

stated that ‘Christian women would not be forced to observe the veil’ while not mentioning the Muslim women.248

☐ (c) Women without male support (female-headed household/single/widowed)

The conflict in Syria has led to a demographic change leading to a bigger number of female heads of households248and women entering the workforce.249The number of female-headed households has additionally increased because of displacement.250 According to an analysis of the World Health Organization (WHO) dated October 2024, in the whole of Syria, ‘almost every third family is headed by a woman.’251 Female-headed households belong to vulnerable groups who were disproportionately affected by the conflict252 and whose basic needs such as healthcare, food, and education were not met.253 Women faced harassment and discrimination at the workplace, especially women without husbands, including widows.254 Female unemployment rate in Syria reached 62.2 % in 2024, according to the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics.255 Children of women heads of households were at an increased risk of statelessness due to inability to register their births.256 Divorced women and widows were at a risk of forced marriages.257 Difficulties when reclaiming properties were reported concerning widows,258 returning women from Lebanon (more than half of such households were female-headed),259 and displaced women in north-eastern Syria.260 Divorced women in north-western Syria faced societal stigma, social exclusion, and lack of support.261

As of January 2025, some 40 000 people were held in the al-Hol camp in north-eastern Syria, reportedly mostly women and children, family members of ISIL members, including thousands of foreign nationals.262 The conditions of the camps have been described as ‘inhumane’263 and ‘life-threatening’.264 On 27 January, the US government ordered to pause ‘foreign development assistance’,265 which was followed by issuing a temporary waiver concerning ‘life-saving humanitarian assistance’ the next day.266 Sources reported that the freeze on humanitarian aid has further worsened the living conditions in the al-Hol camp.267

○ (d) Sexual and gender-based violence

SNHR's annual report released in November 2024 recorded 11 553 cases of sexual violence against women since March 2011.268 The main perpetrators of sexual violence documented by the SNHR were identified as the former Syrian regime (8 024 incidents) and ISIL (3 487 incidents), while HTS was found responsible for two incidents.269 OHCHR reported a rise in 'all types of sexual violence and other gender-based violence' in Syria during the conflict.270 Abuses against women were underreported,271 including because of societal stigma and fear.272 Conflict in Syria has led to increased cases of early and forced marriages, including as a coping mechanism.273 A study by the international organisation PAX indicated that shifting gender roles had contributed to a rise in domestic and gender-based violence..274

In January 2025, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reported that women and girls in Syria faced 'pervasive forms' of SGBV in both public and private life, due to institutionalised gender inequality and patriarchy. The situation has been characterised by a lack of support services, safe spaces, and legal protection.275 According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), out of some 8.5 million people requiring GBV assistance in Syria, 93 % are women and girls. They faced a variety of abuses including 'intimate partner violence, domestic violence, economic and emotional violence as well as sexual violence, including rape and sexual harassment.'276 As of January 2025, in north-western Syria, 67 safe spaces for women and girls providing SGBV services were functional. In Idlib, health care facilities including a maternity hospital were significantly damaged at the end of 2024.277 Women and girls in Aleppo faced 'significant difficulties' when accessing services for victims of the SGBV, including those concerning transportation and a lack of female staff.278 Risk of SGBV was reportedly higher for women in IDP camps279 and in the shelters.280

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