1.3.1. Recruitment practices

The transitional government formally abolished mandatory conscription[88] except in situations such as national emergencies.[89] It also announced that individuals wanted for military or reserve service by the Assad government will not face any issues. However, those with prior civil court judgments or civil charges will still be subject to assessment.[90]

Recruitment to the army is voluntary.[91] There were no reports of forced recruitment or social pressure to enlist in the new Syrian army.[92] Those who join are reportedly driven primarily by financial incentives, as army salaries are relatively high.[93] Recruitment drives have brought tens of thousands of new recruits while creating significant challenges, according to analysts. The rapid recruitment and integration of armed factions occurred without adequate vetting, which led to individuals subjected to sanctions for human rights being integrated,[94] while tens of thousands of trained officers and non-commissioned officers from the former Assad army remain unlikely to be incorporated into the new security apparatus.[95]

The new army is predominantly made of Sunni Arabs,[96] with some sources assessing that Sunni Arabs with a religiously conservative profile make a large proportion of those joining its ranks.[97] Neither the army nor the GSS (ISF) has significantly recruited members of Syrian minority groups, a situation likely influenced both by limited outreach and by minorities' reluctance to enlist.[98] Systematic recruitment of non-Sunni personnel and reintegration of vetted Assad-era police officers, especially in Alawite areas, only began in late summer of 2025, while earlier minority participation had been largely ad hoc and volunteer-based.[99]

Islamic instruction was an important part of the training received by police[100] and army recruits.[101] Most soldiers and commanders reportedly start with three weeks of basic training. The new military recruited volunteers based on set criteria (ninth-grade education, ability to read, physical fitness), though former rebel fighters were incorporated regardless of these standards. Critics say some commanders were appointed primarily on the basis of loyalty[102] rather than qualifications, raising concerns about professionalism within the ranks.[103] Sources interviewed by the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that many officers failed to properly identify themselves and in practice they often followed orders from local commanders or sheikhs, reflecting weak central control.[104]

Around 3 000 defected officers had applied to join or had rejoined the new army. Recruitment practices indicate that the MoD prioritises defector officers, classified in two categories by their wartime role: those who fought against Assad regime units and those who were exempted from military service in recent years due to personal reasons, while excluding thousands of personnel who remained with pro-regime forces until the regime's collapse.[105] In November 2025, the MoD announced the reactivation of more than 2 000 defected officers from the former regime's

army as part of broader military restructuring, following interviews with over 3 100 defected officers from various specialisations, many of whom have now been integrated into active army units.106

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