

SYRIA

(Last updated 2023)

Syria lies at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. It is bordered by Lebanon and Israel on the west, Turkey on the north, Iraq on the east, and Jordan on the south. Area: 185,180 km².

Official name: Syrian Arab Republic

Capital: Damascus (2 503 000 million in 2022). The old city of Damascus is considered to be among the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world.

State organization: Unitary semi-presidential republic under a totalitarian hereditary dictatorship.

Syria can be divided into four control areas. These areas are governed de facto by:

- the Syrian authorities (under President Assad)
- the Syrian Interim Government (SIG), formed in 2013
- the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES)
- the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG), formed in 2017

President: Bashar al-Assad, who became president after the death of his father Hafez al-Assad, who held office from 1970 until his death in 2000.



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Population: Syria has a population of about 18,500,000 (2019 est.), excluding the more than 6 million refugees outside the country. Before the civil war started in 2011, the Syrian population was estimated at approximately 23 million, including people with refugee status from Palestine and Iraq and indigenous Levantine people. Syria is home to diverse ethnic and religious groups, including Syrian Arabs, Kurds, Greeks, Armenians, Assyrians, Circassians, Mandeans and Turks.

Languages: Arabic is the official language, the great majority of the population speaks Arabic. Most Kurds reside in the northeastern corner of Syria and most speak the Kurmanji variant of the Kurdish language. Other languages spoken in Syria include Armenian, spoken in Aleppo and other major cities, and Turkish. Various Turkish dialects are spoken by the Turkmen/Turkoman minority mostly in villages east of the Euphrates and along the Syrian-Turkish border. In addition, there are Turkish language islands in the Qalamun area and the Homs area. Adyghian, a Kabardian (Circassian) language, is also spoken by a minority of the population. English and French are understood, particularly in urban centers.

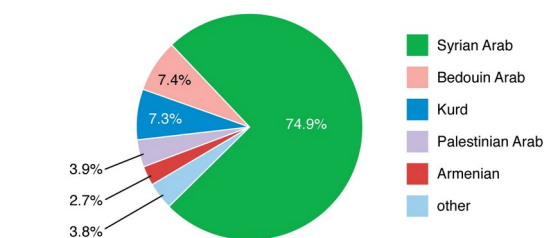
Historically, Aramaic was the lingua franca of the region before the advent of Arabic and is still spoken among Assyrians, and Classical Syriac is still used as the liturgical language of various Syriac Christian denominations. Western Neo-Aramaic is still spoken in the village of Ma'loula as well as two neighboring villages, 56 kilometers northeast of Damascus.

Religions: The overwhelming majority of the population are Muslims. Sunni Muslims account for about three-fourths of Syria's Muslim population and are in the majority everywhere in the country except in the southern Al-Suwaydā' muḥāfazāh (governorate) and the Latakia governorate in the north. The 'Alawites (a Shī'ite subsect) are the next largest group, and most live in the Latakia governorate or in the governorates of Homs and Ḥamāh. Most of the country's Druze population lives in Al-Suwaydā' governorate, and the rest in Damascus, Aleppo, and Al-Qunayṭirah. Christians constitute about one-tenth of the Syrian population. They are divided into several churches, which include Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, Armenian Apostolic (Orthodox), Syrian Catholic, Maronite, Protestant, Nestorian, Latin, and Chaldean. There is also a very small Jewish population, the remainder of what once had been a flourishing community before being subjected to limitations on travel, employment, and other restrictions imposed by the Syrian government. Following international pressure on Syria to allow them to leave the country, much of the Jewish population chose to emigrate in the late 20th century.

History and current situation:

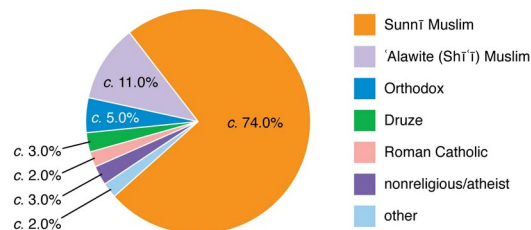
The area now included within the Syrian republic has been inhabited for several thousand years. From the 3rd millennium BCE it was under the control variously of Sumerians, Akkadians, Amorites, Egyptians, Hittites, Assyrians, and Babylonians. In the 6th century BCE it became part of the Persian Achaemenian Empire, which fell to Alexander the Great in 330 BCE. Seleucid rulers governed it (301–c. 164 BCE); then Parthians and Nabataean Arabs divided the region. It flourished as a Roman province (64 BCE–300 CE) and as part of the Byzantine Empire (300–634), until Arab Muslims invaded and established control. Thereafter the region was ruled by various Muslim dynasties. It came under the Ottoman Empire in 1516, which held it, except for brief periods, until the British invaded in World War I (1914–18). After the war it became a French mandate; it was fully **independent by 1946**. It united with Egypt in the United Arab Republic (1958–61). In September 1961 a coup led by Syrian army officers reestablished Syria as an independent state. In 1963 Baathist army officers seize power. During the Six-Day War (1967), it lost the Golan Heights to Israel. Syrian troops frequently clashed with Israeli forces in Lebanon during the 1980s and '90s.

Ethnic composition (2000)



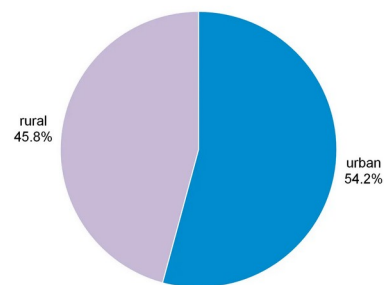
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Religious affiliation (2000)



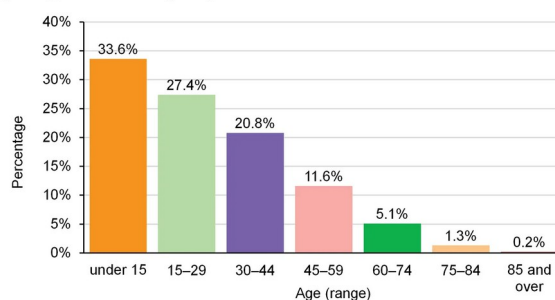
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Syria urban-rural (2018)



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Syria age breakdown (2019)



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In 1970 Hafez al-Assad overthrows president Nur al-Din al-Atasi. Hafez al-Assad's long regime (1971–2000) also was marked by antagonism toward Syria's neighbors Turkey and Iraq. Following the death of al-Assad in 2000, his son Bashar al-Assad became president; he was reelected in 2007.

In 2004 the US imposes economic sanctions on Syria over what it calls its support for terrorism, including Syria in a list of states that make-up an "axis of evil". In 2010 the US renews sanctions against Syria.

The ongoing **Syrian Civil War** began in 2011 as a civil uprising against the government of President Bashar al Assad inspired by the Arab Spring protests across the Middle East.

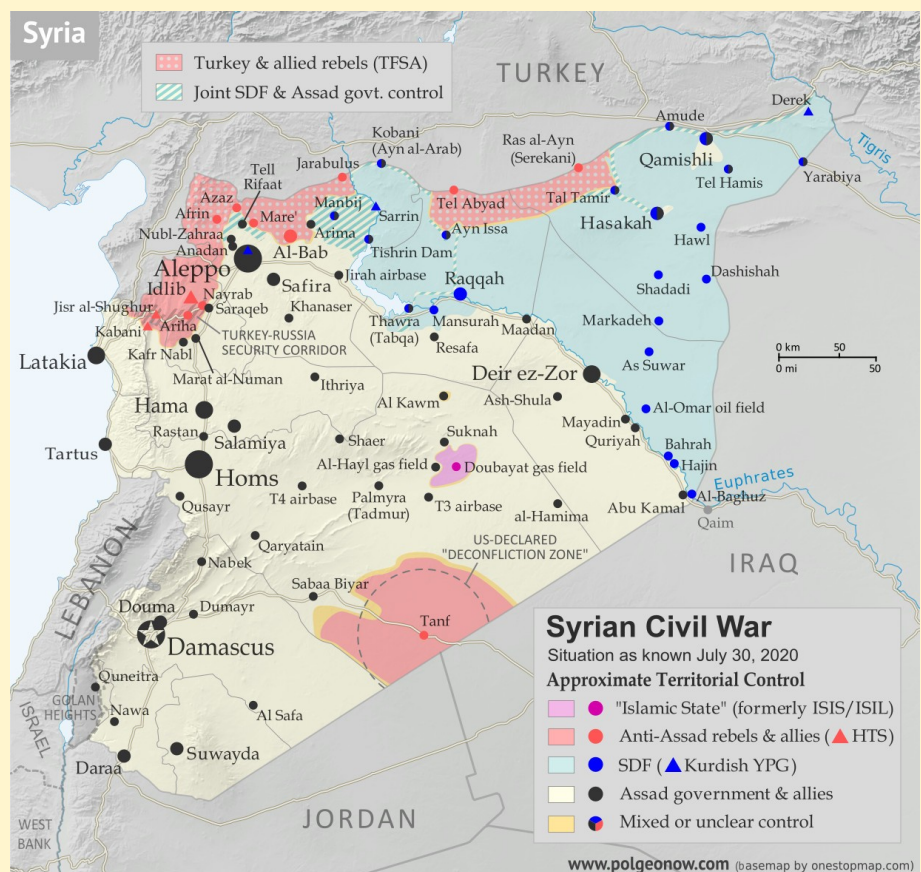
The Syrian armed conflict began in 2011 Since 2012, the conflict became increasingly violent and developed in a full-scale civil war as armed opposition groups confronted Syrian government forces and began seizing key territories. The rise of Islamist groups and subsequent infighting marked another phase in the conflict that culminated in 2014 with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) conquering large areas in the eastern part of the country and further into Iraq and establishing the so-called Islamic State caliphate. The creation of the caliphate prompted the military intervention of an international US-led coalition against ISIL. Since late 2015, military interventions of external actors in support of Assad marked the comeback of the Syrian government who gradually recaptured most territories and consolidated its control. By the end of 2018, the conflict was viewed as having shifted decisively in Assad's favor. During the course of the war, Syria became the scene for a complex series of intersecting conflicts involving many internal and international actors pursuing their own interests and goals. The conflict has become increasingly international in character, drawing the involvement of countries such as the United States (US), Russia, Turkey, Iran, Israel and others. The conflict is viewed as being more about the geopolitical future of the Middle East rather than only about Syria.

Complex alliances, shifting allegiances, rivalries and conflicting interests between the actors involved continue to affect the balance of power and to foster uncertainty.

In May 2011 army tanks enter Deraa, Banyas, Homs and suburbs of Damascus in an effort to crush anti-regime protests. US and European Union tighten sanctions. President Assad sacks the governor of the northern province of Hama after mass demonstration there, eventually sending in troops to restore order at the cost of scores of lives. In July 2011, Army defectors declared the formation of the Free Syrian Army and began forming fighting units. The opposition is dominated by Sunni Muslims, whereas the leading government figures are generally associated with Alawites. The war also involves rebel groups (IS and al-Nusra) and various foreign countries, leading to claims of a proxy war in Syria. In October 2011 New Syrian National Council says it has forged a common front of internal and exiled opposition activists. Arab League votes to suspend Syria, accusing it of failing to implement an Arab peace plan, and imposes sanctions. In 2012 UN Security Council endorses non-binding peace plan drafted by UN envoy Kofi Annan. China and Russia agree to support the plan after an earlier, tougher draft is modified. Turkey changes rules of engagement after Syria shoots down a Turkish plane, declaring that if Syrian troops approach Turkey's borders they will be seen as a military threat. National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces formed in Qatar, excludes Islamist militias. Arab League stops short of full recognition. US, Britain, France, Turkey and Gulf states formally recognise opposition National Coalition as "legitimate representative" of Syrian people.

Islamists rise in 2013, in June 2014 the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria militants declare "caliphate" in territory from Aleppo to eastern Iraqi province of Diyala. In September the US and five Arab countries launch air strikes against Islamic State around Aleppo and Raqqa, in January 2015 Kurdish forces push Islamic State out of Kobane on Turkish border after four months of fighting. Then Islamic State fighters seize the ancient city of Palmyra in central Syria and proceed to destroy many monuments at pre-Islamic World Heritage site. Jaish al-Fatah (Army of Conquest) Islamist rebel alliance takes control of Idlib Province, putting pressure on government's coastal stronghold of Latakia.

In September 2015 Russia carries out its first air strikes in Syria, saying they target the Islamic State group, but the West and Syrian



opposition say it overwhelmingly targets anti-Assad rebels. In December the Syrian Army allows rebels to evacuate remaining area of Homs, returning Syria's third-largest city to government control after four years. In March 2016 Syrian government forces retake Palmyra from Islamic State with Russian air assistance, only to be driven out again in December. In August Turkish troops cross into Syria to help rebel groups push back so-called Islamic State militants and Kurdish-led rebels from a section of the two countries' border. In December government troops, backed by Russian air power and Iranian-sponsored militias, recapture Aleppo, the country's largest city, depriving the rebels of their last major urban stronghold.

In January 2017 Russia, Iran and Turkey agree to enforce a ceasefire between the government and non-Islamist rebels, after talks between the two sides in Kazakhstan. In April 2017 Donald Trump orders a missile attack on an airbase from which Syrian government planes allegedly staged a chemical weapons attack on the rebel-held town of Khan Sheikhoun, then decides to arm the YPG Kurdish Popular Protection Units. In July 2017 the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and the Syrian army launch a military operation to dislodge jihadist groups from the Aarsal area, near the Lebanese-Syrian border. Islamic State retreats: in October-November 2017 the Islamic State group is driven from Raqqa, its de-facto capital in Syria, and Deir al-Zour.

In 2018 Turkey launches an assault on northern Syria to oust Kurdish rebels controlling the area around Afrin. Claims of a new chemical attack in Eastern Ghouta's main town of Douma prompt the US, Britain and France to carry out a wave of punitive strikes on Syrian targets. Syrian army recaptures almost all of the south of the country, up to the borders with Jordan and Israeli-held territory. In September-December 2018 Kurdish-led SDF forces launch offensive that reduces Islamic State territory to a tiny enclave on the Iraqi border.

In 2019 the US withdraws troops from northern Syria, prompting Turkey to attack US Kurdish allies in the area. In March 2020 Turkey sends thousands of troops across the border to stop a Syrian offensive to retake Idlib, the last province still in opposition hands.

In June 2020, the United Nations reported that after more than nine years of war, Syria was falling into an even deeper crisis and economic deterioration as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Protests in southern Syria at growing economic hardship prompt President Assad to dismiss Prime Minister Imad Khamis. In May 2021, for the second time presidential elections have been held in Syria since the start of the conflict in 2011. The President Assad was again re-elected, with about 95% of the vote.

As of 2022, the main external military threat and conflict are firstly, an ongoing conflict with ISIS; and secondly, ongoing concerns of possible invasion of the northeast regions of Syria by Turkish forces, in order to strike Kurdish groups in general, and Rojava in particular. The report compiled by the UN Council on the Current Situation in Syria described the year 2022 as the worst since the outbreak of war in terms of the economic and humanitarian situation, indicating that approximately 14.6 million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance.

MIGRATION

In the past, regional conflict has affected migration patterns in the country. Much of the population of the Golan Heights was expelled to other parts of Syria after Israel took control of the region in 1967; many, along with their descendants, continue to be internally displaced. After the creation of Israel and the first of the Arab-Israeli wars, some 80,000 Palestinian Arabs found refuge in Syria in 1948, a population that is estimated to have since expanded to number more than 400,000. Likewise, with the outbreak of the Iraq War in 2003, Syria absorbed more than one million Iraqi refugees.

The decade-long crisis in Syria continues to affect millions of lives. According to the 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview, over 14.6 million people need humanitarian assistance, a 9 per cent increase from the previous year. There are an estimated 6.7 million people internally displaced across the country, in severe need of humanitarian assistance. About 84% of them are from Central and Southern Syria. About two million of them reside in informal or planned IDP camps. The 2022 HNO finds that economic deterioration is now a major driver of needs even in areas which have been less directly affected by hostilities and displacement. The total number of people in need (PiN) has increased from 14.6 million in 2022 to 15.3 million in 2023.

In total, an estimated seven million Syrians reside as refugees and asylum-seekers in Syria's five neighboring countries and about one

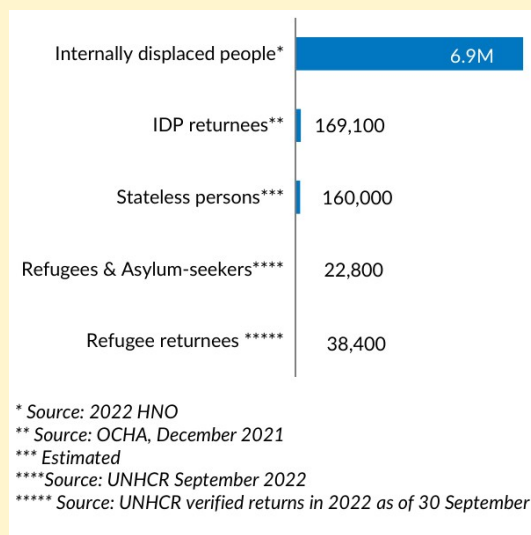
14.6 million
people in need of humanitarian and protection assistance in Syria

6.7 million
internally displaced persons

6.6 million
Syrian refugees worldwide, of whom 5.5 million hosted in countries near Syria

Last updated November 2022

For more data: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>



million in Europe.

The highest number of arrivals in Europe - 1,015,078 - was recorded in 2015. More than 800,000 of them were trafficked by sea from Turkey to Greece, and the majority of them continued to travel through Europe to reach Germany and Sweden. Since 2015, the number of refugees and migrants arriving in Greece has fallen dramatically, after the EU and Turkey signed an agreement to send back to Turkey migrants who do not apply for asylum or whose claim was rejected.

Between 2014 and 2017, a total of more than 919,000 Syrians applied for asylum in the EU.

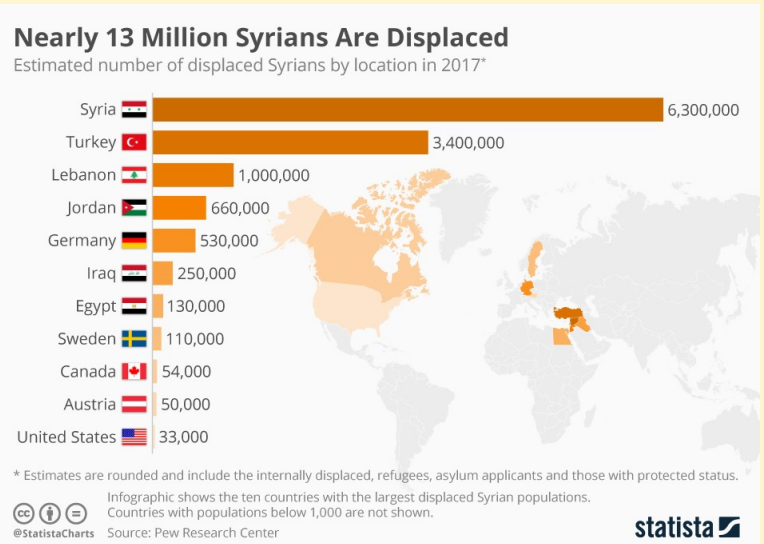
For the first time in the history of European migration policy, in 2015 the Commission proposed to relocate people in clear need of international protection from Member States under extreme pressure (Greece and Italy) to other Member States of the European Union (Relocation Program).

In October 2022, Syrians lodged increasingly more applications (some 18 500) for a sixth consecutive month, reaching a new high since the refugee crisis of 2015/2016. After sharp rises in August and September with month-on-month increases of about 30 %, Syrian applications rose at a somewhat lower rate in October (19 %). For a second consecutive month, Syrians lodged more applications for asylum in the EU+ than any other citizenship, a pattern that had prevailed up to the Taliban takeover in August 2021, when Afghans became the largest applicant group. According to a Frontex report, Syrians were one of the top three nationalities in terms of illegal border-crossings, detected mainly on the Western Balkan, Eastern Mediterranean and Western Mediterranean routes. In addition, a trend towards the escalation of military operations in Syria was reported in October.

Tables:

Syrian migrants and refugees in Italy, Greece and Spain 2014-2017;

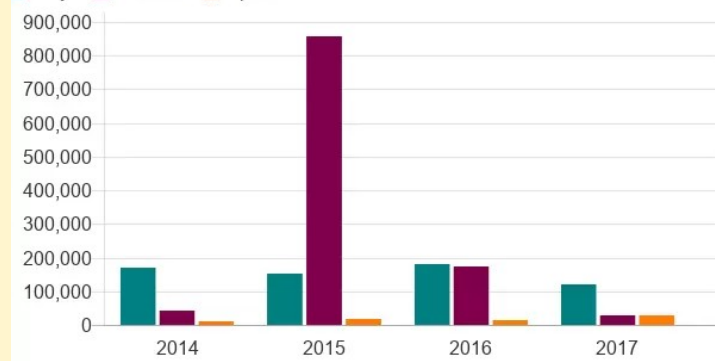
Asylum applications in Europe by country of origin 2014-2017.



Migrants and refugees

Total arrivals 2014-17

Italy Greece Spain



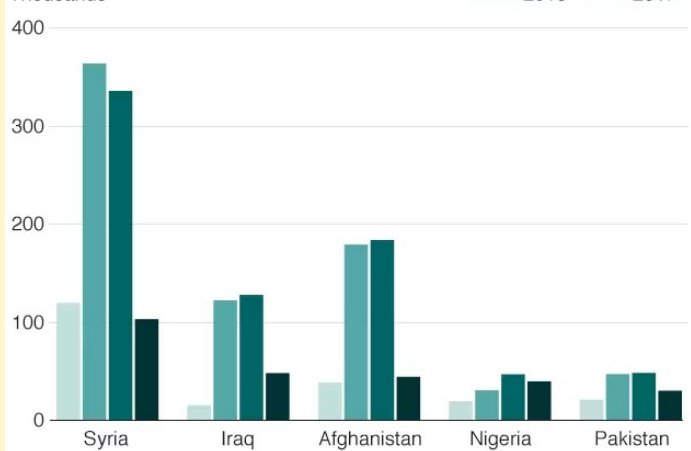
Source: UNHCR

BBC

Asylum applications by country of origin

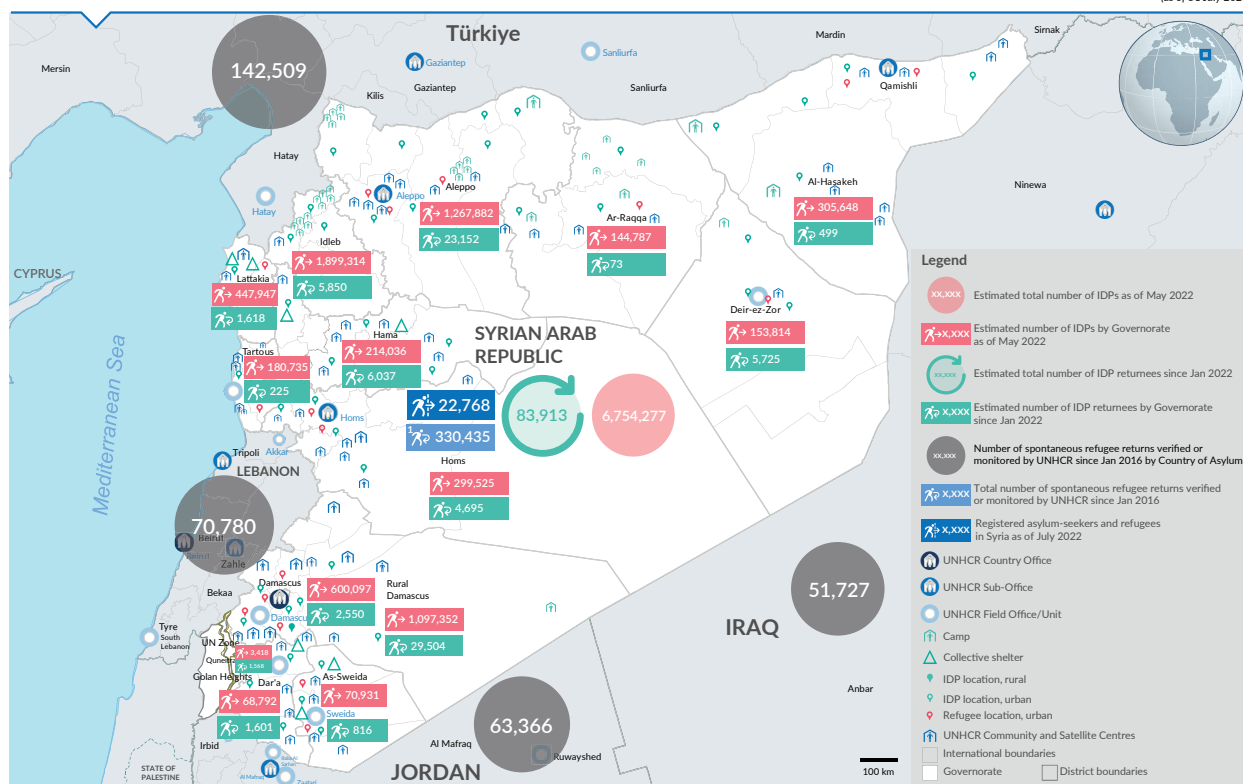
Thousands

2014 2015 2016 2017



Source: Eurostat

BBC



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. | Creation date: 06 August 2022 | Sources: UNHCR proGres v4 (Profile Global Registration System) ; UNOCHA IDPs matrix ; UNHCR Syria Durable Solution portal : https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria_durable_solutions | 1.The numbers reported are only those verified or monitored by UNHCR and do not reflect the entire number of returns, which maybe significantly higher | Feedback: imsyr@unhcr.org

EDUCATION

(Sources: NOKUT, NUFFIC)

Age of compulsory education: 6-15 (primary education and lower secondary education). Language of instruction: Arabic. Some master's degree programmes are in English.

Education is centralized. The Syrian government plays a major role in the supervision and control of education. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the quality assurance of primary and secondary education. Higher education is supervised by the Ministry of Higher Education, with the Council for Higher Education being the coordinating body. Higher education institutions can only operate with government approval. Syria has both public and private universities. There are 7 public universities and 20 private universities.

Due to the unstable situation, it is difficult to obtain accurate information about what is happening on the ground. There's been limited scope for independently researching and verifying any facts, events or circumstances in Syria.

Campuses of Aleppo University, Al-Furat University, Damascus University and Tishreen University have all been attacked. Although (on the surface), the website of the Ministry of Higher Education indicates that universities are currently operating normally, various sources report that the universities/campuses in areas Deir ez-Zor, ar-Raqqa, Aleppo, Idlib and al-Hasaka have been hit the hardest.

The Ministry of Higher Education allows students to transfer to institutions in more stable areas, provided it offers their academic major. Damascus University, Tishreen University and Baath University accepted large numbers of students from various governorates because of the problems in their own universities.

Literacy and enrollment: Across Syria, some 2.4 million children, aged 5-17 years, are out of school. They represent nearly half of the about 5.52 million school-aged children. These children fall prey to child labor, early and forced marriage, trafficking, and recruitment into the fighting. More children are likely to miss out on education and are at risk of

Ministry of Education: <http://moed.gov.sy/site/>

Ministry of Higher Education: <http://mohe.gov.sy/mohe/index.php?node=555&cat=2863>

Al-Fanar Media, news and opinion about higher education: <http://www.al-fanarmedia.org/>

permanently dropping out. The longer children stay out of school, the more difficult it is for them to catch up. Some children have already lost 10 years of school. (UNICEF)

EDUCATION SYSTEM

Basic Education Certificate

Duration: 9 years. Content: general subjects, such as Arabic, a foreign language, mathematics and religion.

Upper secondary education

After the basic phase, students can move on to the upper secondary education. Students have to choose either general or vocational upper secondary education. Depending on their choice, they sit exams for 1 of the following diplomas:

- General Secondary Education Certificate. Duration: 3 years. Content: the 1st year is an introductory year for all students. From the 2nd year onward, they specialize: they either choose the literary section or the scientific section. In the 3rd year, students complete a national school-leaving exam. The General Secondary Education Certificate is usually only issued in Arabic. Exam results for secondary school students from 2014 onward can be verified online through the website for the Ministry of Education (<http://moed.gov.sy/site/>).
- Vocational Secondary Education Certificate. Duration: 3 years. Content: mainly vocational subjects with a lot of emphasis on practice. Students choose a specialization, for example industry, trade or agriculture. The specialization is always part of the diploma name.

Post-secondary technical vocational education and training

After vocational secondary education, students can start working or can continue their studies at a technical institute or intermediate institute. Students complete their study program by sitting exams for a **Technical Diploma Certificate or a Certificate of Associate Degree**. Duration: 2 years. Content: vocational education in various fields, such as industry, agriculture, business and administration. There is also teacher training for primary education.

Higher education

In Syria, students have access to higher education with the General Secondary Education Certificate. Study programmes often have general requirements for students with the General Secondary Education Certificate: Students who took the scientific specialization can usually apply for all degree programmes in higher education; Students who took the literary specialization can only apply for degree programmes in fields such as language, literature, history, economics and law. Exceptions: Universities can admit students with very good results for the Vocational Secondary Education Certificate to a bachelor's programme in a similar field of study. However, this does not happen often. Some degree programmes have extra requirements. For example, students must have passed an exam for a second foreign language or another subject. Degree programmes in Medicine, Dentistry, Architecture and Natural Sciences require good results for the General Secondary Education Certificate exams. The required results vary from year to year. Sometimes, students also have to take an entrance exam. If there are too few places for a particular degree programme, students need to draw lots.

Bachelor's degree - To obtain a Bachelor, students take a study programme with a focus on research or professional practice. Duration: 4 years. Exceptions: degree programmes in architecture, engineering, dentistry, pharmacy or veterinary medicine take 5 years. The degree programme in medicine takes 6 years. Content: education focused on research or professional practice. Usually, the 1st year is a preparatory year in which students study general subjects.

Master's degree - Students with good results for their Bachelor can continue studying for a Master. Duration: 2 years. Content: education with a focus on research. The 1st year is for compulsory subjects and exams. Students have to pass the exams for all subjects. In the 2nd year, they have to write a thesis. Admission requirements: a Bachelor with an average of 70% as final result. Often, students also have to pass a language test in English or French. For degree programmes in Dentistry, Engineering and Medicine, candidates must take a special admission exam.

PhD - Students can obtain the degree of Doctor after completing a doctoral degree programme (PhD). Usually, candidates continue to study in the field of study of their master's degree. Duration: at least 3 years. Content: students conduct research, they write and defend a dissertation and publish at least 2 academic articles. Admission requirements: there is a strict selection process. Candidates need a Master in a similar subject with a result of at least 75%. In addition, candidates have to take a language test in a modern foreign language.

Higher education diplomas are issued in Arabic. Some private universities issue documents in English. Documents are legalized by the issuing authority and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Refugees often flee suddenly, without the ability to take much with them. Refugees may come with full documentation, partial documentation, or nothing at all. Even when open, some institutions may be unresponsive or refuse to verify documents for various reasons. Refugees may have good reasons for not directly requesting documents from institutions.

Public institutions

Public Universities educate the vast majority of the students in Syria:

- Damascus University <http://www.damascusuniversity.edu.sy/> Is under the control of the Syrian government.
- Aleppo University <http://www.alepuniv.edu.sy/> Main campus and campuses in Idlib are closed. The Ministry of higher Education suspended all exams.
- Tishreen University <http://www.tishreen.edu.sy/> Is under the control of the Syrian government. Has been attacked several times.
- al-Baath University <http://albaath-univ.edu.sy/> Is located in Homs, activities are regularly disrupted because of the conflict.
- al-Furat University <http://www.alfuratuniv.edu.sy/> - website is offline. Located in Deir ez-Zor is under the control of the regime, but in the outskirts of the city 'Islamic State' has control. Colleges of the university in the city al-Hasaka were closed. The university set up offices on other university campuses where students are able to graduate with a degree awarded by al-Furat university.
- Syrian Virtual University <https://www.svuonline.org> Head office is located in Damascus and under control of the Syrian government.
- University of Hama <http://www.hama-univ.edu.sy/>

Private institutions

Some private universities set up temporary campuses in safer locations of the capital Damascus (however with deficiencies in infrastructure). Qasyuon University transferred classes from its main campus to a secondary school in Mezzah neighborhood (Damascus). Ittihad Private University, founded in Raqqa, moved its campus to the Institute of Fine Arts in Mezzah. The International University for Science and Technology (IUST) moved the faculty of pharmacy to a temporary campus at a public sports facility in Damascus.

