



# The State of Justice in Syria 2026

Syria Justice and  
Accountability Centre



## *About the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre*

*The Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC) strives to prevent impunity, promote redress, and facilitate principled reform. SJAC works to ensure that human rights violations in Syria are comprehensively documented and preserved for use in transitional justice and peace-building. SJAC collects documentation of violations from all available sources, stores it in a secure database, catalogues it according to human rights standards, and analyzes it using legal expertise and big data methodologies. SJAC also supports documenters inside Syria, providing them with resources and technical guidance, and coordinates with other actors working toward similar aims: a Syria defined by justice, respect for human rights, and rule of law.*

*Learn more at [syriaaccountability.org](http://syriaaccountability.org)*

*The State of Justice in Syria, 2026*

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*Cover: Damascus looking east from Al-Jameyah As-Soureya bridge*

## Acronyms

AANES	Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CJA	Center for Justice and Accountability
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EU	European Union
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
FAFG	Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation
HLP	Housing, land, and property
HTS	Hayat Tahrir al-Sham
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IIIM	International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism
IIMP	Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
NCTJ	National Commission of Transitional Justice
NCMP	National Commission on Missing Persons
NDF	National Defense Forces
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SMFT	Syrian Missing Persons and Forensic Team
SJAC	Syria Justice and Accountability Centre
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
US	United States

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## Memorialization and Truth-Seeking

Throughout this report, SJAC will share art from Syrian artists who work to preserve the experience of the Syrian conflict through visual storytelling. This process can be a therapeutic means to share not just the artist's story with the world, but that of thousands of Syrians whose experiences risk being erased after over a decade of conflict. Artwork helps build a collective memory of the Syrian conflict which will be essential for future transitional justice efforts.



### Mural – Sednaya Prison

#### Artist: Unknown

Sednaya Prison was one of the most notorious prisons during the Assad era. Thousands of Syrians were imprisoned and executed at this facility. Today, the main prison gate is flanked by two murals.

The mural to the left of the gate reads “Free Syria,” in English and “The human slaughterhouse: We will not forget and we will not forgive,” in Arabic.

The mural on the right reads “Our prisoners, oh, the pain in our souls, oh, the bitterness of victory.”

### Notes to Readers

- » The hyperlinked text in this report references resources published by SJAC.
- » This report refers to the current government in Syria as the “transitional government,” or the Syrian government in all other instances. The former government will be referred to as the “Assad government,” or the “former government”.

# 1. Introduction

The 2026 State of Justice in Syria is the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre's seventh annual report that covers human rights violations in Syria in 2025 and highlights justice efforts that will impact Syrians in the country and the diaspora. The past year marked a historical juncture for Syria following the events of December 8, 2024, and the fall of Bashar Al-Assad's government. While institutional steps to address justice issues and support national reconciliation were seen from the transitional government, expectations were tempered due to continued violations across Syria by different internal and external forces, unmet demands for accountability for violations committed by Assad's government, and rising pressure on Syrian refugees in the diaspora to repatriate to Syria.

In 2025, violations continued to affect public security and confidence in transitional institutions in Syria. While arbitrary arrests and detentions dropped, there were documented cases of Syria's governing entities, namely the Syrian government and Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), politically targeting journalists and activists with detention. Poor conditions, solitary confinement, torture, and death in detention were reported across multiple cases. In Northeast Syria, the AANES continued to detain and hold ISIS members and their families in camps under poor and dangerous conditions.

Extrajudicial reprisal killings by known and unknown actors against alleged Assad government affiliates also transpired this year. While the reprisal killings targeted Syrians of different backgrounds, the Alawi community in the Coastal region and other major city centers were particularly affected by violations, including killings and summary executions, torture, forced evictions, looting, abductions, extortion, hate speech and incitement. In Suwayda, what started as violent retaliatory attacks over a local dispute between Druze and Bedouin parties developed into significant armed clashes, with the Syrian government and Israel supporting opposing parties. Civilians experienced serious violations as a result, including killings, inhuman and degrading treatment, and continued displacement despite successive ceasefire proceedings.

Housing, land, and property rights violations were prevalent this year, although at a lower level than during the Assad period. The largest perpetrators were Israel in Southern Syria, the Syrian government in the Coastal region and Suwayda, and Turkish-backed militias in Northwest Syria. Violations included unlawful seizure of property, extortion, looting, demolitions, and destruction of agricultural lands.

Outside Syria, refugees and asylees experienced increasing pressure to repatriate following the fall of Assad's government. The first deportations from Europe to Syria since 2011 were seen in Austria and Germany. Further, parties on the political right across Europe increasingly pushed for the mass deportation of Syrians. Forced returns to Syria will expose Syrians to potentially unsafe physical, legal, and material conditions that would contribute to further rights violations.

During 2025, past violations by the former government also remained at the fore, and demands for accountability continue to be important to the Syrian public. Current violations, particularly crimes in the coastal region and in Suwayda, compound existing grievances. These violations are symptomatic of a lack of transparency and actionable commitment to transitional justice processes. The already fragile social fabric in Syria may be further burdened for years to come by these composite atrocities. The transitional government is responsible for advancing justice and accountability by supporting transitional justice efforts that respond to past violations, prevent recurrence of violations in the future, and build public trust in justice mechanisms and institutions.

Despite these many issues, meaningful progress was made on justice efforts in Syria during 2025. The government introduced several transitional justice bodies, notably the National Commission on Transitional Justice (NCTJ) and the National Commission on Missing Persons (NCMP). The government also initiated fact-finding committees to investigate violent events in the Coastal region and in Suwayda; and carried out the arrest, detention, and rehabilitation of former government officials and affiliates. The results of these domestic efforts remain uneven, and, in many instances, require clearer legal parameters and protocols to be valid and effective. Further, genuine government investment in justice processes and fair and transparent inquiries into violations are necessary to avoid deepening public mistrust in state institutions.

On the international level, universal jurisdiction was the most active mechanism for legal proceedings on atrocity crimes in Syria. Notable trials in 2025 included the upholding of the ruling against [Mustafa A.](#) whose sentence was increased at the Hague Court of Appeals, the conviction of [Alaa M.](#) in the Frankfurt Higher Regional Court, and the conviction of [Majdi N. \(Islam Alloush\)](#) in a French court. While these are lower-level perpetrators, French courts issued multiple arrest warrants for high-level former government officials in 2025, and the Dutch and Canadian case against the former Syrian government for state-sponsored torture continued at the ICJ.

Justice efforts on the missing persons file in Syria also saw developments in 2025, with the introduction of a new Syrian national mechanism, the NCMP, to investigate and establish the fates and whereabouts of missing persons in Syria. To be effective, the Commission is tasked with developing its internal systems and technical capacities to undertake missing persons investigations on a national scale. Alongside the NCMP, several domestic and international organizations continued their work on missing persons investigations in Syria, including the UN IIMP, ICRC, SJAC, SMFT, and other Syrian civil society organizations.

Lastly, international decisions in 2025 eased sanctions on Syria, including suspension of sectoral sanctions by the European Council, a comprehensive lifting of sanction on Syrian institutions by the UK government, and the US's full repeal of sanctions imposed by the Caesar Act.

Beyond the overview of the state of justice in Syria more broadly, the report shares SJAC's progress on justice work in 2025, namely in documentation and investigation of past and present human rights violations, case building, trial monitoring, missing persons, justice policy, technology and human rights, and capacity building. SJAC's major achievements in these areas of work include obtaining nearly [one million Assad government documents](#), analyzing more than 10,000 pieces of documentation, case building support and trial monitoring for several cases in Europe and North America, the identification of [255 ISIS prisons and 60 grave sites](#) as part of missing persons investigations, and key improvements to SJAC's database software, [Bayanat](#). More on developments related to justice in Syria and SJAC's work this year are detailed in the following report.



Abbasid Square, Damascus.



Truck damaged by Israeli Bombardment of Beit Jann on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

## 2. VIOLATIONS

## 2A. Overview of the Transition

The fall of the Assad government ended decades of authoritarian rule and initiated a fragile and uncertain transition process. Transitional politics in Syria have been shaped by the urgent need to address past violations while managing competing visions of state authority and civic participation.

In the immediate post-Assad period, expectations among Syrians were high for reform, accountability, and an end to pervasive human rights abuses, yet persistent insecurity and fragmented governance have continued to shape daily life and undermine confidence in reform efforts.

In the aftermath of Assad's departure, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) established an interim Syrian government and pledged to restore security, unify state authority, and oversee a political process culminating in elections. However, the transitional government's Constitutional Declaration and the Temporary Parliamentary Electoral Decree [risked undermining genuine democratic representation](#) by concentrating executive authority and weakening independent oversight.

Throughout 2025, authorities announced plans for phased local and national elections, positioning these as central to post-conflict legitimacy. Yet the implementation of electoral frameworks has been uneven, constrained by ongoing violence, mass displacement, and competing armed authorities that limit the reach of the central government and complicate inclusive political participation.

The transitional government has faced significant challenges in unifying the country under central leadership. While the government and Kurdish forces (SDF) reached an initial agreement on March 10, 2025 to join forces, the year ended with no progress on the implementation of the agreement (in January 2026 negotiations reopened and were settled, after the Government's conclusive military advance to seize control of North and East Syria).

At the institutional level, the transitional government has publicly committed to reversing repressive practices associated with the Assad era, including arbitrary detention and systemic abuses by security organs.

Nevertheless, SJAC continues to observe and document arbitrary detentions and related violations, though at a lower level than previously recorded.

Critically, the transition has unfolded without a clear, publicly articulated framework for transitional justice inclusive of all victims of the conflict. This absence of a credible, inclusive transitional justice process has left long-standing grievances unaddressed and contributed to an environment conducive to retaliatory violence, social fragmentation, and renewed human rights violations.



Damaged banner of Bashar Al-Assad, Damascus.

## **2B. Arbitrary Detention and Torture**

In much of Syria, the number of arbitrary arrests and detentions sharply dropped following the fall of the Assad government.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, the transitional government has exhibited a concerning trend in arbitrarily arresting and detaining journalists and activists. For example, a Kurdish-Syrian journalist was arrested in June over “security concerns” and held incommunicado before his release without charge a week later.<sup>2</sup> An Alawi journalist and activist was similarly detained in July for several days without charge upon being summoned to the local security branch to delete footage of government raids on her house. She had previously been critical of the government’s handling of violence in coastal Syria (see Section [2e](#)).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, SJAC’s documentation team identified two cases in which activists were arbitrarily detained and only released after being forced to sign a pledge not to participate in or publish content criticizing the government.

While torture practices in prisons have largely ceased, poor detention conditions persist. Authorities are relying on makeshift facilities with limited humanitarian access, no independent monitoring, and missing records, raising concerns that broader structural reform remains limited, and that abusive practices could persist under new leadership. Detainees held on “security grounds” are often held incommunicado for long periods of time without charge<sup>4</sup> and there have been sporadic reports of torture and abuse. Facilities are over-crowded, and detainees receive insufficient food and are denied medical care, which may amount to inhuman treatment.<sup>5</sup> In several incidents, detainees died during their brief time in detention in apparent cases of severe torture.<sup>6</sup>

In the parts of Northeast Syria under control of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), authorities, including SDF forces, arbitrarily arrested and detained scores of individuals. Such arrests were often politically motivated, in response to criticizing the SDF or celebrating the transitional government.<sup>7</sup> Detainees were subjected to solitary confinement, ill treatment, torture, and extended periods of detention. The SDF claimed that detainees were terrorists or parts of criminal networks.<sup>8</sup> SJAC’s documentation team confirmed several cases of detention and torture,

including of a civilian activist on charges of having links with the current government, who was later released with restrictions on her freedom of movement.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the SDF continued to detain tens of thousands of suspected ISIS members and their family members, particularly third-country nationals, in camps with deteriorating conditions.<sup>10</sup> As of January 2026, management of detention facilities and detainees has reverted to control by the transitional government.

## **2C. Extrajudicial Killings and Targeting of Alawis**

In 2025, SJAC [documented](#) a pattern of reprisal killings against individuals who were allegedly associated with the former Assad government, including those affiliated with the military and intelligence apparatus, alleged informants, and individuals affiliated with pro-Assad militias.

The identities of the victims are not specific to an ethnic or sectarian identity, and include Sunni, Alawi, and Shi’i individuals. However, the Alawi community in particular was the target of systematic human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture, looting, abductions, and hate speech and incitement, perpetrated both by forces associated with the transitional government and by private individuals.<sup>11</sup> Although many Alawis did not support the former government, the Alawi community was disproportionately represented in positions of power under the Assad government, leading to the current wave of reprisal killings.

The most severe outbreak of violence against Alawis took place in early March in a cycle of retaliatory violence in the Coastal region where Alawi communities predominate (see Section [2e](#) for an in-depth discussion of these incidents).<sup>12</sup> Prior to and following those events, Syrian government forces and government-aligned armed groups conducted “combing” operations with the stated intent of rooting out remnants of the Assad government, resulting in atrocities against Alawis, former government officials, and civilians with no government affiliation alike, including killings, torture and humiliation, and property destruction.<sup>13</sup> In many of these instances, perpetrators singled out those of Alawi identity or espoused anti-Alawi rhetoric.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, in Homs, SJAC [documented](#) a consistent pattern of kidnappings and killings of Alawi civilians, men and women, by unknown masked gunmen. SJAC assesses that this targeting stems from a perception among some Syrians that all Alawis are complicit in Assad's crimes.

In Damascus, government security forces, often masked and armed, evicted Alawi civilians from their homes without court orders.<sup>15</sup> Such forces evicted families from both government housing, as part of a wave of mass dismissals from the civil service, and private homes.<sup>16</sup> In many instances, the Alawi individuals were not allowed to collect their belongings before being evicted.<sup>17</sup> In March, as violence was unfolding against Alawis on the coast, unknown masked men conducted raids on Alawi neighborhoods in Damascus, kidnapping at least 25 men, at least eight of whom were killed. Multiple witnesses to the raids said the perpetrators identified themselves as the General Security Service, which is housed within the Syrian government's interior ministry.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, Alawi women and girls have faced a pattern of abductions, kidnappings, and other forms of gender-based violence at the hands of unknown assailants. In the first half of 2025 alone, at least 33 women and girls were abducted or went missing.<sup>19</sup> Some families received calls demanding large amounts of money as ransom.<sup>20</sup> Families also reported threats to dissuade investigation of these crimes.<sup>21</sup> Some victims later resurfaced, describing accounts of physical abuse. However, many remained missing weeks after their disappearance.<sup>22</sup> In most cases, local authorities failed to conduct proper investigations.<sup>23</sup> The Syrian government denied the existence of such a pattern of abductions, with one official claiming instead these were cases of couples eloping or were "family disputes."<sup>24</sup>

## **2D. Housing, Land, and Property Violations**

Violations of Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) rights continued to be committed by multiple groups across Syria, notably Turkish-backed militias, the Syrian government, and Israel, in 2025.

### **Turkish-Backed Militias**

In Turkish-occupied areas of Northwest Syria, extortion and pillaging committed by Turkish-backed militias went largely ignored by Turkish authorities.<sup>25</sup> One increasingly common pattern of HLP violation was the seizure of homes, businesses, and agricultural land by militias that then resold the property to Syrians returning to the country. In some of these cases, displaced Syrians returned to their homes and found them inhabited by individuals who had legally purchased the properties from the parties who had seized them. In other cases, militias forcibly evicted current occupants and either sold or pillaged the property.<sup>26</sup> These HLP violations were likely part of a larger pattern of [Turkish-led efforts to shift demographics](#) in Northwest Syria, decreasing the Kurdish population and selling their confiscated homes to Syrian National Army fighters and Arab returnees from Türkiye.<sup>27</sup>

### **Transitional Syrian Government**

Although systematic HLP violations committed by the Syrian government have decreased, SJAC documented several violations along [Syria's coastal governorates](#) and in [Suwayda](#), where civilian property was destroyed and looted by armed groups, including government forces and affiliates, during outbreaks of violence in 2025. Thus far, the government has not responded to the HLP violations its forces committed, and it remains to be seen if perpetrators will be held accountable. Although some government affiliated militia were charged in trials underway in Aleppo (see sub-section "Coastal Events Fact-Finding Committee & Trials" in Section [3b](#)).

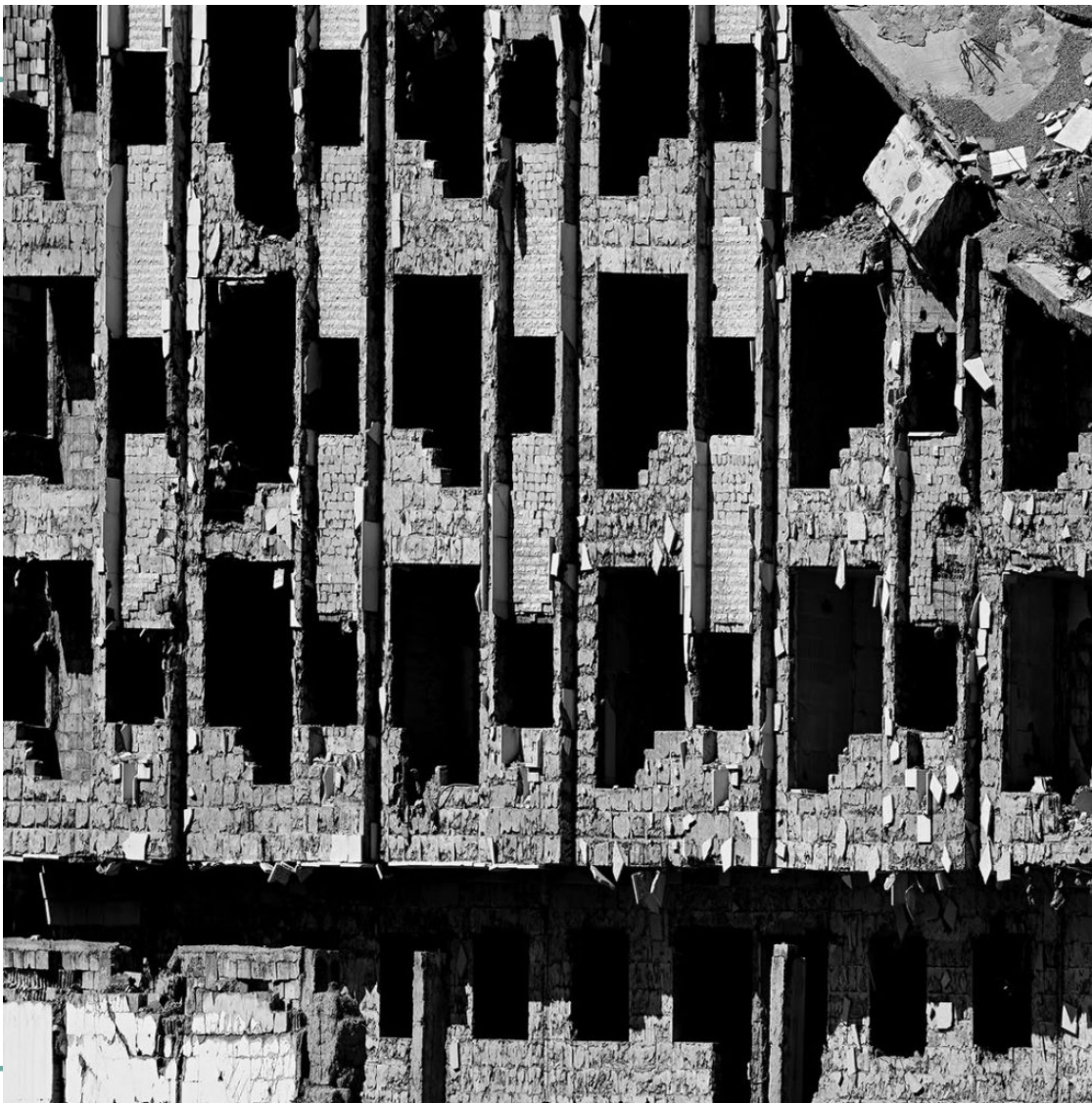
### **Israel**

Shortly after the fall of the Assad government, Israeli forces crossed the de facto border separating Syria from the occupied Golan Heights, [gradually occupying](#) the buffer zone established in 1967. Many Syrians have reported that Israeli forces bulldozed homes, blocked Syrians from accessing their property, and destroyed acres of agricultural land.<sup>28</sup> Israel claimed this destruction was justified for military purposes, however, a more comprehensive investigation of these claims is necessary as there were no reports of active fighting or military operations in the area.<sup>29</sup>

## Addressing Past HLP Violations

Despite extensive documentation of HLP violations, many Syrians are unlikely to recover stolen property. Informal property ownership in Syria, estimated to be around 40%,<sup>30</sup> means many Syrians lack official documentation to reclaim property. This is further compounded by the widespread destruction and forgery of official records.<sup>31</sup>

The new Syrian government has made efforts to address property violations and issued several laws reversing seizures made by the Assad government.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, government authorities have established local committees to resolve property disputes; however, these efforts lack official records, resources, or essential expertise, which means only clearcut cases of HLP will be resolved.<sup>33</sup>



### Jobar

**Artist: Nassouh Zaghloleh**

This photo depicts the Damascus neighborhood of Jobar, which was leveled during a series of battles between the Assad government and opposition forces between 2013 – 2018. Throughout 2025, Syrians living in Europe faced increasing pressure to return to Syria and rebuild their lives. Unfortunately, like Jobar, much of the country remains in ruins.

## 2E. Coastal Violence

Tensions between Alawi communities on the coast and government and affiliated forces came to a head on March 6, 2025, when armed individuals, allegedly former government remnants or loyalists, fired on a General Security patrol carrying out an arrest. This attack was the first of a series of coordinated attacks carried out against Syrian government forces and institutions across the Syrian coast, resulting in hundreds of casualties and the General Security's loss of control over wide areas of the region. As reports of these attacks spread, Syrian government and military forces mobilized, and were joined by government-aligned militia groups and armed civilians. Mobilized forces moved into largely Alawi communities with the stated aim of putting down the Assad remnants' insurgency.<sup>34</sup> During the course of these operations, these forces committed a wide range of human rights violations, often purposefully targeting Alawis, including summary executions—with estimates ranging from [hundreds](#) to more than 1,400 killed, as well as cases of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, and sectarian incitement of violence and hate speech.<sup>35</sup> Several reports allege General Security involvement in killings and abuses potentially amount to war crimes.<sup>36</sup> For information on investigations and accountability processes in the aftermath of the violence see section [3b](#).

## 2F. Suwayda

Months after the first wave of violence erupted on the coast of Syria, a second wave of violence rocked the country in the Governorate of Suwayda, further underscoring the need for transparent and preventative transitional justice measures. On July 13, 2025, a Druze truck driver was reportedly kidnapped at a checkpoint manned by members of the local Bedouin community, the situation quickly led to a series of retaliatory attacks by both sides.<sup>37</sup> These attacks were initially localized, however, the violence devolved into a larger conflict involving Israel, Syrian government forces, and thousands of fighters from Druze and Bedouin armed groups. Hundreds of civilians were reported to have been killed, with evidence later demonstrating that government and affiliated forces executed dozens of Druze individuals in Suwayda.<sup>38</sup> [SJAC further documented](#) and analyzed some of the egregious rights violations that took place, which ranged from extrajudicial killings to cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.

In the aftermath of the violence, multiple internationally sponsored ceasefire agreements were signed to halt the violence and prevent future outbreaks, but many Bedouin and Druze families remain displaced as part of those agreements.<sup>39</sup>

## 2G. Refugees and Forced Returns

This year, the first deportations to Syria took place since the outbreak of the armed conflict in 2011. One Syrian convict was deported [from Austria](#) in July 2025, and another from Germany on 23 December 2025, with three more following in early January 2026.<sup>40</sup> These deportations are part of [a larger anti-refugee rhetoric](#), which spread across several EU Member States immediately after the fall of Assad, calling for mass returns of Syrians. Although not all states called for systematic returns,<sup>41</sup> such demands were often accompanied by offering financial incentives for voluntary returns.<sup>42</sup> The deportation of convicts has raised serious concerns, while assessing the in-country risk of return to individual returnees remains difficult. As asylum and return orders are established through a case-by-case procedure, the individual circumstances of the applicant and the situation in Syria critically influence the decision-making process. Authorities must establish that a person will not face persecution or torture upon return. Without an appropriate basis for assessing whether there is a risk of persecution or torture, a return to Syria may violate the principle of non-refoulement and international human rights.<sup>43</sup>

Court decisions in 2025, such as the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) case concerning [Austria's deportation of a convict to Syria](#); in which the Court barred the deportation at first, but subsequently [discontinued](#) the interim measure after it held that the security situation in Syria would not pose a risk to the man are cause for alarm. The deportee later disappeared in Syria and his whereabouts remain unknown. Such cases have solidified the concern about a lack of accurate and reliable information available for the assessment of conditions in Syria by courts and authorities.

To accurately assess the risk level to returnees, potential violations and mistreatment must be thoroughly investigated. SJAC has recorded cases of [arbitrary](#)

[detention, enforced disappearances, and torture ongoing in government-controlled facilities](#). Without an appropriate basis for assessing the individual's risk level, deportations remain premature and may violate Article 3 of the CAT and the ECHR.

Throughout 2025, SJAC has repeatedly [called on states to refrain from premature examination](#) of asylum claims, which had been suspended across the EU in early 2025 due to the inability to assess the situation in Syria. Despite presumed stability in the second half of the year, conditions in Syria remained highly volatile throughout 2025, with continuing [records of violations](#) and [persistent barriers](#) to sustainable returns due to poor economic conditions, widespread unemployment, limited access to basic services, and extensive infrastructure damage nationwide. Institutions such as the European Union Asylum Agency (EUAA) and the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) [have clearly argued](#) that returns remain unsustainable, and are neither safe nor dignified.<sup>44</sup>

Returns cannot be considered safe and dignified when persons are placed in an unsafe physical, legal, or material environment or are subjected to policies that deny them their human rights, including their civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.<sup>45</sup> [Access to basic services, such as](#) housing, health, education, food, and decent work, humanitarian assistance and services upon return, economic opportunities and sustainable integration must be guaranteed to returnees. Additionally, freedom from violence and freedom of movement must be ensured. If these conditions are not met, forced returns of Syrians would likely amount to inhuman or degrading treatment.



Ruined building in Raqqa being used as a makeshift home.



Assize Court in Paris - Location of the Majdi N. Trial.

### 3. Justice Progress

### 3A. Overview of the Transitional Government's Approach to TJ

Following the overthrow of the Assad government, the new Syrian government formally identified transitional justice as a central pillar of the post-conflict process. An assessment of internal political developments to date indicates that these initiatives have progressed slowly, lack procedural transparency, and remain limited in scope. They have yet to demonstrate the level of commitment required to address the scale of violations committed during the conflict or the expectations of victims and survivors. Rather than constituting a comprehensive and victim-centered transitional justice framework, current measures appear fragmented, rushed, and largely symbolic, raising concerns about their credibility and long-term impact.

#### **The National Dialogue**

The National Dialogue, held on February 25-26 in Damascus, was presented as a foundational mechanism through which Syrians would participate in shaping the transitional agenda, including issues of accountability, governance reform, and national reconciliation. In practice, however, the National Dialogue had significant shortcomings that limited its legitimacy and effectiveness.<sup>46</sup>

The National Dialogue Conference was convened with minimal transparency and insufficient preparation. Participants were invited on short notice, in their personal capacities, and without publicly available criteria explaining how individuals were selected or how representation across regions, political affiliations, civil society, victims' groups, and marginalized communities was ensured. As a result, participation did not reflect the diversity of Syrian society or the breadth of harm experienced during the conflict. The process also lacked clear mechanisms for incorporating participants' input into decision-making. Feedback provided during sessions was not incorporated in the conference's final statement. This reinforced the perception that the document had been pre-written and that the process functioned more as a formality than as a genuine dialogue to strengthen national unity at a sensitive transitional moment. The

final statement also did not create binding obligations or procedural guarantees to facilitate effective dialogue or meaningful participation.

As a result, the National Dialogue failed to produce a shared national vision for the transitional phase and did not build public trust in the government's commitment to inclusive governance. Instead, it reinforced a trend toward restricting the public sphere and limiting civic, social, and political participation.



Banner in Damascus reads, "Syrian people, decide your fate."

#### **Constitutional and Electoral Developments During the Transitional Period**

In March 2025, Transitional President Al-Sharaa issued a Constitutional Declaration to guide Syria's constitutional process during the transition.<sup>47</sup> One of four stated objectives in the Declaration is achieving transitional justice and providing redress for victims. It provides that the state shall protect human rights and fundamental freedoms and that all human rights treaties ratified by Syria will be respected (Article 12). Two provisions deal specifically with transitional justice. Article 48 provides that all exceptional laws are cancelled, the unjust rulings of the Anti-Terrorism Court are cancelled, and confiscated property must be returned. In addition, Article 49 foreshadows the creation of the NCTJ to determine accountability mechanisms and excludes the principle of non-retroactivity of laws related to atrocity crimes (war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide) – albeit limited to crimes committed by the Assad government. These provisions could set the stage for a meaningful transitional justice process.

However, the Declaration was flawed in many respects. The Constitutional Declaration concentrates extensive authority in the hands of the Transitional President, Al-Sharaa. The President exercises broad executive powers, including appointing the government and senior officials (Article 35), ratifying treaties (Article 37), and declaring war or states of emergency (Article 41). While the Constitutional Declaration did not grant the President legislative powers, limiting the office to proposing laws and signing bills into laws, President Al-Sharaa has issued nearly 300 legislative decrees. The President also plays a decisive role in shaping the legislature by appointing one-third of the People's Assembly and overseeing the committee responsible for selecting the remaining members, thereby limiting parliamentary independence (Article 24).

The Transitional President also issued [Decree No. \(143\) of 2025](#), which establishes the temporary electoral system for the Syrian Parliament (the Syrian Parliament), a pivotal document during this transitional phase. It was supposed to represent a major milestone on the path of political transformation following years of conflict and open the door to free and fair elections that reflect the will of the diverse components of the Syrian people. However, a close reading of its provisions reveals an electoral system plagued by deep structural flaws, rendering it far from meeting even the minimum international standards for political participation.

The Decree states that two-thirds of the Parliament members are elected through "electoral bodies" (Article 3, Paragraph 4), while the remaining third is directly appointed by the Transitional President (Article 38, Paragraph 5 of the decree and Article 24, Paragraph 3 of the Constitutional Declaration).

The decree also grants the president the authority to name replacements for any member who loses their seat due to death, resignation, or disqualification (Article 45).

The decree includes broad and undefined exclusionary criteria, such as affiliation with the former government, terrorism, or separatism, leaving room for selective application. It is inconsistent with Article 25 of the ICCPR<sup>48</sup>, which guarantees all citizens the right to participate in public affairs, including through universal suffrage and free and fair elections. It also falls short of obligations under CEDAW (Articles 2 and 7)<sup>49</sup>, providing only a minimum 20 percent quota

for women rather than ensuring full gender equality. References to the inclusion of women, internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities, and detainee-survivors are non-binding and apply "where possible." The Parliament that was selected fell short of its own gender quota as only six seats of the first 119 went to women (i.e. 5%).<sup>50</sup>

Judicial independence is similarly constrained, as the President appoints all members of the Supreme Constitutional Court (Article 47), and the 1961 Judiciary Law, which subordinates the judiciary to the executive, remains in force. Amendments to the declaration may only be proposed by the President (Article 50), leaving constitutional reform dependent on executive initiative rather than participatory mechanisms. Meaningful transitional justice can only take place within an independent judiciary.

### 3B. Domestic Accountability Processes in Syria (2025)

#### **National Commission for Transitional Justice (NCTJ)**

Syria's approach to transitional justice has been primarily articulated through the issuance of Decree No. (20), which established the National Commission for Transitional Justice (NCTJ).<sup>51</sup> The Commission was established to be the primary domestic mechanism to address historical violations committed during decades of authoritarian rule and armed conflict in Syria.<sup>52</sup> The NCTJ was mandated to document violations, collect victim complaints, preserve evidence, and refer cases to prosecutorial authorities, while contributing to broader goals of truth, accountability, reconciliation, and guarantees of nonrecurrence. While the creation of a dedicated institution represents a formal acknowledgment of the need for accountability, there are serious concerns regarding its effectiveness.

Although the decree required the NCTJ to be operational within 30 days, its establishment was delayed for three months, and the Commission has yet to adopt a clear internal regulatory framework. This delay occurred during a critical early phase of the transition. This undermined confidence in the government's

commitment to prioritizing justice and accountability, without which vigilantism prevailed.

Additionally, the NCTJ's mandate is confined to only investigating violations attributed to the former government, excluding abuses committed by other actors involved in the conflict. This mandate diverges from principles of equality and non-discrimination, and the right of all victims to recognition and remedy. By excluding violations committed by non-state armed groups or other conflict parties, the framework risks entrenching selective accountability and perpetuating impunity for a wide range of serious crimes as well as inviting critiques of "victor's justice."

The Commission's design also lacks meaningful provisions for victim participation. International best practice emphasizes the central role of victims in shaping transitional justice processes, including the setting of priorities, definition of harms, and design of reparative measures. The current framework does not adopt internationally recognized definitions of victims and provides no clear mechanisms through which survivors, families of the disappeared, or affected communities can engage with or influence the Commission's work. This exclusion undermines the legitimacy of the process and limits its capacity to respond to victims' needs. That said, at the end of 2025, the NCTJ initiated a series of outreach events in different cities to engage a variety of communities in a consultative process. It is too early to determine the inclusiveness or impact of these meetings because there is no publicly available independent evaluation of their impact. It remains to be seen how transparent, representative, and truly inclusive of community input the outreach was and if it is influencing institutional policy or design of the Commission's mandate.

## Arrests of Assad Government Remnants (Fuloul) and Prominent Shabbiha Figures

Throughout 2025, the Syrian government [announced the arrest of numerous](#) individuals identified as Assad government remnants (*fuloul*), including former intelligence officials, security commanders, militia leaders, and prominent *shabbiha* figures associated with repression, extortion, and violence against civilians. These arrests were frequently presented as evidence of a decisive break with the former security apparatus.

While some detentions targeted individuals long associated with torture, enforced disappearances, or paramilitary violence, the legal basis for many arrests remained unclear. In numerous cases, authorities did not publicly disclose charges, evidence, or procedural safeguards, raising concerns about arbitrary detention and the risk of substituting political retaliation for lawful accountability.

In late 2025, security forces announced a series of large-scale and targeted operations against networks allegedly linked to the former Assad government and its security services, resulting in the arrest of dozens of individuals across multiple governorates.<sup>53</sup> Official statements indicated that those detained included former senior military and intelligence officers, militia commanders, and prominent *shabbiha* figures who had held influential roles within the previous security apparatus. Publicly cited names included Major General Pilot Riyad Abdullah Yusuf, Brigadier General Pilot Rami Qanbar Suleiman, and Colonels Abdul Karim Habib Ali, Malik Aw Saleh, Shadi Adnan Agha, Ghassan Shabaan, and Mohammed Nadeem Shab, who were presented as emblematic figures of the former government's coercive structures. While authorities framed these arrests as part of efforts to dismantle entrenched networks responsible for repression and violence, particularly in sensitive areas such as the Coastal region, it remained unclear where many of the detainees were being held, which authorities exercised custody over them, or whether detention facilities were officially recognized. Moreover, authorities did not share information regarding detainees' ability to communicate with legal counsel or family members.

The Syrian government also established detention<sup>54</sup> and screening centers for individuals categorized as *fuloul*, describing these facilities as temporary measures pending prosecution, release, or reintegration, a term used by authorities in public statements and reporting related to the handling of former government affiliates. There is an absence of a clear legal framework to govern such processes.

Limited information is available regarding detention conditions, legal safeguards, or independent oversight, raising concerns about arbitrary or prolonged detention and the potential reproduction of abusive practices associated with the former security system.

As of the end of 2025, a limited number of cases involving former government officials appear to have progressed to formal judicial proceedings, reportedly before investigative courts in Damascus.<sup>55</sup> The inconsistent application of legal policy and procedural violations by judicial authorities, such as carrying out legal and investigative proceedings in jails without defense counsel, undermine the rule of law and rights of detainees. A transparent justice process must adhere to a clear, lawful mechanism from the initial arrest through to the final verdict. Public information regarding indictments, charges, or trial timelines remains sparse, and it is unclear how many detainees have been formally referred to prosecution as opposed to remaining in screening or administrative detention. The absence of comprehensive public reporting on the status of these cases, including whether proceedings are addressing serious international crimes or command-level responsibility, leaves the future trajectory of accountability for former government actors uncertain.

## Coastal Violence Fact-Finding Committee & Trials

In March 2025, large-scale violence erupted along Syria's coast following armed attacks by former Assad government remnants and loyalists against the new Syrian government's security forces. This led to subsequent retaliatory operations by the transitional government (see section [2c](#) and [2e](#)).<sup>56</sup>

In response to the violence, the Syrian government formed a fact-finding committee, which was charged with producing a report on the events in March within 30 days.<sup>57</sup> This deadline was subsequently extended for three months, after which the committee presented its findings at a press conference. However, the findings have not been published in the form of a report that can be independently reviewed or verified, raising concerns about transparency.

The committee report documented more than a thousand deaths over several days and identified hundreds of suspects linked to both the initial attacks and retaliatory abuses.<sup>58</sup> The findings were formally referred to judicial authorities, and a limited number of arrests were announced. A trial process was initiated in Aleppo in November 2025 against 14 accused: seven Assad government loyalists and seven from transitional government affiliated militias.<sup>59</sup> These

proceedings marked the first publicly acknowledged trials linked to post-transition mass violence. While public hearings represented a potential step toward transparency, observers expressed concern regarding the legal framework governing the trials, the selection of defendants, and the extent to which senior-level responsibility would be addressed.<sup>60</sup>

## Suwayda Fact-Finding Committee

During 2025, Suwayda was also subjected to repeated episodes of violence involving local armed groups, civilians, and security forces (see section [2f](#)).<sup>61</sup>

The government created a fact-finding committee to investigate the violence, like the committee created to investigate the March 2025 events in the Coastal region. In November 2025, this committee announced that it had arrested Syrian government officials in the Ministries of Defense and Interior and that the committee was entering “a more assertive phase.”<sup>62</sup>

Despite the announcement of arrests, the committee has not published a comprehensive report detailing its investigative methodology, evidentiary standards, criteria for suspect selection, or the extent to which command-level responsibility was examined. It remains unclear whether the inquiry addressed alleged abuses by pro-government militias and security forces in a systematic manner, or whether accountability efforts focused disproportionately on select individuals. The absence of a transparent final report clarifying the scope of responsibility examined, including whether senior-level decision-making figures or affiliated militias were investigated, has limited the ability of observers to assess the credibility and completeness of the accountability process. The absence of transparent procedures, victim participation mechanisms, and independent oversight has led observers to characterize the response as limited in scope and uneven in application. Local actors and civil society organizations warned that selective enforcement risked deepening mistrust between state institutions and local communities.<sup>63</sup>

## Documents and Evidence from Security Branches and Centers of Power

Following the collapse of the former government, authorities gained access to documents and archives from intelligence branches, detention facilities, and centers



Criminal Security Branch in Damascus. The building was set on fire after the fall of the government, likely to destroy incriminating documents.

of power, including detention registers, interrogation records, and internal correspondence.<sup>64</sup> These materials represent a critical evidentiary resource for prosecutions related to torture, enforced disappearance, and extrajudicial killings.

Domestic accountability processes in Syria during 2025 reflected a complex and fragile transition. While institutional steps like the creation of the NCTJ and public trials related to the coastal violence represent important openings for justice, these efforts remain undermined by selective investigations, due process concerns, amnesty ambiguities, and risks to evidence preservation.

For accountability to be meaningful, domestic mechanisms must evolve toward inclusive mandates, independent judicial processes, and adherence to international legal standards, ensuring that justice is not subordinated to political expediency.

### 3C: International Accountability Processes

Despite significant new opportunities on the horizon for justice and accountability in Syria, universal jurisdiction remained the most active mechanism for Syria-related trials for atrocity crimes. Most trials in 2025 involved direct low-level perpetrators, rather than commanders or high-level government officials.

In August, the Hague Court of Appeal awarded €40,000 to a Syrian victim of torture.<sup>65</sup> The Court upheld the conviction of Mustafa A., a former commander in



Alaa M. at the opening day of his trial.

the pro-Assad government Liwa al-Quds militia and increased his sentence to 13 years' imprisonment for crimes against humanity and participation in a criminal organization. Mustafa A. played a central role in the arrest and transfer of a Syrian victim to the notorious Air Force Intelligence Directorate, where one of the victims represented in this case was subjected to torture. SJAC drafted a report clarifying key aspects of Syrian tort law relevant to claims of damages related to criminal conduct. Although the trial court had rejected the request for damages, the appeals [court accepted SJAC's report](#) and awarded damages to the Syrian victim – a first in such proceedings.

After 3.5 years of hearings, the trial of Alaa M., the so-called “torture doctor,” ended in Frankfurt, Germany when he was convicted of crimes against humanity, war crimes and murder, and sentenced to life in prison.<sup>66</sup> The Frankfurt Higher Regional Court announced the judgment noting its finding that Alaa M. conducted these criminal acts as part of a systematic attack carried out by the former Syrian government under Bashar Al-Assad. Further, it found that the eight acts of torture and one murder were particularly grave, meriting the highest possible sentence with [no possibility of early release](#). The Court also established that Alaa M. posed a danger to the public due to his sadistic tendencies, imposing preventive detention.

In May, [Majdi N.](#) (aka Islam Alloush), who was a former spokesperson of the armed group, Jaysh Al-Islam, was convicted in a French court of complicity in the war crime of conscription of minors and sentenced to ten years imprisonment.<sup>67</sup> Majdi N. had been in France on a student visa in 2020 when he was arrested. The case had been the subject of multiple appeals, testing the bounds of universal jurisdiction and ultimately expanding the application of the legal doctrine in France.<sup>68</sup>

French courts were also active in issuing multiple arrest warrants for high level Syrian government officials from the Assad government. In September, an investigating judge issued warrants for seven officials being investigated for bombing a press center in Homs, killing a French photographer, and a US journalist.<sup>69</sup> The officials included Bashar Al-Assad, his brother Maher Al-Assad, and Ali Mamlouk, the former head of Syrian General Intelligence.<sup>70</sup> Mamlouk, alongside Jamil Hassan and Abdel Salam Mahmoud, was [convicted](#) of crimes against humanity in absentia the year prior.

This amounts to a total of 17 high-level former Syrian officials and military commanders being investigated by French courts, including earlier cases for chemical weapons attacks, and a case investigating torture at Al-Mezzeh Air Force intelligence branch.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, the case against the former Syrian Government for state sponsored torture at the International Court of Justice continues as the Dutch and Canadian governments filed their briefs (memorials) in support of the action in June.<sup>72</sup> The position the new Syrian government will take remains unclear as it is now the respondent in the case and will need to file its own brief in October 2026.<sup>73</sup>

### 3D. Missing Persons

On May 17, 2025, President Al-Sharaa signed Decree No.19, establishing a National Commission for Missing Persons (NCMP) to establish the fates and whereabouts of missing persons in Syria. Creating a centralized authority to lead missing persons investigations within the country was an important first step. Since May, the Commission has begun its work under the leadership of Dr. Ridaa Al-Jalkhi, including appointing its first advisory council,<sup>74</sup> hiring limited staff, beginning outreach with families, and signing a memorandum of understanding with six civil society organizations (including SJAC)<sup>75</sup> that have agreed to support the national missing persons search.

While these steps were necessary to lay the groundwork for the Commission's efforts, families that SJAC has spoken with want to see more concrete progress in 2026. First, the Commission should focus on launching a nationwide registration process, allowing families to document their loved ones in-person at offices or mobile clinics operating throughout the country. Online registration would miss many of Syria's most vulnerable individuals and likely lead to errors in the collection of sensitive information, which could be avoided through the collection of interviews by staff trained in documenting missing persons cases. Such a registration process will be vital in establishing the scope of the crisis and can inform upcoming decisions regarding what investigative files to prioritize.

The NCMP should also be granted full access to the records of the prior government, particularly from detention facilities and military hospitals. These

documents record the deaths in detention of thousands of individuals. While families deserve to have their missing persons identified, whether through their discovery alive or through the return of their remains, government documents could provide answers to many families in the interim at significantly less cost and complexity than will be necessary for forensic identifications.

If the NCMP is to pursue these efforts effectively, it will need consistent funding and support from the central government and international donors.

Along with the NCMP, a multitude of other international and domestic organizations continue to pursue missing persons investigations in Syria, including the UN IIMP, ICRC, and various Syrian civil society organizations. While the large number of organizations operating within Syria provides the NCMP with access to deep expertise in forensic missing persons identifications, it also brings the risk of disjointed, or even competing, investigative efforts. Careful coordination, ideally by the NCMP, will be necessary to effectively use existing expertise and resources. However, such coordination must not be used to prevent interested organizations from freely documenting cases of missing persons and enforced disappearance within the country.

Meanwhile, in Northeast Syria, SJAC and its local partner, the Syrian Missing Persons and Forensic Team (SMFT) made meaningful progress toward identifying the fates and whereabouts of those who went missing in formerly ISIS-held areas of Syria. The team investigated grave sites and missing persons cases across the Raqqa and Deir Ezzor governates, including cases of missing Yazidi captives, following leads that SJAC initially established in a [report](#) published in July on the disappearance, death, and disposal of remains of Yazidi captives in Northeast Syria.



Missing persons fliers in Damascus.

Through these investigations, SJAC and the SMFT work to select cases where there is a high likelihood of identification. These cases can be prioritized for forensic analysis and DNA testing with SJAC's partner, the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG). In October 2025, the FAFG traveled to Raqqa to investigate one such prioritized case, conducting forensic analysis of ten unidentified human remains and establishing profiles of the individuals, including biological sex and estimated age. This work lays the groundwork for future efforts to identify remains and return them to families.

### 3F. Sanctions

As countries reacted to the change in governance in Syria, so, too, did their sanctions policies. Many governments were initially hesitant to immediately lift sanctions imposed during the Assad government, instead many policymakers awaited to see how the new Syrian authorities would govern and whether their approach would be inclusive and representative of Syria's diverse population. This resulted in a phased approach to sanctions relief throughout 2025.

The first major shift came in February 2025, when the European Council announced a suspension of sectoral sanctions in energy and transportation and the delisting of five core entities, such as the Syrian Central Bank.<sup>76</sup> The Council simultaneously said that it would continue to monitor the situation in Syria before suspending additional sanctions. Just two months later, the UK lifted most of its sanctions on Syria, including an asset freeze and trade sanctions that were directed at certain sectors and the transitional government.<sup>77</sup>

While the EU and UK suspended certain sanctions on Syria early in the year, the US took a more conservative approach to sanctions relief, suspending few sanctions and waiving secondary sanctions for only 180 days, despite President Trump's announcement in May 2025 that the United States would lift sanctions on Syria.<sup>78</sup> The phased approach to sanctions relief delayed aid from reaching the Syrian people, as reconstruction and recovery efforts were hampered by the continued historical overcompliance by outside entities concerned about running afoul of shifting laws.<sup>79</sup>

In December 2025, however, the US Congress passed the National Defense Authorization Act, which included



Image of Syria's new 100 Lira note.

a full repeal of the Caesar Act sanctions.<sup>80</sup> The passage of the Act signified that sanctions against Syria may be heading towards permanent and long-lasting relief, although key sanctions – including the United States' designation of Syria as a State Sponsor of Terrorism – remain.<sup>81</sup> For investors to confidently invest in Syria's future and recovery and reconstruction to begin, the Syrian government and international community must continue efforts to build confidence in Syria's governance and financial policy.

### 3G. Recommendations

In the first full year after the fall of Assad, the transitional government took several important steps towards establishing transitional justice processes. However, little concrete progress has been made, and the country saw incidents of violence—including in the Coastal region in March and in Suwayda in July. SJAC provides the following recommendations to the Syrian government, relevant states, and international mechanisms:

#### Criminal Accountability

**The Syrian government should:**

- **Broaden the NCTJ's mandate** to include all perpetrators of abuses and violations in Syria, not only those committed by the Assad government.
- **Build the capacity of the Syrian justice system** to enable the domestic prosecution of perpetrators of complex crimes. This will require Syria to conduct extensive reforms of its existing system as well as invest in the capacity of legal professionals in the country. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) should take the following steps:

- » **Inventory of legal personnel:** Conduct an inventory of legal expertise within the country. This could be conducted partially via surveys of existing bar associations and should assess the number of qualified lawyers within the country, including those with specific experience in areas like criminal prosecution and defense. The MOJ should likewise create a registry of current judges.
- » **Vetting and lustration:** Draft a plan to assess the fitness of current judges to continue in their roles. This should include a vetting and lustration process. Additionally, the MOJ should appoint a group of legal experts to draft a ‘bench book’ for Syrian judges to delineate the practical details and relevant jurisprudence that are not in the procedural codes. This would help to standardize processes within the country and could also explain new provisions relevant to international crimes. All judges who pass vetting and choose to continue in their roles should be required to undergo onboarding training on the new bench book before returning to their positions.
- » **Fair trial guarantees:** The Constitutional Declaration provides that: “All rights and freedoms stipulated in international human rights treaties, charters and agreements ratified by the Syrian Arab Republic are considered an integral part of this Constitutional Declaration.” Syria is a state party to the ICCPR and the MOJ should review the Syrian penal code to ensure that all provisions align with the ICCPR, particularly Art. 14 re: fair trial guarantees. The penal code should also be amended to criminalize international crimes.

#### **International actors should:**

- **Continue supporting universal jurisdiction cases** against war criminals in Europe and other jurisdictions. Such trials should prioritize a victim-centered approach, ensuring accessibility for Syrians, trauma-informed testimony practices and cohesive witness protection protocols, broader inclusion of Syrian victims in state-led financial reparations, and balanced prosecution strategies targeting a diverse range of political and economic actors who committed crimes in Syria.

- **Establish multi-lateral cooperation** between Syrian and international offices with competence to try serious crimes and encourage jurisdictional cooperation through mutual legal assistance.

### **Missing Persons Investigations**

#### **The new National Commission for Missing Persons should:**

- **Launch a nationwide registration process**, which will allow families to document their missing relatives at offices or mobile clinics operating across the country. The registration process should be conducted through in-person interviews with trained staff rather than an online form. All cases should be stored within a centralized database.
- Draft a law for consideration by parliament to **criminalize the tampering of grave sites** and clarify one central authority within the MOJ to authorize exhumations. Until a comprehensive strategy is in place, exhumations should only be approved in emergency cases, such as when remains are visible on the surface or need to be removed to allow for urgent reconstruction.
- Draft a law for consideration by parliament that creates a unique **legal status for registered missing persons**. This would allow families who have completed the registration process to settle inheritance, child custody, and other legal matters while waiting to learn the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones.

#### **International actors and missing persons entities should:**

- Ensure that international efforts to support missing persons investigations are **coordinated** by the NCMP to ensure a centralized and Syrian-led process.

### **Preserving Assad’s Archives**

#### **The Syrian government should:**

- Launch a centralized effort to **preserve and analyze documents** from Assad’s intelligence archive. The National Commission for Transitional Justice and National Commission for Missing Persons should

both have direct access to the preserved archives. The analysis effort should include identifying evidence to be used in criminal trials, as well as detention records that could be shared with families of missing persons.

## Halting & Investigating Current Violations

### **The Syrian government should:**

- **End enforced disappearances and improve current detention conditions.** There are reports that new arrestees, including former Assad government officials, are being held incommunicado. The Syrian government should work with the ICRC to ensure that the conditions of current prisoners are monitored and that they are able to maintain contact with loved ones and legal representation. Family and lawyer visits are fundamental rights owed to all detainees. The MOJ should maintain lists of detainees and make these publicly available.
- **Publish transparent and unified protocols for administration of arrest and detention** across the country. These protocols should ensure humane detention conditions for all detainees and prisoners regardless of background and affiliation. Mistreatment of detainees amounting to torture or inhuman treatment should be investigated and prosecuted.
- **Create an up-to-date registry of all prisons and staff** for vetting and lustration purposes. Prisons associated with the most serious crimes of the Assad government should be permanently closed, with Sednaya prison preserved and converted into a public museum. The MOJ should propose a transparent vetting and lustration procedure for all continuing prison staff and consider re-tasking vetted prison workers to other government positions and introducing new personnel to manage jails. The MOJ can then develop a standardized set of procedures for prison operations and hire and train new personnel on these updated rules.
- The independent committees investigating violence on the Coast and in Suwayda should **publish their findings** and provide regular updates on criminal investigations and trials that emerge from these investigations.

## Protecting Refugees

### **Foreign governments should:**

- **Uphold the refugee status of Syrians** and refrain from repatriation due to continued violations and persistent economic and social barriers to sustainable returns. In line with guidance from the UNHCR and EUAA, returns to Syria remain unsustainable and are neither safe nor dignified due to the unsafe physical, legal, and material environment in the country and the potential for rights violations.

## Governance and Rule of Law

### **The Syrian government should:**

- **Reopen the national dialogue process** based on transparency and broad political and civic participation, including guaranteed seats for women, youth, productive sectors, and unions.
- **Limit over centralization and uneven executive branch control** over decision making. An excessively powerful executive branch stands to weaken democratic political development in Syria and harkens back to the former political status quo in the country. Political control should revert to legislative and judicial branches and to leadership within governorates.
- **Prioritize diverse and inclusive representation** in decision-making bodies, including at the ministerial level, in the legislature, and in the judiciary. These measures will strengthen political and social cohesion in the transition process and help ensure representation in public offices reflect the Syrian people in their diversity. Take meaningful steps to achieve 20% female representation in the People's Assembly as promised. In addition, the selection of new judges should be inclusive of women and other minorities by, for example, selecting new candidates through an anonymized exam process.
- Activate anti-corruption and oversight bodies with enforcement powers, excluding war-economy financiers from public contracts.



Mass grave at Najjha Cemetery, Rif Damascus. This and other gravesites were used to bury the victims of Assad's prison and intelligence apparatus.



Graffiti in Sednaya prison reads "Assad is a criminal, a traitor, a pig."

## 4. SJAC Activities in 2025

## **4A. Introduction on SJAC**

### **Updates**

In 2025, SJAC continued its long-term efforts to document and investigate crimes and support accountability processes. The team collected 391 interviews, analyzed over 10,000 pieces of evidence, conducted forensic missing persons investigations in Northeast Syria, and supported several criminal investigations and trials of Syrian perpetrators in North America and Europe. In addition to this ongoing work, the team pivoted after the fall of the Assad government, providing technical expertise and capacity building support directly to government entities and legal professionals inside the country.

## **4B. Documentation**

SJAC documents violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Syria to provide evidence to facilitate current and future transitional justice efforts and publish information about ongoing violations. SJAC has a dedicated team of experienced documenters working across Syria and in the diaspora to preserve evidence of violations without prejudicing any case based on affiliation or the identity of the victim or perpetrators. SJAC's documentation findings help the SJAC inform the public, support formal independent, governmental, and supranational mechanisms, and assist prosecutors pursuing criminal investigations globally.

During 2025, SJAC's documentation team conducted 391 interviews with 253 men and 138 women. Violations documented included 170 cases of arbitrary arrest, 109 cases of extrajudicial killings, 26 cases of property violations, 7 cases of child recruitment, 50 cases of torture, and other violations related to forced displacement and reporting of war criminals. The documented cases also included 43 violations related to sexual and gender-based violence.

The alleged perpetrators in most interviews were the former Syrian government, unidentified armed groups, the transitional government, and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), ISIS, and the former Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. In recent months, the documentation team's efforts have focused on monitoring violations related to kidnapping,

extrajudicial killings, and arbitrary arrests, some of which have targeted activists and journalists.

In the first half of 2025, SJAC continued to collect Assad government documents, preserving an additional 800,000 + documents from abandoned military and intelligence facilities. This includes at least 125,000 documents from facilities belonging to the notorious National Defense Forces (NDF). All physical documents have since been returned to the interim government, with SJAC retaining digital copies for future analysis.



**SJAC's Documentation Team scans Assad government documents.**

## **4C. Investigations and Case-building**

SJAC's data analysis team processes all incoming documentation to ensure it is labeled, searchable, and linked to related evidence. SJAC's investigative team then utilizes this analyzed documentation, along with supplementary documentation like satellite imagery, to investigate and expose patterns of crimes committed in Syria. This year, the team analyzed more than 10,000 pieces of documentation, including interviews, documents, and videos.

In early 2025, SJAC completed an analysis of the Assad government's hierarchy of command using Syrian government documents obtained after the Assad government's fall, strengthening SJAC's capacity to link crimes to responsible individuals and institutions. Some

of the analysis's findings were included in a *New York Times* [visual investigation](#). Further analysis of preserved government documents resulted in the creation of thousands of actor profiles for individuals detained or killed by the former government's security and military apparatus.

SJAC completed several investigations, revealing widespread and systematic violations in Syria primarily perpetrated by the former Syrian government:

- [“Update on SGBV Violations Committed by the Assad Government”](#), based on hundreds of survivor and witness interviews, focused on the Assad government's systematic practice of sexual and gender-based violence as a tool of repression.
- [“Attacks on Critical Infrastructure by the Assad Government”](#) analyzed the Assad government's and its Russian allies' systematic targeting of critical civilian infrastructure as a form of collective punishment, resulting in widespread displacement and human suffering.
- [“Sacrificing the Innocent: The Use of Civilians as Human Shields in the Syrian Conflict”](#) documented how multiple parties to the conflict unlawfully exposed civilians to harm by using them as shields.
- [“Scorched Earth: Incendiary and Cluster Munitions Attacks in Syria”](#) investigated the Syrian government's and its Russian ally's unlawful use of incendiary and cluster munitions in civilian areas.
- [“Due Process Denied: Investigating Extrajudicial Executions in the Syrian Conflict”](#) shed light unlawful killing of prisoners without due process by all parties to the Syrian conflict.

## Case Building

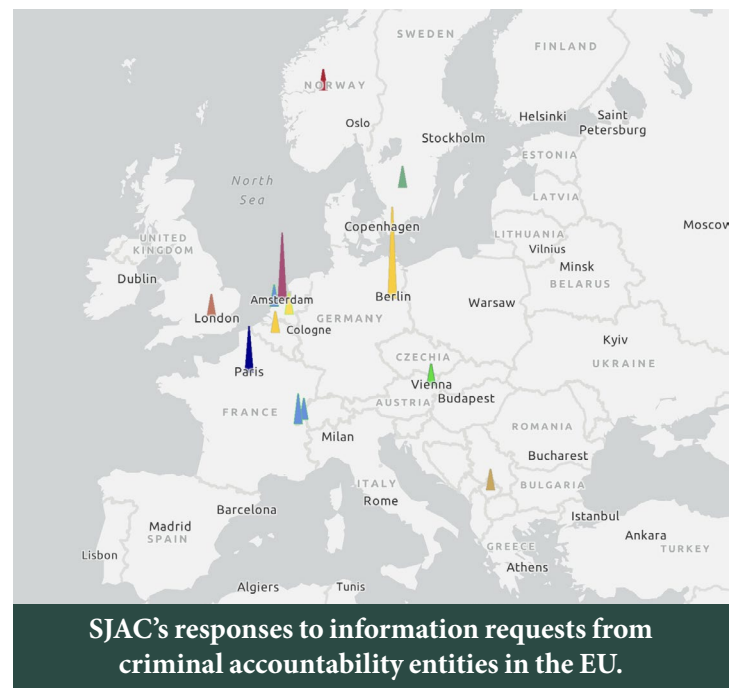
SJAC's Case Building team contributed to dozens of cases throughout Europe and numerous cases in North America in 2025.

Under the direction of the Case Building Team Lead, SJAC's team of community advocates based in Germany and the Netherlands worked to identify victims and witnesses who had knowledge of Syrian perpetrators present in those countries. In addition to making

proactive submissions when the team identified suspects independently, SJAC responded to requests from war crimes units and police in several European and North American countries. These authorities regularly reach out to SJAC's Case Building team, requesting information about suspects and potential witnesses who are willing to testify and participate in investigations.

In 2024, SJAC made a substantial contribution—10 witness statements and 10 government documents—to a case filed by the Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA) on behalf of Obada Mzaik, a dual Syrian-American national tortured at the Mezzeh Military Airport during Assad's rule. In 2025, the US District Court issued a default judgment, finding the Assad government guilty of detaining and torturing the individual and ordering it to pay damages.

In another success, SJAC produced an expert report explaining Syrian tort law on the application of damages and shared it with the legal representative of a victim in the Netherlands. Generally, victims have been unable to obtain compensation in criminal courts adjudicating crimes that occurred in Syria, because these courts would need to apply Syrian domestic law. The representative submitted the report to two ongoing appeal proceedings. In one case, that of Mustafa A., a member of Liwa al-Quds militia, the court for the first time issued damages—40,000 euros—to Syrian victims.



## 4D. Missing Persons

SJAC's missing persons program utilizes forensic methods to investigate missing persons and mass graves in Northeast Syria with the goal of supporting accountability processes and identifying those who were disappeared by ISIS. SJAC's project consists of three main areas: working with families to document missing persons cases, investigating sites of detention and burial, and building the forensic capacity of its local partner, the Syrian Missing Persons and Forensic Team. Taken together, these activities lay the groundwork for SJAC and its partners to identify human remains in Northeast Syria.

In 2025, SJAC's team reached an important milestone, as it conducted its one thousandth interview with the family of a missing person. SJAC's in-depth missing persons interviews document the nature of the person's disappearance, as well as physical features that could assist in identification. This information is uploaded to SJAC's database, [Bayanat](#), which represents the most comprehensive collection of evidence on those who went missing under ISIS.

SJAC also conducted contextual investigations into key grave sites, visiting and photographing sites, analyzing satellite imagery, and conducting 49 interviews with survivors and witnesses. To date, SJAC has identified 255 ISIS prisons and 60 grave sites, all of which can be viewed [online](#).

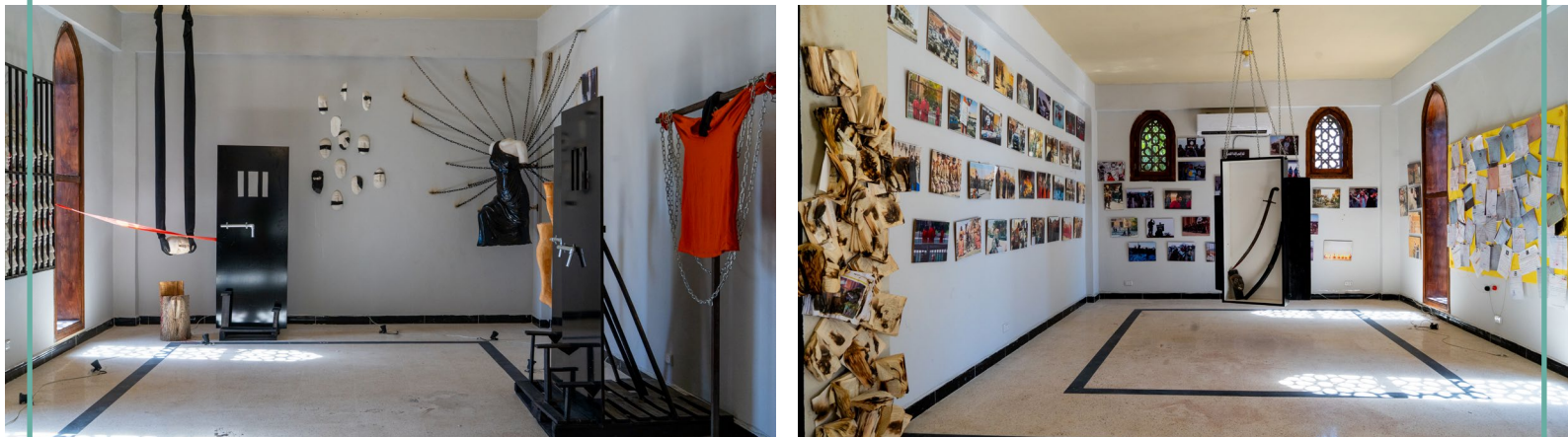
In October, two experts from the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG) travelled to Raqqa to conduct skeletal analysis of human remains exhumed at one of the grave sites under investigation. The FAFG team worked to establish profiles (including information such as biological sex, estimated age, and other physical attributes) of skeletal remains that represent at least ten distinct individuals, laying the groundwork for identification.

Meanwhile, SJAC's Damascus-based investigation team continued investigations into government detention and disappearance at the [Mezzeh Military Airport](#) and associated Air Force Intelligence facilities, connecting information from the ground with the tens of thousands of government documents collected at that site. Many of these [documents](#) include information about those killed in detention. Missing persons investigations in Syria should prioritize analysis of these documents and sharing this information with families.

Finally, SJAC began collaborating with the newly created National Commission for Missing Persons in 2025, signing a protocol for collaboration on the International Day of the Disappeared. The creation of the Commission is a historic step, and SJAC is hopeful that the expertise its team has built in Northeast Syria can inform a centralized, countrywide missing persons process moving forward.



The Syria Missing Persons and Forensic Team during a training session, Raqqa.



## **ISIS Atrocities Museum - Raqqa**

In 2025, the AANES finished constructing a museum memorializing the victims of ISIS. The museum features a series of installations meant to document ISIS crimes, including mass imprisonment, violence against women, book burning, and the public beheadings that came to symbolize ISIS rule.

As of 2026, the status of the museum is unknown following the withdrawal of the AANES from Raqqa.

## 4E. Trial Monitoring

In 2025, SJAC completed trial monitoring in several major cases, including the [Alaa M.](#), [Ahmad A.](#), and [Majdi N.](#) trials, while starting to monitor the trial of [Twana H.S. and Asia R.A.](#) charged with genocide in Munich. It further initiated monitoring of the sister trials concerning the alleged crimes in the Yarmouk District in Southern Damascus: [Mahmoud S.](#) trial in Stockholm, Sweden, and [Jihad A.](#), [Mahmoud A.](#), [Mazhar J.](#), [Sameer S.](#), and [Wael S.](#) in Koblenz, Germany. Monitoring of two cases in [Stuttgart](#) and [Duesseldorf](#), Germany was terminated due to a suspension of funding from the Department of State in early 2025.

SJAC also engaged in activities to increase access to and participation in universal jurisdiction proceedings by filing several requests for SJAC's monitors to be accredited as [press representatives and for interpretation](#) to be made available to monitors. It further supported a motion filed by leading scholars in the field of international criminal law to the Higher Regional Court of Koblenz to [audio-record the trial](#) of Jihad A. et al. to preserve the material for future generations and accountability efforts.

Despite significant efforts, courts in several jurisdictions are reluctant to grant access, with SJAC receiving positive responses only after submitting requests multiple times. This highlights a lack of coherent practice. Moreover,

German courts continue to refuse requests for recording trials, missing the opportunity to create an archive of the Syrian conflict adjudicated before domestic courts.

In addition to challenges in accessing the proceedings, shortcomings in the handling of international trials were observed across jurisdictions, including the poor [quality of interpretation](#), a lack of cultural expertise, and the use of [asylum interviews](#) in criminal proceedings. Based on the evidence gathered from [over ten trials](#) monitored since 2020, SJAC conducted a comparative analysis, highlighting overarching themes and formulating meaningful recommendations to judiciaries, practitioners, and civil society engaged in Syria-related prosecutions.

In December, 2025 SJAC launched its [first trial monitoring project inside Syria](#), to monitor the trial of perpetrators of the March 2025 Coastal incidents in Aleppo. SJAC plans to continue to publish regular monitoring reports, summaries of key hearings, and legal analysis as the trial progresses in 2026. In a context where official court records remain limited or inaccessible, SJAC's monitoring serves to preserve an accurate historical account, support future justice efforts, foster a culture of transparency, and ensure that victims, families, researchers, and the broader public have access to reliable information about such cases.



Entrance to the Palestine refugee camp and the Yarmouk refugee camp, Damascus.

## 4F. Tech and Human Rights

2025 marked a pivotal year for SJAC’s database software, [Bayanat](#), transitioning the platform from a specialized database for analyzing human rights violations, into a versatile, customizable data management solution that can be tailored to all purposes of humanitarian work and human rights documentation. This year’s updates demonstrated meaningful progress in expanding functionality, improving user experience, and strengthening the technical foundation that supports organizations worldwide documenting human rights violations.

Bayanat’s primary update of 2025 was [v3.0.0](#)’s **Dynamic Forms architecture**. This redesign allows administrators to customize data fields without modifying code or their core database. Previous versions limited edits to Bayanat’s structure; however, the platform can now be adapted to the needs of users. This change allows organizations to evolve their data models as investigations proceed, contexts shift, or new requirements emerge.

Early in the year, [v2.4.0](#) introduced new and simplified **evidence archiving capabilities**, enabling users to directly import video evidence from websites without first manually downloading the data. Throughout 2025, SJAC released several critical updates to ensure Bayanat’s safety, security, and long-term sustainability. Examples include:

- **Adding audio transcription** through OpenAI Whisper integration, which reduces known issues with processing interview recordings and surveillance audio;
- **Introducing a real-time notification system** that keeps remote teams aligned on critical updates and action items;
- **Redesigned interfaces** across actors, bulletins, and administration to accelerate workflow.

These updates have adapted Bayanat into a more responsive tool that helps organizations achieve their documentation goals without compromising any of Bayanat’s analysis or security features. Whether documenting conflict-related violations, enforced disappearances, missing persons cases, or broader humanitarian work, organizations can now tailor the

platform to their specific operational needs while maintaining investigative rigor and data integrity.

## 4G. Capacity Building

In 2025, SJAC shifted the focus of its capacity building efforts primarily inside Syria. After over a decade of building expertise on justice processes abroad, the SJAC team can now work alongside both the Syrian government and independent legal professionals in building domestic capacity for transitional justice.

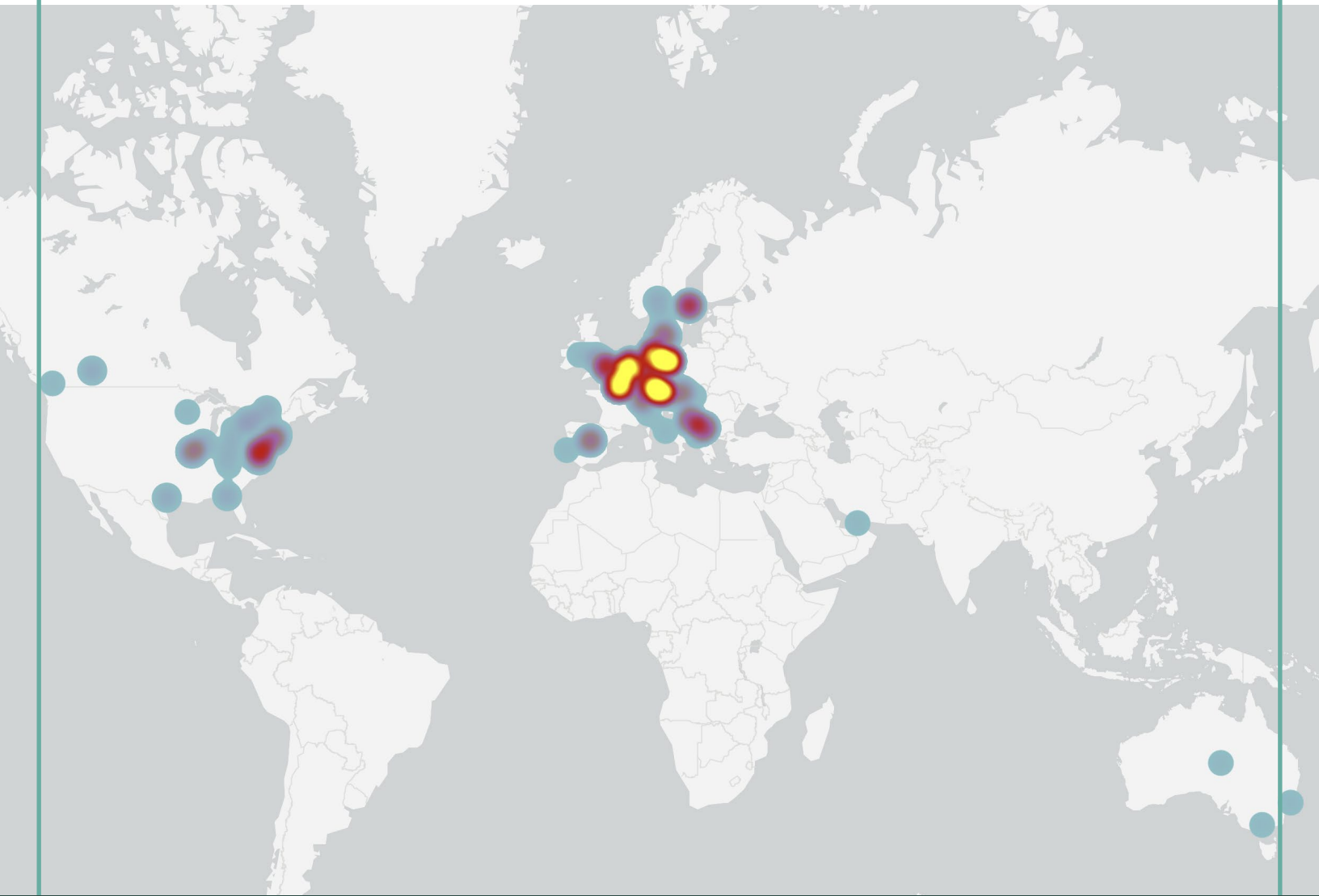
As an initial step, SJAC conducted a needs assessment of Syrian lawyers’ knowledge on serious international crimes, international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and related human rights topics. This assessment provided a clear, evidence-based understanding of existing knowledge gaps and practical challenges and now serves as a foundational reference for shaping SJAC’s future legal training and capacity-building initiatives in Syria. SJAC offered an initial training session on international law to the Syrian Bar Association in the fall of 2025.



**Mural – Bab Touma, Damascus**

Artist: Mariam / Unknown

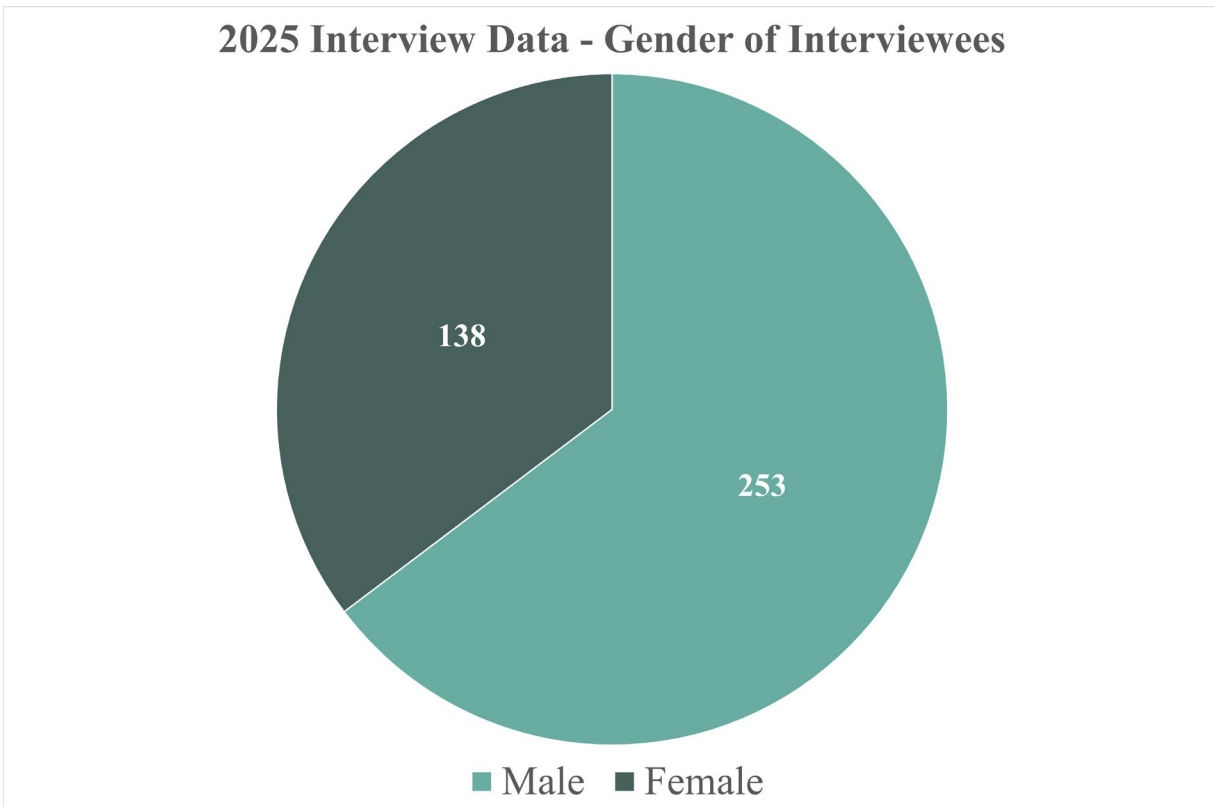
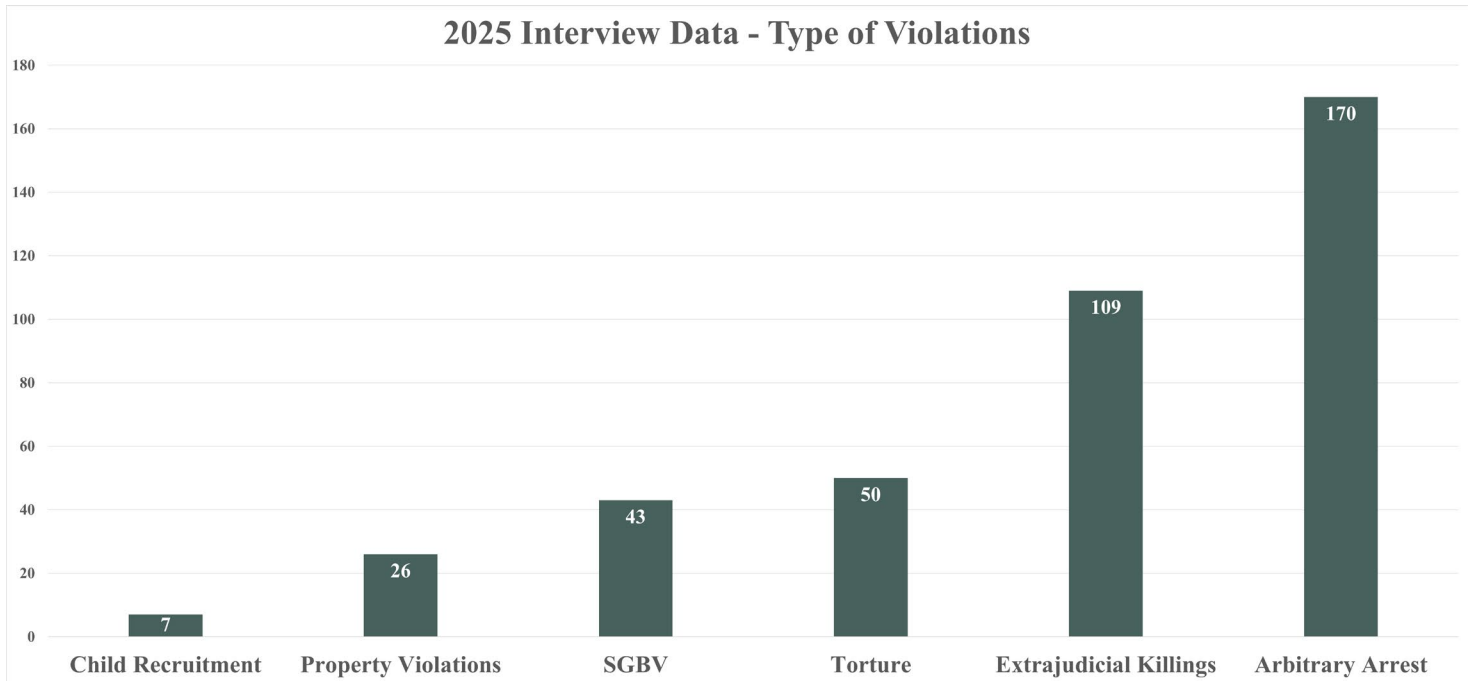
A mural painted on the Bab Touma Gate in Damascus reads “Heaven, our homeland.” Similar murals were made across the country as Syrians celebrated their liberation from the Assad government.



SJAC's online tracker of Syria-related criminal cases ([available here](#)).

## Annexes

## Annex I: Charts



## Annex II: Endnotes

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SJAC’s documentation team also documented such detention conditions in interviews with detainees.

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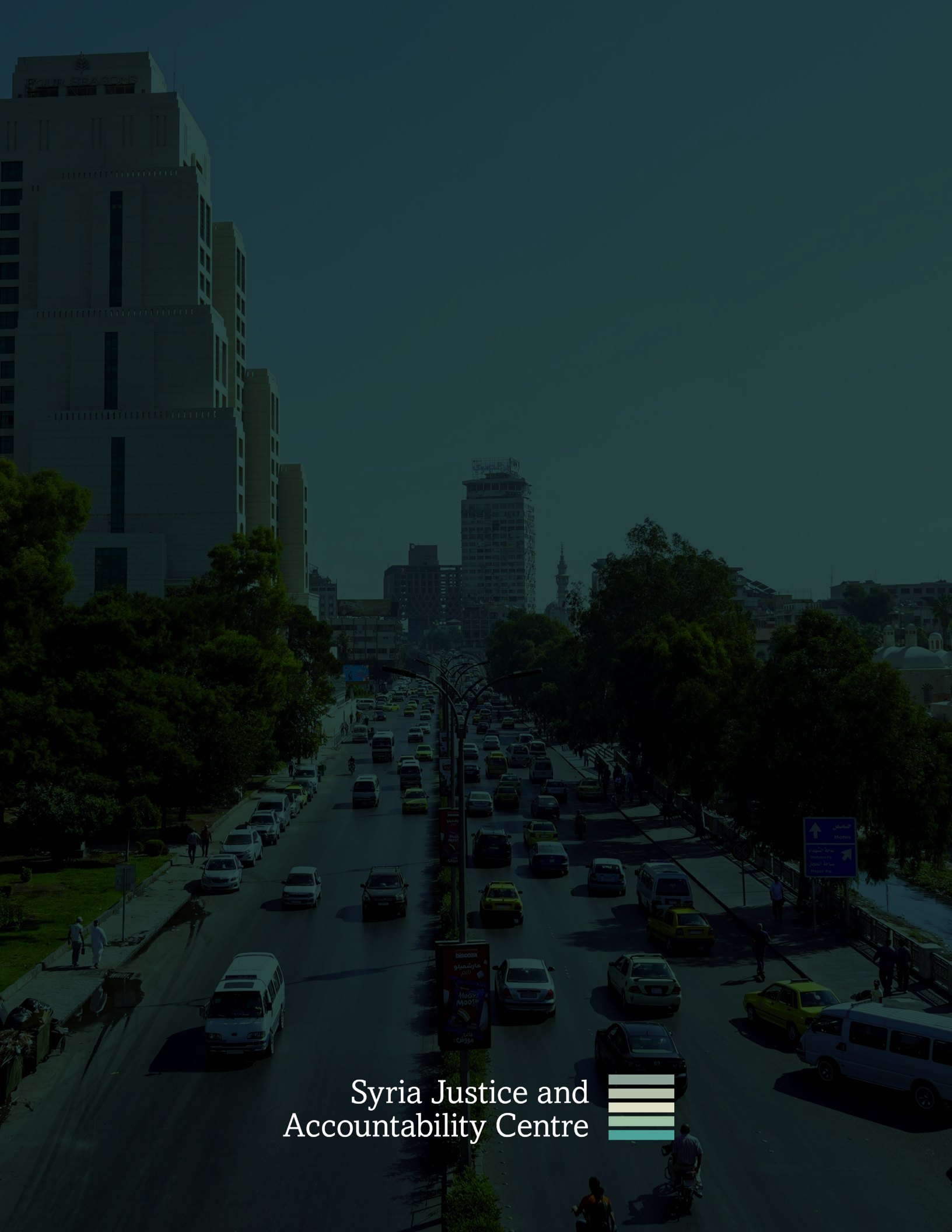
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