



2.2.4. Journalists and other media professionals

Under the rule of Bashar al-Assad, civic space^{[313](#)} and media freedom were severely restricted in practice despite formal constitutional guarantees.^{[314](#)} Journalists in government-controlled areas were subjected to censorship, arbitrary detention, torture and deaths in custody, while media outlets were required to obtain approval from the Mol. Media ownership was closely linked to regime-affiliated actors. In areas controlled by other groups, local media reportedly faced pressure to align with dominant armed factions.^{[315](#)}

The first months following the fall of Assad were described as a period of ‘permissive civic atmosphere’,^{[316](#)} during which civil society activity re-emerged and newly established independent media registered and opened offices across the country.^{[317](#)} This was also reflected in a pledge by the Minister of Information in January 2025 to work towards a ‘free press’,^{[318](#)} as well as in Article 13 of the Constitutional Declaration, which explicitly guarantees freedom of opinion, expression, information and publication.^{[319](#)} Freedom of the press was reported to have improved significantly, as the government ended pre-publication review requirements, lifted censorship measures, and suspended restrictive media laws inherited from the former government.^{[320](#)} Exiled Syrian journalists and foreign reporters were also able to return and report from within the country,^{[321](#)} including on abuses committed under the former regime.^{[322](#)}

Following the violence in the coastal areas (March 2025) and Sweida (July 2025), authorities began to reassert control over civic space,^{[323](#)} particularly in relation to activities not aligned with their priorities.^{[324](#)} In February 2026, the Ministry of Information launched the Professional and Ethical Code of Conduct for the media sector, describing it as a comprehensive framework for regulating journalistic work. The code prompted criticism from journalists, who argued that professional codes of conduct should be developed by independent syndicates rather than by government bodies.^{[325](#)} Moreover, the gains achieved during the transition were undermined by limited structural and legislative reforms.^{[326](#)} The media sector continued to operate under repressive legal frameworks developed under the previous regime, which enabled extensive state control^{[327](#)} and remained in force.^{[328](#)} Protections guaranteed under the Constitutional Declaration were subject to broad restrictions on grounds such as public order, morality, and national security.^{[329](#)} At the same time, the collapse of the former regime created a legal vacuum and left civic space largely unregulated,^{[330](#)} exposing the media landscape to manipulation, whether through direct political exploitation or more informal pressure from emerging centres of power.^{[331](#)}

Several confidential sources interviewed by the Netherlands MFA in September 2025 indicated that journalists were required to register with the Ministry of Information and were not always granted permission to report on certain events.[332](#) Restrictions reportedly included denial of access to the Druze-controlled areas of Sweida.[333](#) Journalists who had worked in the former HTS-controlled area of Idlib generally enjoyed greater access to information than other journalists.[334](#) However, despite these constraints, Haid Haid assessed that freedom of expression for journalists has remained relatively noticeable throughout the period, although experiences may differ between Syrians and non-Syrians, since foreign journalists could face administrative restrictions, such as difficulties in obtaining visas. [335](#)

Over the reference period there were reports of journalists being briefly detained by transitional government for 'inciting sectarian strife',[336](#) criticising the attacks on the Alawite community, including the abduction of Alawite women and girls,[337](#) or in the context of the government reasserting control over former SDF-controlled areas.[338](#) One source also reported incidents in which journalists were arrested at checkpoints, subjected to ill-treatment, and released shortly thereafter without their families being informed of their whereabouts or being provided access to legal assistance. Such incidents were generally characterised by the authorities as isolated cases or misunderstandings. In many instances, the Ministry of Information reportedly intervened when journalists had been arrested by internal security forces.[339](#) SNHR noted that short detentions of activists or journalists who criticised the government have been documented, consistent with the imposition of actual restrictions on opposition without reaching the threshold of formal criminalisation.[340](#)

In January 2026, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported on the arrest of three journalists in Aleppo following the reassertion of government control and restrictions on independent reporting. The journalists were eventually released after a couple of hours.[341](#) Journalists Eva Maria Michelmann and Ahmed Polad, a German and a Kurdish-Turkish journalist working for an Istanbul-based News Agency and TV, were arrested in January 2026, during the takeover of Raqqqa. In April, Syrian authorities confirmed that the German journalist was detained in Damascus, while, according to information shared by Free Media Union in northeast Syria, Polad is being held in a detention facility in the northern city of Aleppo.[342](#) Authorities stated that the two journalists were found at an SDF security headquarters, had refused to identify themselves or disclose their professional role, and were not carrying official documentation.[343](#)

Several sources interviewed by DIS indicated that incidents of detention and harassment of journalists appeared to be isolated rather than systematic.[344](#) Some detentions were attributed to the low professional standards of local security actors rather than to a coordinated government policy.[345](#) Journalists who had previously worked for the former government's state media had not been subjected to kidnappings or targeted killings, although some had reportedly experienced verbal confrontations.[346](#)

According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), 45 journalists and media workers missing or believed to be held hostage under Assad rule remain unaccounted for. Although the new Syrian government has pledged to investigate their fate, as of December 2025, no information regarding their whereabouts has been made public.[347](#)

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