



2.7.1. Kurds

Kurds constitute the largest ethnic minority in Syria, with an estimated population of 2 to 2.5 million,^{[505](#)} or up to 10 % of the country's pre-war population of 23 million.^{[506](#)} Kurdish population is concentrated in the regions of Afrin, Kobane, and Jazira (Hasaka), neighbourhoods of Aleppo and Damascus cities, and, to a lesser extent, in several districts in Raqqa city.^{[507](#)} Kurds constitute approximately one third of the population in Damascus and are generally considered an integrated component of Syrian society. In long-established Kurdish-majority neighbourhoods of Damascus, such as Rukn al-Din and Wadi al-Mashari, Kurds reportedly do not visibly differ from other residents and are therefore not easily identifiable on the basis of ethnicity. Kurds also hold high-ranking positions within the government.^{[508](#)}

On 16 January 2026, Presidential Decree No. 13 recognised Kurdish as a national language, permitting its instruction in both public and private schools in areas with significant Kurdish populations. It also designates 21 March (the Kurdish New Year - Nowruz) as a nationwide public holiday in Syria.^{[509](#)} The January 2026 integration agreement between the SDF and the transitional government includes provisions to facilitate the return of predominantly Kurdish displaced persons to Afrin, Sheikh Maqsoud (Aleppo governorate) and Sere Kaniye (Hasaka governorate) and envisages the appointment of local officials in these areas.^{[510](#)} However, neither the agreement nor the decree provides for the constitutional recognition of Kurdish rights, a key demand of Kurdish political leaders.^{[511](#)}

Kurds residing in transitional government-controlled areas generally continue their daily lives without significant restrictions, harassment, mistreatment, discriminatory treatment, or ethnically motivated attacks,^{[512](#)} provided they do not engage in political activity.^{[513](#)} According to a Syrian lawyer consulted by DIS, individuals perceived as politically active or critical of the authorities may face reprisals similar to those experienced by government critics irrespective of their ethnic background.^{[514](#)} In general there have been no attacks against Kurds living in government-held areas apart from isolated incidents reported of Kurds travelling from northeast Syria to Damascus who have been screened for alleged links to DAANES and in some cases detained.^{[515](#)} According to a Kurdish activist interviewed by DIS there have been arrests of Kurds travelling from SDF-controlled areas to Damascus for alleged links to the Democratic Union Party (PYD) with some of them reportedly being tortured. No other cases of mistreatment of Kurds have been reported.^{[516](#)}

Situation of Kurds in Aleppo governorate

In Aleppo governorate, some arrests and detentions carried out by government forces during the first half of 2025 reportedly targeted individuals of Kurdish background perceived to be affiliated

with the SDF,[517](#) including cases where images related to the SDF were found on their mobile phones.[518](#) The sources did not provide further information on the cases.

After the transitional government took control over the Kurdish-neighbourhoods of Ashrafiyeh and Sheikh Maqsoud in Aleppo city in January 2026, reports indicated that government forces arrested over 300 Kurds that the authorities claimed were fighters, while some sources reported that those detained were civilians.[519](#) A STJ report based on testimonies from witnesses and victims indicated that civilians attempting to leave Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyeh between 6-12 January 2026 were frequently arrested and detained, without being informed of the reasons for their arrest, particularly at checkpoints such as al-Awarid.[520](#) Witnesses reported identity checks conducted by a mix of armed personnel, including individuals in plain clothes, Internal Security Forces uniforms, and members of Arab tribes. Documentation suggests that several tribes, notably the Mawali tribe, operated alongside Internal Security Forces in these areas. Some civilians reported degrading treatment during arrest and initial detention, including beatings, verbal abuse, threats, and confiscation of personal belongings.[521](#)

In Afrin, following the entry of the transitional government in 2025, abuses by Turkish-aligned armed factions reportedly decreased only marginally. While some detainees were released and certain properties returned to their original owners, these measures are widely perceived as symbolic steps aimed at improving the government's image rather than reflecting substantive human rights reforms. Armed factions, including the Hamzat and Amshat groups, reportedly remain influential and active in the area.[522](#)

In September 2025, Turkish MoI forces stationed in Afrin withdrew from the city. Following the January 2026 agreement between the transitional government and the SDF, convoys carrying hundreds of IDPs returned to Afrin,[523](#) with approximately 1 400 families having returned as of mid-April 2026[524](#) and further returns reported in May 2026.[525](#) Other reports indicate that Kurdish IDPs have been returning to Afrin[526](#) even before January 2026, with some estimates on the number of returnees ranging up to 60 %[527](#) and some analysts assessing that the demographic balance has partially shifted back in favour of the Kurdish population.[528](#) In rural areas of Afrin, however, former SNA factions, including the Sultan Suleiman Shah and Sultan Murad brigades, reportedly continue to engage in largely unchecked criminal practices. Allegations include the looting of olive harvests, occupation of farmland and private property, and demands for substantial payments from returnees seeking to reclaim their homes or land from Arab settlers and SNA-affiliated actors. Cases have also been reported in which Kurdish returnees were denied property restitution on the basis of alleged sympathy with SDF-aligned armed groups.[529](#) According to researcher Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, the number of checkpoints and visible SNA symbols in Afrin has significantly decreased, and factions previously accused of human rights violations against Kurds have been incorporated into newly formed army divisions and redeployed to other governorates. However, individual figures and commanders from former factions may still retain control over confiscated real estate in Afrin and continue to refuse its return to original owners, owing to lack of alternative accommodation, personal financial gain, and the persistence of patronage networks.[530](#) The 80th Division of the army, which is led by a former Nour al-Din al-Zinki leader and includes fighters from former SNA groups, was reported to be present in Afrin.[531](#)

Authorities in Afrin require displaced persons to validate ownership documents through an approved lawyer, often with certification from a local *mukhtar* and witnesses. The documents are then reviewed by local and central 'economic committees', which, according to official procedures, should ensure the return of property once ownership is confirmed. The head of the Afrin administration stated that, in cases where confiscated property is occupied by displaced families unable to return to destroyed homes, authorities seek negotiated arrangements with original owners, such as rental agreements, or alternatively provide accommodation in displacement camps. Critics, particularly those aligned with the SDF, argue that these 'economic committee' mechanisms effectively legitimise property confiscations by armed groups and that procedures governing property restitution remain arbitrary and inconsistent. [532](#)

During the Kurdish celebrations of Nowruz, violence erupted in several areas after images circulated of a man removing the Syrian flag in Kobane/Ayn al-Arab, triggering unrest amid recent tensions. Incidents included mob attacks and vandalism in Kurdish areas in Afrin, prompting a curfew, and assaults on a Damascus-affiliated security post in SDF-controlled Qamishli, with no casualties immediately reported. [533](#)

Stateless Kurds

A 1962 census in Hasaka governorate required residents to prove residence in Syria prior to 1945, [534](#) resulting in the deprivation of Syrian citizenship for an estimated 120 000 Kurds [535](#) and the creation of two stateless groups. [536](#) The *ajanib* ('foreigners') were individuals who were able to provide proof of residency but failed to meet all requirements, while the *maktoumeen* ('unregistered') either lacked documentation or did not participate in the census, resulting in their presence in Syria to be considered illegal. The stateless status of the *ajanib* and *maktoumeen*, passed down from fathers to their children, led to severe marginalisation of the community, whose rights, including access to health, education, property ownership, and political participation, became severely limited. [537](#) In April 2011, the Syrian government issued Decree 49 granting Syrian citizenship to the *ajanib* group of stateless Syrian Kurds. [538](#) *Maktoumeen* Kurds were left outside of the scope of the 2011 decree. [539](#)

On 16 January 2026, President Ahmad al-Sharaa issued Decree No. 13 which granted Syrian nationality to all Syrians of Kurdish origin [540](#) residing in Syria, including those previously listed as stateless or unregistered, while guaranteeing full equality in rights. [541](#) The decree specifically abolished all laws and exceptional measures resulting from the 1962 Hasaka census, which had stripped thousands of Kurds of their citizenship and basic civil rights. [542](#) Kurdish political leaders reportedly welcomed the measure, while calling for these rights to be constitutionally guaranteed. [543](#)

In February 2026, the MoI issued Decision No. 144/M to implement Presidential Decree No. 13 of 2026, establishing procedures for granting Syrian citizenship to eligible Kurds. Applicants must submit a formal request at designated centres, either individually or as a family application filed by the head of household. Required documentation includes an identification certificate issued by a local *mukhtar*, proof of residence and presence in Syria, and supporting evidence such as utility bills, certified school enrolment documents, or other legally accepted records. Application centres were established in Damascus, Aleppo, Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor, and Hasaka. A review committee will be established at each application centre to assess citizenship requests. Each

committee will be chaired by a judge of counsellor rank appointed by the Minister of Justice and will include a civil affairs representative serving as rapporteur, as well as a Syrian Kurdish community representative appointed by the governor.⁵⁴⁴ In May, the authorities extended the deadline for receiving citizenship applications after a high number of submissions.⁵⁴⁵

According to Bassam Alahmad, thousands of stateless Kurds have applied to be granted citizenship following the issuance of Decree No. 13. The process is ongoing as the evaluation of applications and subsequent issuance of documents takes a few months.⁵⁴⁶

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