

# Syria (The Syrian Arab Republic)

## Key Facts

Total Population:	18,502,000	(2015)
Population aged under 15 years (%):	35%	(2015)
Population aged 10-19 years:	4,771,700	(2013)
Population aged 15-24 years (%):	19.85%	
Migration to the UK:	2001 Census identified over 4000 people	
Capital:	Damascus	
Area:	185,180 sq km (71,498 sq miles)	
Languages:	Arabic	
Kurdish		
Armenian		
Armaic		
Circassian		
Major religions:	Sunni Muslim 74%	
Other Muslim (Alawaite, Druze)	16%	
Christian	10%	
Jewish (communities in Damascus, Al Qamishli and Aleppo)		
Life expectancy:	male 70 years : female 60 years	
President:	President: Bashar al-Assad	



## Geographical Location



## Economy

Syria's economy continues to deteriorate amid the ongoing conflict that began in 2011. The government has struggled to address the effects of international sanctions, widespread infrastructure damage, diminished domestic consumption and production, reduced subsidies, and high inflation, which have caused dwindling foreign exchange reserves, rising budget and trade deficits, a decreasing value of the Syrian pound, and falling household purchasing power. During 2014, the ongoing conflict and continued unrest and economic decline worsened the humanitarian crisis and elicited a greater need for international assistance, as the number of people in need inside Syria increased from 9.3 million to 12.2 million, and the number of Syrian refugees increased from 2.2 million to more than 3.3 million.

Labour force by occupation	Agriculture	17%	(2008)
	Industry	16%	(2008)
	Services	67%	(2008)
Unemployment rate youths aged 15-24:	Total	35.8%	(2011)
	Male	26.6%	(2011)
	Female	71.1%	(2011)
Population below the poverty line:		82.5%	(2014)
Child labour (aged 5-14 years):	Total	192,915	(4%)



## Education

Percentage of youths aged 15-24 years who can read and write:	Male	96.6%
	Female	94.5%

## Child Protection

Percentage of children married	- by age of 15:	2.5%	(2005-2013)
	- by age of 18:	13.3%	(2005-2013)

Violent discipline:	- total	88.5%	(2005-2013)
	- males	89.5%	(2005-2013)
	-females	87.5%	(2005-2013)

Births by age 18 years:	8.7%	(2009-2013)
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## Politics

### Key political dates:

**1918** October - Arab troops led by Emir Feisal, and supported by British forces, capture Damascus, ending 400 years of Ottoman rule.

**1920** - San Remo conference splits up newly-created Arab kingdom by placing Syria-Lebanon under a French mandate, and Palestine under British control.

**1946** - Independence.

**1958-61** - Short-lived union of Syria with Egypt as the United Arab Republic (UAR).

**1967** - Egypt, Jordan, and Syria are defeated in the Six-Day War with Israel. Israel seizes the Golan Heights.

**1970** - Hafez al-Assad comes to power in a coup. His rule is characterised by stability, repression and a major arms build-up.

**1973** - Egypt and Syria launch surprise attack on Israel in October to try reverse defeats of 1967.

**1976** - Syria intervenes in the Lebanese civil war. It maintains military presence there for next three decades and exerts significant influence on Lebanese politics.

**1980** - Muslim Brotherhood member tries to assassinate Assad.

**1982** - Muslim Brotherhood uprising in the city of Hama is suppressed in a month-long siege by the military, who are accused of killing tens of thousands of civilians.



**2000** - Assad dies and is succeeded by his son Bashar.

**2001** April - Outlawed Muslim Brotherhood says it will resume political activity, 20 years after its leaders were forced to flee.

**2002** - Senior US official includes Syria in a list of states that make-up an "axis of evil", first listed by President Bush in January. Undersecretary for State John Bolton says Damascus is acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

**2005** - Syrian forces withdraw from Lebanon under international pressure following assassination of Lebanese premier Rafiq al-Hariri.

**2006** November - Iraq and Syria restore diplomatic relations after nearly a quarter century.

**2007** September - Israel carries out an aerial strike against a site in northern Syria that it said was a nuclear facility under construction. In 2011 the UN's IAEA nuclear watchdog decides to report Syria to the UN Security Council over its alleged covert nuclear programme reactor programme at the site.

**2009** June - The UN nuclear watchdog, the IAEA, says traces of undeclared man-made uranium have been found at second site in Syria - a reactor in Damascus. The IAEA was investigating US claims that the site destroyed in the 2007 Israeli raid was a nuclear reactor.

**2009** July - US special envoy George Mitchell visits for talks with President Assad on Middle East peace.

**2009** August - Iraq and Syria recall their envoys in a deepening rift over charges of responsibility for a string of deadly bomb attacks in Baghdad. They restore ties later in 2010.

**2011** - Unrest inspired by "Arab Spring" uprisings. Confrontation between government and opposition soon develops into civil war that draws in world powers and triggers refugee crisis.

## National Service

Syrian Armed Forces consist of Land Forces, Naval Forces and Air Forces. The age for compulsory and voluntary military service is 18 years. There is a conscript service obligation of 18 months for men. Women are not conscripted but may volunteer to serve.

## Illicit Drugs

Syria is a transit point for opiates, hashish, and cocaine bound for regional and Western markets.



## Human Rights

Violence continues to escalate inside Syria amid an absence of meaningful efforts to end the war or reduce abuses. The government and its allies carry out deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilians. Torture remains rampant in detention facilities. Non-state armed groups opposing the government also carried out serious abuses including attacking civilians, using child soldiers, kidnapping, and torture. The armed extremist group Islamic State (also known as ISIS), and Al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, Jabhat al-Nusra, were responsible for systematic and widespread violations, including targeting civilians, kidnappings, and executions. According to local Syrian groups, as of October 2015, the death toll in the conflict reached more than 250,000 people including over 100,000 civilians. According to local groups, more than 640,000 people live under long-term siege in Syria. The conflict has led to a humanitarian crisis with an estimated 7.6 million internally displaced and 4.2 million refugees in neighbouring countries.

### Government Attacks on Civilians, Indiscriminate Use of Weapons

The government persisted in conducting indiscriminate air attacks, including dropping large numbers of improvised barrel bombs on civilians in defiance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2139 passed on February 22, 2014. These unguided high explosive bombs are cheaply made, locally produced, and typically constructed from large oil drums, gas cylinders, and water tanks, filled with high explosives and scrap metal to enhance fragmentation, and then dropped from helicopters. Between February 2014 and January 2015, Human Rights Watch determined at least 450 major damage sites that showed damage consistent with barrel bomb detonations. One local group estimated that by February 22, 2015 aerial barrel bomb attacks had killed 6,163 civilians in Syria, including 1,892 children, since the passage of the UN Security Council Resolution 2139. Airstrikes have indiscriminately hit markets, schools, and hospitals.

### Arbitrary Arrests, Enforced Disappearances, Torture, Deaths in Custody

Syrian security forces continue to detain people arbitrarily, regularly subjecting them to ill-treatment and torture.

Detainees include children, women, and elderly people

Released detainees consistently report ill-treatment and torture in detention facilities, and prison conditions that lead to many cases of deaths in custody. Former detainees, including detained doctors, said that common causes of death in detention include infections, torture, and lack of care for chronic diseases.

Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS Abuses Extremist Islamist groups Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS committed systematic rights abuses, including intentionally targeting and abducting civilians. According to witnesses, the attackers killed civilians using automatic weapons including machineguns and rifles. The victims were shot, beheaded, crucified, or stoned to death depending on the charge. Some people were executed for blasphemy, adultery, or treason, the witnesses reported. ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra have imposed strict and discriminatory rules on women and girls and they have both actively recruited child soldiers.

### Trafficking

As conditions continue to deteriorate due to Syria's civil war, human trafficking has increased. Syrians remaining in the country and those that are refugees abroad are vulnerable to trafficking. Syria is a source and destination country for men, women and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking. Syrian children continue to be forcibly recruited by government forces, pro-regime militias, armed opposition groups, and terrorist organizations to serve as soldiers, human shields, and executioners.

ISIS forces Syrian women and girls and Yazidi women and girls taken from Iraq to marry its fighters, where they experience domestic servitude and sexual violence. Syrian refugee women and girls are



forced into exploitive marriages or prostitution in neighbouring countries, while displaced children are forced into street begging domestically and abroad.

The government is not fully compliant with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. The government is making no effort to investigate, prosecute, or convict trafficking offenders or complicit government officials, including those who forcibly recruited child soldiers.

## Sexuality

ISIS have executed men accused of homosexuality. International media has reported the execution of men charged with being gay in ISIS controlled areas by throwing them off the top of buildings. According to the gay activist organization Out Right Action International, 36 men in Syria and Iraq were killed on charges of sodomy.

## Refugees

In July 2014, a Security Council Resolution authorized deliveries of cross border humanitarian aid even without government permission. As of November over 4.2 million Syrian refugees had registered in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt. In 2015, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon all implemented measures to restrict the numbers of refugees entering their countries. All four neighbouring countries accepting Syrian refugees have denied Syrians secure legal status. Palestinians from Syria have faced additional obstacles. They have been refused entry or forcibly deported from Jordan and some Palestinian-Jordanians who had been living in Syria had their Jordanian citizenship withdrawn. Palestinian refugees coming from Syria have also faced additional restrictions in Lebanon following new regulations by the minister of interior in May that limited Palestinians' ability to enter the country or renew their residencies if they already were in the country.

In 2015, more than 440,000 Syrians attempted to reach Europe by sea. While some European Union countries offered them safety, as the year progressed, and particularly in the aftermath of the November 13 Paris attacks, barriers were increasingly erected to prevent entry of all migrants, including Syrians.



## Family life

Syrian life centers on the extended family. The individual's loyalty to his family is nearly absolute and usually overrides all other obligations. Except in the more sophisticated urban circles, the individual's social standing depends on his family background.

### Division by Gender

Gender is one of the most important determinants of social status in Arab society. Although the traditional seclusion of women is not strictly observed in most parts of the country, social contact between the sexes is limited. Among Muslims, men and women in effect constitute distinct social subgroups, intersecting only in the home. A strict division of labour by sex is observed in most social environments, with the exception of certain circumscribed professional activities performed by educated urban women. The roles of the sexes in family life differ markedly, as do the social expectations. The differences are expressed and fostered in child rearing, in ideology, and in daily life. Traditionally, wives in towns are responsible for running the household and are restricted to the home. Rural women often work in the fields in addition to performing domestic tasks. While women are legally allowed to work outside the home, there are significant obstacles.

### The Relative Status of Women and Men

The Baath Party was one of the first in the Arab world to declare as one of its goals the emancipation and equal treatment of women; its constitution of 1964 states that all citizens have equal rights. While women are now entitled to receive the same education as men and to seek employment, the traditional attitude that views females as inferior beings prevails. A woman is considered the possession of a man rather than her own person. She is identified as her father's daughter until marriage; after the birth of a male child, her identity is transferred from the wife of her husband to the mother of her son

### Marriage

By Muslim tradition, marriage is arranged by the couple's families. While more leniencies are now allowed, particularly in cities and among the upper classes, it is still extremely rare for a couple to marry against their family's wishes. Ideally one should marry within one's lineage. The son or daughter of one's father brother, i.e., one's first cousin, is considered the most appropriate mate.

### Domestic Unit

The family is the primary social unit. An older male, usually the father or grandfather, has the ultimate authority and is responsible for providing for the other family members. It is customary for several generations to live together in the same house. Particularly for women, who are not allowed to leave the home, family provides the primary or only social outlet and relationships with other people. Children are highly valued as a blessing from God. The more children one has, the more fortunate one is considered. Children are treated with a great deal of affection. The bond between mother and son (especially the oldest son) is particularly strong.



## Cultural Etiquette

- People from different classes generally do not socialize with one another, and people in the lower classes often adopt a humble attitude and an acceptance of their position.
- Class lines tend to coincide with racial differences, as people perceived as having lighter-skin hold higher economic and political positions and most of the people in the lower-ranked professions are darker-skinned.
- Dress is another indicator of social class. Different tribes and villages have their own distinctive patterns, designs, and colours of clothing. Men traditionally wear long gowns called kaftans, and women wear long robes that leave only their hands and feet exposed. Both men and women wear head wraps. The educated upper classes, particularly the young, tend to prefer modern Western attire. Traditionally, it is a sign of wealth and status in a family for its women to dress in long robes with their faces veiled.
- Men and women socialize separately except on occasions when the whole family is involved.
- In social interactions, people stand close together, speak loudly, and gesture widely with their hands and heads.
- Greetings hold great social significance. They usually are accompanied by a handshake and sometimes by a hug and a kiss on each cheek. Placing the right hand on the heart when meeting someone is a signal of affection.
- Syrians are very affectionate people. Men walk linking arms or holding hands and hug and kiss a great deal, as do women. Close physical contact in public is more common between people of the same gender than it is between girlfriend and boyfriend or husband and wife.

## Specific Taboos

- Don't show the sole of your foot or use the foot to move anything as it is viewed as the lowliest body part.
- Flicking the wrist with an outstretched hand usually means 'What do you want?'
- Raised eyebrows combined with a slight back flick of the head usually mean 'No'.

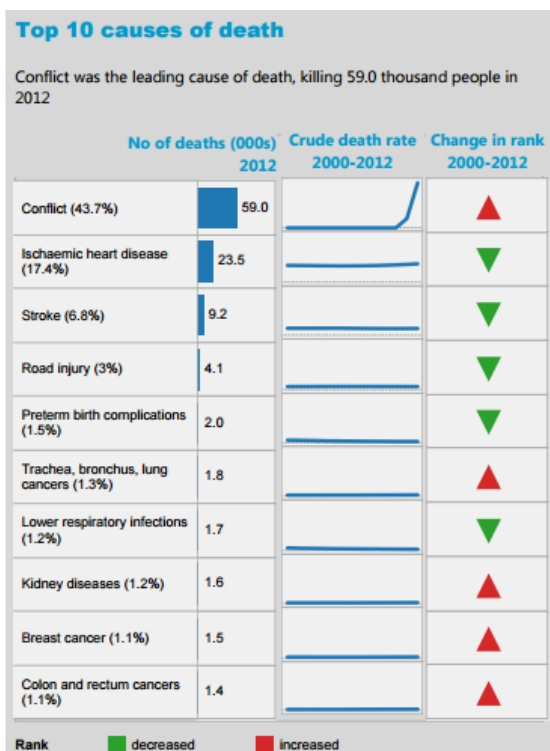
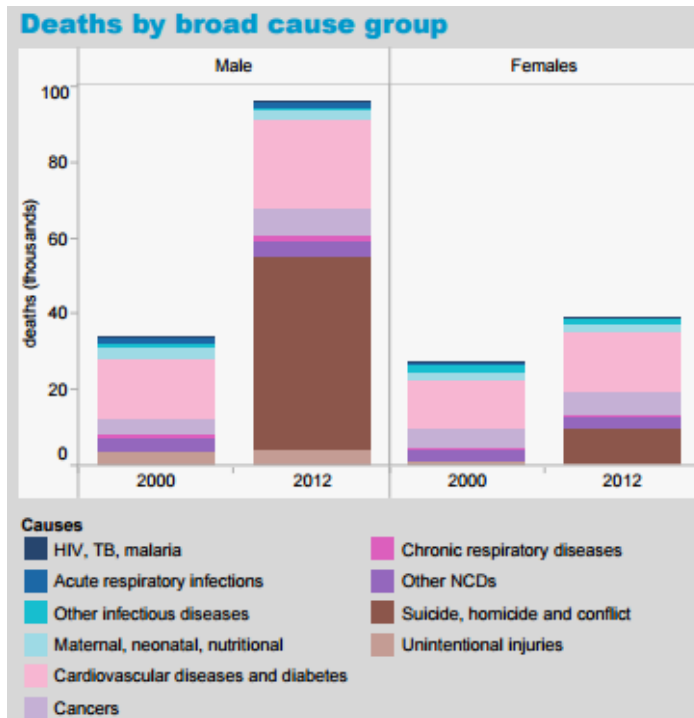
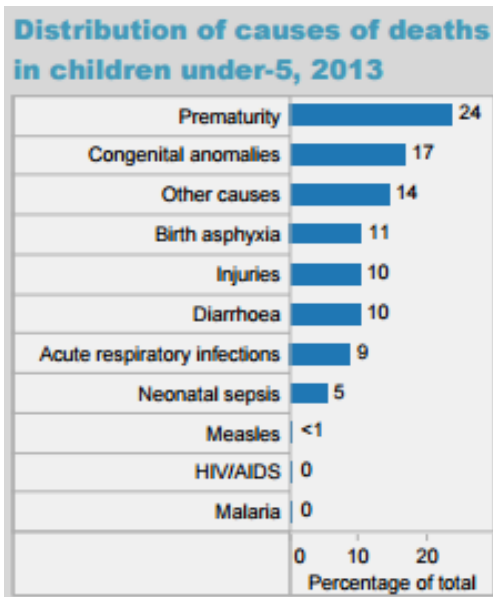




## Health

### Mortality

Neonatal mortality rate per 1000 live births: 7.9 (2013)  
 Infant mortality rate per 1000 live births: 11.9 (2013)  
 Under 5 mortality rate per 1000 live births: 14.6 (2013)



## Infectious diseases

- TB - This country has a low rate of tuberculosis (less than 40/100,000)
- HIV - The rate of HIV in this country is  $\leq 1\%$
- Hepatitis B - Syria has an intermediate prevalence of hepatitis B
- Malaria - There is a low risk of Malaria in some areas due to *P.falciparum* and *P.vivax*.
- Enteric fever - There is a risk of typhoid infection in Syria.
- Helminths - There is a risk of helminth infections including soil transmitted helminthiasis.
- Polio - An outbreak of polio among young children in Syria has been reported.

## Immunisations

Percentage coverage in under 1s:

DPT3/pentavalant 41% combination vaccine: diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis B and Hib

Measles 61%

BCG 84%

PCV3 0%

HBV3 (hepatitis B) 71%

Rotavirus 0%

Hib 41%

Polio 52%

Newborns protected against tetanus 94%

## Nutrition

Percentage of babies exclusively breastfed for 6 months: 42.6%

Breastfeeding at age 2: 24.9%

Percentage of under 5s whose growth was stunted: 27.5%

Percentage of under 5s whose growth was wasted: 11.5%

Percentage with low birthweight: 10.3%

Anaemia - The estimated prevalence of anaemia in pre-school children is  $>40\%$

Vitamin A deficiency - There is a high risk of vitamin A deficiency in Syria.

