

4.1.2. Members of anti-government armed groups

Following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, this document has been reviewed and updated. Please consult '[Interim Country Guidance: Syria \(2025\)](#)'

COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: April 2024

There are multiple anti-government armed groups active in Syria (see [3.4. Anti-government armed groups](#)). This profile addresses current and former members of anti-government armed groups, including those that had undergone a reconciliation process, and their targeting by the GoS.

For targeting of members of these groups by other armed actors, see [4.4. Members of and persons perceived to be collaborating with the SDF and YPG](#) and [4.5. Persons perceived to be opposing the SDF/YPG](#).

COI summary

Arrests of individuals with various types of alleged links to anti-GoS armed groups, some of whom had undergone 'reconciliation'/settlement with the GoS, continued to be reported in 2023. Those detained included persons suspected of former membership of the Free Syrian Army, ISIL and other (un)specified opposition factions, as well as individuals (including women) with relatives who had been affiliated with armed opposition groups. Several civilians were also arrested on (reportedly unfounded) allegations of 'communicating with opposition groups in north Syria' and planning a car-bomb attack, or because they lived near places where attacks on GoS targets had occurred [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, pp. 18-19].

Detainees were subjected to systematic torture in the intelligence services' many detention centres. They were detained for days or months, often without being brought before a judge and without being told what they were accused of. In most cases, the detainees' families were not informed of their whereabouts. Detainees were held in crowded cells and without sufficient food. [[Security 2019](#), 4.3, p. 33]

The outcomes of court trials of defendants accused of membership in the armed opposition reportedly 'appeared predetermined', although some defendants were able to bribe prosecutors and court officials. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 19]

GoS entered into so-called reconciliation agreements with different actors in most of the areas the GoS forces have recaptured from various anti-government groups. The reconciliation agreements vary to a great extent. They may range from opposition fighters remaining involved in security and governance roles in their areas up to cases of virtual opposition surrender involving (forced) evacuations of fighters or even whole populations. In several places, armed rebel groups have switched sides in the conflict as part of a reconciliation agreement. [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.2.1, p. 18]

Applications from individuals who wished to surrender were also possible. The formal process known as 'resolving status' typically involves interrogation about previous opposition activities (such as participating

in protests, relief work in rebel-held areas or fighting with rebels), many of which fall under the GoS's expansive definition of 'terrorism'. Additionally, it involves a pledge to abstain from these actions in the future. Thereafter, the individual receives a clearance paper, and the security agencies supposedly remove him or her from their list of wanted persons. [[Recaptured areas](#), 2.5.1, p. 17]

However, the reconciliation agreements have been broken often. In particular, former activists, opposition commanders and persons who have been affiliated to an armed rebel group have been arrested, disappeared or have been harassed despite the reconciliation agreements [[Targeting 2020](#), 1.2.1, p. 19]. Furthermore, civilians and former opposition fighters who signed reconciliation agreements with GoS and who took up positions in local administration or military forces have been killed by unknown perpetrators in what appeared to be targeted killings. [[Security 2022](#), p. 29; 2.11.3, p. 195; [Targeting 2022](#), 1.2.4, p. 28; [Recaptured areas](#), 3.2.2.1, p. 36]

Some groups and individuals are denied or do not enter into the reconciliation agreements. This applies to individuals that have 'Syrian blood on their hands' as well as those that are considered by GoS to be affiliated with terrorist groups like ISIL or HTS. Another condition of the reconciliation process is that it 'shall not overturn criminal sentences that are unrelated to current events in Syria, or which are related to the rights of other Syrian civilians'. Those who refuse the reconciliation agreement with GoS, as was the case for around 10 000 persons from Dar'a and Quneitra governorates, were evacuated to areas under the armed opposition's control in Idlib and northern Aleppo governorates [[Recaptured areas](#), 2.5.3, p. 19]. It was reported that the GoS considers the fighters who chose passage to Idlib over the 'reconciliation deals' to be 'irreconcilable', suggesting that it will entertain no such bargain in case Idlib is recaptured [[Security 2020](#), 2.1.3, p. 62].

There are reports of reconciliation agreements not being observed by the government, for both individuals and communities. There are many reports of returnees having been arrested, detained, harassed or conscripted after they had completed the reconciliation process and received protection papers [[COI update 2023](#), 2, p.11; [Country Focus 2023](#), 1.1.2, p. 21; [Targeting 2020](#), 1.3.6, p. 27]

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

In itself, the prosecution of criminal acts committed by members of anti-government armed groups and their potential targeting in accordance with the rules of international humanitarian law would not amount to persecution. However, acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. assassination, torture, arbitrary arrest).



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

For members of anti-government armed groups, well-founded fear of persecution would in general be substantiated. In case of reconciliation agreement, well-founded fear of persecution would also be substantiated in general, as those are often broken in practice and the reconciled fighters may furthermore face a risk of targeting by other actors.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.



Exclusion considerations could be relevant to this profile (see the chapter [8. Exclusion](#)).

See other topics concerning persons perceived to be opposing the government:

- [4.1.1. Political dissent and opposition in Syria](#)
- [4.1.2. Members of anti-government armed groups](#)
- [4.1.3. Political activists, opposition party members and protesters](#)
- [4.1.4. Civilians originating from areas associated with opposition to the government](#)