

About 16 Million Syrian Citizens are Suffering as a Result of the Syrian Regime's Control Over Official Documents

The Syrian Regime is Exploiting Citizens'
Need for State Documents to Extort
Grossly Unfair Sums of Money from Syrians,
and Using Them as an Instrument
of War Against Dissidents



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The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyzes in Syria.

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INTRODUCTION

In the broadest sense, official documents are, as the name suggests, the documents used to legally prove a person's identity, status, or ownership of something. They are universally required in almost every major financial, bureaucratic, and legal transaction. Obtaining ID papers is an essential human right, especially bearing in mind their status as prerequisites for the exercise of many other rights, including participation in public life and society. Examples of official documents include passports, I.D. cards, marriage/divorce certificates, birth certificates, and death certificates. All of these documents, among others, are indispensable essentials required to access other services, such as education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

Since the start of the popular uprising for democracy in Syria in March 2011, obtaining official documents has become a major issue that has only further exacerbated the suffering of Syrians.

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have lost their documents as a result of enforced disappearance, bombardment and the destruction of their houses, through displacement, or simply because the documents were unjustly and arbitrarily confiscated at military and security checkpoints, with both of these operated by Syrian regime forces and by other parties to the conflict. Other Syrians' official documents have been lost or confiscated at border checkpoints while they were trying to seek asylum in neighboring countries.

In addition to this, approximately 13.3 million Syrians have been forcibly displaced (meaning that almost half the Syrian population are now either internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees). Most of these people are no longer able to return to regime areas to obtain any kind of official documents for fear of falling prey to the regime's ruthless machine of arbitrary arrest, torture, and enforced disappearance.

Syrians' suffering has not, of course, been limited to the loss of their official documents, with the people also subjected to a wide range of horrendous violations by the regime against its own citizens as they attempt to obtain or renew these documents, or to have new ones authenticated.

Given the severity of these violations, their wide scope, and the fact that they've affected millions of Syrians; the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has compiled this report in an attempt to shed light on this issue, specifically on the Syrian regime's exploiting the essential state service of issuing official documents as a means of attaining further political and economic gains for itself in a deliberate and calculated manner by disregarding the proper role of its government and authorities at the expense of the people's interests. In other words, the regime has been using the state's apparatus and resources to blackmail Syrian citizens and cruelly impose total control over them to force them to submit to its rule and deter them from demanding their fundamental human rights and joining the popular uprising for freedom that erupted against its dictatorial reign. The report also explains how the regime controls the process of issuing those documents in an unlawful and discriminatory manner, as well as providing details of the violations resulting from the regime's practices that affect various aspects of Syrians' lives.

In the report's first section, we give a brief overview of the most important official documents which Syrians need domestically and abroad, while the second section examines the rising costs and charges imposed by the regime for issuing official documents. The third section concerns the issue of how the regime's security apparatus exerts control over the state institutions and the mechanisms by which official documents are issued. The fourth section sheds light on the exploitation of Syrians in the process of obtaining documents. Regarding this exploitation, SNHR has identified seven main groups who are primarily targeted for such practices. These are:

- Those wanted and prosecuted by the regime security apparatus over their political views, particularly political activists and humanitarian workers;
- Former detainees who were arbitrarily arrested and families of forcibly disappeared persons, as well as survivors of other violations, including torture or the use of chemical weapons;
- University students and graduates;
- Property owners;
- People from areas that saw local settlement and reconciliation agreements;
- Those wanted for mandatory and reserve military service and;
- Other groups, chief among them ethnic minorities, including Kurds; retirees; those wishing to move about or travel; and those trying to invoke power of attorney or conduct other types of transactions.

In the fifth section, the report discusses the regime's control over the issuance of death certificates for extrajudicially killed victims, and victims who died under torture while arbitrarily detained or subjected to enforced disappearance.

The report then goes on to briefly analyze the consequences resulting from Syrians being denied official documents. The report mainly focuses on eight main consequences:

- A rise in the numbers of undocumented newborns/children;
- Rising numbers of newborns/children of unknown lineage since their parents could not obtain documents proving their identity;
- Denial of the right to education, healthcare, and humanitarian assistance;
- Denial of the right to property;
- Denial of freedom of movement;
- Potential denial of Syrian citizenship and;
- Denial of the right to vote and participate in future political life;
- Female-specific consequences.

Lastly, the report examines some of the aspects of the rampant corruption in Syrian state institutions, and how this threatens the credibility of Syrian official documents, with forgery networks, which the regime does nothing to combat, having infiltrated these institutions. The report also briefly summarizes the most notable local and international laws regulating the right to obtain official documents.

The report, which is based on meticulous scrutiny and analysis of the data and information at hand, and of the items of evidence we have been able to collect from eyewitnesses and other sources, reaches a number of conclusions; chief among these is that the regime is not only the primary cause of this crisis regarding official documents through the numerous violations it has committed, including killing, forcibly disappearing, and displacing Syrians, as well as denying them their rights, but it has also spared no effort to exploit this crisis; it is able to do this due to one crucial fact, namely that the regime remains the only internationally recognized entity for issuing official papers and official documents. Accordingly, the regime has consistently grievously abused this power to turn the issuing of these documents into a source of hard currency, taking millions of dollars from its own citizens who are struggling to obtain what should be one of their most basic and essential rights.

Even worse, the regime has withheld personal documents from many dissidents as a form of punishment, giving its security personnel free rein within its own institutions. In turn, the regime's security apparatus used documents to blackmail citizens, taking advantage of its status as the primary entity responsible for the proliferation of brokerage and forgery networks that has turned Syrian official documents into commodities that can be sold and bought.

The Syrian regime has also used its control over issuing official documents to achieve other goals, including seizing Syrians' properties, and concealing the crimes it has committed by refusing to issue death certificates for victims who were killed in the military offensives carried out by the regime and its allies or who died as a result of torture in regime detention centers.

Moreover, the report finds that the Syrian regime's violations in relation to official documents, have affected all the forcibly displaced citizens regardless of their political alignment, as well as a significant proportion of Syrians living in regime areas. According to SNHR's estimates, about 15-16 million Syrians have been affected by violations related to official documents in Syria and abroad.

As Fadel Abdulghany, SNHR Executive Director, says:



Even though the Syrian regime has committed crimes against humanity and war crimes, which should have stripped it of any of the usual democratic legitimacy vested in a government by its people, it still clings to power today as a de facto military dictatorship. About 16 million Syrian citizens are still suffering from the regime's shameless exploitation due to their indispensable need for various official documents; the regime is enabled in this primarily by the UN's incompetent bureaucracy and lethargy, as the international community has been unable to find a suitable alternative to the current system of ID documents for over half the Syrian people, who are powerless in the face of the regime's absolute hegemony over the state apparatuses and institution, which the regime treats as if they were its private property. This has enabled the regime both to earn vast amounts of hard currency every year and to further exploit this illicit power politically to crush dissent, with dissidents forced into silence by the regime's control of their lives and fate through controlling their official documents. Action must be taken to find an alternative to the regime's control and hegemony over the Syrian people's right to obtain essential documents from what should be their own national state.



METHODOLOGY

In the years since 2011, SNHR has closely monitored dozens of laws, regulations, and administrative decisions issued by the Syrian regime concerning the issuance of official documents. The report's authors obtained information on many of these from open sources, including government websites such as embassies and consulates in various countries worldwide, to understand the procedures and costs involved in obtaining different types of official documents. SNHR's team has also collected accounts from dozens of Syrian citizens, in Syria and abroad, who spoke about the violations they have faced in the process of obtaining various documents, including, inter alia, passports, birth certificates, marriage certificates, death certificates, family records, and individual and family registry records. We documented the procedures they had to follow, the cost of obtaining and authenticating these documents, and how they were treated by employees in state institutions such as civil registry offices, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and branches of the Immigration and Passports Department in Syria, as well as by brokers and employees in embassies or consulates outside Syria. We also spoke with several lawyers and brokers about the procedures required for obtaining these documents and their costs.

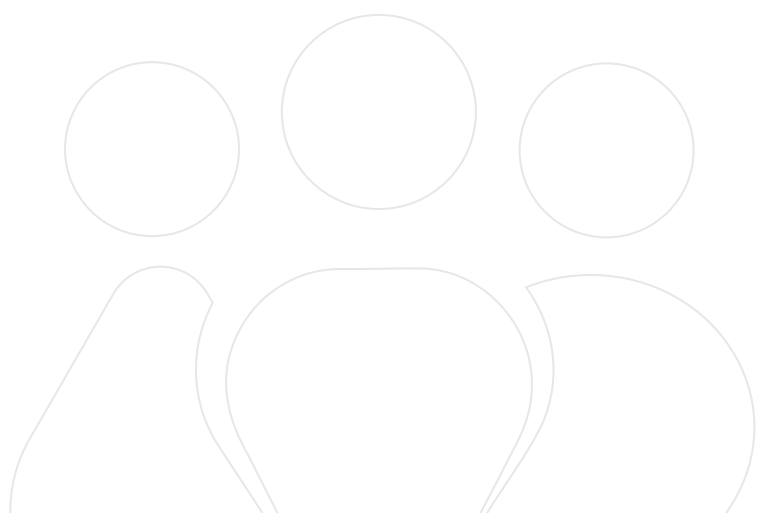
To ensure that the report is kept to a manageable length, we limited ourselves to presenting only certain parts of these accounts in order to avoid repetition in cases where there were similarities in the pattern of violations. We explained the purpose of the interviews beforehand to all interviewees, who gave us their consent to use the information they provided in the service of this report without offering or providing them with any incentives or financial compensation in exchange for these interviews. In some cases, we have used pseudonyms in some of the accounts, at the witnesses' request to protect their anonymity and prevent them from being subjected to security harassment, and to avoid the risk of authorities withholding official documents in the future if they could be identified from speaking about their experiences for this report. These interviews were conducted in accordance with SNHR's internal protocols which have guided our work for years, and which we constantly strive to improve.

To ensure even greater accuracy, after obtaining these accounts, the SNHR team carefully cross-checked the information obtained from victims, witnesses, lawyers, and brokers with SNHR data and information from some open sources, including some journalistic reports.

In the course of working on this report, which took several months, we faced many challenges, among the most prominent of which was the difficulty encountered in investigating and gathering information from people in regime areas, since communicating with human rights groups such as SNHR is classified as a crime by the regime and could expose the individual to security forces' persecution, arbitrary arrest, or enforced disappearance. Some Syrians outside regime areas were also hesitant about relating their own experiences out of fear that their relatives in regime areas might face harassment or arbitrary arrest as a result.

At times, we faced difficulties in obtaining copies of official documents due to the personal information they contain and the unwillingness of their owners to share them. This is particularly true for death certificates of those arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared who were killed under torture in regime detention centers, since displaying such documents exposes the victims' families to security authorities' persecution, which could result in arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, or death under torture.

Despite these challenges, however SNHR's team remains, as always, committed to following our customary painstaking methodology which guides our processes of collecting and verifying information. Given the enormous challenges facing us, we must note that this report only reflects the bare minimum of the violations that Syrians face in the process of obtaining official documents, which is a fundamental right that all states should guarantee for their peoples.



I. OVERVIEW OF THE MOST ESSENTIAL OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS AND THEIR INDISPENSABILITY FOR SYRIAN CITIZENS

As part of its consolidated hegemony over the various aspects of state, the Syrian regime wields great control over many official documents which are indispensable to Syrians both in the country and abroad. These include, inter alia, civil status documents, documents issued by the Ministry of Interior, travel documents, passports, educational documents, and documents related to the criminal and security status of the individual. Chief among these are:

1. Identity Card or Personal Identification: This legal document is used to verify a person's identity. It contains some personal information, including the permanent national number issued at age 14 that is unique to each citizen. [As the official website of the Syrian regime's Ministry of Interior confirms](#), Syrian law requires that every citizen, both male or female, who has reached 14 years of age must obtain a personal ID from their assigned civil registry office within no more than one year of reaching the aforementioned age.

2. Passport: With millions of Syrians having been forcibly displaced, a passport has become an invaluable identification document for many, since it is an essential requirement not only for refugees but for anyone wishing to travel or to flee Syria to escape the worsening living conditions. Furthermore, many Syrians in the diaspora need to renew their passports on a regular basis since having a valid passport is a requirement for obtaining and renewing a residency permit in many of the countries hosting Syrian refugees.

Obtaining and renewing passports, however, involves going through the most complex and costly processes needed to acquire any of the official documents required by Syrians. For this reason, SNHR released a special report examining the process of the regime's issuance of passports and shedding light on the violations committed against Syrians in the course of their efforts to obtain a passport. [The report was released on February 24, 2024.](#)

3. Family Record Book/Family Card: This can be described as a miniature civil record for a family, issued in the name of a husband and/or wife and containing detailed information about them and their children. This document is an essential requirement for anyone wishing to obtain a family statement, to enroll children in schools, or to receive humanitarian aid. It is also essential for any family reunification, especially for Syrians in the diaspora, following the massive refugee waves, in addition to its use in other transactions.

4. Individual Record: An official document issued by the Civil Status Department, showing the holder's civil and marital status, as well as their age and national number. It is used in place of the personal identification card in some transactions.

5. Family Record: A document showing the number of family members, along with the national number of each family member. The family record is used in cases such as proving kinship, arranging inheritance settlements, receiving aid, or as documentation for the military recruitment office to clarify the number of a recruit's brothers, etc.

- 6. Marriage Certificate:** An official document issued by the Civil Status Department, confirming the marriage of the parties concerned, including their personal information and the date of their wedding. Married couples need to obtain this certificate to formally document their marriage in the eyes of the law. It is also essential in many legal transactions involving the married couple, as well as for obtaining birth certificates for newborn children.
- 7. Birth Certificate:** An official document issued by the Civil Status Department that indicates the place and date of a person's birth. It is indispensably important to obtain a birth certificate for newborn children, as this is the legal document that proves the child's identity (name, place, and date of birth) and parentage. Without a birth certificate, a child may not be able to prove their Syrian nationality in the future, or to obtain a civil registry record, Syrian ID, or passport. Additionally, they cannot legally cross the borders with their parents without this document. Birth certificates are also crucial for ensuring the child's rights, including the right to education and healthcare.
- 8. Death Certificate:** An official document issued by the Civil Status Department that indicates the specific date and place of a person's death. It is important to issue a death certificate for various purposes, including removing the deceased from government records in order to proceed with inheritance settlement. Any widow wishing to remarry or to carry out certain legal transactions involving her children must supply a death certificate confirming her husband's demise.
- 9. Divorce Certificate:** An official document issued by the Civil Status Department that indicates the date of divorce between a married couple. This certificate is essential for any divorcee wishing to legally remarry.
- 10. Basic Education Certificates and University Degrees (9th Grade and Baccalaureate/High school diploma):** These are required in many transactions. For example, any school student wishing to pursue higher education outside Syria, will need to obtain and authenticate their basic education certificates. Similarly, for graduates pursuing postgraduate studies, an authenticated university degree is necessary. These certificates are also essential in other transactions or actions such as securing employment or obtaining citizenship in some countries.
- 11. Military-related Documents:** Several documents issued by a military recruitment office must be obtained by individuals wanted for mandatory or reserve military service. These documents include:

 - Military Service Book: A record issued to individuals subject to mandatory military service.
 - Postponement or Exemption from Military Service Documents: A citizen is considered in violation of their mandatory military service requirement if they do not provide proof of postponement or exemption within no more than one year of reaching conscription age.
 - Search Clearance Document: A document issued by security and police authorities, which is required by individuals who've been criminally prosecuted, detained, or sentenced by the Syrian judiciary. It is obtained via a request submitted by the concerned individual or their legal representative to the Public Prosecution authority and the police.
- 12. No-criminal-record certificate:** An official document issued by the Syrian authorities, proving that the bearer has not been convicted, through an unappealable ruling, of any felony or misdemeanor by Syrian courts.

13. Other Essential Documents: In addition to the aforementioned documents, Syrians may need other documents that must be exclusively obtained from government offices affiliated with the Syrian regime, including, inter alia, powers of attorney, legal guardianship documents, vehicle ownership certificates, professional vocational certification documents for doctors, teachers, engineers, etc., real estate records, and sworn translations.

II. RISING COSTS DICTATED ONLY TO BLACKMAIL CITIZENS

With the start of the popular uprising, which turned into an armed internal conflict about a year later according to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Syrian regime devoted various state resources to staying in power. As the conflict dragged on, the regime's need for funds to finance the war persisted. To that end, the regime exploited the structural need of Syrian citizens for government documents and imposed excessively costly fees for these documents relative to Syrian citizens' income. SNHR has also noted significant disparities between the costs of obtaining official documents in regime-held areas and non-regime areas.

A. PRICES IN REGIME-HELD AREAS

For citizens living in regime areas, only those not wanted by security forces or for military service who can personally manage their transactions at government offices, and have never faced the need to pay bribes can obtain some official documents for the default cost plus the costs of stamps and added taxes. This cost usually ranges between 3,000 and 5,000 Syrian pounds/SYP (equivalent to \$1.19 to \$1.99 USD based on the current exchange rate at the time of writing) for each copy of basic documents such as marriage certificates, birth certificates, and individual records.

However, the cost of obtaining a family record book or different types of legal powers of attorney starts at 50,000 SYP (about \$19.90) and can rise as high as 100,000 SYP (\$39.80) if the applicant needs to pay bribes to expedite the process.

The cost of a passport in regime-held areas is 312,700 SYP (about \$21 USD) for standard processing, while, for expedited processing, the cost increases to 432,700 SYP (\$29 USD), and for immediate issuance, it rises to 2,107,000 SYP (approximately \$135 USD).

Despite the lower cost of documents in regime-held areas compared to prices for Syrians outside these areas, they remain prohibitively expensive when one takes into consideration the average Syrian's income and living conditions. According to UN estimates, over 90 percent of Syria's population lives under the poverty line, with a minimum wage for public sector workers of 185,940 SYP (about US \$13.50 based on the exchange rate at the time of writing).

B. PRICES OUTSIDE REGIME-HELD AREAS

Syrians living in non-regime areas of the country or abroad must pay for their official documents exclusively in hard currency.

The most expensive document is the passport, with the official fee for standard issuance being \$300, while an expedited passport costs \$800, making the Syrian passport one of the most expensive in the world.

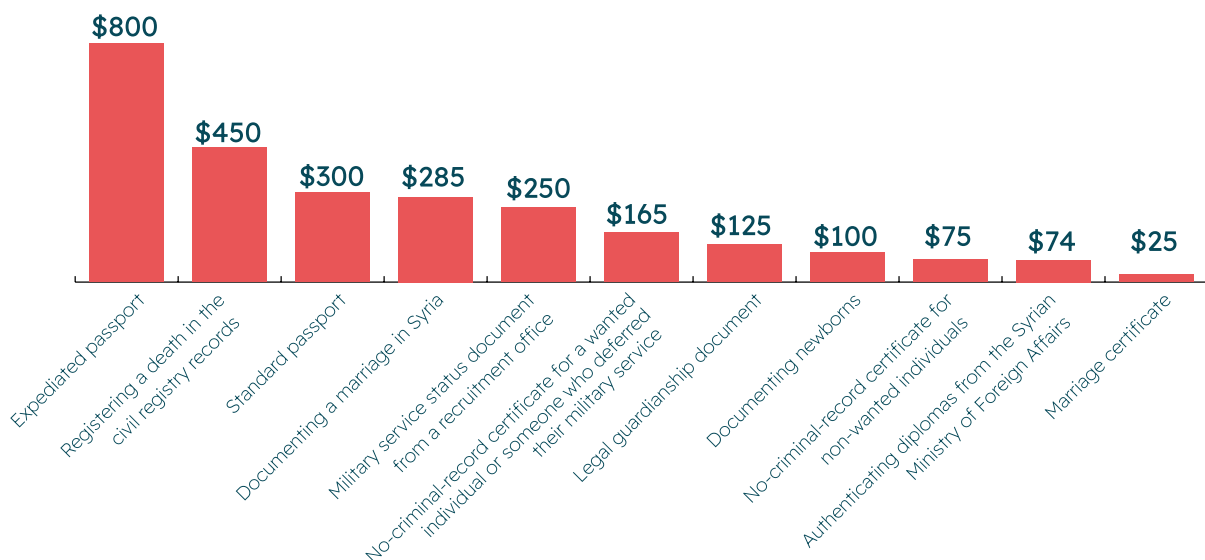
This extreme overpricing also extends to other official documents, which should normally be of minimal cost. The fees for these documents vary depending on their type and the country where the applicant is living.

Here are some examples of how much Syrian documents cost in different countries:

- **Türkiye:** Despite hosting around 3.6 million Syrian refugees, the Syrian consulate in Istanbul offers a limited number of services. Syrians often resort to paperwork assistance offices to obtain documents from Syria and then have them authenticated through the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These companies charge around \$285 for registering a marriage in Syria, \$25 for extracting and certifying a marriage certificate, and about \$100 for registering a newborn child, although this figure is slightly increased if the child being registered is over one year-old.

The cost of processing a death certificate can be around \$450, while a military service status document authenticated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs costs around \$250. A no-criminal-record certificate costs about \$75, which may rise to around \$165 if there is a military deferral or other legal issues are involved. A legal guardianship document can cost \$125, while it costs \$74 on average to have any certificates authenticated by the Syrian Foreign of Ministry Affairs.

Documents also need to be authenticated once again by the Syrian consulate in Istanbul, which requires additional fees ranging from \$50 to \$400 depending on the document and its owner's security status in Syria. In addition to all these factors, a Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs seal is valid only for three months, meaning the Syrian consulate in Istanbul will refuse to authenticate any papers older than three months. In other words, the applicant will have to obtain new documents and pay again to have them authenticated by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



- **France:** [The official Syrian embassy website in France](#) sets the fee for issuing a birth certificate at €50, with a late registration fine of €95 if the registration is delayed beyond three months but within a year. The same fees apply for [marriage certificates](#), both for standard and belated certificates.

However, these transactions also require other documents and costs. For instance, a recent family statement authenticated by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is required for a birth certificate, while a recent individual record for both the husband and wife, which must also be authenticated by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is required to verify a marriage.

- **Belgium:** Similar to France, the fee for a birth certificate is €50, with additional €50 late registration fine for delays beyond three months and a €95 fine for delays exceeding a year, according to the Syrian Arab Republic embassy in [Brussels](#).

However, marriage certification that has not taken place at the embassy [costs more](#). In such cases, a power of attorney costing €190 according to the embassy's official document is required. The married couple will also need to pay €50 in fees for authentication and for translating a foreigner's marriage certificate, in addition to another €50 fee for a consular registration, making a total of €290 simply to obtain a marriage certificate in Brussels.

- **Egypt:** The Syrian embassy in [Cairo](#) charges \$100 for registering births, with a \$50 fine for delays beyond nine months and \$100 for delays exceeding a year. The same fees apply for marriage registration.

- **Malaysia:** The Syrian embassy in [Malaysia](#) charges a flat rate of \$100 for any official document, whether a civil status document or a no-criminal-record certificate. Documents used for transactions outside the embassy require payment of an additional \$50 consular fee. However, if the document in question is to be used for a transaction outside the embassy, or is intended to be shown as ID for the authorities of a foreign state, then the document will require consular authentication, which costs an additional \$50. In total, such a document will cost \$150 in total.

To make matters worse, SNHR has interviewed many Syrians who have obtained various official documents only to find that the regime routinely does not adhere to the already exorbitant official pricing system listed above. Instead, the regime often extorts additional payments through various methods, which will be discussed later in this report.

III. THE SECURITY APPARATUS'S CONTROL OVER ISSUING OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS AND THEIR HEGEMONY OVER STATE INSTITUTIONS

The Syrian regime grants its security agencies unlimited powers, meaning they now have the authority to either issue or withhold official documents for citizens. SNHR has observed that the Syrian regime has entrenched the repressive power of these agencies and bolstered their dominance over state institutions by:

Either imposing a requirement for 'security clearance' on applicants before they can obtain a large variety of official documents, which has provided immunity to the security agencies, enabling them to extort citizens and rob them of their money, or giving the security agencies the authority to use public service institutions to track down individuals wanted for security reasons. As a result, even entering these institutions has become a risky endeavor for citizens which could lead to arrest simply in the course of obtaining any type of official documents.

A. Security clearance requirement for obtaining official documents

The Syrian regime has imposed a requirement for citizens to obtain security agency approval before being allowed to access a wide range of official documents through introducing several decrees and decisions, blatantly violating the principles of rule of law and separation of powers.

Although security agencies had the authority to grant approvals in certain cases prior to 2011, their powers were expanded significantly, with the beginning of the popular uprising for democracy.

In August 2015, the regime issued Decision No. 4554, which required security clearance for real estate sales, rental transactions, and property transfers. This decree contradicts Article 15 of the 2012 Syrian Constitution, which guarantees the protection of individual property rights and the freedom to dispose of one's property.

Similarly, the Ministry of Justice issued [Circular No. 82 of 2018](#), requiring security clearances for transactions involving internal and external agencies that handle property ownership transfers, as well as the establishment, participation, or withdrawal from companies.

On July 9, 2019, [Circular No. 14 of 2019](#) was promulgated, establishing a requirement for a security clearance to be obtained by external agencies handling various transactions, including, but not limited to, the sale and purchase of vehicles, property sales under previous contracts, pension withdrawals, company contract amendments, dealings with public and private banks to withdraw money or renew ATM cards, property and assets rentals, transactions concerning cooperative housing projects, terminating contracts, agricultural land investments, well-drilling, resignations from public or private sectors, inheritance settlements, and the use of commercial and residential establishments.

Additionally, [Circular No. 30](#), issued by the Ministry of Justice in September 2021, linked the issuance of judicial authorization for managing the assets of absent or missing persons to a prior security clearance. Similarly, Circular No. 22, promulgated in August 2022, also required security clearances to process deaths in Sharia courts.

These circulars apply to both Syrians living in the country and those abroad. Syrians living in regime-held areas suffer more severely under the repressive domination of the regime's security authorities. Security clearances have, in effect, become a form of martial law controlling every aspect of life, being required for marriage, travel, employment, and holding events at certain locations, with even burial now requiring security authorities' approval in Damascus.

Security clearances is not only a tool to monitor and suppress Syrians, prosecute fugitives, but also a significant source of income for the regime's security apparatus. In that, this restrictive system has opened the door for widespread extortion, forcing citizens to pay large sums or risk being denied their official documents. For instance, clearances are not granted to those wanted by security agencies, those who left the country illegally, or those wanted for military service unless they first pay significant bribes.

Often, requests for security clearances are arbitrarily denied, even without citing any of the reasons outlined above, but simply to extort money. This forces citizens to pay bribes directly to security personnel or through middlemen, with the amount demanded varying depending on the individual's security situation and the type of document sought, ranging from \$100 to \$1,000.

B. Prosecution by security agencies and the risk of arrest in the course of obtaining official documents

Regime security agencies exercise full control over the process of obtaining official documents through the Political Security Division, which operates offices within immigration and passport departments, or courts of various types. These offices are responsible for conducting a process known locally as 'tafyeeesh,' (which can be roughly translated to 'vetting') which involves gathering information about the applicant to determine if they are wanted by any other security agencies. Civil institutions are also expected to refer certain requests to Political Security branches, especially in cases where the applicant is a former government employee.

As a result, a large number of Syrians faces security harassment or extortion by regime employees linked to security agencies.

Families of citizens who attempt to handle paperwork for their relatives living outside regime-held areas are particularly vulnerable, as they are pressured to pay bribes under the pretext of security issues concerning the applicants.

SNHR has interviewed several witnesses from opposition-held areas who had tasked their relatives in regime-held areas with obtaining official documents, only to discover that it was impossible without paying bribes to move the transaction forward.

Many eyewitnesses, meanwhile, refrained from asking their relatives to assist out of fear of arrest, instead turning directly to middlemen. This was the case for 'Akram', who now lives in the Netherlands and wanted to reunite with his family in Damascus in 2021. Fearing security harassment or even arrest of his wife, he avoided asking her to obtain the necessary documents. Instead, he resorted to a middleman, paying €400 to secure a record for their two children, as well as a marriage certificate, and a family status statement, and another €500 for a family record book.

Although the cost of obtaining these documents would have been much lower if his wife had handled the process herself, Syrians now fully understand that arbitrary arrests can happen to anyone, and simply being outside regime-held areas is considered a “crime”. They also know all too well that the Syrian regime uses state institutions as tools for detaining citizens. This has been especially evident in the regime’s immigration and passport departments, which have seen hundreds of cases of arbitrary arrest. SNHR has documented the arrest of at least **1,912 civilians**, including 21 children, 295 women, and 193 individuals who had agreed to settle their security status with the regime, at immigration and passport departments across Syria between March 2011 and December 2023. Of the people detained in these operations, regime forces released 723, while **21 died** due to torture and medical negligence. The remaining **1,168**, including 16 children and 96 women, remain under arrest, with 986 of these classified as forcibly disappeared persons.

IV. SEVEN GROUPS PRIMARILY TARGETED BY THE SYRIAN REGIME’S EXPLOITATION, MAKING UP ABOUT 16 MILLION SYRIANS IN TOTAL

Citizens are subjected to various forms of extortion by state institutions, forcing them to pay additional amounts to obtain official documents. This has become especially true in recent years since resorting to ‘brokers’¹ has become virtually essential for all Syrians living outside regime-held areas, and for some Syrians living in regime-held areas too. These individuals have no option but to pay the official fees for the necessary documents, in addition to ‘brokerage’ fees and other bribes required to process their transactions.

The Syrian regime is primarily responsible for fostering and enabling this culture of ‘brokerage’, which is one manifestation of the rampant corruption within state institutions. Indeed, the regime has given free rein to these corrupt state employees to act as they please within its institutions, using their official positions to profiteer by extorting citizens and demanding bribes. One of the reasons behind the normalization of this institutional corruption is the fact that the regime is no longer capable of paying its loyalists to ensure their allegiance, as government spending has been focused on its war against the Syrian people.

Moreover, the deep entrenchment of the security apparatus within the state and its control over all aspects of the state’s functions has contributed to the creation of a network of shared interests between the security forces and corrupt officials in government institutions. Corruption has thus become an institutionalized policy, practiced openly and on a wide scale, with the blessing of the Syrian regime, which views corruption as a means to reward its security apparatus at citizens’ expense. This necessarily involves shielding corrupt officials from accountability and punishment, especially since the regime monopolizes all regulatory authorities, including the judiciary.

1. Brokers serve as intermediaries and middlemen liaising between state employees and people wishing to obtain certain documents. Brokers take huge amounts of money from these people to facilitate the processing of documents, with these ‘fees’ later split with the relevant regime officials. Some brokers are even directly linked to regime security personnel, who take a cut from the brokers’ profits to issue identification documents for individuals wanted by the various security agencies. In reality, people have no choice but to go through these brokers, especially in the case of the forcibly displaced who cannot go in person to regime held areas to acquire documents.

As a result of the Syrian regime's sponsorship of corruption, millions of Syrians are vulnerable to extortion whenever they attempt to obtain any type of official document. SNHR has identified several groups of individuals who are specifically targeted by this extortion.

A. Those wanted and prosecuted by the regime's security apparatus

Individuals wanted by the regime's various security agencies are the group most vulnerable to extortion when trying to obtain official documents. The vast majority of these individuals are pursued for reasons related to their dissenting political views, activism, or humanitarian work. Due to their security status, they are faced with a choice between being deprived of official documents or paying exorbitant sums for them, sometimes amounting to thousands of dollars depending on the type of document and the nature of their security status. In many cases, a Syrian citizen may be wanted by one of the regime's security branches without even being aware of the fact.

SNHR spoke with an official at the Syrian opposition's embassy in Doha, who said **"those wanted by the security apparatus are among the groups most subjected to violations by the Syrian regime concerning official documents."** He provided several examples of the kind of cases handled on a daily basis by the embassy, confirming that **"the Syrian regime threatens many wanted individuals with the denial of their documents."** One such case involved a Master's student residing in Qatar, whose university degree certificate the regime completely refused to issue to them on the basis that they had defected from the regime's infamous Scientific Studies and Research Center.

The same official further confirmed that **"the Syrian regime not only uses official documents as a means to punish defectors, but also extends this punishment to their families."** This was the case for the daughter of a former officer and defector from the regime military, who was unable to obtain her university degree certificate because brokers demanded an exorbitant sum of \$3,000 to issue and authenticate it. On learning that she could not afford to pay this extortionate amount, the brokers threatened to have her name erased from the university's records, thereby permanently preventing her from accessing her degree certificate in the future. This case underscores the extent and degree of corruption in state institutions and how brokers, backed by the security apparatus, control the fate and lives of Syrians, even those living abroad.

The embassy official added, **"A no-criminal-record certificate is one of the most challenging documents for Syrians to obtain, especially if they are wanted by security agencies."** Since this critical document is required for employment or residence permits in Qatar and many other countries, the Syrian opposition's embassy has made it available for Syrians living in Qatar at low costs, whereas Syrians elsewhere have to pay large sums for a no-criminal-record certificates, sometimes as much as \$500.

SNHR also interviewed a woman who was denied the right to obtain a family record book because she and her family were wanted by security agencies. Despite multiple attempts, even after resorting to and paying brokers, she failed to secure the document because it must be delivered in person to the wife, husband, or legal guardian if the husband had passed away. In her case, none of these individuals could enter regime-held areas due to the risk of arrest.

Most witnesses interviewed by SNHR confirmed that they had to pay additional sums to brokers because they were wanted by security agencies. One of these was Mohammad, who arrived in Germany through smuggling routes in 2022. Subsequently, German authorities requested proof of his Syrian nationality. Initially, he tried to obtain a passport, but the high cost made him reconsider. Instead, he opted instead to acquire an individual record from Syria, as this was less expensive and would be accepted as official proof of nationality. To obtain this document, Mohammad contacted his village mukhtar (headman), who refused to deal with him, calling him a “terrorist”. Mohammad was forced instead to turn to a broker, who charged \$50 as personal fees in addition to another \$50 for the document, bringing the total cost to \$100.

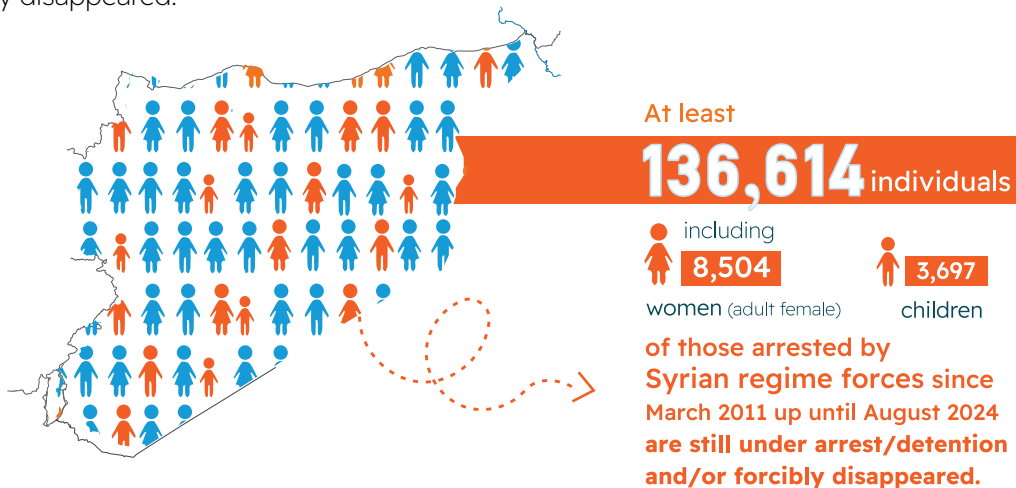
Another Germany-based eyewitness interviewed by SNHR told us that he had no choice but to resort to brokers to obtain his official documents since he is viewed as a dissident of the regime and thus wanted by security agencies. This status means that it is impossible for him to travel to regime-held areas or send relatives to obtain the documents for fear that they might be arrested. Obtaining a marriage certificate cost him €300, and he had to pay an additional €300 to acquire a birth certificate for each of his three children, sums that far exceed the official fees set by the regime.

Another witness originally from Daraa reported that obtaining a marriage certificate cost him \$400, even though he handled the process through a lawyer and did not use brokers, simply because he is wanted by security agencies.

The witnesses interviewed by SNHR also confirmed that such instances of extortion are not limited to state institutions inside Syria but are also common at the regime's embassies and other overseas outposts. The cost of authenticating official documents at some consulates can be higher than the usual fees if the individual is wanted by security agencies. The cost of authenticating some documents can reach as much as \$400.

B. Former detainees who were arbitrarily arrested and families of forcibly disappeared persons

SNHR has documented that 136,614 of the individuals arrested by regime forces between March 2011 and August 2024, including 8,504 women (adult female) and 3,697 children, are still arrested and/or forcibly disappeared.



These individuals and their families are among those worst most affected by violations related to obtaining official documents. Released detainees face extreme difficulties in acquiring all types of documents due to their 'security record.' They may be permanently denied access to these documents or forced to pay exorbitant sums in bribes to employees and brokers to obtain what should be their natural right to official documentation.

Former detainees also encounter significant security-related obstacles, especially when trying to acquire certain documents such as a passport or a no-criminal-record certificate. Such documents can cost thousands of dollars, particularly for individuals with complex security statuses. Furthermore, they face additional challenges in obtaining any documents that require security clearance, including all forms of property ownership documents, which they are often denied.

The same difficulties are encountered by survivors of other violations, including those who survived bombings and military attacks, particularly those involving chemical weapons. The families of victims killed in extrajudicial killings and those tortured to death also face severe challenges.

As for the families of forcibly disappeared persons, who are effectively deprived of their very right to existence, and whose families do not even know whether they are still alive or have died under torture, this group face particularly arduous challenges. For instance, the wives and children of forcibly disappeared men must go to great lengths to obtain legal documents in the absence of the family head and main breadwinner. Many legal procedures require either the presence of the husband and father or proof of his death for his wife to be allowed to manage their children's legal affairs.

Death certificates for arbitrarily arrested detainees and forcibly disappeared persons who died due to torture are among the most difficult documents for families to obtain. The report tackles this issue in greater detail in the fifth section.

C. University students and graduates

The regime's absolute control over the issuance of school and university certificates means it has been able to extort students and graduates by demanding large sums of money in exchange for issuing their diplomas and degree certificates, although these are theirs by fundamental right and should be granted freely and automatically on their graduation. While students and graduates wanted by security agencies suffer more from these extortion practices, they affect all students, regardless of their political views. This is particularly true for students and graduates living outside regime-held areas or abroad, since they cannot travel in person to schools or universities to collect their certificates, forcing them to do so through brokers who charge a lot of money.

These extortions also affect some students living in regime-held areas, especially those wanted for military service. These students are required to come in person to collect their certificates.

SNHR spoke with a Syrian woman now living in Egypt, who had no involvement in the popular uprising for democracy, and never expressed any anti-regime political views to the Syrian regime. Despite this, however, the woman told us that it took her a full year simply to acquire her school certificates from her high school in Aleppo, with school staff claiming that the school had been bombed. Her sister tried to obtain replacement certificates from the Directorate of Education, but to no avail. The woman was finally able to obtain her certificates after paying approximately \$250.

We also spoke with a young man living in northern Syria whose father, a Warrant Officer First Class, wanted to obtain his ninth-grade certificate from Aleppo through a broker. However, the broker informed him that the process would cost \$100 (\$20 for the broker and \$80 for the employee who would issue the certificate). This was beyond what he could afford, which led him to abandon his attempt to obtain a certificate.

Another interviewee, a law student living in northern Syria, told us that he wanted to obtain a transcript from Aleppo University. The broker demanded \$500 for this service. The student added, **“It’s not just me. All my colleagues living in opposition-controlled areas have had to pay similar amounts to obtain their university certificates from regime-held areas.”**

D. Property owners

As mentioned earlier, the Syrian regime has introduced a requirement for property owners to obtain security clearance in order to process real estate transactions, including sales, rental agreements, or transfer of ownership of homes and shops, both in regulated and unregulated areas. This also applies to obtaining domestic and international powers of attorney and legal documents for appointing lawyers in property and other matters.

This means that a property owner wishing to conduct a transaction must submit a request to the local security branch serving the area where the property in question is located. The security branch then contacts other departments and branches of the regime’s security apparatus to ensure there are no outstanding summonses or searches against the property owner. The security profile of the owner is vetted, and based on this, the request and thus the transaction is either approved or denied.

While security clearances are typically issued by Political Security branches, influential military divisions have the power to also issue security clearances for properties under their control. For instance, the Fourth Division, led by Maher Assad, grants security clearances for all properties located in Qedsayya suburb in Rural Damascus.

The issue of the need to obtain security clearances has opened the door wide to extorting property owners. In many cases, requests are denied without any valid reason. Citizens have come to understand that repeated denials of their requests for a security clearance mean they must pay bribes to the relevant authorities to process their transactions. The value of these bribes varies depending on the value of the property. In other words, ‘security prosecution’ has come to be viewed as a pretext for extorting property owners and forcing them to pay large sums of money simply to be able to freely dispose of their own assets.

It is worth noting, however, that while payment of bribes has become an essential requirement for property owners to gain the freedom to deal with their own properties, even these bribes are not always effective. Security agencies often refuse to grant clearances if the citizen lives in areas outside the regime’s control, is wanted, is banned from traveling for security reasons, or has previously been tried before the exceptional Counterterrorism Court. There are also numerous cases where security agencies have rejected power of attorney documents issued by [Syrian consulates](#) and embassies in several other countries, despite their legitimacy.

While it is possible to 'buy' most official documents by paying large sums to the Syrian regime, property-related documents are something of an exception. It is in the regime's interest to obstruct the granting of these documents to owners, with the objective of preventing them from managing their properties. This step aligns with the regime's broader policy of seizing property through the introduction of a series of real estate redevelopment laws that allow the regime to seize control of Syrians' assets. While these laws can theoretically affect all Syrians, they primarily target the three aforementioned groups – the 12 million forcibly displaced people, 112,000 forcibly disappeared persons, and half a million people who have been killed and not registered in the civil registry records.

This issue was the subject of an extensive report released by SNHR on May 25, 2023, entitled, ['The Laws Employed by the Syrian Regime to Control Real Estate Ownership and Lands Before and After the Beginning of the Popular Uprising in March 2011'](#)

E. People from areas that saw local settlement and reconciliation agreements

The Syrian regime also uses [official documents](#) as a tool to extort residents of the so-called ['reconciliation areas'](#). These are regions previously under opposition control which were recaptured by the regime in 2018. Examples of such areas are Eastern Ghouta, Daraa, and northern rural Homs. Many residents of these areas have lost their documents due to the conflict and displacement, and the regime has refused to provide replacements or to allow them to obtain new documents unless they first obtain a security clearance. This has left the residents of these areas at the mercy of the security agencies, which exploit and extort them financially.

In addition to the security agencies, residents are also exploited by officers, lawyers, brokers, and employees in government offices. They are often forced to pay large bribes to obtain any kind of official document, especially the no-criminal-record certificates.

As a form of collective punishment against residents of such areas, the regime deliberately deprives many of these residents of essential documents such as marriage and birth certificates, and family record books. Thousands of families in these areas have faced difficulties registering marriages and births that took place while the opposition controlled the region. Syrians in these cases must file legal cases to register their marriages and lineage in court. And even after paying large sums and navigating the bureaucracy, their claims may be rejected. Even worse, there have been many cases where even when a court approves the marriage or lineage, regime offices arbitrarily refused to issue further documents, such as family record books. This leads to additional challenges when families attempt to enroll their children in schools or seek aid.

Furthermore, the Syrian regime uses official documents as a weapon to humiliate its dissidents in these areas, refusing to issue their documents unless they agree to settle their security status. Through this process, they must admit they were wrong in their demands for freedom and dignity, beg the regime for forgiveness, and request that the regime's various security agencies stop pursuing them.

F. Those wanted for mandatory and reserve military service

Those conscripted for mandatory and reserve military service are also among the groups targeted in extortions, as they are unable to obtain many of their official documents unless they either perform their service or pay a financial exemption fee. The Syrian regime continues to issue laws and legislative decrees that force young men to pay large sums if they wish to be exempt from military service.

According to Legislative Decree No. 31 of 2020, which amended some provisions of Legislative Decree No. 30 of 2007, those assigned to mandatory service who are classified as having 'fixed services' must pay a financial exemption fee of \$3,000 to be exempted from military service.

The decree also adjusted the exemption fee for conscripts living outside Syria from \$3,000 to \$10,000 depending on the length of their stay abroad. Additionally, the decree set a fee of \$5,000 USD for exemption from reserve service for those residing outside Syria.

Furthermore, the Syrian regime issued Legislative Decree No. 37 on December 1, 2023, which requires a payment of \$4,800 USD, or its SYP equivalent for those called up for reserve service who have reached the age of 40 and have not yet enlisted, if they wish to be exempt. The decree also allows those who have joined the reserve service and reached the age of 40 while still serving to pay the specified exemption fee, with a deduction of \$200 USD (or its SYP equivalent) for each month they have already served.

Needless to say, most Syrians find it difficult to secure such large sums, especially since 90 percent of the Syrian population now lives below the poverty line, as mentioned earlier. according to [estimates by the International Committee of the Red Cross \(ICRC\)](#).

Even those who manage to secure these amounts by [selling their assets](#) remain [vulnerable](#) to extortion and [brokerage](#). They must often pay bribes to the recruitment office to obtain approval for paying the exemption fee. They are also routinely subjected to threats and forced to pay additional bribes that can reach \$200 to get their exemption application processed.

G. Other groups

Other sizeable categories of the Syrian population can also be subjected to extortion. Chief among these are ethnic minorities, including Kurds who have previously been the victims of widespread violations by the regime, with peoples in these categories having been denied their rights to possess official documents by the regime for many years, since before the start of the popular uprising for democracy.

These categories also include, among others, Syrians seeking to obtain or renew travel documents both inside and outside Syria, retirees who are not living in regime-held areas and wish to authorize relatives to collect their pensions, Syrians who left the country irregularly and wish to settle their security status with the regime, and public sector workers wanting to resign or to obtain leave to travel abroad.

Obtaining official documents: A source of widespread suffering affecting all Syrians regardless of their political stance or geographical location

While the groups mentioned above face especially high levels of extortion and harassment, the process of obtaining official documents has become an arduous ordeal for all Syrian citizens regardless of their political stance or geographical location. This suffering includes mistreatment, poor service, bureaucracy and unnecessarily complex procedures enforced by the Syrian regime in its institutions. All these factors ultimately force citizens to deal with brokers or pay bribes to conduct transactions and obtain official documents.

In all state institutions inside Syria, for instance, citizens attempting to handle their transactions themselves are treated in degrading ways. They are often required to spend many hours in crowded queues, and frequently face humiliation and contempt from public sector workers. Their transactions are often obstructed for trivial reasons, meaning citizens often need to visit civil registry offices, immigration and passports departments, or other institutions multiple times before finally obtaining the necessary documents.

Citizens wishing to authenticate their documents themselves at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs face similar violations. Applicants at the consular section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs complain about bureaucracy and slow service, unnecessarily complicated procedures, deliberate harassment of citizens, and officials questioning the validity of their documents. According to witnesses, this treatment is intentional and aims to force citizens to deal with brokers who are complicit with employees at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in order to extract more money from citizens.

Mistreatment is not limited to state institutions inside Syria but also extends to state institutions abroad. SNHR has documented cases where citizens' dignity was degraded while handling their transactions at some Syrian consulates and embassies, such as the Syrian Consulate in Istanbul, and the Syrian Embassies in Egypt and Lebanon. Syrians visiting these institutions routinely experience a deliberate pattern of humiliation and extortion, which forces them to pay bribes or resort to brokers.

In one case, a witness interviewed by SNHR described being humiliated by an staff member at the Syrian Consulate in Istanbul, leading him to enlist a broker to handle his transaction. The witness said, "The first time I went myself to the Syrian Consulate in Istanbul to authenticate a family record book, I was shocked by the employee's extreme rudeness. After a heated exchange because of his rude behavior, he tore up my appointment slip and refused to process my transaction. I didn't want to face such humiliation again, so I arranged with a broker to handle the transaction without my needing to go to the consulate, for \$200, and that broker undoubtedly split the money with the employee."

In general, having to turn to brokers is not a matter of choice for Syrians in Turkey; they are unable to book appointments at the Syrian Consulate in Istanbul themselves through the online platform due to unavailable slots, forcing them to "buy" appointments from brokers. The price for these appointments ranges from \$100 to \$400, depending on the nature of the appointment.

Even after paying large sums to brokers, Syrians often receive poor service and discover errors in their documents, necessitating additional payments for new documents. This happened to several witnesses interviewed by SNHR. One witness received a birth certificate for his son with an incorrect birth date, while another received a family record book with the name of one of his three children missing. In both cases, the only option for the witnesses was to pay again for new documents.

The witnesses we spoke to believe that brokers intentionally make these mistakes to force citizens to pay again, as they take advantage of the lack of oversight or accountability.

When taking into account these seven groups, including all forcibly displaced persons (both IDPs and refugees) numbering over 14 million Syrians, along with all arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared persons totaling over 200,000, and a significant number of Syrians residing in regime-held areas, SNHR estimates that around 15 to 16 million Syrians have been, or are facing violations related to official documents.

V. CONTROLLING THE PROCESS OF ISSUING DEATH CERTIFICATES FOR VICTIMS EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLED, AND VICTIMS OF ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

One of the most significant violations Syrians have faced due to the regime's control over the issuance of official documents is the inability to obtain death certificates for thousands of victims who were killed or forcibly disappeared since the beginning of the popular uprising for democracy. These victims have not been officially registered as dead in the civil registry. That is to say that the Syrian regime has arbitrarily refused to issue death certificates in an attempt to cover up the crimes committed.

The regime has refused to issue death certificates for two groups of victims:

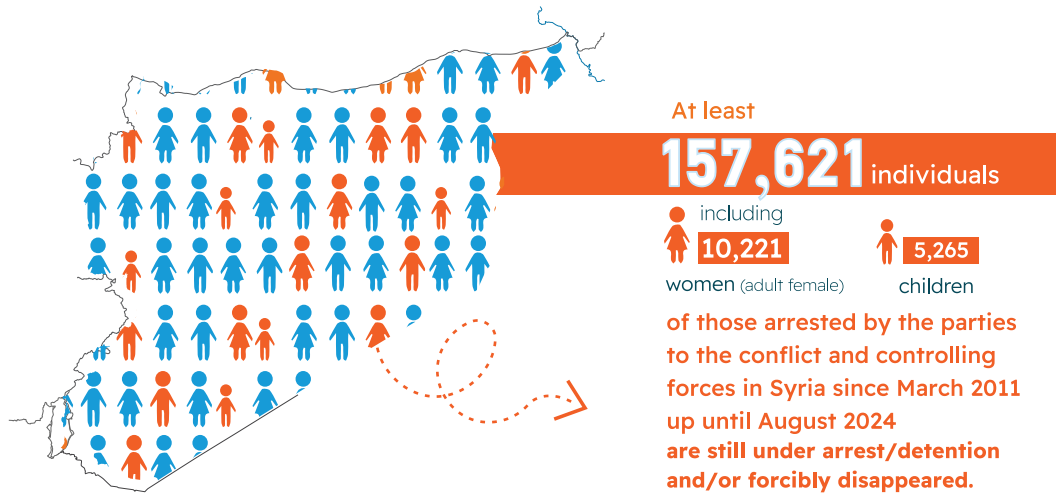
A. Victims killed

The Syrian regime and other parties to the conflict have killed hundreds of thousands of Syrian citizens through various types of bombardment. SNHR has documented the killing of **231,108 civilians** since March 2011 up until January 2024 at the hands of the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria. Of these, the regime and its Russian ally killed 208,197.

SNHR estimates that the vast majority of the families of these victims, who were killed many years ago, have still been unable to obtain any death certificate at all, let alone one that specifies the true cause of the victim's death or identifies the perpetrator.

B. Arbitrarily arrested detainees and forcibly disappeared persons

SNHR has documented that **157,621 individuals**, including 5,265 children and 10,221 women, of these arrested by the parties to the conflict and controlling forces in Syria since March 2011 up until August 2024 are still under arrest and/or forcibly disappeared. Of these, **136,614 individuals**, including 3,697 children and 8,504 women (adult female), are being held in regime detention centers.



Similar to those killed in bombardments, thousands of people who have died under torture have not been officially registered as dead by state authorities. Many of their fates remain unknown, and some may have died without anyone having any knowledge of their death to now still.

A very limited number of families of detainees and disappeared persons have obtained death certificates issued by military hospitals. Many of these certificates show that the cause of death for the disappeared/detainee was sudden cardiac and respiratory arrest. Based on these, families were later able to register the death with civil registry offices.

In some cases, the Syrian regime has informed families of the death of their relatives but withheld the bodies and the deceased detainee's documents. Moreover, the regime has refused to issue a death certificate unless families paid large sums to confirm their children's death and/or acknowledged that "armed terrorist gangs" were responsible for their deaths, not the Syrian regime, by signing a statement prepared by security agencies.

Since early 2018, SNHR has monitored that many families of persons forcibly disappeared in regime detention centers have received death certificates for their missing loved ones. This has occurred without official notification from any regime department; instead, families discovered this merely by accident while conducting routine transactions at civil registry offices. While the actual cause of death is not mentioned in these cases, there is a strong probability that those victims died due to torture. In these cases too, the regime has not returned the bodies to the families or announce the deaths at the time they occurred.

To further entrench the security apparatus's control over state institutions, the Syrian regime has made it a requirement to obtain a security clearance in order to register deaths, through Circular No. 22 issued by the Minister of Justice on August 10, 2022.

This circular represents a blatant interference in the judicial authority, which the current Syrian constitution supposedly guarantees independence, and it contradicts the provisions of Act No. 13 of 2021 on Personal Status, which outlines the regulations for deaths in articles 35-43. These articles do not contain any conditions, restrictions, or approvals for registering deaths. This demonstrates that what is stipulated by the law can be casually overridden by a written or verbal circular issued haphazardly, enhancing the powers of the security apparatus and opening the door wide for harassment, control, and extortion.

SNHR examined these violations in detail in a report issued on August 19, 2022, entitled, '[The Syrian Regime, Through Its Security Services and State Institutions, Controls the Incidents of Registering the Deaths of Victims Killed/'Disappeared' in the Armed Conflict Since March 2011'](#)

This unrestricted control over death records by the Syrian regime has caused further significant suffering for many Syrian families who lost their loved ones during the conflict or in regime detention centers and could not obtain death certificates for them.

Part of this suffering comes from the fact that obtaining a death certificate is a requirement for issuing an 'inheritance settlement' document for the deceased to manage their assets, for the deceased employee's spouse and children to receive a pension, and for the wife to request to be appointed as guardian of her minor children by a Sharia court, which would enable her to obtain passports for them and secure travel visas. Moreover, failing to register deaths deprives the wife of her right to remarry, in addition to many other social, legal, and rights-related implications.

VI. THE SYRIAN REGIME'S RAMPANT CORRUPTION UNDERMINES THE CREDIBILITY OF SYRIAN IDENTIFICATION DOCUMENTS

Although the Syrian regime bears responsibility for providing citizens with identification documents, as the force that controls state institutions, it has wholly failed to meet its responsibilities. Instead, it has acted with a mafia-like mentality, exploiting its powers to deprive many citizens of these essential documents, using them as a weapon to extort the Syrian people, and turning them into a means of plundering Syrian funds.

These policies have turned official documents into a commodity for sale and trade, encouraging officials in state institutions to engage in trafficking through brokers. This has led to the proliferation of black markets for all types of forged documents, including university degree certificates, especially amid a complete absence of accountability and transparency in state institutions, along with widespread corruption and the certainty of impunity in a country governed by corrupt security agencies rather than by the law.

SNHR has monitored the proliferation of two types of forged documents

- 1. Forged documents issued by regime institutions:** SNHR spoke with several identification documents experts, who confirmed that most official documents are susceptible to forgery, particularly school diplomas and university degree certificates. Forgery operations are widespread, and prices vary according to the specialization and type of certificate, with prices for higher education certificates sometimes exceeding \$5,000.

These forgeries are led by a group of officials and employees in the Syrian education directorates and university administration, who deal with their 'clients' through brokers and provide forged university degree certificates that are exact copies of the originals, duly certified with all the necessary signatures and seals. This indicates that forgery networks are deeply rooted and influential in educational institutions.

Forged degree certificates include a date of issuance set by the applicant, and forgery operations also involve 'transcripts,' where the applicant specifies the desired grades as agreed upon. This also includes the option to have the forged certificate authenticated by the Syrian regime's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Many Syrians are forced to resort to forgery offices, which are spread across Syria and abroad, because they cannot obtain their official documents legally. Some Syrians lost their identification documents in the conflict and have not been able to obtain official replacements. They left the country irregularly and, due to the difficulty of obtaining a "lost document" from regime-held areas, they had to resort to forgery offices to obtain IDs to help them secure residency in neighboring countries.

These offices also provide other documents such as military service books, with prices for forged documents starting at \$50 and potentially reaching hundreds or even thousands of dollars depending on the type.

The forgers defend their profession by claiming that **"many Syrians lost their documents during the war, and our job is to facilitate their recovery."**

Despite the serious implications of forging official documents, especially university degree certificates, it is seen as a last resort for many students out of what they called "necessity". One of those students, Khaled,² was arrested by regime forces before completing his final year in the English Literature department at Aleppo University. Khaled fled to Turkey immediately after his release from detention without being able to complete his studies and obtain his degree. Wanting to continue his studies in Europe, Khaled turned to a forger who provided him with a forged degree certificate from Aleppo University, authenticated by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for \$500. Khaled told SNHR, **"I had no other option. I spent three and a half years at university, and it is unthinkable to start my studies over again."**

While resorting to forged documents has provided solutions to the problems of many Syrians who have been deprived of their documents, the proliferation of this phenomenon undoubtedly undermines the credibility of Syrian official documents and negatively affects their value and importance. The Syrian regime remains responsible for the spread of this phenomenon, which is managed from within its institutions since it is the sole official entity responsible for issuing official documents to Syrians.

2. Forged documents not issued by state institutions: The prevalence of document brokerage has encouraged many forgers to impersonate brokers and claim they can obtain official documents from regime institutions.

SNHR spoke with several people who fell victim to these fraudsters, paying large sums of money to obtain official documents that later turned out to be forged and not registered in the civil records of the regime's government. As such, the victims of such scams were unable to utilize these forged documents, or to get their money back.

2. An alias.

These forgers forge all types of documents, including passports, university degree certificates, powers of attorney, and more. Syrians living outside regime-held areas are the main victims of these forgers, as they are unable to process their transactions themselves.

SNHR spoke with individuals who obtained their university degree certificates from regime-held areas through brokers only to discover when they attempted to authenticate these certificates at regime consulates and embassies in their host countries that the certificates were forgeries.

SNHR also spoke with individuals who paid over \$1,000 to obtain passports from the immigration and passport departments in regime-held areas, only to later discover that they had been defrauded, as they received forged passports.

Reports from pro-regime newspapers have revealed that forgeries are not limited to fraudsters and transaction facilitators [but also involve judges and lawyers involved in forgery of identification documents](#), particularly powers of attorney for the sale of property owned by expatriates.

In all of this, SNHR holds the Syrian regime responsible for exposing Syrians to these scams and frauds, as it is the entity that has deprived them of obtaining their documents themselves, unleashed brokers and corrupt individuals within state institutions, and turned these institutions into an infinitely corrupt playground for security agencies to profit from plundering citizens' money.

VII. HOW SYRIANS' LIVES ARE AFFECTED BY LACKING OR LOSING OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

Access to official documents is both an existential human need and a fundamental right. Like any other population, Syrians living in Syria (whether in regime-held areas or elsewhere) have an urgent need to obtain various types of official documents if they wish to carry out any legal transactions. The same applies equally to millions of displaced Syrians, who often need to obtain documents from regime-held areas, then get them authenticated by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and sometimes by Syrian consulates or embassies in the countries where they reside. This process forces them to pay fees both inside and outside Syria.

To diaspora Syrian communities, identification document needs vary depending on the country in which they are based. For instance, in Türkiye, Syrians might need documents such as individual records, marriage certificates, family records, birth certificates, and others to carry out legal procedures, including updating their Kimlik (temporary protection card) information, obtaining residency permits, or applying for Turkish citizenship.

Similarly, Syrians residing in various Arab countries require documents such as marriage certificates, birth certificates, individual and family records, or no-criminal-record certificates, for purposes such as enrolling their children in schools, accessing hospitals, obtaining residency permits, or securing employment. In countries like Lebanon and Jordan, Syrians also need family record books to receive humanitarian aid.

Although most Syrians in Europe have applied for asylum and no longer need to obtain official documents like passports from Syrian regime offices, there are still situations where they need to obtain legal papers from Syria or Syrian embassies in European countries like the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria. These documents are often required for family reunification, obtaining citizenship, or other legal matters. Syrians in Europe also need to register births and marriages with the Syrian civil registry to ensure that their children receive Syrian nationality.

Additionally, all students wishing to re-validate their academic qualifications or continue their education must obtain and authenticate their certificates from Syria through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Many Syrians abroad must deal with regime institutions to manage various legal matters, such as inheritance, property sales, and rentals. Some also need to regularly renew their passports to travel or renew their residency permits in host countries.

Despite the critical importance of official documents, many Syrians in and outside Syria have lost their documents or been denied the ability to obtain or renew them due to high costs or security reasons. This has resulted in numerous challenges, which can be summarized as follows:

- 1. A rise in the numbers of undocumented newborns/children:** Under Syrian civil law, an undocumented child is someone whose parent(s) are registered in the Syrian civil registry records or who has an established affiliation to the Syrian Arab Republic by origin, but has not been registered in the civil records within the legally designated time frame. Children cannot be registered unless their parents' marriage is officially documented. Article 28 of Law No. 13 of 2021 (Civil Status Law) states that **“Newborns born out of undocumented marriages cannot be registered, unless after the marriage is duly documented.”**

Due to the inability of many Syrians to officially register their marriages, the phenomenon of undocumented children has spread in both regime-held and opposition-controlled areas in Syria. Additionally, some Syrians residing in neighboring countries have been unable to complete the process of registering births because they lack the certified documents proving their marriages, while some don't even possess personal official documents or legal residency papers in the host country. For example, a 2021 report by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) suggest that 69 percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon were unable to complete the necessary legal procedures to register their children's births in the foreigner section of the registry.

It is worth noting that even if the parents of undocumented children manage to subsequently register their marriage, then seek to officially register their children, they will still face a series of bureaucratic procedures that also require significant financial costs. To complete the process for documenting an undocumented child, they would need to supply several documents, including an undocumented person statement and a police report outlining the reasons for the undocumented status, which needs to be prepared by the father in the presence of two witnesses. These documents are then submitted to the committee responsible for documenting undocumented individuals at the civil registry office in the governorate to which the child belongs. The documents are also sent to the relevant security agencies. Even after going all through these procedures, some requests are rejected, meaning that applicants must go through the entire process again, possibly repeatedly, until a final judicial decision is eventually obtained confirming parentage. In some cases, the security review cannot be conducted because the birth took place outside the country.

This means that for all births taking place outside Syria, the security review may result in non-approval, which creates unnecessary complications and reflects the vast powers granted to the regime's security apparatus, even in matters of birth registration.

- 2. Rising numbers of newborns/children of unknown lineage:** This issue particularly affects widows who lost their husbands to arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, or extrajudicial killing, and have no legal document proving the identity of their children's father, with their marriage not being documented in the civil registry. In such cases, these widows are unable to document their children in government records, legally rendering these children as stateless or of unknown lineage.

The problem has been exacerbated, especially in areas outside regime control, due to the Syrian regime deliberately depriving citizens in these regions of their official documents by halting civil registry and court services. Additionally, social changes in these areas, such as some women marrying/being married to foreign fighters (mainly from ISIS), whose identities were unknown, or to local fighters who were later killed, have complicated the situation. These marriages often lacked documentation, making it difficult to register the marriages or the births of any resulting children, especially when documents were lost or one or both parents had died.

According to an investigation published by the Aljumburiya website in mid-2019, a total of 1,826 children of unknown lineage had then been documented in Idlib and the northern and western rural areas of Hama. These children were born to 1,124 couples whose marriages were undocumented in northern, eastern, and western rural Aleppo, where the investigation documented over 2,000 children of unknown lineage, along with a further 350 cases in a camp in Kherbat al-Jouz. The investigation estimated that there were over 8,000 cases of children of unknown lineage in three camps under the control of the Autonomous Administration in eastern Syria.

- 3. Denial of the right to education, healthcare, and humanitarian assistance:** One of the most significant consequences of not documenting births in government records and thereby obtaining official documentation is that these children are deprived of the crucial life foundation of education. Indeed, many children are unable to attend school due to not being officially registered in their family's records. Syrian students residing in certain host countries also require several official documents issued by the Syrian regime's government to complete their education, such as school certificates from previous grades, a copy of their passport in some cases, and proof of residency, all of which may require obtaining other documents from Syria. If families are unable to secure these documents due to their high cost and/or security reasons, their children might be deprived of their right to education.

In addition to being unable to attend school, many Syrians who do not possess official documents are also denied access to proper healthcare, including necessary vaccinations and shots for their newborn children.

Another consequence of not having official documentation is that families are unable to receive humanitarian aid, whether inside or outside Syria. Without a family record book or a family record, households cannot prove the number of members in the family, making it difficult to determine their level of need for assistance.

4. **Denial of the right to property:** Many Syrians face the possibility of losing their property rights due to the loss of documents proving ownership and the inability of many to obtain replacement documents. Those most at risk of being deprived of property rights include forcibly displaced persons, arbitrarily detained individuals, and forcibly disappeared persons, especially given the need for citizens to obtain security clearance in order to manage their properties. In addition, the Syrian regime frequently issues laws and regulations specifically aimed at legitimizing the seizure of property.

The risk of losing property rights also affects people living in opposition-controlled areas, who have purchased property based on documents issued by local administrations. These documents are not recognized in regime-held areas or outside Syria.

5. **Denial of freedom of movement:** Many Syrians in Syria are unable to move freely due to their official documents being either lost or confiscated at security and military checkpoints. Many people in both regime-controlled areas and opposition-controlled areas don't even possess an identity card to prove their identity, and are unable to obtain a replacement card either due to security concerns, high costs, or the inability to travel to regime-held areas in the case of those living in opposition-controlled areas.

The high cost of obtaining and renewing a passport is also a major barrier preventing many Syrians, both in and outside Syria, from traveling and moving freely.

6. **Potential denial of Syrian citizenship:** Many citizens who have lost their official documents and are unable to obtain new ones face the risk of being denied Syrian nationality, especially since the Syrian regime manipulates civil registry records with no accountability whatsoever. Undocumented children who were born during the conflict are particularly vulnerable to this threat, as their parents were unable to officially register them in the Syrian civil registry records, leaving these families with no evidence that these children should hold Syrian nationality. This issue is compounded for children born outside Syria, whose parents were unable to document their birth in their home country or even in the country of asylum. This is the case for many Syrian families who entered neighboring countries irregularly and were unable to obtain legal residency or temporary protection cards as refugees, meaning their children's births could not be legally registered there or in Syria.

According to a group called the 'Syrian Initiative to End Statelessness', other groups are also affected by this problem, including the children of Syrian women who married foreign fighters (who either supported one of the various conflict parties or joined jihadist groups), and children born to rape victims in detention centers or at security checkpoints.

7. **Denial of the right to vote and participate in future political life:** Individuals born during the conflict, as well as undocumented newborns and people who lost their personal identification without obtaining replacements and were classified as undocumented in civil records, face potential deprivation of their right to participate in political life and vote in the future. At the very least, they will encounter numerous difficulties and obstacles before they can prove their Syrian nationality and gain the right to participate in political life after the current regime has been ousted.

8. Female-specific consequences: The deprivation of official documents in all forms creates a myriad of challenges for anyone; however, women face particularly arduous challenges. For example, the inability to obtain a marriage certificate deprives a woman of her legal and legitimate rights and may prevent her from proving the lineage of her children in the event of her husband's death and the absence of documents proving his identity. Additionally, the inability to obtain a divorce certificate prevents a woman from legally remarrying, as she cannot document her marriage to a second husband without proving her divorce from the first.

Furthermore, the inability of many women to obtain death certificates for their husbands who died during the conflict or in regime detention centers creates numerous legal complications, especially when there are children involved. A widow is left unable to complete many legal transactions related to her children without the presence of the father or proof of his death.

Indeed, many Syrian women living in regime-controlled areas or other women who have been internally displaced have lost their personal official documents and have been unable to obtain replacements, adversely affecting all aspects of their lives, including facing difficulties in completing their education, finding work, marrying legally, registering their children in schools, or receiving humanitarian aid.

Women who were arbitrarily detained also face additional difficulties after their release from prisons and detention centers. They are deprived of their official documents, which negatively impacts all aspects of their lives. This issue was discussed at length in the SNHR report, [‘Unshakable Voices’](#) which was released on February 19, 2024.

VIII. LAWS GOVERNING THE RIGHT TO HOLD OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

SNHR must stress that the Syrian regime's blatant control and exploitation of official documents as a means of extortion and embezzlement is a violation of both local and international laws. The right of every individual to obtain these documents is a fundamental one guaranteed by national laws and international human rights law. This right is essential in confirming a citizen's identity and legal existence, allowing them to gain legal recognition, and establishing their rights and obligations. This right should not be denied or discriminated against based on an individual's place of residence, whether they are in their home country or have sought asylum in a foreign country.

Syrian domestic laws guarantee these rights to Syrian citizens. Indeed, the right to legal recognition is a fundamental right that a Syrian citizen is supposed to enjoy. The legal framework concerning the issuance of civil documents in Syria is not limited to the Civil Status Law and its executive instructions, but also includes the constitution and several other relevant laws and decrees.

[The 2012 Syrian Constitution](#) contains several articles related to citizenship and equality among citizens. Article 33 states that “Citizenship shall be a fundamental principle which involves rights and duties enjoyed by every citizen and exercised according to law.” This underlines the state’s obligation to enable Syrians, whether in Syria abroad, to obtain legal identity and necessary civil documentation to enjoy all their rights.

[The Law on Syrian Nationality](#), promulgated in Legislative Decree No. 276 of 1969, outlines how children obtain nationality. According to Article 3 of the law, a person has the right to acquire Syrian nationality once it is proven that their father is Syrian, regardless of the place of birth. Syrian mothers can only pass on their nationality to their child in exceptional cases, such as when a child is born on Syrian soil to a Syrian mother and an unknown or foreign father whose status means he cannot confer nationality on the child at birth.

The Law on Child Protection, promulgated in August 2021, establishes a child’s right to legal identity, including the right to birth documentation, as stipulated in Article 4, and the right to obtain nationality, as stipulated in Article 5.

The Law on Passports (Act No. 18 of 2014) provides for the issuance of passports and travel documents to every Syrian citizen who meets the conditions for obtaining a passport. Therefore, legally, the Syrian regime has no right to arbitrarily deny any citizen this document or any others.

However, the Syrian regime ignores and violates all these laws. Not only does the regime violate domestic laws, but it also breaches many regional and international laws and agreements that guarantee individuals’ rights to possess official documents, including:

1. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): Article 6 of the UDHR affirms “the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law” for every human being. However, the Syrian regime’s practices of withholding or complicating access to civil documents deny many Syrian citizens this right.

Article 15 also affirms individuals’ rights to nationality and states that “no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality”; despite this, the Syrian regime blatantly violates this principle through imposing unnecessary complexities, making obtaining proof of Syrian nationality extremely difficult or downright impossible in some cases.

2. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR): Article 16 states that, “Everyone shall have the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law” while Article 24 asserts that “Every child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have a name.” The same article asserts, “Every child has the right to acquire a nationality.”

The Syrian regime’s practices, however, violate these provisions by often preventing timely birth registration, especially for children born in opposition-controlled areas or to parent(s) who lack the required documents.

- 3. The Convention on the Rights of the Child:** According to Article 7 of the Convention, “The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name,”. However, the regime’s practices often lead to violations of this right, especially for child refugees, or newborns who were born in conflict areas.
- 4. The Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons:** Although Syria has not ratified this convention, it frames the international standards governing the status of stateless persons. Given that the Syrian regime’s practices threaten to create a large number of stateless persons, these practices clearly conflict with international standards.
- 5. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination:** Article 5(d)(iii) guarantees the right to nationality without discrimination. However, the Syrian regime’s selective application of documentation laws, particularly in areas formerly controlled by the opposition, may constitute a violation of this principle
- 6. The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR):** The lack of proper documentation often leads to violations of the rights guaranteed under the ICESCR, such as the right to work, education, and an adequate standard of living.
- 7. Customary International Law:** The right to nationality and legal identity is increasingly recognized as a customary international law standard, binding on all states regardless of treaty ratification.
- 8. International Humanitarian Law:** Although the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols do not directly address civil documents, they call on parties to armed conflicts to respect the rights of civilians. The use of documentation and official documents as a weapon in the conflict by Syria can be considered a violation of these principles.
- 9. UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement:** Principle 20 recognizes that “Every human being has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.” To that end, the same principle demands that the “authorities concerned shall issue to [IDPs] all documents necessary for the enjoyment and exercise of their legal rights.”

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- The Syrian regime has exploited the need of Syrian citizens, both in Syria and abroad, for official documents, using said documents as a weapon to achieve political and economic gains. By controlling the issuance of these documents as the sole official authority recognized for providing Syrian official papers, it has extorted millions of dollars from Syrians for documents that should be of minimal cost, and has used this money to fund its war against the Syrian people.
- The Syrian regime has used official documents as a means to extort Syrians, weaponizing these essential documents against political opponents and forcing them to pay additional costs on top of already exorbitant official fees. To that end, the regime has extracted more money from Syrians sought by security agencies or residing outside regime-controlled areas, regardless of their political positions. The regime has also used official documents to blackmail individuals required for military service, property owners, Syrians living in areas that saw settlements with the regime, students, retirees, and other groups.
- The Syrian regime has accorded its security agencies free rein within state institutions, increasing their control over citizens' lives by imposing requirements for security clearances to obtain many documents. This has been used to further restrict Syrians and remind them that they remain under draconian security control even if they manage to leave the country.
- Obtaining official documents has become a burden and a source of suffering for Syrians, regardless of their political stance or geographical location. All state institutions follow a systematic policy aimed at humiliating, extorting, and restricting citizens through bureaucratic and complicated procedures that waste citizens' time and money.
- The Syrian regime is primarily responsible for the proliferation of the phenomenon of brokerage within state institutions. It has commodified and monetized the issuance of official documents (which should be among the most fundamental citizenship rights), ensuring that in many cases, these documents can now only be obtained through brokers.
- The Syrian regime is central to the spread of forged documents due to systemic corruption within its institutions on one hand, and the difficult procedures and high fees it imposes on citizens seeking documents on the other.
- The regime's arbitrary control over official documents has led to a large number of Syrians being deprived of their documents, resulting in the loss of fundamental rights such as legal recognition of their existence and access to education, healthcare, humanitarian assistance, property rights, movement, and legal work.
- All segments of Syrian society are affected by the regime's violations related to official documents, with approximately 16 million Syrians estimated to be affected. Women and children bear the brunt of this suffering as they are the most vulnerable in society, particularly in the absence of legal frameworks that provide adequate protection for these two groups.
- The regime's deprivation of Syrian citizens' documents is an assault on the most basic citizenship rights, a clear violation of local laws, and a breach of human rights charters and international laws.

- The Syrian regime violates international laws and norms through many practices, including arbitrary denial and deprivation of Syrian nationality by complicating the procedures for obtaining official documents, which also threatens to create a large number of stateless individuals. The regime also breaches principles of non-discrimination through selective application of documentation laws, especially in areas previously controlled by the opposition, and violates international humanitarian law by using the withholding of documents as a means of control or punishment in the context of the conflict. Additionally, it clearly breaches several agreements protecting children's rights by imposing difficulties in registering births and obtaining documents for children.

Recommendations

- Establish an alternative system to provide internationally recognized documents for Syrians, including issuing documents through international private companies. One possible solution would be to assemble a team from various countries to develop standardized methods for verifying and authenticating Syrian documents, reducing reliance on corrupt regime institutions.
- Increase diplomatic pressure and make the reform of the civil documentation issue a fundamental condition in any negotiations or aid to the Syrian regime.
- Support alternative documentation efforts by recognizing alternative forms of documentation issued by local councils in non-regime areas, and provide financial and technical support for local documentation efforts.
- Address the issue in international forums by raising the matter of civil documentation in Syria before the UN Security Council and the Human Rights Council (HRC), and task the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) and the UN Special Rapporteur with preparing a report on the right to legal identity in Syria.
- Support legal aid by funding legal assistance programs to help Syrians navigate the documentation process.
- Focus on meeting the need for a political solution in Syria that involves transitioning to democracy to end the regime's control over all state institutions and its use of these in its war against the Syrian people.

UN and UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

- Expand documentation services by increasing the capacity to issue identity documents recognized by the UNHCR for Syrian refugees, and develop a system to verify and recognize unofficial documents coming from Syria.
- Secure civil documents for refugees to prevent citizens from having to deal with brokers and pay exorbitant fees.
- Provide legal assistance to refugees who have lost their civil documents and are unable to obtain replacements, which threatens their residency in host countries.
- Advocate for universal birth registration by launching a campaign to ensure the registration of all Syrian children born in areas of displacement and asylum, and provide technical support to local communities and host countries to improve birth registration systems.

- Establish guidelines on the issue of documentation, by approving comprehensive guiding principles for countries on how to handle cases of Syrians with missing documents and by training the relevant officials in host countries on these guidelines.
- Mediate documentation issues by creating a neutral mechanism to facilitate the verification of documents between different areas of control in Syria and mediate between the Syrian regime and opposition factions on the mutual recognition of documents.
- Regularly monitor and report on the challenges and violations related to documentation faced by Syrians, and include access to documents as a key indicator in humanitarian needs assessments.

States hosting Syrians

- Provide legal residency options by developing pathways for obtaining legal residency that do not require documents from the Syrian regime, and extending the validity periods of residency permits to reduce the documentation burden.
- Improve birth documentation by simplifying procedures for Syrian refugees.
- Address risks of statelessness by implementing safeguards to prevent statelessness among Syrian children born in host countries, and considering granting citizenship to children at risk of statelessness.
- Facilitate the documentation of marriages and deaths in host countries without requiring refugees to engage with the Syrian regime.
- Adopt flexible documentation policies by establishing alternative procedures for Syrians unable to obtain documents from Syria.
- Support civil society initiatives by funding and supporting civil society organizations working on documentation and facilitating coordination between these organizations and government entities.

Syrian regime

- Review pricing policies by setting reasonable and fixed prices for all types of documents.
- Implement a comprehensive reform of the civil documentation system by establishing an independent committee to oversee the reform process and implementing a digital system for document applications and processing to reduce corruption.
- Ensure non-discrimination in issuing documents by introducing clear guidelines prohibiting discrimination based on political affiliation, place of residence, or other factors, and establishing a monitoring system to ensure compliance.
- Restrict security agencies' control over state institutions by granting legal validity to Syrians' official documents without the need for security clearance from these agencies and resuming the approval process for all previously rejected permits.
- Deter and hold accountable officials and employees who deal with brokers and forgers by bringing them to justice to eliminate these practices.
- Decentralize the documentation process by allowing local administrations to issue certain types of documents.

- Monitor and improve services at Syrian embassies and consulates worldwide, as well as at civil registry offices, immigration and passport departments, and all state institutions in Syria, and prevent these service institutions from being used as a means to fund the war against the Syrian people.
- Cease manipulation of the constitution, laws, and regulations, as well as civil registries.
- Take full legal and financial responsibility and compensate victims and their families from the resources of the Syrian state.

Interim government and opposition forces

- Develop standardized documentation practices by establishing a unified system for issuing civil documents in opposition-held areas and ensuring that these documents meet international standards for security and verifiability.
- Seek international recognition by engaging in diplomatic efforts to gain recognition for documents issued in opposition-controlled areas and working with international organizations to verify and authenticate these documents.
- Intensify diplomatic efforts and coordinate more closely with the governments of countries hosting Syrian refugees to find alternatives to documents issued by the Syrian regime's government, and facilitate essential processes for Syrian refugees without requiring them to return to Syrian government institutions.
- Preserve existing records by taking necessary measures to protect and maintain civil records in opposition-controlled areas, and digitizing records where possible to ensure their long-term preservation.
- Coordinate with humanitarian organizations, facilitate the work of international organizations providing documentation services, and coordinate with these organizations to avoid duplication and ensure comprehensive coverage.

Civil society organizations

- Document cases of lost official documents and raise awareness among refugees and IDPs of their rights and the importance of possessing official documents.
- Plan for future transitional justice processes that address the issue of millions of Syrians losing many of their official documents.
- Support community initiatives for informal documentation, which could potentially be recognized or converted into formal status in the future.

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