

# Abduction in Syria: Alawite Women Most Targeted Amidst Transitional Government Inaction



- ◆ The Syrian Transitional Government Must Stop Denying Violations And Fulfill Its Legal Duty To Protect All Civilians Equally

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*The Syrian Transitional Government Must Stop Denying Violations And Fulfill  
Its Legal Duty To Protect All Civilians Equally*

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## 1. Executive Summary

This detailed investigation by Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) describes a series of abductions targeting civilian men and women, mainly from the Alawite community, throughout 2025. The incidents mostly occurred in the governorates of Latakia, Tartous, Homs, and Hama; regions that have experienced sectarian tension and widespread human rights violations. Additional cases were also recorded in As Suwayda and the Damascus countryside.

The motives behind the abductions varied, including political and sectarian revenge as well as ransom demands. Women and girls, who comprised the majority of documented cases, were especially targeted in incidents involving gender-based violence, coercion, and blackmail.

The report was based on 17 in-depth interviews with victims, their families, and eyewitnesses, as well as an analysis of open-source materials and cross-referencing information published by reputable sources, including local and international human rights organizations and media outlets.

The abduction cases following the fall of the regime have disproportionately targeted Alawite women and girls, who suffered beatings, mistreatment, sexual assault, verbal abuse, and forced marriage under threat. Harrowing testimonies from survivors and their families document these abuses, while the fate of many remains unknown.

This occurs amid widespread public fears about the worsening abduction phenomenon, fueled by government denial, the lack of effective security deterrents, and the proliferation of uncontrolled weapons. At the same time, a growing sense among minorities of being targeted and lacking legal protection deepens sectarian tensions and threatens civil peace.

This report aims to shed light on the phenomenon of abductions in Syria, which has accelerated recently, mainly targeting women and men from the Alawite sect, as shown by testimonies collected by STJ and human rights reports. It also seeks to identify the reasons behind the increase in abduction activities and their effects on social cohesion and the country's future, while highlighting the strategies used by Transitional Authorities to address this issue, as they bear direct responsibility for ensuring security for all Syrians regardless of their affiliations.

If the Transitional Government aims to establish genuine legitimacy, it must move beyond denial regarding the abduction issue, reform the security sector, and establish an independent judiciary to prosecute perpetrators regardless of their factional ties, while laying the groundwork for comprehensive transitional justice. Additionally, breaking free from the cycle of a weakened economy and creating jobs and adequate salaries would help dismantle the ransom-based economy.

## 2. Methodology

The report's methodology relies on firsthand testimonies collected through STJ's efforts to document violations in Syria, especially abductions, killings, and extortion across all regions. The organization's team conducted 17 detailed interviews with victims and their relatives to

analyze the abduction cases of 20 individuals, eight men, nine women, and three children, covering the period from December 2024 to November 2025.

The abductions discussed in the interviews mainly occurred in the governorates of Latakia, Tartous, Homs, and Hama, areas that have experienced high sectarian tension, along with additional cases reported in As Suwayda and the Damascus countryside. Among these cases, three resulted in killings, four were motivated by ransom demands, and two involved girls being forced into marriage. The reason for abduction in two cases remains unknown, the status of four victims is still unclear, and in two cases, it was confirmed that the girl had left voluntarily.

It should be noted that these figures do not reflect the total number of victims; rather, they represent only the cases documented and analyzed in detail within the scope of this report. The identities of witnesses were kept confidential to protect their safety. Other local sources have documented additional cases, including the [Stop the Abduction of Syrian Women](#) campaign, which summarized abduction cases involving women from February to December 2025. The campaign verified 130 cases, most of which involved women from the Alawite sect, with 36 still missing. This clearly highlights the scope and scale of the ongoing violations.

Along with testimonies from local sources, the report's authors examined open-source materials such as posts, images, and videos. They also cross-checked information from reputable sources, including the United Nations (UN), international, and local human rights organizations, as well as media outlets, which have published recent reports and investigative studies showing the growing extent of the phenomenon and its repeated occurrences.

The cases of abduction were not limited to a specific geographic area or gender, although most involved women from the Alawite sect. This increases the sensitivity and complexity of the issue. Further complicating matters are the challenges in reporting all details of abductions or documenting every case, due to threats and societal pressure that families may face.

Along with the above, the report's authors monitored the Transitional Government's responses to the abduction issue, including the measures it implemented and the official statements made by its officials. The report concluded with a series of recommendations prepared by the STJ's legal researcher to halt the spread of this problem and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable.

### 3. Introduction

The abduction issue in Syria has become one of the most complex humanitarian and security challenges, where sectarian revenge motives mix with the criminal and economic interests of abduction groups. This situation threatens the country's fragile social fabric, as all religious and ethnic minorities deserve to live safely and with dignity. Many human rights organizations and media outlets have underscored how serious this problem is, especially in cases involving women.

[UN experts](#) have expressed serious concern over the documented abduction of 38 women and girls from the Alawite minority between March and July 2025. The victims, aged from three to

40, were taken from several governorates, including Latakia, Tartous, Hama, Homs, Damascus, and Aleppo.

The abductions took place in broad daylight, while the girls were on their way to school or work, visiting relatives, or even inside their homes. The experts observed that “The pattern of violations described – involving gender-based violence, threats, forced marriage of minors, and a glaring lack of effective response by Syrian interim Government – suggests a targeted campaign against Alawite women and girls based on intersecting grounds.”

[Amnesty International](#) also documented the abduction of at least 36 Alawite women and girls between February and July 2025 in the governorates of Latakia, Tartous, Homs, and Hama. In all but one of these cases, security and police personnel failed to conduct effective investigations to determine the fate of the abducted women and their places of detention, according to the organization.

Additionally, [Reuters](#), the [Associated Press](#), [DW](#), and the British newspaper The [Independent](#) published investigative reports that included firsthand testimonies from survivors of abduction and sexual violence in the coastal regions, documenting between 33 and 40 cases.

Meanwhile, the [Stop the Abduction of Syrian Women](#) campaign released a summary of abduction cases affecting women from February to December 2025, documenting 130 cases. Most involved women from the Alawite sect, with 36 still missing. The campaign states this number does not reflect the full scope due to intimidation faced by the families of the abducted, social stigma, and the shame associated with reporting abductions to government authorities.

Given the difficulty in identifying the perpetrators, the cross-analysis of collected testimonies indicates the involvement of organized criminal networks exploiting the security vacuum for ransom and trafficking. This includes individuals or militias affiliated – either officially or unofficially – with the Transitional Government, foreign elements, and local groups pursuing sectarian retaliatory agendas.

Meanwhile, the International Crisis Group, in its report titled “Restoring Security in Post-Assad Syria: Lessons from the Coast and Suweida,” confirmed a general increase in ransom-related abductions throughout Syria since the fall of Bashar al-Assad’s regime. The report noted that Alawite women are disproportionately among the victims, not only because criminals see them as easy targets but also because they are perceived as “entitled prey.”

Without an effective government response, families are forced to publicly appeal for the return of their daughters through social media, a practice that can worsen the stigma faced by women.

Since last March, social media has been flooded with posts and videos of families pleading for any information about their missing loved ones. Meanwhile, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (COI Syria) confirmed that it has launched an official [investigation](#) into the abductions of women in the coastal region and will present its

findings to the Human Rights Council once finished.

In contrast, the government's response denied that abduction cases existed. When announcing the findings of the special investigation committee on the abductions of women and girls in the Syrian coastal region, Interior Ministry spokesperson Nour al-Din al-Baba [stated](#) that "the committee documented 42 disappearance cases over 60 sessions spanning three months, of which only one was found to be an actual abduction". He added that "the remaining cases involved false claims, women running away with romantic partners, fleeing domestic violence, or cases of prostitution or extortion," without providing any evidence.

## 4. Background: Causes and Motives

Although abductions and extortion have been a [persistent pattern](#) throughout the 14-year Syrian conflict, these incidents increased sharply in 2025. The rise following the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's regime on 8 December 2024 can be linked to several factors rooted in security, military, political, and economic dynamics.

### 4.1. Security vacuum

The [decision by the Transitional Government](#), led by Ahmad al-Sharaa, to reorganize the Syrian Army and the subsequent dismissal of most police and intelligence personnel linked to the previous regime in late January 2025 resulted in a [rise in abduction cases](#) due to the lack of an institutional replacement prepared to fill the resulting gap. Although this move might have been politically necessary to sever ties with the era of repression, it created a significant human resources shortage. The Ministry of Interior reported a deficit of up to 50,000 officers and staff needed to maintain full security control nationwide.

The number of security forces grew rapidly due to a nationwide recruitment campaign. According to a statement from an official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the General Security [doubled](#) its personnel in December, and by February 2025, approximately [17,000](#) new recruits had joined, split between the police and the General Security forces, according to sources in the political administration. However, this was still not enough to form a large, cohesive force.

The coastal governorates, along with Homs and Hama, regions with diverse populations, including minorities such as Alawites, Ismailis, and Christians, posed a significant security challenge. Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor also experienced episodes of violence. The [first wave of widespread abductions](#) began in February 2025, affecting [19](#) Alawite civilians in the rural areas of Homs, Hama, and Latakia, with some incidents resulting in deaths.

### 4.2. Fragmented military structure

The newly formed military forces were organized into three main layers: a core affiliated with Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), Sunni Islamist factions, and factions of the Syrian National Army (SNA), with no effective central coordination among them. This fragmented power structure allowed opportunistic criminal networks, individuals impersonating security forces, actual

security personnel, and armed groups connected to them to conduct abductions and extortion beyond the oversight of the central government, especially in rural areas and remote locations far from urban centers.

### 4.3. Economic motives

The severe economic crisis affecting the country, combined with the collapse of the Syrian pound and the dismissal of many workers, has created favorable conditions for illegal activities, including abduction and extortion. Ransom-motivated abduction has become a lucrative trade run by criminal networks and organized gangs that exploit the widespread availability of weapons and the lack of oversight, with ransom demands ranging from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of U.S. dollars in some cases. [Experts](#) believe that some armed groups use abduction to finance their military operations and purchase weapons.

### 4.4. Sectarian retaliation

Abduction has become a way to seek revenge and settle scores, developing into a systematic practice targeting community groups based on their religious identity. The increase in abductions after the fall of the Assad regime has been linked to a narrative that portrays the entire Alawite sect as collectively responsible for atrocities committed during his rule. This reasoning has turned ordinary civilians, especially women and girls, into “legitimate” targets for retaliation. Abduction cases rose sharply after the [coastal massacres](#) in March 2025. Human rights [reports](#) documented the use of [extremist sectarian language](#) by abductors, who called Alawite women “captive” and “infidels,” and the phenomenon of abductions and on-the-spot killings based on [identity](#) also emerged.

Sectarian-motivated abductions were not limited to Alawites. On 15 February 2025, the [Wadi al-Nasara](#) area in western rural Homs experienced attacks during which 12 Christian young men were abducted; nine of them remained hostages for an extended period. The alleged reason given by the abductors was “ringing the church bells.” A similar pattern occurred in As Suwayda during the security campaign in July 2025, after tensions between the Druze and Bedouins, involving mutual abductions as a form of military and social pressure. UN [reports](#) indicate that at least 105 Druze women and girls have been abducted by armed groups linked to the Transitional Syrian Authorities, with the fate of many still unknown.

### 4.5. Lack of accountability

The lack of accountability for those involved in violations, along with delays in the justice process and the deepening of a culture of impunity, creates a vicious cycle of violence. In this context, the absence of meaningful accountability directly encourages the escalation of abductions and retaliatory acts. Furthermore, failing to prosecute [perpetrators](#) or granting them amnesty before accountability is effectively a signal to criminal networks and unruly factions that they can continue abducting for profit, confident they will face no legal consequences.

[Evidence](#) indicates that the lack of transparent accountability for Assad regime officials has fostered an environment where Alawites are at risk as part of retaliatory actions. Since the government has not taken meaningful steps in this area, nor have victims received compensation, some perpetrators of abductions justify their actions as revenge for injustices suffered under the previous regime. Without formal justice, the phenomenon of “street justice” emerges, with local communities using it to reclaim their rights, sometimes engaging in counter-abductions.

## 5. Documented Abductions by Nature of Violation

### 5.1. Abduction for ransom

Abductions have become a main source of income for criminal networks and militias taking advantage of the security gap, with even children targeted in these schemes.

- On 8 October 2025, in Latakia, 13-year-old eighth grader Muhammad Qais Haidar was abducted in front of his school by armed men. He was only released after his family paid a large ransom.

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A relative described the incident saying,

“A group of masked armed men, traveling in two vehicles, abducted Muhammad in front of his school, Jamal Dawood, near the Tenth Project in Latakia. The incident took place openly in front of his classmates and passersby, amid shock and fear, with no one able to intervene. Muhammad is the son of a hematologist, and his mother is a teacher. The family had been living abroad and had recently returned to Syria to settle. A report of the abduction was filed at the police station, but it was of no use, as it was recorded without follow-up. Had the ransom not been paid, the child would have died.”

The child was [returned](#) to his family on 1 November 2025. In a press [statement](#), his uncle, Orwa Haidar, said,

“We did not know who the abductors were. The amount was so large that we had to sell our homes, cars, and clothes to pay the ransom. [Media reports](#) stated that the ransom paid was \$100,000.”

- Muhammad Ali Hawea (32), a farmer, was abducted from his home in al-Khandaq village in the Ghab Plain, rural Hama, by a group claiming affiliation with HTS. He was subjected to severe torture before being released after paying a ransom of \$5,000.

A relative of Muhammad recounted the abduction,

“On 13 March 2025, after coming home from work and while eating, Muhammad was surrounded by abductors who arrived in three vans and claimed affiliation with HTS. They took him in front of his family and children, subjecting him to verbal abuse, kicking, and beatings with weapons. When his older brother asked why Muhammad was being taken, the abductors said it was because he had cut down pomegranate trees. When

asked further about the reason for his abduction, they replied, 'We want to build our houses'."

In the evening, the abductors reached out to his family and initially demanded 75 million Syrian pounds (SYP), then 100 million, for his release, ultimately settling on a ransom of \$5,000.

The witness added,

"Several young men from the village were abducted along with Muhammad and subjected to intimidation in an attempt to extort money. When the family notified the local General Security office, officials stated that the abductors had only claimed affiliation with HTS and had no actual ties to the group; no action was taken. Losing all hope of effective intervention, the family decided to pay the ransom. Muhammad was released on 4 April 2025 after his family was forced to mortgage their house, car, and agricultural tractor. Upon his return, he remained bedridden for nearly two weeks due to the severity of the abuse he had suffered."

- Ahmed Abdul Karim Al-Abdullah (37) was abducted while returning from work in Homs. Surveillance cameras recorded a vehicle following him before the abduction, and it is believed that the motive was financial, as he was carrying bags of cash.

A relative of Ahmed recounted,

"Ahmed was abducted near the exhibition he manages on 15 October 2025, around 10:00 PM, by a black Azera car with a blue license plate reading 'Idlib – Test,' according to surveillance footage at the location".

He added,

"All we know is that he was returning home with a colleague, speaking on the phone with a friend. His friend heard Ahmed say, 'Wait, guys, wait!' followed by screams. The friend immediately notified the General Security, which tried to gather information and obtain surveillance footage. They told us they identified the car and its license plate".

He concluded,

"I believe the abduction was carried out for ransom, as Ahmed was carrying two bags of cash. However, no one has contacted us so far, and the General Security has not provided any further information".

## 5.2. Extrajudicial killings: abductions for retaliation

The violations extended beyond financial extortion, with reports also confirming cases of immediate physical liquidation of victims.

- Killing of brothers Mahmoud and Ahmad Mustafa: They were abducted in Homs along with their vehicle and subsequently executed.

A local source close to the victims' family stated,

“On 26 December 2024, Mahmoud and Ahmad left the family-owned cleaning supplies shop to buy goods, carrying 60 million SYP. They headed toward the al-Qusour neighborhood in Homs. In front of al-Abbasiyah Clinic, before al-Bayadah Roundabout, they were forced into a silver Tucson vehicle bearing Idlib plates around 12:00 noon, according to witnesses. Contact with them was lost afterward, and the vehicle was seen heading toward Deir Ba'alba. The family's Hyundai Verna, which was used as a taxi, was also taken. Mahmoud had worked as a chief accounting officer in Deir ez-Zor and had been discharged from the army after settling his status, while Ahmad was a lawyer”.

He added,

“I later learned that they were killed on 28 December, and their bodies were found on the al-Mimas road near the Orontes River. I was able to see photos of their bodies at the forensic department in al-Wa'er on one of the doctors' phones”.

The witness believes they were targeted because they lived in the Alawites-majority al-Muhajireen neighborhood.

- Killing of Engineer Mahmoud Hamed al-Deeb (69), from Homs: After heading to the Kafr Aya village to locate a water well as part of his work in artesian well surveying, he was abducted and killed.

A local source close to the victim stated,

“On 23 April 2025, Mahmoud went to identify the location of a water well in the Kafr Aya area. A meeting had been arranged with the concerned party at the southern bus station at 12:00 noon. He remained in constant contact with his wife, but after completing his work, contact was lost around 1:00 PM, and he did not return home by evening.”

The source added,

“On the morning of the following day, the family went to Bab Alsebaa Police Station to file a missing person report. On the evening of 24 April, his wife received a shocking call from Bab Alsebaa Police Station informing her that he had been treacherously killed. Upon contacting the Civil Defense, it was confirmed that his body had been found in an abandoned oil site in Kafr Aya, and forensic examination revealed that he had been shot in the back of his flank”.

### 5.3. Hostage-Taking

In July 2025, an armed group claiming affiliation with the General Security forces raided Daniel Darb Nasr's home in the village of Nijran, As-Suwayda Governorate, after surrounding the house and throwing grenades at it. The group then abducted his entire family, including his wife Nisreen, their daughters Venus and Vivian, and his cousin Adam.

The abductees were transferred between Daraa and Damascus and detained for more than one month and ten days, during which they were used as hostages to extort their families and as leverage in negotiations involving the exchange of detainees for wounded fighters.

A family source reported,

“On 19 July 2025, individuals in General Security uniforms abducted Adam, Daniel, and their family, taking their vehicle, gold jewelry, and U.S. dollars. They were initially detained at a school in Daraa used to house displaced people. During this time, a man with a Bedouin accent contacted me, asking for help in finding wounded fighters; he gave names and photos and demanded information in exchange for the family's release. I told him we are civilians and do not know these people. After six days, the family was moved to Damascus and held in a villa near the Conference Palace. The abductors stayed in contact, asking for information about certain individuals and vehicles. I reported the situation to the International Committee of the Red Cross in Damascus, which said it would raise the issue with the Transitional Government. Two days later, the family was released.”

### 5.4. Gender-Based Violence

- Abduction of Abeer Younes Suleiman (29): She was abducted in May 2025 in Tartous, right in the middle of the day while heading to the market. Her family later received a call from an Iraqi phone number, during which the abductor threatened them, saying, “She will not return. I swear I will kill anyone who asks about her”.

A local source close to the family testified,

“During the call, Abeer was crying heavily and looked exhausted and scared. She was trembling, and all her responses were, ‘I do not know, I cannot talk.’ When asked about her location, she said, ‘I do not know whether I am inside Syria or outside it. I do not understand their language; I do not know what they are saying’”.

Even though the family followed the abductors' demands and paid a ransom of \$15,000, her whereabouts remain unknown.

- Abduction of Zainab Nasr Diab (36): She was abducted in February 2025 from the village of Asilah in western rural Hama after going to a medical center. Her fate remains unknown.

A local source close to the victim confirmed,

“Four days after her disappearance, the abductors sent voice recordings to her daughter indicating that she was with a stranger and that her marriage contract had been concluded with him”.

- **Abduction and Assault of Raghad Abboud (15):** On 6 April 2025, in the village of Tayr Jumla, rural Masyaf, Raghad was abducted and violently beaten by masked gunmen in an unmarked vehicle, according to eyewitnesses, while she was on her way to the institute. She was held for two hours inside the vehicle, which drove around the village, during which the abductors threatened her and her family, stole her gold earring, and subjected her to physical and psychological abuse.

A local source close to the victim stated,

“No ransom was demanded, indicating that the abduction was intended as intimidation. Raghad was released in a remote area after the abductors panicked when her disappearance was quickly reported and her name circulated at checkpoints. She was later found exhausted by the roadside on the Mahrusah–Masyaf road, near agricultural lands.”

- **Disappearance of Rasha Kamel Mansour (30):** Her family reported her missing on 13 September 2025, from the Qatana area in rural Damascus. Four days later, she was found abandoned near the Jdaydet Artooz junction, showing signs of severe beating and torture. Her family declined to provide any official statement regarding what happened to her.

## 6. Government Response to the Abduction Crisis

### 6.1. Documented failures in handling abduction reports

Relatives of victims face systematic denial when reporting abductions to the Transitional Government’s security forces. Official responses are often marked by neglect or sectarian bias, and in cases involving the abduction of girls, families are often subjected to stigmatizing moral accusations that shift blame onto the victims themselves. The testimonies collected reveal a consistent pattern of impunity: in every case, the perpetrators’ identities remain unknown, and no one has been held accountable for these violations.

### 6.2. Negligence and minimization of the crime

Many relatives of the disappeared interviewed for this report expressed their frustration that security authorities did not take their cases seriously, including failing to file official reports or conduct thorough investigations. For example, in the case of the two young men, Mahmoud and Ahmad Mustafa, who were abducted and killed in the al-Nuzha neighborhood of Homs, a relative stated,

“After losing contact with them, I visited all police stations and the provincial police headquarters, but I was repeatedly turned away. They constantly asked about my sect and refused to file any official report. I went to the al-Bayadah and Bab Alsebaa police stations, as well as the provincial police headquarters, but to no avail. Only at the al-Hamidiyah station did officers write a report on a plain sheet of paper, but they did nothing regarding the case”.

### 6.3. Security collusion and involvement

In an abduction case in Safita city, a source (name withheld for the witness’s safety) reported that the governor denied any abductions had taken place, claiming that the girls had run away due to marriage, boredom, or family issues, and initially refused to file the complaint.

Nevertheless, after an investigation and the witness refuted these claims, an official report was eventually produced; however, the witness was neither given a copy nor the report number, and it was not shared with security branches in other cities or governorates. Additionally, security authorities failed to review surveillance footage from the abduction site or track the victim’s phone, despite their promises. Furthermore, the witness revealed serious security collusion: the abductors contacted him and provided detailed information about his activities within security offices, such as the room numbers he entered, confirming that the abductors were connected to the security apparatus.

### 6.4. Sectarian discrimination

Testimonies documented conduct by security forces motivated by sectarian bias, including verbal insults and mockery.

The mother of a girl abducted in Homs reported that she faced ridicule from police officers, who failed to take immediate action to search for her daughter. Instead of investigating the abduction, they questioned her daughter’s honor, making offensive remarks such as suggesting she was “at a party with her friends,” “using drugs like 80% of university students,” or “trying to become a trend like the girl [Mira](#).” The mother added,

“I believe the officer’s assumption that my daughter was at a party with friends came from his view that Alawite girls have a lot of freedom to act as they please without limits. I denied and challenged this idea when he tried, in a way, to question my daughter’s honor.”

### 6.5. Government statements

Statements and comments from the Transitional Authorities, led by Ahmed al-Sharaa, were inconsistent, shifting between official denial and promises to hold perpetrators accountable, amidst rights-based criticism of their handling of the issue.

Ahmed al-Sharaa [described](#) the mass killings and abductions targeting members of the Alawite community in the coastal region as “isolated incidents and criminal acts,” rather than

government policy, calling them a “threat to his efforts to reunify the country.” He publicly [promised](#) to hold those responsible accountable, even if they were “among his closest associates.”

During a [meeting](#) with local elders and prominent figures from Latakia and Tartous governorates at the People’s Palace, al-Sharaa stated that “the state holds no exclusionary or vengeful tendencies toward any community. Syria is a civic state that ensures justice and safeguards the rights of all Syrians.” In the same meeting, representatives of local families confirmed that cases of women’s abduction had occurred on the Syrian coast, condemning the government narrative that labeled them as instances of “elopement for romantic reasons.”

In July 2025, Anas Khattab, the Minister of Interior in the Transitional Government, established an investigative committee to look into complaints about the abduction of women and girls along the Syrian coast. The committee’s findings were announced by the Ministry of Interior spokesperson, Nour al-Din al-Baba, in November 2025. At a [press conference](#), al-Baba announced that the committee had collected, verified, and documented all reports and posts related to abduction cases from the start of 2025 through 10 September.

He mentioned that the committee “recorded 42 cases of disappearance in 60 sessions over three months, of which only one was confirmed as an abduction,” describing most reports circulating on social media as “false claims” or cases of “voluntary disappearance due to family issues or romantic reasons”.

Both the head of the Investigation Committee for the Coastal Events, Judge Jomaa al-Anzi, and its spokesperson, Yasser al-Farhan, [denied](#) that any girls had been abducted from the Syrian coast in connection with the violations that occurred there in March 2025. Al-Anzi stated that the committee reviewed 948 testimonies and briefings from numerous officials and met with hundreds of victims, yet received no reports of girls being abducted; “neither verbally nor in writing,” he said.

Al-Farhan stated that the committee was informed about some abducted women being returned, [describing](#) these incidents as criminal acts that need to be addressed.

Meanwhile, Anas Ayrouth, a member of the Civil Peace Committee, swore on air during an [interview](#) on the state Syrian News Channel three times that no women had been abducted, stating, “By God, what I say is true; by God, there is not a single incident,” and dismissed all reports on the matter as mere fabrication.

## 6.6. Rights-based Criticism

The authorities’ refusal to acknowledge abduction incidents, along with how the government handles these cases, has caused widespread frustration.

Agnès Callamard, the UN Secretary-General of Amnesty International, [criticized](#) the Syrian government for failing to stop abductions and kidnappings of women and girls, to prevent physical abuse, forced marriage, and likely trafficking in persons, and for not effectively investigating or prosecuting those responsible.

She added,

“Authorities have a legal and moral responsibility to act to prevent and punish gender-based violence. All women in Syria deserve to live free from fear of abuse, discrimination and persecution. Investigations must be prompt and thorough, led by independent investigators with full access to the necessary resources. Accountability must be pursued, and reparation should be provided. A failure to do so is a human rights violation.”

UN experts, for their part, [stated](#) that the government's response has been inadequate; the Syrian Interim Government reportedly failed to conduct timely and impartial investigations in most cases, and in some instances, refused to register complaints or dismissed families' concerns, noting that several cases involved security actors or individuals affiliated with the institutions of the interim Government. “Authorities have an obligation under international law to protect all women and girls from violence, provide effective remedies, and ensure access to justice, protection and assistance, including psychosocial support,” the experts said. They urged the government to end this cycle of violence and rebuild confidence in the judicial and legal systems.

A [statement](#) issued by a group of Syrian civil society organizations and independent activists also criticized the investigative committee report formed by the Ministry of Interior on crimes of abduction against women, describing it as “humiliating and shocking, facilitating attacks on women’s honor and the degradation of their dignity. The report does not merely deny the suffering of women but turns them and their families into the accused”.

The abduction of women is a crime of a particularly sensitive nature, requiring precise professional investigation standards that consider the vulnerability of victims and the specific traits of the offense, standards that the committee did not meet. According to the statement, “the committee fails to meet requirements of independence and professional competence, as it is composed entirely of ministry employees, with no mention of female participation among its members. Moreover, no evidence has been provided to demonstrate that its members possess specialized expertise in this type of crime, or that they offered protections for victims and their families.” Additionally, “the ministry did not disclose the mechanisms for communicating with the committee, its investigative methodology, or the criteria relied upon in drawing its conclusions, rendering these findings professionally unsound and unreliable,” the statement added.

## 7. Major Repercussions of Abduction

### 7.1. Psychological and social impact on women and their families

Testimonies from women who survived abduction reveal that they have endured severe psychological trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), loss of self-confidence, and intense feelings of guilt and shame. In conservative communities, abductions are worsened

by social stigma and the pressure to remain silent in order to protect the family's reputation. When abducted women are released, their families often avoid discussing what happened, [fearing](#) retaliation from the perpetrators who are still at large, authorities demanding secrecy, and the victims themselves, who may deny the crime occurred.

In one case, a husband divorced his wife, who had survived abduction and forced marriage, and married another woman immediately after her return, saying he could not bear the "social responsibility" of the incident. Families of other survivors faced social pressure that forced them to leave their original villages, and some moved as a safety measure.

The effects also spread to entire communities, creating a widespread sense of fear among women and girls. Many [avoid](#) leaving their homes alone because of repeated daytime abductions while going to school or work. [Reports](#) also documented cases where female students had to stop their education in coastal areas and As Suwayda due to security concerns.

## 7.2. Threat to social cohesion

Abduction cases, especially those targeting minority groups like Alawites, Druze, and Christians, have damaged mutual trust among Syria's social groups and worsened sectarian divides. Revenge-driven abductions after the [coastal](#) and [As Suwayda](#) massacres increased sectarian hostility, with some communities viewing the abductions as part of a campaign of "ethnic cleansing" or "systematic extermination".

This was accompanied by an increase in hate speech, especially on social media, and narratives that blamed entire sects, effectively turning civilians into "legitimate" targets. The lack of security and the loss of faith in the government's ability to recover abducted persons or punish perpetrators also sparked "vigilante justice" or "street justice." Families in [As Suwayda](#) and the [coastal](#) areas took justice into their own hands through counter-abductions or field executions of abductors as acts of revenge.

## 7.3. Erosion of trust in authorities

A sense of frustration grew over how the Transitional Government handled abduction cases, especially after the Ministry of Interior [dismissed](#) most reports as "false claims" and, in many cases, blamed the victims. Local communities saw this as a failure to take responsibility and provide protection. Thousands of people in Latakia, Tartous, and Jableh held unprecedented [protests](#) against the government, criticizing the security vacuum amid rising acts of killings and abductions, and calling for the release of those detained.

## 7.4. New waves of displacement

Due to rising abductions and revenge killings, human rights reports and field analyses documented waves of internal displacement from isolated villages and areas with sectarian diversity or "frontline" zones to more homogeneous regions or city centers in search of safety.

In many cases, families made this displacement as a precautionary step to avoid falling victim

to abduction networks or retaliatory attacks based on their identity. [Alawite villages](#), for example, saw large-scale displacement toward safer areas or inland rural zones, fearing the recurrence of massacres and sectarian violations that had previously targeted residents.

Thousands of residents from southern As Suwayda also [fled](#) their original villages to urban centers such as As Suwayda city, or to other governorates like Daraa and rural Damascus, escaping abductions, roadside ambushes, and retaliatory raids that [affected](#) them during the summer of the previous year.

## 7.5. Threat to foreign investment

Despite the Transitional Government's efforts to attract foreign capital necessary for reconstruction, the security vacuum remains a major obstacle. Ongoing abductions and financial extortion are [seen](#) as significant risks to investment flows, undermining investor confidence.

[Analysts](#) also warn that as international personnel and companies continue to arrive, foreign nationals may be targeted because they are seen as "high-value" by abductors, making them potential future targets. This situation increases insurance and security costs.

Furthermore, worsening security and economic conditions, along with ongoing extortion of merchants and small business owners in Aleppo, Damascus, and the coastal regions, have led some enterprises to [close](#) or relocate to neighboring countries such as Türkiye and Egypt.

## 7.6. Decline in refugee returns

The rise in abductions and the unstable security environment have led to a significant drop in Syrian refugees' willingness to return from neighboring countries. Although January 2025 showed some signs of [optimism](#), UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) surveys published in June 2025 indicated a 33% [decline](#) in the intention to return.

An [analytical report](#) by the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP) in December 2025, primarily based on UNHCR survey data, found that return intentions dropped by 45% among refugees in Jordan and 41% in Lebanon from January to June 2025.

Refugees in Lebanon and Jordan linked this decline to real fears of arbitrary detention by HTS, ransom-driven abductions on international roads, and [ongoing Israeli military operations](#) in southern Syria. Many prefer to stay in exile rather than risk their lives due to the lack of the rule of law. The report concluded that conditions in Syria are still unsafe for a safe and sustainable return because of the lack of political progress and worsening human rights conditions.

## 8. Legal Opinion

The documented abductions in the governorates of Latakia, Tartous, Homs, Hama, As Suwayda, and Rural Damascus represent serious violations of international human rights law, international criminal law, and Syrian domestic law.

Abductions for ransom or to force women and girls into marriage breach the fundamental human right to liberty and personal security, as protected by Article 3 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\)](#) and Article 9 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#). Both documents state that everyone has the right to liberty and security, and no one should be subject to arbitrary arrest or detention.

The fact that the fate of four victims remains unknown, based on testimonies documented for this report, constitutes the crime of enforced disappearance under the [UN Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance \(ICPPED\)](#) and infringes on the [victims' and their families' right to know the truth](#).

If it is established that the abductions documented in this report targeted a specific population group (Alawite, Druze, or Christian) with systematic sectarian and political motives on a broad scale, such acts may qualify as crimes against humanity under Article 7 of the [Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court \(ICC Rome Statute\)](#).

The physical assault and torture of abductees, the use of abusive and degrading language against them, as well as the rape and sexual violence inflicted on female victims, are clear violations of the UN [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment \(CAT\)](#). These acts also violate provisions of the UDHR and ICCPR. Furthermore, the killing of three victims, as documented in this report, is a blatant violation of the right to life guaranteed under those treaties and constitutes extrajudicial killing.

Furthermore, documented cases of forced marriage under threat for some female victims clearly violate a woman's right to freely choose her partner, as guaranteed under Article 16 of the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#). Additionally, the fear expressed by women in certain areas about leaving their homes due to the risk of abduction or harassment, as reported by witnesses in this report and corroborated by human rights organizations, violates the freedom of movement guaranteed under the UDHR and ICCPR.

From the perspective of Syrian law, the acts committed against the victims clearly violate the [2025 Syrian Constitutional Declaration](#), which states that the state: Protects the sanctity of private life, with any violation punishable by law; Guarantees freedom of movement; Safeguards human dignity and bodily integrity; explicitly bans enforced disappearances, physical, and psychological torture, with no statute of limitations for torture crimes; and ensures women's social, economic, and political rights, shielding them from all forms of oppression, injustice, and violence. The Declaration also states: "The state protects human rights and fundamental freedoms, and all rights and freedoms enshrined in the international human rights treaties, conventions, and agreements ratified by Syria form an integral and indivisible part of this Constitutional Declaration".

According to the [Syrian Penal Code](#), depriving someone of their freedom through abduction without a court order is considered the crime of unlawful detention, as detailed in Articles 555 and subsequent sections. The offense is criminal and carries a minimum sentence of three years in prison if it involves physical or psychological torture or if the deprivation lasts longer than one month.

Additionally, the penalty for abduction was increased under [Legislative Decree No. 20 of 2013](#), which states in Article 1: “Anyone who abducts a person, depriving them of their liberty with the intent of pursuing a political or financial goal, seeking revenge, acting for sectarian reasons, or demanding ransom, shall be punished with life hard labor.”

In addition, acts of torture or degrading treatment are criminalized under Article 391 of the Syrian Penal Code and [Law No. 16 of 2022](#), which increased penalties for offenders. This law adopts a definition of torture consistent with the UN CAT and goes beyond the convention by extending liability not only to acts committed or supervised by public officials but also to acts carried out by any individual or group, thereby expanding the personal scope of accountability for this crime.

According to the testimony of a source documented in this report, one of the abducted women was subjected to severe humiliation and rape. Such acts are punishable under the Syrian Penal Code (Articles 489 and following), which states that: “Anyone who coerces a person other than their spouse into sexual intercourse by violence or threat shall be punished with hard labor for a minimum of fifteen years, and the penalty shall not be less than twenty-one years if the victim is under the age of fifteen.”

The Transitional Syrian Government holds primary legal responsibility for protecting civilians and ensuring their safety. This includes a vital duty to conduct thorough and transparent investigations into all suspected abduction cases, determine the circumstances, and hold perpetrators accountable. However, the current approach of concealing the nature of these crimes and protecting the offenders, by official statements dismissing reports as “false claims” or “romantic elopements”, represents a clear evasion of legal responsibility and effectively allows these crimes to continue, especially since some incidents involve individuals linked to government institutions. The authorities’ refusal to register complaints from families, as confirmed by UN experts, is a serious breach of the government’s obligations. Furthermore, blaming the victims and questioning their morality adds to the violation of their dignity, sustains a culture of impunity, and encourages further abuses.

## 9. Summary and Recommendations

The evidence documented in this report shows that abductions in Syria in 2025 are no longer isolated criminal acts. Instead, they have become tools for sectarian revenge and sources of income for organized crime, targeting the core of Syrian society. The Transitional Government’s ongoing policy of denial and attacks on victims’ morality not only fail to offer protection but also provide political and legal cover, allowing perpetrators to go unpunished.

Justice cannot be achieved without fully uncovering the truth, protecting Syrian citizens of all backgrounds, and ending the culture of impunity fueled by inciting rhetoric and security gaps.

Based on the findings of this report, STJ has developed a set of recommendations that, if implemented with genuine, committed political will, could serve as a roadmap to confront the violations documented here and prevent their recurrence. The recommendations can be summarized as follows:

### **9.1.To the Transitional Syrian Government**

- End the policy of officially denying violations, acknowledge the realities on the ground, and fulfill your legal obligations to protect civilians without discrimination, in accordance with the Constitutional Declaration and relevant Syrian laws;
- Conduct transparent and independent investigations into all reports and complaints, especially those related to abductions documented in this report, and prosecute perpetrators regardless of their factional ties or connections to government institutions;
- Avoid making accusations that harm the dignity of victims and ensure their safe access to complaint centers without intimidation;
- Integrate abductions and related violations into the main mandates of the National Commission for Transitional Justice and the National Commission for the Missing to ensure victims can access justice, clarify abduction circumstances, locate the missing, and hold perpetrators responsible;
- Pass comprehensive laws defining hate speech according to international standards, criminalizing all forms of incitement to violence or discrimination based on religious, sectarian, or ethnic identity;
- Reform the security sector and strengthen the role of an independent judiciary to break the cycle of “street justice” and rebuild citizens’ trust in state institutions.

### **9.2.To International and local organizations and institutions**

- Human rights organizations should strengthen on-the-ground documentation of violations to ensure evidence is preserved and support future accountability efforts. They should also launch awareness campaigns to combat hate speech and sectarian incitement targeting civilians for revenge, while promoting the values of equal citizenship;
- Human rights organizations should monitor the actions of the government and the National Commissions for Transitional Justice and the Missing to ensure transparent investigations into abduction cases and related violations. They must ensure that crimes such as abduction, torture, and sexual violence are included in reparations efforts and are not dismissed due to statutes of limitations;
- The Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic (IIMP) should pay special attention to the abduction victims of 2025 to establish the fate of those still missing and clarify the motives and circumstances of these violations;
- The COI Syria and the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) should prioritize this issue, initiate investigations, gather evidence, and produce thematic reports specifically addressing these crimes.



## ABOUT STJ

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) started as an idea in a co-founder's mind while attending the U.S. Middle-East Partnership Initiative's (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program (LDF) in 2015. The idea became a reality and flourished into an independent, non-profit, impartial, non-governmental human rights organization.

STJ's beginnings were more than humble; initially, it only reported stories of Syrians who experienced arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, or torture. Planted in fertile soil, the seed of this project grew into an established human rights organization licensed in the Middle East and the European Union. STJ today undertakes to detect and uncover violations of all types committed in all Syrian parts by the various parties to the conflict.

Convinced that Syria's diversity is a wealth, our researchers and volunteers serve with unfailing dedication to monitor, expose, and document human rights violations that continue unabated in Syria since 2011, regardless of the affiliation of the victims or perpetrators.