

## "The Unwritten Pass": Employment Exclusion and Discrimination in State Institutions During the Transitional Phase



- STJ Calls On The Syrian Transitional Government To Halt Arbitrary Dismissals And Forced Transfers, Ensure Transparency In The Restructuring Of The Public Sector, Prevent Discrimination Based On Sectarian Affiliation, Political Views, Or Gender, And Establish Effective Mechanisms For Review, Appeal, And Legal Accountability

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## **"The Unwritten Pass": Employment Exclusion and Discrimination in State Institutions During the Transitional Phase**

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## 1. Introduction:

Following the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime on December 8, 2024, Syrian state institutions witnessed [extensive changes](#) affecting the administrative and functional structure across several public sectors. These changes included the termination of contracts for tens of thousands of employees, the suspension of salary disbursements, placing staff on extended leave, and executing abrupt occupational transfers to areas far from their original workplaces or professional specializations, amidst an absence of clear and transparent criteria governing these procedures.

In this context, STJ documented new testimonies from former employees in various government institutions, including the judiciary, education, ports, and state-affiliated construction enterprises. They spoke about being subjected to measures they described as arbitrary or discriminatory. These included unjustified dismissal, arbitrary transfer, exclusion from employment, or the deprivation of their salaries and insurance rights, without being provided with reasoned administrative decisions or granted access to effective avenues for appeal or grievance.

The testimonies documented by STJ indicate that some of these measures were not based on administrative or organizational considerations; rather, they were linked to sectarian, political, or gender backgrounds, or to criteria related to the individual's stance on the Syrian uprising (in 2011), or regional and social affiliation. This raises serious concerns regarding the use of the state institution restructuring process as a tool for exclusion and the reshaping of the public sector on non-professional bases.

The testimonies further reveal the profound humanitarian and economic impacts of these practices, including the loss of income sources, the disruption of pension and insurance rights, and forcing some families into migration or displacement, in addition to the exacerbation of feelings of fear and instability among broad segments of public sector workers.

The report aims to shed light on the patterns of dismissal, employment exclusion, and arbitrary transfer within Syrian state institutions following the fall of the regime. It seeks to analyze them in light of the provisions of Syrian law and relevant international standards, particularly the principles of equality and non-discrimination, the right to work, and the right to effective legal protection.

For the purpose of preparing this report, STJ interviewed 5 witnesses and victims. The informed consent of the participants was obtained after explaining the voluntary nature of their participation and how the information would be used -including the publication of this report- and informing them of their right to withdraw their consent at any time.

Upon their request, pseudonyms were used to refer to the witnesses, and any details that could lead to the disclosure of their identities or expose them or their families to the risk of reprisal were withheld.

## 2. Background: The Restructuring of Public Institutions in Post-Assad Syria:

The transitional phase following the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime was accompanied by administrative turmoil and instability within a multitude of Syrian state institutions. This occurred amid the absence of a clear and publicly articulated vision regarding the mechanisms for restructuring public sector, as well as the criteria adopted for retaining, terminating, or transferring employees.

Amidst this ambiguity, mounting complaints emerged from current and former employees across various government institutions. They reported being subjected to arbitrary and discriminatory measures, including dismissal from employment, placement on extended leave, transfer to regions far from their places of residence or professional expertise, or exclusion from employment and promotional opportunities without adequate legal justification.

Although the new authorities announced that some of these measures align with efforts to "[restructure the economy](#)" and address what they described as "disguised unemployment" within state institutions, the lack of published criteria and clear legal mechanisms –coupled with the failure to issue detailed administrative decisions articulating the grounds for dismissal, transfer, or exclusion– has provoked widespread anxiety and uncertainty among public sector workers.

In several governorates, particularly in the Alawite-majority Syrian coastal regions, these measures coincided with escalating security tensions and [sectarian rhetoric](#) following [the violent events witnessed in the area in March 2025](#). This was followed by heightened fears, particularly among members of the Alawite community, of being targeted or excluded within state institutions. STJ had previously [documented](#) multiple testimonies concerning mass dismissals and employment exclusion affecting Alawite employees, amidst allegations that sectarian affiliation or political stance was used as a determining factor in certain employment decisions.

In this context, this report documents a collection of testimonies reflecting a facet of the transformations experienced by the Syrian public sector during the transitional phase. It also highlights the attendant legal and administrative challenges, as well as the apprehensions related to discrimination, exclusion, and the lack of transparency in human resources management within state institutions.

## 3. Arbitrary Dismissal and Forced Transfer in State Institutions:

STJ documented several testimonies where individuals reported being subjected to dismissal from work, contract termination, or exclusion from public service under circumstances that lacked clarity and sufficient legal safeguards. In a number of cases, witnesses stated that decisions were made abruptly without providing clear

administrative reasons or offering effective avenues for appeal or grievance, leaving them in a state of professional and livelihood instability.

In this context, "Sanaa," an administrative employee at the Ministry of Education (from the Alawite community) who was appointed through the 2021 central employment competition contracts, stated that her contract was terminated in early 2026 despite not having reached its legal expiration. She added that the decision affected many workers in the education directorates without clear explanations regarding the reasons or the adopted criteria. She said:

**"I was informed of my contract's termination effective from the first month of 2026, even though our contracts are for five years and had not yet reached their legal term that would allow for termination or non-renewal."**

She added that the paradox for her lay in the fact that the same authorities announced new employment competitions at a time when the contracts of employees filling actual vacancies were being terminated. She questioned:

**"If there are vacancies and a shortage of staff, why dismiss this large number of male and female workers instead of retaining them in their positions?"**

In another testimony, "George," a civilian employee (Christian) who worked for over 32 years at the Military Construction Establishment in Homs, stated that workers at the establishment stopped receiving their salaries in December 2024, before being asked to remain at home pending the appointment of a new administration. He added that the absence of any official explanations later prompted him to submit his resignation in the hope of obtaining his insurance or pension entitlements; however, as of the time of the interview, he remained unaware of the fate of his rights. He stated:

**"To this moment, I am still going back and forth between the relevant authorities without knowing the fate of my financial and insurance rights."**

He also noted that many employees who had spent long years in service found themselves at risk of losing their compensation due to stalled administrative procedures and the uncertain fate of the institutions they worked for, adding:

**"The establishment is currently devoid of key administrative positions, and all workers have been sent home without salaries, and no grant or compensation has been disbursed."**

In Latakia governorate, "Nihad," an engineer (from the Alawite community) who worked in the Syrian Ports for 31 years, recounted how the restructuring procedures turned, according to her description, into a tool to force a large number of employees to resign or leave their jobs. She said the new administration granted workers three-month

leaves before subsequently issuing transfer decisions to distant areas that correspond neither to their professional specializations nor their social circumstances.

She added that out of approximately 335 employees who were removed from their work, only one Alawite employee remained in the establishment. She explained that she received a message via the WhatsApp application informing her that her workplace was transferred to the city of Al-Bukamal, despite her extensive experience in the ports and maritime sector. She said:

**"I requested a meeting with the director to ask him why he transferred me to Al-Bukamal, and what I would do there when I am an expert in my field, having worked on establishing several Gulf ports, including ports in Saudi Arabia."**

According to her statement, the administration informed her that the decision was not considered a dismissal but a "transfer," despite the fact that the transfer, as she stated, was entirely unrelated to the nature of her work and professional expertise. She added:

**"I submitted my resignation immediately, and it was accepted at that very moment. This is administrative arbitrariness; it is not permissible to accept a resignation until after 60 days."**

"Nihad" said that these measures forced her to leave the job where she had spent most of her professional life, without having clear alternatives for work or stability, adding:

**"I am now middle-aged and without a job, and I only know how to work in ports, so where do I go?"**

In one of the testimonies, STJ documented the case of a female teacher from Tartous governorate, whose dismissal from her job (during the dismissal campaigns that targeted a number of workers in the education sector) coincided with a severe deterioration in her family's security and living situation, especially following the events in the Syrian coast in March 2025. According to the testimony, the family was forced to flee Syria to Lebanon via an irregular border crossing after paying bribes, amid growing security fears and the loss of their primary source of income. A member of her family said:

**"Because of this arbitrary dismissal, the family lost its financial and livelihood security after having already lost its personal security."**

He added that upon arriving in Lebanon, the family faced difficult conditions, including housing and education costs. Their child also had to transfer to a new school in Lebanon in the middle of the academic year, struggling to adapt and keep up with the curricula and foreign languages compared to her new peers, which caused additional financial and psychological pressure on the family.

#### 4. Discrimination and Exclusion in Access to Public Employment:

In some cases, the impact of these measures extended beyond the loss of employment or income to include a feeling of exclusion from the public sphere and a loss of trust in the existence of professional or legal criteria governing employment and retention within state institutions.

In this context, "Zeina" (from the Sunni community), a lawyer holding a master's degree in family protection and domestic violence with extensive professional experience in law and arbitration, spoke about her experience applying for a judicial competition following the fall of the regime. She stated that she successfully passed the written exam and legal interviews, obtaining high marks. However, the final interview, according to her description, deviated from assessing legal competence and leaned towards questions of a personal, religious, and political nature.

She said that some of the questions posed to her were not related to judicial qualifications, but rather addressed her stance on the revolution or her religious practices and personal life, adding:

**"It was clear from the nature of the questions that there was a predetermined inclination towards selecting specific individuals."**

She added that the most prominent question directed at her was:

**"What have you done during the 14 years? Or in other words: What have you contributed to the revolution?"**

According to her statement, she felt after the interview that her social and personal background played a role in her exclusion, despite her extensive professional experience, stating:

**"I realized that my answer was not the answer they wanted, and that I do not possess the unwritten 'pass'."**

She also noted hearing comments from other applicants indicating that the chances of acceptance for non-hijabi women were weaker, adding:

**"Outside the halls, I heard many colleagues saying: If you do not wear the hijab, you will not be accepted."**

At the conclusion of her testimony, "Zeina" stated that she felt she had been subjected to a form of discrimination for being a non-hijabi woman and based on her personal appearance, adding:

**"In the end, I feel that I was subjected to injustice, and to a form of gender-based violence, simply because I am a woman and do not wear the hijab."**

In the context of concerns related to increasing indicators of discrimination based on gender and personal appearance within certain official institutions, [activists](#) and [lawyers](#) circulated information regarding the denial of entry to several female lawyers to the Civil Registry Department [Locally known as 'Noufous'] on Al-Thawra Street in Damascus, under the pretext of "preventing gender mixing". According to the circulated information, this measure led to the obstruction of legal and administrative transactions related to the lawyers' clients, in the absence of any officially announced decision regulating these restrictions or defining their legal basis. This raised additional concerns regarding the restriction of women's access to workplaces and public institutions on discriminatory grounds.

These testimonies, despite the variance in the sectors and institutions from which they originated, reflect recurring fears among many workers and applicants for public employment regarding the absence of clear and transparent criteria governing dismissal, transfer, or employment decisions. They also highlight the apprehension that some of these decisions may be influenced by factors related to sectarian, political, or gender backgrounds, amidst weak mechanisms for review and grievance and a lack of adequate official explanations.

## **5. Legal Framework and Issues Related to Dismissal, Transfer, and Employment Decisions:**

The testimonies presented in this report raise a set of legal issues concerning the extent to which public entities in Syria adhere to the principles of equality and transparency in human resources management within state institutions, particularly regarding decisions of dismissal from work, contract termination, administrative transfer, and employment in public service.

According to the testimonies, some measures were taken without providing reasoned administrative decisions or allowing actual opportunities for appeal or grievance. This raises questions regarding the compatibility of these practices with the legal rules governing public service, which stipulate, in principle, that administrative decisions must be based on clear and legitimate reasons, and must be subject to legal procedures and safeguards that ensure the employee's right to review and appeal.

Furthermore, some documented incidents raise concerns related to the principle of equality and equal opportunity in access to public employment, especially in cases that included indicators of discrimination based on sectarian affiliation, political background, gender, or personal appearance. These are considerations that are not supposed to

form the basis for employment decisions or professional evaluations within state institutions.

According to [the Basic Law of State Employees No. 50 of 2004](#), which remains in effect in Syria pursuant to the Constitutional Declaration, the penalty of dismissal or expulsion from service is considered an aggravated disciplinary penalty that may only be imposed pursuant to a judgment issued by the competent disciplinary court for trying employees in public entities, while the administration's authority is limited to executing the judgment, not issuing it. The testimonies documented by STJ do not contain any indication that such judgments were issued against the employees who were dismissed or whose contracts were terminated, which raises legal issues regarding the legality of some of the dismissal and employment exclusion procedures documented in this report.

The same law also stipulates the rights of employees regarding compensations, end-of-service bonuses, and retirement pensions commensurate with the actual period of service, whereas some testimonies indicate cases of ambiguity or obstruction in the disbursement of these entitlements. Likewise, the law contains no provision authorizing the imposition of long-term "forced leaves" of the kind mentioned in some statements, raising additional questions about the legal basis for these measures and the extent of their compatibility with the rules governing public service.

International human rights standards, including the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), and the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), stipulate the right to work, equality before the law, protection from discrimination, and the right to an adequate standard of living and a life of dignity. This is in addition to guaranteeing the right to equal access to public employment and the availability of effective remedies against arbitrary decisions. Similarly, the [International Labour Organization \(ILO\) Convention No. 111 of 1958](#), emphasized the commitment of states to enact national policies aimed at promoting equality of opportunity and treatment in respect of employment and occupation, with a view to eliminating all forms of discrimination in this context.

## 6. Recommendations:

In light of the testimonies documented in this report, and the concerns they reveal regarding arbitrary dismissal, discrimination, and the lack of transparency in public sector management during the transitional phase, STJ calls upon the relevant Syrian authorities and the international community to take the following measures:

### 6.2. To the Syrian Transitional Government and Relevant Administrative Authorities:

- Halt all procedures of dismissal, transfer, or contract termination that are not based on clear and publicly announced legal grounds.

- Publish transparent and written criteria regarding public sector restructuring, as well as mechanisms for employment, transfer, and termination of service.
- Ensure that sectarian or political affiliation, social background, or gender are not used as a basis for making employment decisions.
- Initiate an independent review of dismissal and transfer decisions issued after December 2024, empower affected individuals to submit effective appeals, and urge the National Commission for Transitional Justice to exercise its mandated role in this regard.
- Guarantee the right of workers to receive their salaries, insurance, and pension entitlements without delay or discrimination.
- Refrain from using administrative transfer as a means of pressure to force employees into resigning or leaving their jobs.
- Adopt professional and impartial criteria in employment, and ensure that applicants are not subjected to questions of a religious, political, or discriminatory nature.
- Strengthen transparency and accountability mechanisms within state institutions, ensure the provision of reasoned administrative decisions related to human resources, and monitor the extent of institutions' compliance with the laws governing public service and the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

## **6.2. To the United Nations and Relevant International Actors:**

- Monitor the situation of dismissed workers or those affected by restructuring procedures in Syria, and include these violations in reports related to economic and social rights and non-discrimination.
- Support efforts aimed at enhancing transparency, as well as legal and administrative reform, within Syrian state institutions.
- Emphasize, in communications with Syrian authorities, the necessity of respecting the principles of equality, equal opportunity, the right to work, a life of dignity, and respect for the rule of law.



## 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.

## ABOUT Ceasefire



The Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights aims to empower civilians in situations of armed conflict or prevailing insecurity to document violations of their rights; to seek justice and accountability for violations of civilian rights; and to develop the practice of civilian rights protection and raise public support for the promotion of civilian rights.

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