

# The Demographic Change in Syria 2021-2011



## Prepared by

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## Introduction

In mid-2011, the number of the population in Syria was officially estimated at more than 21 million<sup>1</sup>. It closely approximated the figures issued by the United Nations at the time, with a growth rate of 1.7%<sup>2</sup>.

In 2021, the number of the population in Syria was considerably changed as a result of the conflict that broke out in 2011, after the Syrian regime used excessive force against the peaceful protests and while the conflicting parties were struggling to seize control over areas, as displacements took place and agreements were held that led to the departure of large numbers of the population, and the economic and living conditions forced a large number of people to leave Syria.

Thus, the total number of Syrians has become a little more than 26 million people distributed across different regions and groups, of whom about 16 million are inside the country, and nearly 9 million outside, in addition to more than a million dead or missing people.



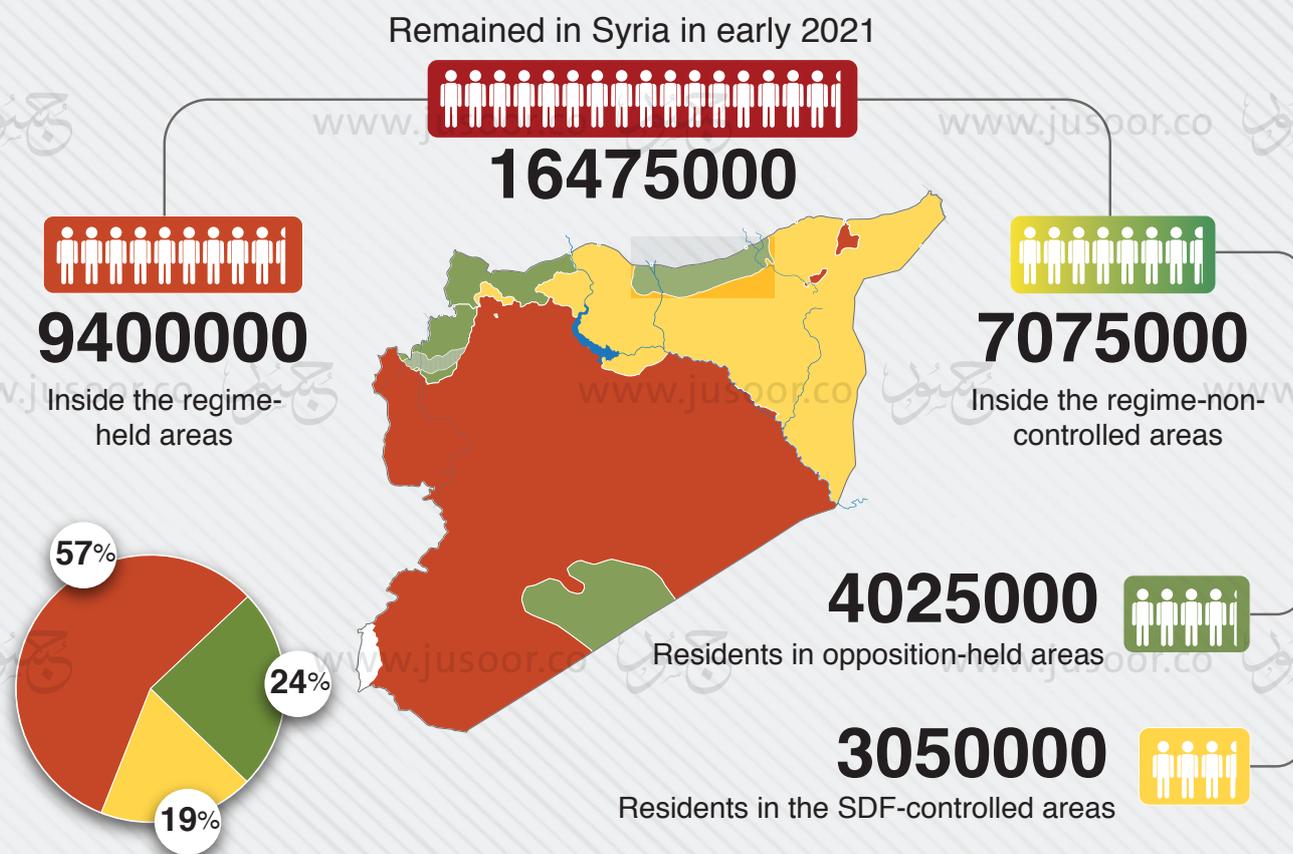
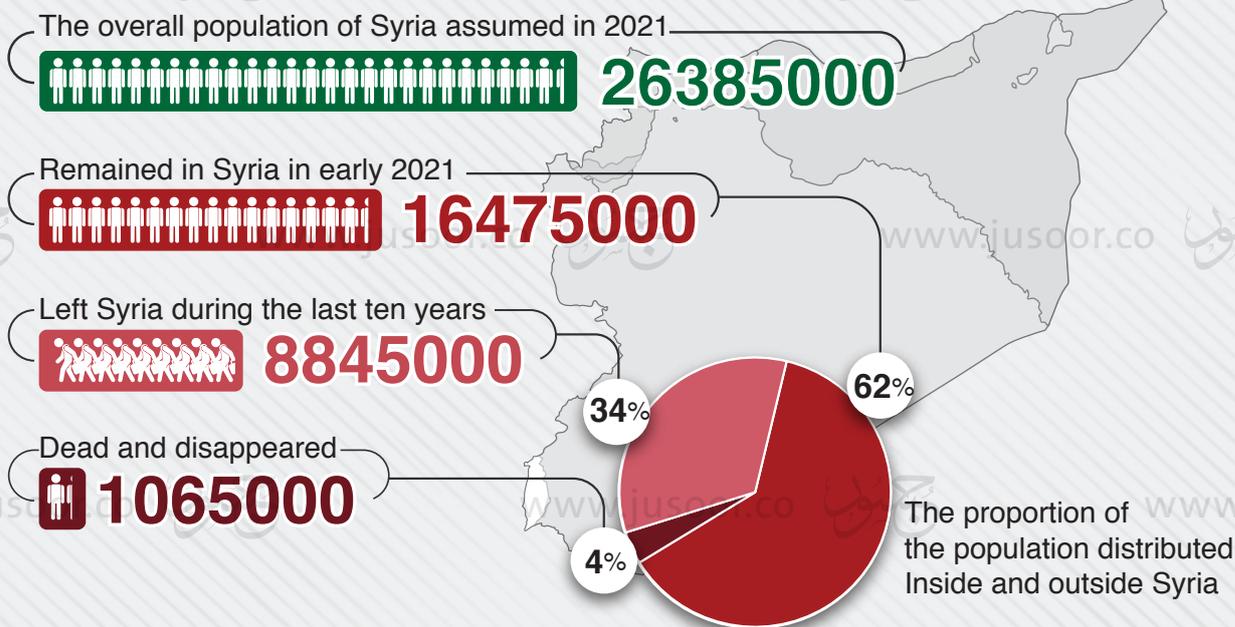
<sup>1</sup>“Estimating the number of people who were on the Syrian territory between the years of 2011-2018”. Central Statistics Office, 2019, <https://cutt.us/wYXPP>

<sup>2</sup>The State of the World Population 2011. United Nations Population Fund, 31-10-2011, <https://cutt.us/ZvcyP>



Table No. (1)

### Clarification on the population distribution inside and outside Syria and the areas of control



The figures of the displaced and people living outside Syria in the post2011- period were prepared based on data from the United Nations and other international organizations, official data from the countries in which the Syrians reside, and at least one local source in each country, in addition to weights, using expert opinions

These numbers have been subjected to multiple calculations and intensive study and discussions by experts and specialists in the field of demography and statistical methods. In general, we can say:

- The data of the displaced and those who live outside Syria in the post-2011 period were based on three main sources: the data of the United Nations and international organizations<sup>3</sup>, Official data from the countries in which the Syrians live, and at least one local source in each country. Taking into consideration the weighting of the final number depending on the opinions of experts to give weight to an arithmetic average for the various data received.
- Population data in the different areas of control, the estimate was based on a set of official references issued by accredited bodies, and data on displacement issued by international and local institutions<sup>4</sup>; in addition to mathematical equations that dealt with the numbers received from each administrative unit or region, taking into account the "push and pull" factors in those areas and their developments.
- The numbers of dead, missing persons, and detainees were also estimated based on a wide number of sources<sup>5</sup>, and the experts' weightings about these numbers.

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<sup>3</sup> Among the most prominent sources that have been relied upon:

Refugee Census Database, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 15-3-2021:  
<https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>

<sup>4</sup> IOM Library, IOM, 14-03-2021: Link: <https://publications.iom.int>

Toward a realistic assessment of the Gulf states' reception of Syrian refugees, The Washington Institute, September 2015:  
<http://bit.ly/3cbihW9>

<sup>5</sup> Among the most prominent sources that have been relied upon:

Compilation of statistics for 2020, Central Bureau of Statistics, 1/03/2021  
Link: <http://cbssyr.sy/yearbook.htm>

Displacement and Return Movement and Cross-Border Operations Manual, OCHA, various figures from early 2019 until December 2020, for more see:

<https://www.unocha.org/fr/syria>

Support Coordination Unit, Displacement Movement Reports and Needs Assessment, 2020, for more see:

[https://www.acu-sy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Winter-needs-2020\\_Ar.pdf](https://www.acu-sy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Winter-needs-2020_Ar.pdf)

The Syrian population pyramid for 2019, the population pyramid site:

<https://www.populationpyramid.net/ar/Syria/2019/>

World Population Prospects 2019, United Nations, Department of Economics and Social Affairs: <https://population.un.org/wpp/>

Among the most prominent sources that have been relied upon:

Syria Events 2018, Human Rights Watch, 2019: <https://www.hrw.org/ar/world-report/2019/country-chapters/325364#>

Syrian Network for Human Rights Statistics: <https://sn4hr.org/arabic/>

Statistics of the Syrian Committee for Human Rights:

The nineteenth report on the situation of human rights in Syria 2020, the Syrian Committee for Human Rights, January 2021:

[https://www.shrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2020-report\\_Arabic.pdf](https://www.shrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2020-report_Arabic.pdf)

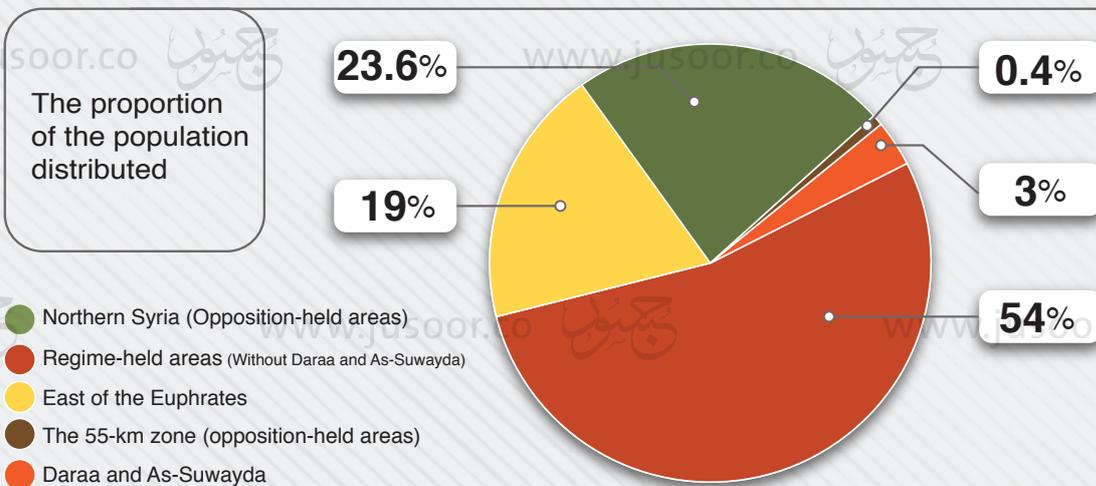
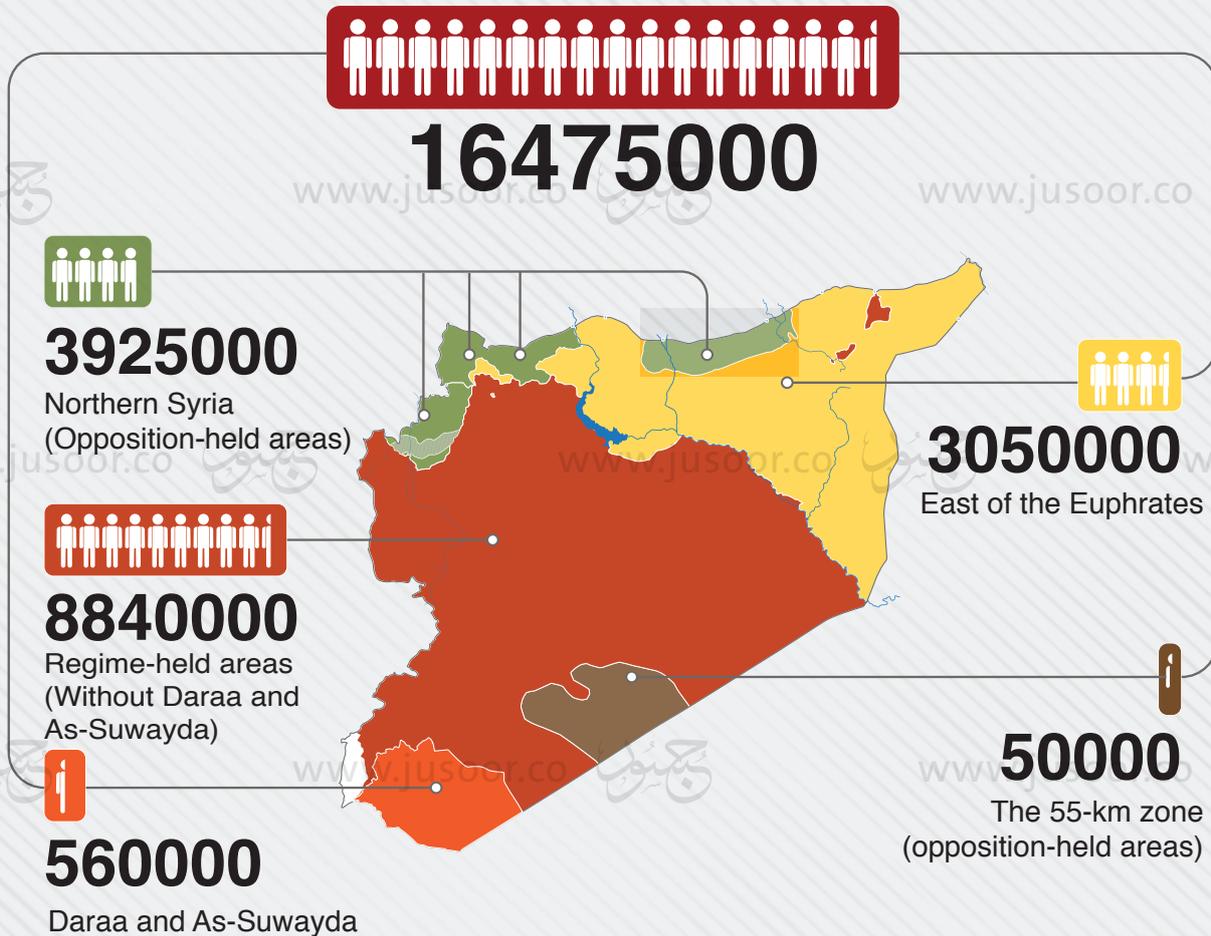
120 months after the start of the revolution, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, <https://www.syriahr.com/120-month-on-launch-the-Syrian-revolution-towards-59/428035/>



Table No. (2)

## The total number of Syrians inside Syria 2021

The total number of Syrians inside Syria 2021



The data estimate was based on a set of official references issued by international and local institutions, in addition to mathematical equations developed by the work team.

However, the statistical figures of the population census do not accurately reflect Syria's overlap in reality, as it does not take into account the implications of conflict, disasters and epidemics on the growth rate, and it has not been implemented through clear mechanisms for field census teams.



**First:**

## The reasons for emigration from Syria after 2011

Between 2011 and 2021, Syria witnessed 4 massive waves of emigration, either asylum seeking or displacement for various reasons like the lack of safety, hard economic / political conditions, the lack of health care and others. The first wave was between 2011 and 2014, the second wave between 2014 and 2015, the third wave between 2015 and 2016, and the fourth wave between 2019 and 2020.

Naturally, factors such as geography, economics and media played a role in determining the path of migration according to the circumstances that changed successively.

The main reasons for the migration of Syrians can be summed up in the following factors:

### 1) Seek safety

When popular protests broke out in March 2011, the Syrian regime resorted to using excessive violence instead of responding to the demands of the demonstrators, and carried out sweeping campaigns of raids and security pursuit in towns, villages, neighborhoods and cities, which caused panic among population, prompted some of them to seek a safe heaven.

Accordingly, the refugee camps were established at an early stage, such as the Abaiden camp in the Hatay region of southern Turkey, which was established in late April 2011, and the Al-Muqayla camp in the Wadi Khaled region in northern Lebanon, which was established in mid-May of the same year.



As the armed conflict escalation severity grew, the number of people fleeing combat operations towards safer areas became very large, similar to the military campaign launched by the Syrian regime and its allies in late 2019, which caused the displacement of more than 900 thousand civilians, which is the largest wave of migration in Syria <sup>6</sup>.

## 2) Fear of arrest

This fear was a key motivation for many people to migrate. As of mid-2020, 129,989 people were arrested and documented in the prisons of the Syrian regime, 85% of whom were under enforced disappearance. Note that at least 14,388 detainees were killed under torture and poor health care by different conflicting parties, 14,235 of them were killed by the Syrian regime, while ISIS was responsible for the killing of 32 detainees <sup>7</sup>.

## 3) Fear of rape and other sexual assaults

The practices of the Shabiha (thugs), especially in 2012 and 2013, against women in areas witnessing protests pushed many Syrians to emigrate, even if they were not participating in any opposition activities. The sexual assaults were being committed in custody or at home during both the pursuit and arrest operations by the Syrian regime,<sup>8</sup> as a strategy for war and a way to harm human dignity.

## 4) Escaping sieges and starvation

Imposing sieges and blockade was one of the main causes of the waves of migration, especially the first one; as the Syrian regime forces were completely or partially besieging more than 36 cities or towns in 2013, most of the population waited for the opportunity to flee their areas towards safer and livable regions.

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<sup>6</sup> Syria is witnessing the largest wave of civilian displacement since the start of the conflict in 2011, and the Secretary-General calls for an immediate ceasefire". UN News, 18-2-2020, <https://cutt.us/ERSTr>

<sup>7</sup> The Ninth Annual Report on Torture in Syria. Syrian Network for Human Rights, 26-6-2020, <https://cutt.us/1ypP7>

<sup>8</sup> I lost my dignity: Sexual and gender-based violence in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, 3/28-2018, <https://cutt.us/nrvvd>



## 5) Fear of conscription

Compulsory conscription was a major reason for the migration of young people from the areas controlled by the Syrian regime, regardless of the political position towards it, sometimes migrants may be loyal to the regime.

In February 2019, the Syrian regime said that the number of people fleeing compulsory military service exceeded 53,000 ones a number that includes refugees .

Despite the issuance of more than one amnesty for draft evaders during the previous years, this couldn't stop the emigration of young people, since the amnesty does not mean that the call-up for compulsory military service will not continue.

## 6) Preservation of Capital

Many capital owners have sought refuge outside Syria In order to search for a safe environment to preserve their own capital and continue making money.

## 7) Searching for better livelihoods

Many Syrian people immigrated to Europe and America to get a better life, after they had difficulty accessing safe and easy sources of fresh drinking water, food, education, health care and work.

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6 "العفو عن أكثر من 53 ألف متخلف عن الخدمة العسكرية في سوريا". سبوتنيك، 2019-2-15. <https://cutt.us/NRJup>





**Second:**

## **The effects of demographic change on the future of Syria**

The forcibly displacement and asylum processes to which the population in Syria has been subjected as a result of the conflict must have major impacts on the future of the country, whether or not a political settlement is reached, because dealing with the causes of immigration takes a long period of time.

### **Change the demographic map**

The vast majority of the refugees are Sunni Arabs, and therefore their failure to return to Syria means a fundamental change in the Syrian mosaic, which may explain the regime's obstruction, with Iranian support, of the efforts to return refugees.

Separating the displaced persons from their land, especially those whose original areas of residence have been completely destroyed, so that it is theoretically difficult to imagine their return to it under any condition, means a change in the demographic structure within the cities, which is highly influential, especially in mixed cities such as Homs.



## Population growth change

Inside Syria negatively, as a result of the decline in birth rates and the high death rates, in the event that the infrastructure remains damaged or the restoration and reconstruction operations need a long period of time, given that the lack of safe and easy access to sources of drinking water, food, education, health care and work will reduce families' desire to have children and will increase life-threatening risks Human.

## Loss of brains and capital

Many doctors, engineers, and university degree holders who have acquired skills and experience in countries of asylum will not be ready to return to Syria once the conflict is declared over, unless there is a safe and stimulating and a stable political environment. The matter is no different from capital, especially those who established companies and investments and achieved great successes and obtained privileges that they would not have obtained even when they were in Syria before the start of the conflict.

## Social and political instability

Especially in the event that the lines of contact between the conflicting parties are preserved, either by maintaining the status quo or within the framework of a settlement in which the administrative division of the country is re-divided based on areas of influence, which would increase the effects of the lack of integration between the local population and the displaced persons on the security of the regions and the authority shape, for the sake of competing over resources and the representation size in the governance.



# Conclusion

It can be said that emigration from Syria has remained the preferred option for many people in the different conflict zones. However, there have been many initiatives to repatriate refugees that have either largely failed or have not achieved satisfactory results.

In fact, most of the initiatives to repatriate refugees were based on political and economic goals, not according to a humanitarian response to the people's needs, such as peace, security, stability, guarantees, justice and others.

Accordingly, in order to return to their residential areas, many refugees and IDPs need guarantees related to:

- Guarantees of non-prosecution by the Syrian regime and the rest of the parties to the conflict, which necessarily requires restructuring of the security services and the judicial system.
- Launching reconstruction projects, providing homes for those who have lost their own homes totally or partially.
- Restore property rights, under the guarantee of the United Nations and the international community.
- Hold the perpetrators of crimes and violations accountable, in order to help restore confidence in the possibility of achieving political stability in the country.
- The declaration of a sustainable ceasefire and an action plan for a political transition that includes provisions to encourage the refugees to return.

Nevertheless, the return of refugees and displaced persons to their areas requires a long period of time, especially in terms of providing stability for health care, economic and political factors, while focusing on the safety factor may contribute to attracting - perhaps temporarily - a considerable number of displaced persons.





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