

## DISCLAIMER

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. All COI Query Responses are compiled in line with the Common EU Guidelines (2008) and the EUAA Methodology (2023). This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. Please refer to all documents cited.

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## COI QUERY RESPONSE

### SYRIA - INFORMATION ON APOSTASY. INFORMATION ON THE SOCIETAL RAMIFICATIONS OF CONVERTING FROM ISLAM TO CHRISTIANITY

A report issued by Freedom House in February 2025 states that: “Sunni Islamist and jihadist groups often persecute religious minority groups and Muslims whom they accuse of impiety or apostasy. HTS's rise to national power in December 2024 sparked concerns that the group would target religious minorities—including the Alawite community—and entrench sectarian divisions, despite HTS leaders' promises to respect the rights of the country's minority groups.”<sup>1</sup>

The US Department of State International Religious Freedom Report in June 2024 mentioned that: “NGOs reported social conventions and religious proscriptions continued to make conversions relatively rare, especially Muslim-to-Christian conversions, which are prohibited by law. These groups also reported that societal pressure continued to force converts from Islam to Christianity to relocate within the country or to emigrate in order to practice their new religion openly.”<sup>2</sup>

The *European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)* in April 2024 reported that: “Apart from the GoS, extremist groups like ISIL, HTS and Jaysh al-Islam who identified themselves as Sunni Arab, targeted Sunni Muslims who did not adhere to the group's interpretation of the Sharia. These groups killed hundreds of civilians, carrying out public executions, beheadings and crucifixions as a punishment for religious offences such as blasphemy, apostasy or cursing God. [Targeting 2020, 10.3.4, p. 79].”<sup>3</sup>

This document also states that: “Christians also faced threats in areas under Turkish control. Detention and charges with apostasy were reported in Afrin.”<sup>4</sup>

The *International Crisis Group* in March 2023 notes that: “That said, many aspects of Nusra's behaviour were certainly oppressive. Its local courts – some of which other insurgents contributed to running – harshly regulated social life. Without reaching ISIS-level violence, they ordered the closure of entertainment places, imposed observance of prayer and the yearly Ramadan fast, and

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<sup>1</sup> Freedom House (26 February 2025) Freedom in the World 2025: Syria

<sup>2</sup> US Department of State (26 June 2024) 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria, p.3

<sup>3</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) (15 April 2024) Country Guidance: Syria (April 2024) [4.10 Ethno-religious groups], p.4

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p.10

occasionally executed individuals who had been accused of apostasy, fornication or homosexuality.”  
[...]<sup>5</sup>

In January 2023 *Open Doors International* reported that: “Christians from a Muslim background experience particular pressure from their families and communities because their conversion is seen as a slight to the family's honour. Converts are at risk of being expelled from their family homes or worse. In northern Syria, religious minorities (including Christians) are persecuted by Turkish forces and associated Islamic militias. They have been attacked, murdered, kidnapped and raped. Many religious sites have also been seriously damaged.”<sup>6</sup>

This document further states that: “Leaving Islam is most dangerous in the northwest and north east of the country. Converts are ostracized by their family and community and, in the most extreme circumstances, killed in order to restore the perceived 'honor' of the family.”<sup>7</sup>

The *Syria Direct* in December 2022 mentioned that: “Al-Khamri and other notables have worked to resolve other deadly disputes, such as one murder "as a result of a disagreement over land and property, and another after Free Syrian Army factions left the area and the Islamic State came in, and killings took place under the pretext of unbelief and apostasy," he told *Syria Direct*. After IS was later expelled, clan disputes "significantly increased," al-Khamri added.”<sup>8</sup>

The *European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA)* in September 2022 points out that: “Individuals converted to Christianity reportedly faced threats in areas under control by Turkish forces and the SNA. USCIRF reported in its 2021 Annual Report on the case of a Kurdish convert to Christianity who was detained and charged with apostasy by an SNA-backed court in Afrin. According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), a Christian NGO advocating for freedom of religion or belief, the man was detained in August 2020 by Failaq Al-Sham, an Islamist militia and part of the SNA, after refusing to hand over a school building to the group, where he was working as headmaster, and that was supposed to be transformed into an Islamic school. He was reportedly released in March 2021. USDOS reported with reference to local news media reports that in August 2020 some militia groups that form part of the Turkish-backed SNA abducted 14 Syrian Kurds living in Afrin, who had converted to Christianity.”<sup>9</sup>

The *Humanist International* in July 2022 states that: “The government officially recognizes Christianity, Judaism and Islam. All religious groups are required to register and the registration process can be lengthy. There is no designation of religion on passports or national identity cards, except for Jews, who are the only religious group whose passports and identity cards note their religion. Apostasy is not directly forbidden, however, the authorities restrict proselytizing and prohibit conversion of Muslims from Islam. Others may convert to Islam. If a Christian converts to Islam, the presiding Muslim cleric has to inform the convert's diocese. Societal pressure further makes conversion, particularly from Islam to Christianity, relatively rare and forces many converts to flee outside of the country.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> International Crisis Group (7 March 2023) Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West, p.10

<sup>6</sup> Open Doors International (18 January 2023) World Watch List 2023 - Syria Country Profile

<sup>7</sup> ibid

<sup>8</sup> Syria Direct (9 December 2022) Clan conflicts in Syria: Seeds of revenge grow under the ashes amid attempts to renew customary law, p.2

<sup>9</sup> European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) (1 September 2022) EUAA COI Report - Syria: Targeting of Individuals (2022) [9. Sunni Arabs; 11. Christians; 12. Palestinians], p.6

<sup>10</sup> Humanist International (28 July 2022) Supporting dossier on the situation of the non-religious [Syria excerpt], p.3

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