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Daily Life in Syria

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In recent years, many European countries have been confronted with residents that have travelled to Syria, often to join jihadist groups such as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Jabhat al-Nusra (JaN). The limited knowledge on what they subsequently do out there hampers our ability to answer several important societal and legal questions. For example, what does daily life in Syria look like? Does traveling to Syria translate into a future as a fighter or is it also possible to lead a non-violent life there? A recently published [report](#) sheds light on several aspects of daily life in Syria. Data for the report was gathered through open sources (such as reports, media coverage, blogs, and social media), judicial files, and interviews with a variety of experts, professionals, and people from (and sometimes still in) Syria.

After Arrival

According to the study, upon crossing the Turkish-Syrian border, foreigners willing to join ISIS or JaN will be subjected to interrogation and monitoring by these groups. One's personal details will be documented and recorded, a fact also illustrated by [the recent mass-leak of ISIS registration forms](#). Subsequently, they receive various sorts of training, including religious and military courses. Usually before partaking in military courses, new recruits need to swear an oath of allegiance, which entails that they will comply with the assigned duties – regardless whether one agrees or disagrees with these duties. Pledging allegiance seems mandatory before entering the ranks of either ISIS or JaN.

The Daily Life of Foreigners

How one will be employed depends on the organization's needs and the recruit's competences and wishes. In return, foreigners receive housing, salary, and several other practical benefits in comparison to non-affiliated citizens – and in some instances even compared to local fighters. Most men seemingly travel to Syria to fight in the civil war. Most Dutch nationals hence became fighters, as was also recently [noted](#) in a report by the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD). However, there are also alternative job options in the ranks of both ISIS and JaN. For instance, one can become an engineer, a doctor, a cook, or a police agent. Yet for a variety of reasons, most other jobs are difficult to see as separate from the

violent jihad. Most men in the ranks of ISIS, for example, receive a rifle and are expected to be armed. Certain jobs also have a clear link to violence. Within ISIS controlled territory, this is for instance the case with religious police agents (agents of al-Hisbah). These agents are tasked with enforcing ISIS' rules and punishing those who disobey. Furthermore, as a consequence of pledging allegiance, all men can, at some point, be called upon for combat duties. In contrast, the [role of women](#) is to serve society from behind the scenes; they are primarily engaged with family affairs, and they generally do not receive a weapon. However, in some cases they have the opportunity to arm themselves, and many allegedly carry a firearm in their purse. Women and men alike also play an important role in recruiting others from their home countries to join them.

Thus, those that have travelled to Syria to join ISIS or JaN contributed to the cause of these parties in one way or another. The men will be prepared for combat in training camps – and know that in advance. Although the majority of the Dutch males became fighters, the above implies that there are also various supporting jobs. This however does not mean that those with a supporting job will not be engaged in fighting or other violence. Yet the degree in which this occurs is difficult to gauge, and seems dependent on for instance the specific job and the course of the conflict.