

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO

THE SYRIA (SANCTIONS) (EU EXIT) (AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2025

2025 No. 507

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This explanatory memorandum has been prepared by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and is laid before Parliament by Command of His Majesty.
- 1.2 This memorandum contains information for the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments.

2. Declaration

- 2.1 Stephen Doughty MP, Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, can confirm that this Explanatory Memorandum meets the required standard.
- 2.2 David Reed, Director for Sanctions at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, can confirm that this Explanatory Memorandum meets the required standard.

3. Contact

- 3.1 The Sanctions Directorate at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Telephone: 0207 008 8553 or email: fcdo.correspondence@fcdo.gov.uk, can be contacted with any queries regarding the instrument.

Part One: Explanation, and context, of the Instrument

4. Overview of the Instrument

What does the legislation do?

- 4.1 This instrument makes amendments to the Syria (Sanctions) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (S.I. 2019/792) (“the 2019 Regulations”) to clarify the purposes of those Regulations. This instrument will update the purposes to reflect that the Assad regime is no longer in place and provide accountability for human rights violations committed by members of the now former Assad regime. It will also allow the Secretary of State flexibility to introduce new designations and target individuals and entities if there is further oppression of the Syrian people or a return to conflict.
- 4.2 This instrument amends the designation criteria in the 2019 Regulations to support the changes made to the statutory purposes, including removing defunct definitions that are no longer applicable.
- 4.3 This instrument revokes specific sanctions measures on energy, transport (aircraft), financial transactions, trade, and exemptions on financial/credit institutions. This instrument also makes a consequential amendment to the Trade, Aircraft and Shipping Sanctions (Civil Enforcement) Regulations 2024 (S.I. 2024/948), as a result of the revocation of aircraft sanctions in the 2019 Regulations.

Where does the legislation extend to, and apply?

- 4.4 The extent of the Regulations is the whole of the United Kingdom (“UK”).

- 4.5 Subject to paragraph 4.6, the territorial application of the Regulations is also the same as the territorial application of the 2019 Regulations, that is, it applies to the whole of the UK.
- 4.6 This instrument also applies to conduct by UK persons where that conduct is wholly or partly outside the UK, and to conduct undertaken by any person in the territorial sea adjacent to the UK. “UK person” is defined in section 21(2) of the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018 (“the Sanctions Act”).

5. Policy Context

What is being done and why?

- 5.1 The Syria conflict has been one of the most destructive in recent human history: over 400,000 people have been killed and half of Syria’s pre-war population displaced. The Assad regime’s violent repression of the civilian population was the principal cause of the conflict; the UN Independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria stated that the regime’s use of disappearances, torture, rape and sexual violence amounted to crimes against humanity. In addition, the regime was responsible for the repeated use of chemical weapons. The UK continues to press for accountability for those responsible for the most serious crimes committed in Syria.
- 5.2 This instrument amends several provisions in the 2019 Regulations in light of the fall of the Assad regime on 8 December 2024. These changes ensure the UK’s Syria sanctions regime remains fit-for-purpose and that designations relating to human rights violations committed by members of the now former Assad regime can remain in place and now be imposed for the purpose of accountability. The amendments also support Syria’s economic recovery following almost fourteen years of conflict by removing measures on certain sectors that can no longer benefit the former Assad regime.
- 5.3 This instrument removes the definition of “the Syrian regime” because it relates to the former Assad regime. Where certain sectoral sanctions measures are maintained, a new definition of the “Governing Authority of Syria” replaces defunct references to the Syrian regime.

What was the previous policy, how is this different?

- 5.4 The 2019 Regulations were introduced to encourage the Syrian regime, led by Bashar Al-Assad, to end policies that resulted in the violent repression of the civil population and to reach a negotiated political settlement in Syria. Sanctions were imposed under the 2019 Regulations to discourage individuals and companies from supporting the Syrian regime or being directly or indirectly involved in its repression of the civilian population. This instrument amends the statutory purposes of the 2019 Regulations to remove defunct references to the Assad regime and to allow the Secretary of State to consider further designations of individuals and entities in relation to Syria under the revised purposes. The amended purposes are:
- to promote the peace, stability and security of Syria;
 - to promote respect for democracy, the rule of law and good governance in Syria, including in particular promoting the successful completion of Syria’s transition to a democratic country;
 - to discourage actions, policies or activities which repress the civilian population in Syria;

- to promote compliance with international human rights law and respect for human rights in Syria, including in particular, respect for —
 - the right to life of persons in Syria;
 - the right of persons in Syria not to be held in slavery or required to perform forced or compulsory labour;
 - the right of persons not to be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in Syria;
 - the right to liberty and security of persons in Syria, including freedom from arbitrary arrest, detention or enforced disappearance;
 - the right to a fair trial of persons charged with criminal offences in Syria
 - the rights of journalists, human rights defenders, civil society activists, religious leaders, politicians and all other persons in Syria to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association with others;
 - the enjoyment of rights and freedoms in Syria without discrimination, including on the basis of a person’s sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status;
- to provide accountability for gross violations of human rights carried out by or on behalf of the Assad regime.

5.5 This instrument also makes amendments to the designation criteria under the 2019 Regulations to reflect the amended statutory purposes. The amended designation criteria ensure that the Secretary of State has flexibility to introduce new designations and target individuals and entities if there is further oppression of the Syrian people or a return to conflict.

5.6 This instrument revokes Part 6 of the 2019 Regulations which sets out prohibitions on the movement of certain aircraft. Currently, any aircraft operated by Syrian Arab Airlines, or which is owned, chartered or operated by a person connected with Syria who is using that aircraft exclusively for the provision of air cargo services, are prohibited from landing in the UK unless an exception or relevant licence applies. The Secretary of State may also direct the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to either refuse or revoke certain permissions given under the Air Navigation Order 2016 (S.I. 2016/765) in respect of aircraft falling within the prohibitions. An airport operator may also direct the pilot or operator of an aircraft falling within the prohibitions not to land at an airport and the Secretary of State may direct an airport operator to give such a direction. Part 6 also established offences in respect of aircraft falling within the prohibitions, including for the failure by an airport operator to comply fully with a direction without a reasonable excuse. These restrictions are being removed as the former Assad regime no longer controls Syrian Arab Airlines and cannot use its aircraft to enable its oppression of the Syrian people and, therefore, the sanctions are no longer considered necessary. The Department for Transport’s security and safety policies will continue to apply to Syrian Arab Airlines.

5.7 This instrument also revokes certain financial investment, services and financial market sanctions in the 2019 Regulations. In particular, it removes prohibitions linked to investment in crude oil and energy production, financial services and financial markets in Syria and the provision of insurance services. The measures applying prohibitions on Assad era bonds remain in force. These measures are intended to enable financial flows to support the economic recovery of Syria.

- 5.8 This instrument also revokes certain trade prohibitions in the 2019 Regulations. In particular, it removes prohibitions related to the export of aviation fuel and aviation fuel additives, new bank notes and coinage, goods and technology relating to crude oil and natural gas, goods related to electricity production and prohibitions related to the import of Syrian crude oil and petroleum products. These measures are intended to support the economic recovery of Syria.
- 5.9 This instrument also amends certain trade prohibitions previously imposed on Syria under the Assad regime and ensures that they continue to apply under the interim Syrian authorities. These are related to the trade in gold, diamonds and precious metals, and to the provision of interception and monitoring services. Additional trade restrictions that will stay in place include the import of military goods and technology, the export of goods and technology relating to chemical and biological weapons, the export of goods and technology relating to internal repression, and the export of goods and technology related to interception and monitoring.

6. Legislative and Legal Context

How has the law changed?

- 6.1 As noted above, this instrument makes various amendments to the 2019 Regulations. The Sanctions Act establishes a legal framework which enables His Majesty's Government to impose sanctions for a number of purposes, which include in the interests of international peace and security and for the promotion of democracy, the rule of law and good governance.
- 6.2 This instrument is made in exercise of the powers conferred by sections 1, 3, 5, 11, 15, 45 and 54 of the Sanctions Act. It makes amendments to the 2019 Regulations, which were made under the Sanctions Act for discretionary purposes within section 1(2) of the Sanctions Act. This instrument also makes a consequential amendment to the Trade, Aircraft and Shipping Sanctions (Civil Enforcement) Regulations 2024, as a result of the revocation of aircraft sanctions in the 2019 Regulations.

Why was this approach taken to change the law?

- 6.3 This is the only possible approach to make the necessary changes to the purposes of the 2019 Regulations which are now defunct following events in Syria.

7. Consultation

Summary of consultation outcome and methodology

- 7.1 No consultation has been carried out on this instrument. The Explanatory Memorandum to the 2019 Regulations explain that consultation has been carried out in relation to the Sanctions Act.
- 7.2 There is neither a requirement in the Sanctions Act for public consultation on instruments made under the Act, nor is there any other legal obligation to consult in respect of this instrument. HM Government will continue engagement with stakeholders on the implementation of UK sanctions.

8. Applicable Guidance

- 8.1 In accordance with section 43 of the Sanctions Act, guidance has been published in relation to the prohibitions and requirements under the 2019 Regulations. This guidance will be updated to reflect the amendments to those Regulations made by this instrument.

Part Two: Impact and the Better Regulation Framework

9. Impact Assessment

- 9.1 A full Impact Assessment has not been prepared for this instrument as no, or no significant, impact on the private, voluntary or public sector is foreseen.

Impact on businesses, charities and voluntary bodies

- 9.2 The lifting of sanctions creates trade and investment opportunities for the UK. The impact on UK growth is expected to be positive but negligible due to the small size of the Syrian economy. Any such trade and investment with Syria will remain subject to other existing legal regulation including international sanctions.
- 9.3 We do not expect a significant impact on voluntary bodies given a Humanitarian General Licence has already been introduced to support humanitarian aid delivery.
- 9.4 The legislation does not impact small or micro businesses.
- 9.5 There is no impact on the public sector as this is an update to existing legislation.

10. Monitoring and review

What is the approach to monitoring and reviewing this legislation?

- 10.1 If His Majesty's Government determined that if it was no longer appropriate to maintain a sanctions regime or specific sanctions measures, that regime would be removed or amended accordingly. In the case of the 2019 Regulations, that would include the measures introduced by this instrument. As such, the Minister does not consider that a review clause in this instrument is appropriate.

Part Three: Statements and Matters of Particular Interest to Parliament

11. Matters of special interest to Parliament

- 11.1 This instrument contains "non-UN regulations" and does not contain any "UN regulations" (within the meaning of section 55(7) of the Sanctions Act), meaning that it is subject to the Made Affirmative Parliamentary procedure under section 55(3) of the Sanctions Act. It is laid before Parliament on 24 April 2025 and comes into force on 25 April 2025.

12. European Convention on Human Rights

- 12.1 Stephen Doughty MP, Minister of State for Europe, North America and the Overseas Territories at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, has made the following statement regarding Human Rights:
- "In my view the provisions of the Syria (Sanctions) (EU Exit) (Amendment) Regulations 2025 are compatible with the Convention rights."

13. The Relevant European Union Acts

- 13.1 This instrument is not made under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, the European Union (Future Relationship) Act 2020 or the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023.