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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is the seventy-first submitted pursuant to paragraph 17 of Security Council resolution 2139 (2014), paragraph 10 of resolution 2165 (2014), paragraph 5 of resolution 2191 (2014), paragraph 5 of resolution 2258 (2015), paragraph 5 of resolution 2332 (2016), paragraph 6 of resolution 2393 (2017), paragraph 12 of resolution 2401 (2018), paragraph 6 of resolution 2449 (2018), paragraph 8 of resolution 2504 (2020), and paragraph 3 of resolution 2533 (2020), in the last of which the Council requested the Secretary-General to provide a report at least every 60 days on the implementation of the resolutions by all parties to the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

2. The information contained herein is based on data available to entities of the United Nations system and obtained from the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and other relevant sources. Data from entities of the United Nations system regarding their humanitarian deliveries have been reported for the months of December 2020 and January 2021.

II. Major developments

Key points

1. Official rates of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) infection remained relatively low in the Syrian Arab Republic compared with other countries in the region; however, epidemiological analysis indicated the emergence of a renewed wave of infections from mid-December 2020.
2. The economic crisis continued to deepen humanitarian needs across the country, with food prices reaching new historic levels and continued shortages in basic commodities, including heating fuel.



3. In the north-west, the ceasefire in the Idlib de-escalation area was interspersed with air strikes, artillery shelling and occasional raids across contact lines.
4. Strong winds, torrential rains and flooding affected some 141,000 people across 407 displacement sites in the north-west. Some 25,000 tents and nearly 120 schools were damaged or destroyed.
5. In the north-east, a sharp increase in mutual shelling and ground-based clashes was reported in the vicinity of Ayn Isa, displacing more than 3,000 people in the area in early December.
6. On 2 December, the World Food Programme (WFP) received confirmation from the Government that it would be able to restart food distributions in non-government-controlled parts of Raqqah, following the suspension of distributions to some 220,000 people since October.
7. Escalating tensions between the Government and local authorities in the north-east resulted in local authorities blocking humanitarian assistance from entering areas under government control in Qamishli and Hasakah cities from 20 January to 2 February.
8. After Uluk water station resumed operations on 20 December, water supply was again disrupted on 17 January, impacting some 460,000 people in Hasakah. Service was restored on 23 January.
9. The security situation at Hawl camp continued to deteriorate, with 14 people reportedly killed in the camp. Humanitarian organizations continued to advocate with camp authorities for improved safety for residents and humanitarian workers.
10. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) verified incidents in which at least 67 civilians, including 17 children, were killed and at least 74 civilians, including 35 children, were injured as a result of ongoing hostilities across the Syrian Arab Republic.
11. Humanitarian assistance by United Nations entities and partner organizations continued throughout the country, delivering assistance to some 7.6 million people on average per month in 2020.

Humanitarian update

3. Official rates of COVID-19 infection remained relatively low in the Syrian Arab Republic compared with other countries in the region. Epidemiological analysis, however, indicated the emergence of a renewed wave of infections from mid-December 2020. In December 2020 and January 2021, the Ministry of Health reported the highest and second-highest infection rates, respectively, since the start of the pandemic. As at 31 January, the Ministry of Health reported 14,048 cases, including 21 deaths. Another 8,490 cases were reported in the north-east, including 296 deaths, and 20,997 cases were reported in the north-west, including 399 deaths. Humanitarian actors continued to receive reports of additional possible cases and, given limited testing across the country, it is likely the actual number of cases far exceeds reported figures. On 15 December, the Ministry of Health submitted a vaccine application to the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility. A separate application was submitted by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for the north-west part of the country. In coordination with the Gavi Alliance, WHO and UNICEF continued providing detailed technical assistance to and sharing guidelines with the national health authority and relevant committees. The vaccine introduction readiness assessment tool was used to update the readiness status on a monthly basis.

4. The value of the Syrian pound continued to depreciate on the informal market, reaching around LS 3,300 against the United States dollar at the end of the reporting period. Food prices reached new highs, deepening humanitarian needs across the country. Price monitoring by WFP showed the price of an average food basket in December 2020 at LS 111,676: the highest level recorded since WFP began price monitoring in 2013, and an increase of 236 per cent over the previous 12 months. Prices remained uneven, with prices in Idlib recorded as 26 per cent higher than the national average. Across the country, nearly one in five households reported poor food consumption, according to survey data from December. In January, 85 per cent of surveyed households reported adopting at least one strategy to cope with a lack of reliable access to sufficient and nutritious food, and four out of five households reported already depleting their savings as a result of the worsening economic situation across the country. Among the reported coping mechanisms is a growing reliance on child labour. One in 10 surveyed households reported having to rely on their children to contribute to the family income.

5. Shortages and rising prices for fuel continued into the winter. A growing number of tent fires were reported in displacement camps and sites as a result of burning unsafe materials for heat. Distributions of subsidized heating fuel, which would normally happen in October or November, did not take place in many areas. In Aleppo, where the majority of neighbourhoods did not receive subsidized heating fuel during the reporting period, black market prices were up to 10 times the subsidized rate. A resumption of shortages in fuel for transportation caused a return to long queues at fuel stations in many government-controlled areas.

6. In the north-west, the ceasefire in the Idlib de-escalation area was interspersed with air strikes, artillery shelling and occasional raids across contact lines. Mutual shelling was concentrated in locations south of the M4 highway, with some shelling directed at areas situated north of the highway. Raids and ground-based clashes remained local, limited and intermittent. Aerial bombardment predominantly focused on locations south of the M4 highway, with some reportedly taking place north of the highway within southern Idlib. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, which has been designated a terrorist group by the Security Council, reportedly further consolidated its power inside the Idlib de-escalation area, while also experiencing some pushback from local groups. The contact lines in Tall Rif'at, Bab and Manbij saw increased artillery shelling and small arms fire, as well as attacks against oil refineries and storage facilities. The use of explosive weapons continued to kill and harm civilians, including children.

7. In the second half of January, strong winds, torrential rains and flooding affected some 141,000 people across 407 displacement sites in the north-west. Roughly 25,000 tents were damaged or destroyed, the majority at informal sites, which are more prone to flooding and lack adequate drainage. Nearly 120 schools were damaged or destroyed by the floods, impacting at least 21,000 children and more than 980 education personnel. Other parts of the country were also affected by flooding, including in Tartus, where heavy rains caused flooding in at least one internally displaced persons camp, and in Hawl camp, where heavy rains reportedly damaged tents.

8. In northern Aleppo, shortages of potable and agricultural water supplies continued to be reported in Bab city and surrounding areas, affecting some 185,000 people. Bab is among the top four subdistricts in the country reporting water-borne diseases, such as leishmaniasis. The water available from local wells is unsafe and meets only a small portion of the demand. Based on available information, the pipeline from Ayn al-Bayda pumping station to the Bab city network is technically capable of delivering water supplies from the Khafsah station on the Euphrates. The

United Nations continued to advocate for a resumption of water supplies to Bab from the Ayn al-Bayda station.

9. In the north-east, a sharp increase in mutual shelling and ground-based clashes was reported in the vicinity of Ayn Isa from late November 2020. More than 3,000 people were displaced in the area in December, and were supported with humanitarian assistance. While active fighting had subsided, the area remained tense.

10. On 2 December, WFP received confirmation from the Government that it would be able to restart food distributions in non-government-controlled parts of Raqqah, following the suspension of distribution to some 220,000 people since October. Escalating tensions resulted in local authorities blocking all traffic, including civilian, commercial and humanitarian shipments and partners, from entering areas under government control in Qamishli and Hasakah cities on 20 January. The action disrupted food assistance for some 200,000 people, as well as other assistance and essential services. Reports were also received of movement restrictions by government forces in parts of eastern Aleppo and Menbij. All traffic resumed on 2 February, including humanitarian shipments to government-controlled parts of Qamishli and Hasakah (see also paras. 40 and 41). Escalating tensions were reportedly also marked by mutual detention incidents, the arrest of government forces and the prevention of government employees from accessing their workplaces. Protests against local authorities emerged in Qamishli and Hasakah cities, as did counter-protests in support of the local authorities.

11. After Uluk water station resumed operations on 20 December, water supply was again disrupted on 17 January, impacting some 460,000 people in Hasakah, who rely on Uluk as their primary source of safe water. Service was restored on 23 January. The United Nations continued to advocate for a sustainable solution to keep water from Uluk flowing, including continued safe access for technical teams to the water and electricity installations.

12. Some 61,800 people remained at Hawl camp, 94 per cent of them women and children and 53 per cent children under the age of 12. More than 1,300 households (approximately 7,000 Syrians) had left Hawl to return to their places of origin as at 31 January. Violent attacks in the camp continued. The United Nations received reports of at least 14 people killed in Hawl between 1 and 28 January 2021. Humanitarian organizations continued to advocate with camp authorities for improved safety for residents and humanitarian workers.

13. Tuberculosis and hepatitis cases in a detention facility in the north-east reportedly resulted in the death of one child. Some 800 children remained in detention centres across the north-east. The United Nations continues to seek access to provide support.

14. The United Nations remained without access to the 12,000 people living at Rukban. Bakeries at the camp reportedly stopped working as deliveries of flour ceased in January. Alongside efforts to support voluntary departures, the United Nations continued to advocate for immediate humanitarian assistance to reach those remaining at the camp.

Update on overall developments

15. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria facilitated the fourth and fifth sessions of the small body of the Constitutional Committee from 30 November to 4 December 2020 and from 25 to 29 January 2021, respectively. In line with the mandate and the terms of reference and core rules of procedure of the Constitutional Committee, the agenda was to discuss national foundations and principles, and constitutional principles, respectively. After the conclusion of the fifth session, the

Special Envoy stated his disappointment with the state of the work of the Committee. He pledged to continue his efforts to facilitate the implementation of Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). The Special Envoy's facilitation of the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), also involved continued consultations with regional and international interlocutors.

16. The Special Envoy continued to liaise with members of the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, which stressed that the core constitutional rights of women across political, social and economic spheres must be safeguarded in the Constitutional Committee process. The Special Envoy also engaged Civil Society Support Room interlocutors, who continued to press for progress in working sessions of the Constitutional Committee while also reminding parties to the political process that Syrians seek tangible improvements to their lives.

Protection

17. Civilians across the Syrian Arab Republic continued to suffer the direct and indirect consequences of armed conflict and violence. Civilians were killed and injured as a result of ground-based strikes in southern Idlib and western Hama and armed clashes between and within various armed groups in the north-west, northern and eastern parts of the country. Armed clashes in Ayn Isa, Raqqah Governorate, resulted in the death, injury and displacement of civilians in that area. The majority of civilian casualties, however, were a result of attacks carried out by improvised explosive devices, including vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, by unidentified perpetrators and also as a result of explosive remnants of war, including unexploded ordnance. Many of the improvised explosive device attacks were carried out in densely populated areas, including residential areas and local markets.

18. OHCHR verified at least 45 incidents in which at least 67 civilians, including 6 women and 17 children, were killed and at least 74 civilians, including 11 women and 35 children, were injured as a result of ongoing hostilities across the Syrian Arab Republic, including through ground-based strikes, improvised explosive devices, explosive remnants of war, armed clashes and targeted killings at the hands of various parties to the conflict or by unidentified perpetrators. At least 22 civilian deaths (36 per cent) were attributed to what appeared to be indiscriminate attacks with improvised explosive devices by unidentified perpetrators in busy markets and residential areas. In the light of the patterns observed and the high number of incidents and civilians killed and injured in markets and residential areas, it appears that parties to the conflict have failed to respect the key principles under international humanitarian law of distinguishing civilians from fighters and civilian objects from military objectives; of refraining from indiscriminate attacks; of respecting proportionality in attack; and of taking constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects in the conduct of military operations.

19. The situation in the south-west part of the country remained tense, as assassinations and assassination attempts continued against fighters reconciled from former armed opposition groups as well as government security forces and officials. At least 10 civilians and fighters reconciled from former armed opposition groups were killed by unidentified perpetrators. Two heads of government-led local councils were killed in drive-by shootings by unidentified perpetrators.

20. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as Daesh) continued to carry out attacks in several areas, claiming responsibility for the killing of the head of a local council and her deputy, both of whom were linked to local authorities in the north-east. ISIL claimed responsibility for two attacks in the central part of the country: the first targeted Syrian Arab Army buses and the second targeted fuel transportation trucks. It is not clear whether the fuel was intended for civilian or

military purposes. Recent ISIL attacks focused on a triangle between Hama, Aleppo and Raqqah, as well as the Salamiyah-Tabaqah road. Targeted assassinations and attacks by unknown perpetrators against local tribal leaders and notables continued to be reported, most recently in Dayr al-Zawr.

21. Parties to the conflict continued to arbitrarily detain individuals, including women and children, humanitarian workers and media professionals, in areas under their effective control. In the majority of cases recorded by OHCHR, detainees were denied information about the reasons for their detention and other due process rights, while their families were denied information concerning their whereabouts or their fate, raising concerns that, in some cases, such detentions may constitute enforced disappearance.

22. Parties to the conflict continued to target humanitarian and health-care personnel and services as well as media professionals, including through attacks with improvised explosive devices and abductions.

23. In the north-east, local authorities continued to impose unofficial school curricula. In January, local authorities arrested a number of teachers after raiding their homes on the grounds that they were teaching curricula approved by the Government. The following day, a number of students were arrested during a protest in Hasakah Governorate. Teachers and students were released after several days, except for one teacher who remains in custody.

24. UNICEF recorded one incident of hostilities causing damage to educational facilities during the reporting period. On 14 January, Al-Sabbagh school in Ariha, Idlib, was hit by a rocket. The artillery shelling attack took place in the early evening and caused material damage to the structure of the facility.

25. The WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care reported one incident affecting health care. Additional incidents have yet to be verified as part of the Surveillance System.

26. During the reporting period, the Mine Action Service and UNICEF conducted a joint analysis which highlighted that children represent nearly 43 per cent of people living in areas reportedly contaminated by explosive hazards in 2020. Among recorded direct victims, one out of every four is a child.

Humanitarian response

27. Humanitarian assistance by United Nations entities continued throughout the Syrian Arab Republic (see table 1). Assistance included WFP food assistance for 5 million people in December and 4.6 million people in January, across all 14 Governorates. Mine Action Service-trained explosive ordnance risk education teams delivered awareness sessions to more than 50,000 civilians, promoting safe behaviours in communities most affected by explosive ordnance contamination. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees continued to support 126 operational community/satellite centres and mobile units across the country, providing a set of integrated services to persons of concern. The United Nations continued to support the COVID-19 response across the country, including by enhancing surveillance and diagnostic capacity and procuring vital medical supplies and equipment; supporting clinical readiness; and protecting the delivery of essential health-care services.

Table 1
Average number of people reached each month by the United Nations and other organizations through all modalities throughout the Syrian Arab Republic: December 2020 and January 2021

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Average number of people reached monthly</i>
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	240 500
International Organization for Migration	169 800
Mine Action Service	26 200
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	312 700
United Nations Children's Fund	1 090 600
United Nations Development Programme	663 200
United Nations Population Fund	471 900
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East	142 000
World Food Programme	4 807 800
World Health Organization	484 800

28. From inside the Syrian Arab Republic, assistance provided by United Nations entities included the delivery of food assistance by WFP for 3.6 million people in December and 3.1 million people in January. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provided cash assistance to more than 13,600 Palestine refugees, food baskets for more than 284,000 individuals and non-food items for almost 23,000 individuals. Some 94,500 people benefited from the rehabilitation of irrigation stations in Dayr al-Zawr Governorate by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The United Nations Humanitarian Air Service began flights on the Damascus-Aleppo-Damascus route in January, following approvals from the relevant authorities. WFP and the United Nations Population Fund supported almost 76,300 pregnant and lactating women with e-vouchers for fresh nutritious food and hygiene items, as well as a pregnancy visit and access to antenatal and postnatal care services.

29. Humanitarian assistance delivered cross-border into the north-west included WFP delivery of food assistance for 1.2 million people in December and 1.4 million people in January. As part of winterization efforts, WFP distributed double ready-to-eat rations to 18,800 people in December, with increased distributions to continue through February. In response to flooding in January, contingency plans were activated, thousands of emergency relief items were distributed and additional shelter kits and non-food items were dispatched to the affected areas. Support was initiated to relocate families willing to leave flooded areas (see figure I and table 2).

Figure I
Number of beneficiaries assisted by the United Nations and its partners through cross-border humanitarian deliveries, by cluster: December 2020 and January 2021 (monthly average)

(Thousands)

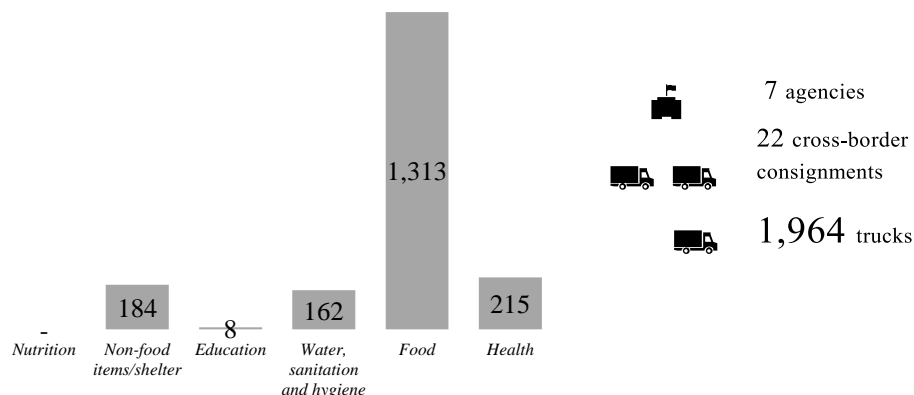


Table 2
Number of beneficiaries targeted through cross-border deliveries, by sector and by district: December 2020 and January 2021 (monthly average)

Governorate	District	Early recovery/ livelihood	Education	Food	Health	Non-food items/shelter	Nutrition	Water, sanitation and hygiene
Aleppo	Afrin	42 712	–	113 383	–	–	–	–
Aleppo	Bab	643 425	–	–	–	6 400	–	2 500
Aleppo	I'zaz	10 320	–	142 625	–	16 420	–	15 500
Aleppo	Jarabulus	458 919	–	–	–	451	–	–
Aleppo	Jabal Sim'an	164 330	–	76 513	–	–	–	–
Idlib	Harim	311 282	–	873 968	214 750	101 952	–	71 950
Idlib	Idlib	132 974	8 438	106 513	–	59 083	–	72 263

30. The Russian Federation sent informational bulletins to the United Nations from the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides and Refugee Migration Monitoring, which outlined the provision of bilateral relief assistance. Other Member States also continued to provide bilateral and other forms of humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian access

31. The provision of humanitarian assistance requires timely, safe, sustained and unimpeded access by the United Nations and all humanitarian partners to people in need across the Syrian Arab Republic. Principled humanitarian action depends on the ability to independently assess needs and deliver assistance, and to monitor and evaluate impact independently, including by engaging regularly and directly with affected people. The access landscape in the country is complex, with different geographical areas and different types of services requiring different operating modalities. More than 1,800 United Nations staff members are in-country, with more than 600 deployed in humanitarian hubs outside Damascus, in Aleppo, Dayr al-Zawr, Hama, Homs, Ladhqiyyah, Qamishli, Suwayda' and Tartus. A further 3,860 UNRWA staff are deployed across the country. A decentralized presence contributes to greater

access and proximity to affected populations. Across the Syrian Arab Republic, aid is distributed and implemented primarily by national actors, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

Access limitations related to the pandemic

32. Border crossings remained affected as the Syrian Arab Republic and neighbouring countries continued the implementation of COVID-19-related precautionary measures. Most land borders into the Syrian Arab Republic remained closed, with some limited exemptions, including commercial and relief shipments and the movement of humanitarian and international organization personnel. Access through some crossing points inside the Syrian Arab Republic remained restricted. Domestic flights continued to operate, including the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service. Overall, COVID-19 preventative measures were no longer considered a significant impediment to humanitarian response activities, with humanitarian actors adapting programming and activities to new operational realities and facilitating measures by relevant authorities.

Access in government-controlled areas

33. In government-controlled areas, communities and enclaves that remained difficult to access, owing to administrative and security approvals, included Shaffuniyah, Mayda'a and Kafr Batna in eastern Ghutah, and Bayt Jinn and Mazra'at Bayt Jinn in western Rif Dimashq. In the southern part of the country, insecurity and administrative restrictions continued to prevent sustained access to areas formerly controlled by non-State armed groups, particularly in Dar'a al-Balad neighbourhood in Dar'a city, in Karak al-Sharqi in Dar'a Governorate, and in parts of western Dar'a and Qunaytirah.

34. United Nations personnel and third-party contractors continued to mobilize to field locations alongside national NGOs and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to conduct assessment and monitoring, as well as logistics and administrative support missions. In December and January, 1,852 regular programmatic movements took place with programme or blanket approvals, approximately a 5 per cent decrease compared with the October to November reporting period, when 1,940 such movements took place (see table 3).¹ Monitoring missions, mostly conducted by third-party monitors, constituted the bulk of all conducted missions, at approximately 58 per cent of the total. Of these regular programme movements, 37 per cent were conducted in the north-eastern Governorates of Hasakah, Raqqah and Dayr al-Zawr. Another 13 per cent were conducted in the southern Governorates of Suwayda', Dar'a and Qunaytirah (see figure II).

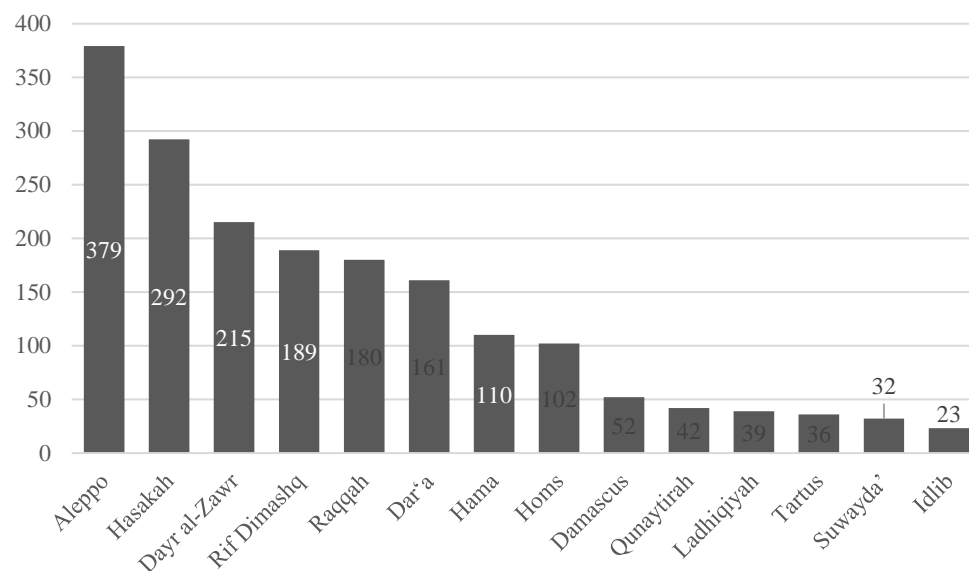
¹ United Nations staff and third-party contractors operating at humanitarian hubs outside of Damascus obtain "blanket approvals" to carry out movements as part of their regular programming. These enable regular access and reduce bureaucratic requirements.

Table 3
Total number of missions conducted with programme or blanket approvals* from within the Syrian Arab Republic by United Nations agencies and third parties/facilitators, by type: December 2020 and January 2021

Type of mission	Blanket approval	Programme approval	Total number
Assessment missions	4	5	9
Missions accompanying aid deliveries	–	745	745
Monitoring missions	1 013	57	1 070
Security, logistics and administrative support missions	28	–	28
Total	1 045	807	1 852

* Missions conducted under programme or blanket approvals do not require specific approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Figure II
Total number of missions conducted with programme or blanket approvals from within the Syrian Arab Republic by United Nations agencies and third parties/facilitators, by governorate: December 2020 and January 2021



35. For missions requiring specific approval by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the United Nations submitted 360 new requests, 71 per cent of which were approved (see table 4). This represents an improvement of 5 percentage points compared with the previous reporting period, when 66 per cent of 387 requested missions were approved, and is 15 percentage points higher than the average approval rate since December 2019 (56 per cent average approval rate).

36. During the reporting period, United Nations personnel monitored the distribution of humanitarian assistance, including core relief items and agriculture kits, to returnees in eastern Ghutah (Hazza, Nashabiyah and Misraba), in addition to Darayya in Rif Dimashq Governorate, and Khan Shaykhun in Idlib Governorate. Approval by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was not required for these missions. The Mine Action Service conducted 39 missions in western Ghutah, Rif Dimashq, to

assess the explosive ordnance contamination in mostly agricultural land, in preparation for the future clearance of land confirmed as contaminated.

37. United Nations entities continued to report improved access to communities in the north-west that shifted control during 2019 and 2020. For instance, UNICEF, in coordination with the Directorate of Education in Hama Governorate, rehabilitated two schools in Lataminah and Kafr Zayta.

38. In terms of access in northern Homs Governorate, WHO finalized rehabilitation works for four health clinics in Jabburin, Kafr Nan, Tayr Ma'lah and Talldaww.

Table 4

Missions from within the Syrian Arab Republic requiring specific approval by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: December 2020 and January 2021

<i>Type of request</i>	<i>Number requested</i>	<i>Number approved</i>	<i>Percentage approved</i>
Assessment missions	70	51	73
Missions accompanying aid deliveries	74	52	70
Monitoring missions	128	84	66
Security, logistics and administrative support missions	69	51	74
Explosive ordnance assessment missions	39	39	100
Total	360	257	71

Note: Missions by United Nations personnel departing from Damascus or travelling cross-line generally require specific approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Access in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic

39. In the north-east, the United Nations maintained regular and sustained humanitarian access in most parts of Hasakah Governorate and some parts of Raqqah Governorate, while other areas, including Manbij and Ayn al-Arab, remained difficult for the United Nations to access from Damascus, owing to the lack of agreement between parties in control and to insecurity.

40. On 2 December, WFP received confirmation from the Government that it would be able to restart distributions, following the suspension of WFP general food assistance to some 220,000 people in non-government-controlled areas of Raqqah Governorate. All planned distributions for the non-government-controlled areas of Raqqah have since been completed.

41. Escalations in and around Ayn Isa in Raqqah Governorate during December 2020 and early January 2021 led to the temporary displacement of some 3,000 people and to the temporary closure of a section of the M4 highway connecting Tall Tamr and Ayn Isa between 27 December and 2 January. Tensions between the Government and local authorities in the north-east resulted in local authorities blocking humanitarian shipments and partners from entering areas under government control in Qamishli and Hasakah cities on 20 January. The restriction affected the supply of critical items, including food, fuel, medicines and water trucks, and limited civilian access to essential services such as schools and health facilities. WFP food assistance for some 200,000 people was disrupted and approximately 80,000 people had little to no access to bread owing to the lack of wheat flour and fuel at bakeries. An education programme for out-of-school children in Hasakah city was suspended as students and teachers could not cross lines of control to access schools. Restrictions on staff movements affected community-based protection, legal, health and livelihood

services in Hasakah, Qamishli and Arishah camp. Reports were also received of movement restrictions by government forces in parts of eastern Aleppo and Menbij. All movements were able to resume on 2 February, including humanitarian shipments to government-controlled parts of Qamishli and Hasakah. Security conditions remained tense in the area.

42. Efforts continued towards the delivery of sufficient and sustained medical assistance to areas in the north-east outside of government control. In 2020, WHO medical supplies supported 2.3 million treatments in Hasakah, Raqqah, and Dayr al-Zawr Governorates, 1.9 million of which were delivered in areas outside of government control. Six cross-line road convoys took place in 2020, in addition to 13 airlifts. Supplies contained in these shipments included essential medicines, vaccines and COVID-19-related support such as personal protective equipment, ventilators and oxygen concentrators, as well as other life-saving equipment. All facilities previously served through the Ya‘rubiyah border crossing point were reached with WHO supplies at least once in 2020. Humanitarian needs in the north-east remained high, however, including for medical assistance, and have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

43. On 14 December, United Nations personnel from the Dayr al-Zawr hub conducted a mission to Albu Kamal. This established direct access by the United Nations to the Albu Kamal community, which was previously assisted through implementing partners. Mission participants conducted key informant interviews and collected relevant information on needs and gaps to inform future operational interventions.

44. In the light of deteriorating security conditions at Hawl camp in December and January, the camp administration suspended all activities on Fridays, with the exception of activities it deemed critical, such as bread distribution, water supply and health services. Humanitarian organizations operating at Hawl were not consulted prior to this suspension. The United Nations continued advocacy for strengthened security for residents in Hawl camp, and for security to be provided in a manner that does not further endanger residents or violate their rights; that does not restrict the provision of humanitarian assistance; and that does not limit ability of camp residents to access health and other essential services.

Access in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic

45. United Nations entities and humanitarian partners continued to address the logistical and operational challenges resulting from the reduction to one authorized border crossing following the adoption of Security Council resolution [2533 \(2020\)](#). All United Nations humanitarian assistance into the north-west continues to be routed through the Bab al-Hawa crossing, with 4,369 trucks of humanitarian aid sent in by way of this crossing point since Council resolution [2533 \(2020\)](#) came into effect.

46. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic continued its operations as mandated under Security Council resolutions [2165 \(2014\)](#), [2191 \(2014\)](#), [2258 \(2015\)](#), [2332 \(2016\)](#), [2393 \(2017\)](#), [2449 \(2018\)](#), [2504 \(2020\)](#) and [2533 \(2020\)](#). The Monitoring Mechanism monitored and confirmed the humanitarian nature of 22 consignments consisting of 1,964 trucks that crossed into the Syrian Arab Republic from Turkey, all through the Bab al-Hawa crossing. This brings the total number of trucks monitored since the beginning of operations to 44,382 (34,410 through Bab al-Hawa, 5,268 through Bab al-Salam, 4,595 through Ramtha and 109 through Ya‘rubiyah). There were no concerns or questions regarding the humanitarian nature of these consignments. For every shipment that crossed the border, the United Nations provided 48-hour advance notice to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, including information on the humanitarian goods to be delivered, the

number of trucks, the United Nations owner and the destination (district). The Mechanism continued to benefit from the excellent cooperation of the Government of Turkey.

47. Humanitarian workers continued to actively pursue an all-modalities approach to respond to the humanitarian needs in the north-west. The United Nations continued engagement with the concerned parties regarding the dispatch of a cross-line mission into the north-west from inside the Syrian Arab Republic. The United Nations and its partners have been unable to proceed, as parties do not agree on the mission composition. Work has begun to address the parties' reservations and develop an approach that will allow the mission to proceed in a safe and timely manner. Consultations with relevant stakeholders continue.

Access in the south of the Syrian Arab Republic

48. The most recent United Nations humanitarian convoy to reach Rukban from within the Syrian Arab Republic was undertaken in September 2019. Access by commercial trucks, using informal routes, has been sporadic. Since the decision by the Government of Jordan in March 2020 to close the border as a COVID-19 preventative measure, medical cases from Rukban have been unable to access the United Nations clinic on the Jordanian side of the border. Critical health cases continued to be referred to Damascus, in coordination with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, but those who have left have not been allowed to return. There have been 68 such medical evacuations from Rukban since the closure of the United Nations clinic. The United Nations continued to advocate for immediate humanitarian access to people remaining in Rukban.

49. Tensions continued to be reported in different parts of Dar'a Governorate, with a significant increase in the final weeks of January. Attacks, clashes and assassinations were reported, including in Tafas, Ruwayhinah, Qusaybah, Dar'a city, Saham al-Jawlan and Nahtah villages, and on the road between Yadudah and Muzayrib towns. This situation had a significant impact on the civilian population's freedom of movement, and some international NGOs operating in the area suspended their activities, including their implementation, monitoring and assessment missions. WFP was able to complete its January distribution plan.

50. On 7 December, the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, together with UNRWA and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat, visited Yarmouk camp in Rif Dimashq Governorate to assess conditions and gain first-hand knowledge about the humanitarian situation and needs.

Visas and registrations

51. The United Nations continued to work with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to allow for the timely provision of visas to staff (see table 5).

Table 5
Requests for United Nations visas: December 2020 and January 2021

<i>Type of request</i>	<i>Number requested</i>	<i>Number approved</i>	<i>Number rejected</i>	<i>Number pending^a</i>
Visas requested during reporting period	57	25	2	30
Renewals requested during reporting period	150	103	–	47
Visas pending from before reporting period	57	25	–	30
Renewals pending from before reporting period	71	64	–	7

Note: The United Nations withdrew two visa requests pending from before the reporting period.

The number of pending visa requests and visa renewal requests shown in rows 3 and 4 cover the period from February to November 2020.

^a The number of pending visa requests and visa renewal requests covers the period from February to November 2020.

52. A total of 41 international NGOs are registered with the Government to operate in the country.

Safety and security of humanitarian personnel and premises

53. The United Nations and NGOs continued to implement programmes in areas affected by frequent armed clashes, air strikes and the regular exchange of indirect artillery fire and other types of attacks by or among parties to the conflict. Humanitarian relief personnel also operate in areas highly contaminated with unexploded ordnance, explosive remnants of war and landmines.

54. Since the beginning of the conflict, hundreds of humanitarian workers have reportedly been killed, including: 22 staff members of the United Nations and of the entities of the United Nations system, 14 of whom were staff members of UNRWA; 66 staff members and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent; and 8 staff members and volunteers of the Palestine Red Crescent Society. Many staff members of international and national NGOs have also been killed.

55. A total of 44 staff members of agencies and programmes of the United Nations system (all from UNRWA) were detained or missing as at the end of the reporting period.

III. Observations

56. The civilian population in the Syria Arab Republic has entered 2021 amid some of the most challenging humanitarian conditions experienced in the past 10 years of conflict. Millions inside the country and millions of refugees outside are grappling with deep trauma, personal insecurity, grinding poverty and a lack of hope for the future. Economic decay and the compounding impact of COVID-19 are driving immense humanitarian need, while active hostilities and explosive remnants of war tragically and shamefully continue to kill and maim civilians. Humanitarian indicators reveal the profound impact on the civilian population. Food insecurity and acute and chronic malnutrition among children are on the rise, as is the overall number of people in need, which is projected to reach 13.4 million people in 2021, a staggering 20 per cent increase compared with early 2020, when an estimated 11.1 million people in the country required humanitarian aid. An unprecedented 12.4 million people, or 60 per cent of the population, are food insecure, an increase of 4.5 million people over the course of just one year.

57. When it comes to delivering life-saving aid to people in need across the Syrian Arab Republic, all channels should be made, and kept, available. In the north-west, millions of people are pressed up against the border in what is still, in spite of the ceasefire agreement, an active conflict zone. They rely on humanitarian aid delivered cross-border from Turkey. The horrendous conditions caused by torrential rains and flooding in parts of the north-west demonstrate again that, even with the massive cross-border operation under way, we are still far short of meeting people's needs. More access is needed. While the United Nations continues its efforts to establish access into the north-west from inside the Syrian Arab Republic, across active conflict lines, such cross-line missions cannot begin to substitute for the cross-border operation. I also recall that, a year on from the expiration of the Security Council's authorization for the United Nations entities and their implementing partners to use the Ya'rubiyah border crossing, humanitarian needs in the north-east remain high, and have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. I remind all parties of their obligation under international humanitarian law to allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need that is impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction.

58. I remain alarmed by the fact that civilians continue to bear the brunt of hostilities, including as a result of indiscriminate attacks in populated areas. Attacks that are directed against civilians or that are indiscriminate, including improvised explosive device attacks in populated areas and markets, must cease immediately. I further remind the parties of their obligation under international humanitarian law not to attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects that are indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, which include drinking-water installations and supplies. The COVID-19 pandemic adds to the urgency of protecting access to water and sanitation. I call on all parties to remove practical obstacles to education in territories under their control, in line with the human right to education.

59. The Special Envoy continues efforts for the unilateral release of persons arbitrarily deprived of their liberty, the majority of whom are held by the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. I call upon the Government and other parties to account for the fate and whereabouts of those they are detaining and to allow humanitarian and human rights agencies access to all places of detention. I remind parties that torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and arbitrary arrest and detention, are prohibited. All persons in detention should be promptly informed of any charges against them. Persons facing prosecution should be afforded all minimum fair trial guarantees. They should be brought promptly before a judge and immediately released if their deprivation of liberty is arbitrary. Detaining authorities should carry out prompt, effective, thorough and transparent investigations of deaths in custody and, if it is found that such deaths resulted from criminal acts, the perpetrators should be brought to justice. Families of persons who have died in custody should be informed and receive full and adequate reparations within a reasonable period in the case of wrongful death. Respect for these principles would also build confidence, both within society and between the parties and international stakeholders. A failure to address arbitrary deprivation of liberty would leave credible justice, true reconciliation and sustainable peace elusive.

60. Perpetrators of serious violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law must be held accountable. I remind all States, in particular those with direct influence over parties to the conflict, that they are bound to take proactive steps to ensure respect for international humanitarian law, including as it relates to the protection of civilians. I call upon all parties to the conflict, in particular the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as all States, civil society and the United Nations system, to cooperate fully with the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons

Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, in particular by providing relevant information and documentation. Accountability for serious violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law is both a legal requirement and central to achieving sustainable peace in the Syrian Arab Republic. I reiterate my call for the situation in the country to be referred to the International Criminal Court.

61. In view of the ongoing serious concerns repeatedly raised with regard to the protection of civilians and other human rights concerns in the Syrian Arab Republic, I continue to strongly urge the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, in line with Human Rights Council resolutions [S-18/1](#) and [19/22](#), to cooperate with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council and with OHCHR, including through the establishment of a field presence with the mandate to protect and promote human rights.

62. I reiterate my appeal for an immediate global ceasefire and fully support the appeal of my Special Envoy for a complete nationwide ceasefire throughout the Syrian Arab Republic, as called for in Security Council resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#). My Special Envoy will spare no efforts to engage Syrian parties in the United Nations-facilitated political process and to engage key international players in support of the process. The credibility of the process relies on a willingness by negotiating parties to find common ground and recognize the need for all Syrians to move beyond a perpetual state of conflict. I support the efforts of the Special Envoy to facilitate the work of the Constitutional Committee as part of a broader political process that requires dialogue on the future of the Syrian Arab Republic and the emergence of concrete actions that will build trust and confidence and result in the creation of a safe, calm and neutral environment on the ground. This is necessary to ensure that issues of urgent concern to ordinary Syrians identified in Security Council resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#) and the political process that the resolution envisages can be meaningfully addressed, with a view to ensuring the interests of Syrians, ending their suffering and ensuring that sustainable peace remains the overriding priority.

Annex

Reported incidents affecting civilians recorded by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: December 2020 and January 2021*

Idlib Governorate

- On 23 December 2020, a civilian was killed and another was injured when a reported vehicle-borne improvised explosive device was detonated near the Bab al-Hawa border crossing in northern rural Idlib.
- On the same day, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham reportedly detained a humanitarian worker at the Ghazzawiyah border, which separates Idlib and northern Aleppo. He was released five days later.
- On 25 December 2020, a boy was injured after a reported unexploded ordnance detonated in Joseph village in the Jabal al-Zawiyah area in southern rural Idlib.
- On 31 December 2020, a boy was killed and a boy and a girl were injured when reported unexploded ordnance detonated in Sarmin town, eastern Idlib.
- On 14 January 2021, a man and woman were killed and a man was injured after reported ground-based strikes impacted in Ariha city, southern rural Idlib.

Aleppo Governorate

- On 4 December 2020, three civilians, including a woman, were injured when a reported magnetic improvised explosive device attached to a vehicle was detonated in Jindayris city in Afrin district in north-west rural Aleppo.
- On 12 December 2020, a male media worker was killed in a reported drive-by shooting by unidentified masked men on a motorcycle near the city of Bab in eastern rural Aleppo.
- On 13 December 2020, two men were injured during reported armed clashes between armed groups in Jindayris city in Afrin district in north-west Aleppo.
- On 2 January 2021, 11 civilians, including 2 women and 2 boys, were injured when a reported vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated in Jindayris city in Afrin district in north-west rural Aleppo.
- On 3 January 2021, a man was killed in a reported drive-by shooting by unidentified perpetrators in the Bab area in eastern rural Aleppo.
- On 6 January 2021, a male media worker was injured in a reported attempted assassination by two masked men in Bab city in eastern rural Aleppo.
- On 17 January 2021, a man was killed and six civilians, including a pregnant woman and a boy, were injured after a reported magnetic improvised explosive device attached to a vehicle detonated in the Sijju area in I'zaz district in northern Aleppo.

* The list of incidents exemplifies human rights issues of concern raised in the report. Owing to the changing patterns of conflict and the loss of networks of credible and/or reliable sources in many conflict-affected areas, however, verifying incidents is increasingly difficult. The list, which contains only those incidents that were reported to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and that have been verified according to its methodology, should not be considered comprehensive.

- On 23 January 2021, four civilians, including a woman and two boys, were killed, and eight civilians, including a woman and a boy, were injured when reported ground-based strikes landed in Tall Rif^{at} in northern rural Aleppo.
- On 30 January 2021, at least 5 civilians, including 3 boys, were killed and 29 others, including 2 women, 7 boys and 3 girls, were injured when a reported vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated in Afrin city in north-west rural Aleppo.
- On 31 January 2021, at least 6 civilians, including 2 girls and 1 woman, were killed and 25 individuals, including 3 women, 3 boys and 1 girl, were injured when a reported vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated in I^zaz city in northern rural Aleppo.

Hasakah Governorate

- On 20 December 2020, a man was injured when a reported roadside improvised explosive device detonated in Ra[’]s al-Ayn in western rural Hasakah.
- On 2 January 2021, a boy and a girl were killed and their mother was injured when a reported vehicle-borne improvised explosive device detonated in Ra[’]s al-Ayn in western Hasakah.
- On 8 January 2021, a man was killed in Hawl camp in rural Hasakah.

Hama Governorate

- On 26 December 2020, five men were killed when a reported ground-based strike hit their tractor in an agricultural land area near Zaqqum village in western rural Hama.

Homs Governorate

- On 8 January 2021, a man died after a reported landmine detonated in an agriculture field in Dab[’]ah village in south-east rural Homs.

Dayr al-Zawr Governorate

- On 5 December 2020, a man was killed in a reported drive-by shooting by unidentified perpetrators in Sajir village in northern rural Dayr al-Zawr.
- On the same day, a man was killed in a reported drive-by shooting by unidentified perpetrators in Jasmi village in northern rural Dayr al-Zawr.
- On 12 December 2020, two men were killed after a reported landmine detonated in Susah city in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr.
- On 6 January 2021, two boys were killed when reported unexploded ordnance detonated in Duwayr city in eastern rural Dayr al-Zawr.

Raqqah Governorate

- On 26 December 2020, two men were injured when several ground-based strikes reportedly landed in Ayn Isa in northern rural Raqqah.
- On 3 January 2021, a man and a woman were injured when a reported ground-based strike landed at Hawshan village in northern rural Raqqah.
- On 4 January 2021, two men were injured after a reported improvised explosive device exploded in Raqqah city.

- On 5 January 2021, two boys were killed as a result of what was reported to be a landmine detonated near them in agricultural land near Ayn Isa in northern rural Raqqah.
- On 26 January 2021, three civilian men were killed and two civilians, including a boy, were injured when a reported roadside improvised explosive device detonated in the city of Tall Abyad in northern rural Raqqah.

Dar'a Governorate

- On 11 January 2021, a boy and a girl were killed and seven boys and three girls were injured after a reported landmine exploded in Shaykh Miskin city in northern rural Dar'a.
 - On 24 January 2021, a man was killed and another injured after a reported roadside improvised explosive device detonated in Jasim city in northern rural Dar'a.
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