

Syria

Military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate



Ministry of Immigration
and Integration

The Danish
Immigration Service

This report is not, and does not purport to be, a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed. It should thus be weighed against other country of origin information available on the topic.

The report at hand does not include any policy recommendations. The information does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

The report is a synthesis of information gathered from different sources, and it brings together condensed information in a relevant manner for the reader's COI needs and it organises information together thematically to form a coherent whole of the topic in question, instead of listing or quoting information source by source.

Front-page picture depicts members of the Self-Defence Forces. The picture has been provided to the Danish Immigration Service by the Representation of AANES in Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

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Executive summary

The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) largely respect the law on military service (the so-called Mandatory Self-Defence Duty) that is implemented in most areas under their control, which includes most of Hasakah Governorate. The Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP) are generally not used in combat. However, there have been cases of conscripts being sent to frontlines in force majeure situations as well as in situations, where conscripts have volunteered to fight at the frontline. DIS has not found reports of HXP committing violations against civilians.

Non-Kurdish ethnic minorities are not discriminated during their service in HXP. Minors are not recruited to the HXP, and women can join these forces on a voluntary basis.

If caught by the authorities, draft evaders and deserters from the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty are sent back to service, sometimes following a short period of detention. There are no reports of mistreatment during the detention. Deserters may be subject to prosecution depending on the circumstances of their desertion. Evasion and desertion has no consequences for the families of evaders and deserters other than potential questioning.

Recruitment of men and women to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) takes place on a voluntary basis. The number of minors in the SDF has decreased since 2020. However, minors are still being recruited to the SDF. Most of the recruited minors are released after a short period. There are reports of the SDF having committed violations against civilians.

There are no reports of direct recruitment to the PKK taking place in AANES territories. However, a youth organisation called Revolutionary Youth is believed to recruit minors to its ranks in order to prepare the youth for later recruitment to the PKK.

The Government of Syria (GoS) does not recruit conscripts for military service in the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) in AANES-controlled areas. It is unclear whether or to what extent recruitment to the SAA takes place in areas controlled by GoS in Qamishli and Hasakah City.

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Introduction

This report focuses on recruitment to military forces in Syria's Hasakah Governorate. This includes the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty, recruitment to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), recruitment to the military wing of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as well as military service in the Syrian Arab Army (SAA).

The purpose of the report was to collect updated information on the issues relevant for the processing of asylum cases. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the report were drawn up by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) in consultation with the Secretariat of the Danish Refugee Appeals Board as well as an advisory group on COI ('Referencegruppen').¹ The ToR are included in the end of the report (Annex III).

The report is written in accordance with the EASO COI Report Methodology.²

The report is a synthesis of the information obtained from oral and written sources and does not include all details and nuances provided by the sources. In the report, care has been taken to present the views of the sources as accurately and transparently as possible. The individual sources should not be held accountable for the content of the report.

The majority of the oral sources were interviewed during a fact-finding mission conducted by the Country of Origin Information Division of DIS to Erbil and Suleimania, Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), from 25 January 2022 to 2 February 2022.

During the mission, meetings were held with six sources, while eight additional meetings were held through Skype or WhatsApp. All consulted sources have been selected by virtue of their expertise on the topics of this report.

Meeting minutes have been drafted from each meeting. These were forwarded to each source for approval, providing the source an opportunity to amend, comment or correct statements so that the minutes reflect the information shared most accurately. All sources approved their statements. The minutes are attached as an annex to this report (Annex I).

For the sake of transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the meeting minutes have been given consecutive numbers, which are used in the report when referring to the statements of the sources in the footnotes.

The consulted sources were informed about the purpose of the meetings and the fact that their statements would be included in a public report. Ten out of fourteen sources requested varying degrees of anonymity.

During the meetings, sources also touched upon topics that are not addressed in the ToR. However, whenever such topics could be relevant for asylum cases, the information has been included in the minutes but not addressed in the report.

¹ The group consists of the Danish Refugee Council, Amnesty International in Denmark, Danish Institute for Human Rights, Dignity, representatives a Christian organisation (Danish European Mission) and the Danish Bar and Law Society (representing asylum lawyers).

² EASO, *EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology*, June 2019, [url](#)

Interviews for the report were conducted in January and February 2022. The situation regarding military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate has been monitored continuously during the subsequent writing process in order to avoid the inclusion of outdated information.

It should be noted that although this report mainly focuses on military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate, the information collected indicates that the situation regarding military recruitment is in many ways the same in the other parts of North and East Syria (NES).

Attention should be called to the changeable and unstable situation in Syria, including in Hasakah Governorate, and the fact that the information provided in this report may become outdated. Therefore, the issues addressed in this report should be monitored periodically and brought up to date accordingly.

DIS has observed conflicting information in the written sources, specifically regarding the accurate affiliation of different actors in the governorate. Attention should thus be called to the fact that many sources may confuse different actors present in Hasakah Governorate (e.g. Self-Defence Forces and SDF, or Revolutionary Youth and SDF) due to the close relationship between these actors. When reading these sources, care has been taken to establish to which actor the specific information concerns.

The research and editing of this report was finalised on 17 June 2022.

The report can be accessed from the website of DIS, www.us.dk, and is available to all stakeholders working within the field of refugee status determination as well as to the general public.

Abbreviations

AANES	Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
COI	Country of Origin Information
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
GoS	Government of Syria
HPG	People’s Defence Forces
HXP	Self-Defence Duty Forces
IS	Islamic State
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
NES	North and East Syria
PKK	Kurdistan Workers’ Party
PYD	Democratic Union Party
SAA	Syrian Arab Army
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SNA	Syrian National Army
YPG	People’s Protection Units
YPJ	Women’s Protection Units

Glossary

AANES	Political entity that administers areas in north-eastern Syria.
Asayish	Police force of the AANES areas. ³
Child Protection Office	Abbreviation for the Office for Protection of Children in Armed Conflict, an AANES institution, which was established to prevent recruitment of minors to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).
Conscript	Person required for military service.
Deserter	Soldier who has left her/his post without permission and is thus no longer in active military service.
Draft evader	Person required to perform military service, who has not enlisted in due time.
North and East Syria	Areas that are administered by AANES.
Syrian Democratic Forces	A military force comprised of several armed groups.

³ Allsopp, H. and van Wilgenburg, W., *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflict*, 2019, pp. 116-117

1. Background

Hasakah Governorate is located in the north-eastern part of Syria (see location on Map 1 on page 10). The Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated the population of the governorate to be 1,803,000 in 2019.⁴ The ethnic composition of the governorate is a mix of Arabs and Kurds with smaller populations of Assyrians, Armenians and Yezidis.⁵

In July 2012, Kurdish forces took control of most of the areas in northern Syria with a Kurdish majority, including Hasakah Governorate.⁶ The same year, a civil administration was established. It was renamed several times, most recently in September 2018 to the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES).⁷

Today, AANES administers almost 25 % of Syria, including most of Hasakah Governorate, as well as parts of the governorates of Raqqa, Deir Ezzour and Aleppo.⁸ Security in these territories is mainly managed by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the internal security forces, the *Asayish*.⁹ The term North and East Syria (NES) is used in this report to describe the AANES-controlled areas.

The Government of Syria (GoS) controls smaller areas in the cities of Hasakah and Qamishli, in addition to Qamishli Airport. GoS and its Russian allies also have a presence close to the Syrian-Turkish border.¹⁰ A strip of land between Tel Abyad in Raqqa Governorate and Ras Al-Ayn in Hasakah Governorate is controlled by Syrian National Army (SNA), a Turkish-backed opposition group.¹¹ On 23 May 2022, the Turkish president Erdogan announced Turkey's intention to expand this area via a military operation.¹²

1.1. Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria

The Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) is the executive body of AANES. SDC is ruled by a coalition dominated by the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD; Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat).¹³ Although AANES institutions are

⁴ EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 158

⁵ EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 22; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, June 2021, [url](#), pp. 11-12

⁶ Allsopp, H., *The Kurds of Syria*, 2015, p. 1; EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 159

⁷ Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *The Autonomous Administration: A Judicial Approach to Understanding the Model and Experience*, 7 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 11-12; SDC, *Autonomous Administration in North and East Syria*, n.d., [url](#)

⁸ EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 22, 157-160; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, June 2021, [url](#), pp. 11-12, 15, 22

⁹ DIIS, *Mosaics of Power: Fragmentation of the Syrian state since 2011*, 2018, [url](#), p. 19; EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 22-23; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, June 2021, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁰ EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 157-160; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, June 2021, [url](#), p. 25

¹¹ ICG, *Steadying the New Status Quo in Syria's North East*, 27 November 2019, [url](#); Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, June 2021, [url](#), pp. 12, 25; EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 159

¹² Turkey, Presidency of the Turkish Republic, "NATO'nun genişlemesi konusundaki yaklaşımımız terörle mücadele konusundaki ilkeli tutumumuzdan kaynaklanıyor" [Our approach to the enlargement of NATO stems from our principled stance in the fight against terrorism], 23 May 2022, [url](#)

¹³ Allsopp, H. and van Wilgenburg, W., *The Kurds of Northern Syria*, 2019, pp. 2, 95-97; EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 24; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, June 2021, [url](#), p. 12

officially separate from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), there are close ties between the political and military leadership of AANES and the PKK.¹⁴

AANES is divided into seven administrative areas (previously called cantons¹⁵): Jazire, Euphrates, Manbij, Deir Ezzour, Tabqa, Raqqa and Afrin.¹⁶ Though Afrin is an administrative area of AANES, it is under control of SNA today.¹⁷ The administrative area of Jazire roughly corresponds to Hasakah Governorate.¹⁸

1.2. Mandatory Self-Defence Duty

The Mandatory Self-Defence Duty (hereafter: 'the Self-Defence Duty') is a compulsory military service for young men in the AANES-controlled areas.¹⁹ Conscripts who perform the duty are serving in the Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP; Hêzên Xweparastinê).²⁰

The Law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty in the Democratic Autonomous Areas (hereafter: *Self-Defence Duty Law*) was passed in July 2014.²¹ In the latest version of the law from June 2019, the Self-Defence Duty is described as "*a national, human and moral duty*".²²

AANES implemented conscription in 2014. The conscription was introduced following a need for a larger military force in the fight against the Islamic State (IS).²³

The Self-Defence Duty was initially only mandatory for Kurds, as AANES feared that Arab communities would oppose it. However, due to dissatisfaction with this practice among Kurds, in the last two years, it has been extended to cover Arabs as well.²⁴ Three residents of NES²⁵ and a university professor interviewed by DIS for this report mentioned that AANES is very attentive to the public opinion with regard to the Self-Defence Duty.²⁶

Wladimir van Wilgenburg, a journalist and author on several books on Kurds in Syria, explained that the Self-Defence Duty partly serves the purpose of introducing the AANES system and ideology to the conscripts.²⁷

¹⁴ Fabrice Balanche: 19; Journalist and writer: 39-40; Political analyst: 2; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 15-16; University professor: 10

¹⁵ EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 158

¹⁶ Representation of AANES in KRI: 2; RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#); SDC, *Autonomous Administration in North and East Syria*, n.d., [url](#); Wilson Center, *SDF's Arab Majority Rank Turkey as the Biggest Threat to NE Syria*, 2019, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁷ Representation of AANES in KRI: 2; Fabrice Balanche: 4

¹⁸ Representation of AANES in KRI: 2; EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), p. 158

¹⁹ Allsopp, H. and van Wilgenburg, W., *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflict*, 2019, p. 99

²⁰ Representation of AANES in KRI: 1

²¹ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Update on Military Service, Mandatory Self-Defence Duty and Recruitment to the YPG*, September 2015, [url](#), p. 21; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Military and Security Structures of the Autonomous Administration in Syria*, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 25

²² RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

²³ Expert from International Crisis Group: 1

²⁴ Expert from International Crisis Group: 1

²⁵ These residents have general knowledge on recruitment in the NES based on their civil and social activities, as well as from their personal experience of serving the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty. For reasons of anonymity, these activities will not be further elaborated on.

²⁶ Local residents: 23; University professor: 2

²⁷ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 13

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The Self-Defence Duty is one of the push-factors that make people leave the AANES territories.²⁸ According to Fabrice Balanche, associate professor at the University of Lyon 2, this is not as much due to the duty itself. Rather it is the result of the duty's economic consequences for the conscript's family, as the wage during service is very low.²⁹

Map 1. Map of Syria. Hasakah Governorate is highlighted in dark yellow³⁰



²⁸ Fabrice Balanche: 1; Local residents: 22; Political analyst: 3; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 9; Allsopp, H. and van Wilgenburg, W., *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflict*, 2019, p. 22; Enab Baladi, *Under guise of duty: patterns of coercion enabled by SDF's draft law*, 15 April 2021, [url](#); Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Military and Security Structures of the Autonomous Administration in Syria*, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 27

²⁹ Fabrice Balanche: 1

³⁰ The map has been edited by DIS and is based on a United Nations map. The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of DIS concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

2. Self-Defence Duty

2.1. Self-Defence Duty Law

2.1.1. Who are required to serve?

According to Article 1 in the Self-Defence Duty Law from 2019, which currently regulates the Self-Defence Duty, men above the age of 18 deriving from NES are required to perform military service. In practice, the Defence Office of the AANES in each administrative area decides the age range of those required for serving.³¹

Previously, the differences in age requirements between different areas under AANES control have created some confusion about who were required to serve.³² However, at the time of writing, the duty is, pursuant to Decree No. 3 of 4 September 2021, only compulsory for men between the age of 18 and 24 (born in 1998 and later), which is the same across all areas. Prior to this decree, the age range was higher, and has been as high as 18 to 40 years old.³³ The decree does not apply to those who currently serve and to deserters from the SDF and Asayish.³⁴

The Self-Defence Duty is mandatory in every region governed by the AANES.³⁵ Yet, there are areas where protests have led to temporary suspensions of the duty.³⁶ This has happened in e.g. Deir Ezzour³⁷ and Manbij in June 2021.³⁸ It is unclear whether the Self-Defence Duty is applicable for a person from Afrin, which no longer is under AANES control. According to the AANES representation in KRI and an article in news outlet Kurdistan24, conscription is not mandatory for persons from Afrin³⁹, while Professor Fabrice Balanche stated the contrary.⁴⁰

The duty does not apply to individuals residing in or originating from other areas than NES.⁴¹ However, if such persons have resided in NES for more than five years, the law would also apply to them.⁴² If someone is recorded as originating from Hasakah in his ID card, but has lived in e.g. Damascus his entire life, AANES would consider him to be from NES and he would be required to perform the Self-Defence Duty.⁴³

³¹ RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

³² Expert from International Crisis Group: 5; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 2

³³ Representation of AANES in KRI: 4, 9; Journalist and writer: 1; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 2; North Press Agency, *Syria's AANES Determines Age Required For 2021 Self-Defense Duty*, 3 May 2021, [url](#)

³⁴ AANES, /قرار رقم ٣/ [Decree Number 3], 4 September 2021; Kurdistan24, *Kurdish-led forces in northern Syria ease conscription conditions*, 4 September 2021, [url](#)

³⁵ Representation of AANES in KRI: 4; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 3; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 1

³⁶ Expert from International Crisis Group: 4; Representation of AANES in KRI: 4; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 3

³⁷ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 4

³⁸ Representation of AANES in KRI: 4; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 3; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 4

³⁹ Representation of AANES in KRI: 26; Kurdistan24, *Syrian Kurds pause conscription for people displaced from Turkey-held areas*, 10 June 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁰ Fabrice Balanche: 4

⁴¹ Journalist and writer: 4; Representation of AANES in KRI: 26

⁴² Journalist and writer: 4, 18; Representation of AANES in KRI: 26; RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴³ Representation of AANES in KRI: 26

All ethnicities as well as stateless Kurds are required to serve the Self-Defence Duty.⁴⁴ Arabs were initially not asked to serve. However, this has gradually changed since 2020.⁴⁵

2.1.2. Postponement and exemptions from the Self-Defence Duty

The law contains provisions that allow persons required to serve the Self-Defence Duty to have their service postponed or to be exempt from it, depending on the individual circumstances.⁴⁶ These rules, which among others include exemptions due to medical issues⁴⁷ and postponement for persons living abroad,⁴⁸ are enforced and respected by AANES.⁴⁹ A person who has been exempted or is discharged from the Self-Defence Duty will have this written in the Self-Defence Duty booklet (see Chapter 2.2).⁵⁰

Some exemptions are temporary and given on basis of a financial guarantee.⁵¹ According to an article from the news outlet Al-Monitor, potential conscripts sometimes avoid applying for exemption, as it can be costly and difficult.⁵²

The below subsections concern different circumstances under which postponement or exemption from serving the Self-Defence Duty are granted.

2.1.2.1. Education

According to the Self-Defence Duty Law, a person studying at pre-university and university level can have the duty postponed until he finishes his education.⁵³ The postponement is valid for one year at a time.⁵⁴ Postponement based on education is only given to persons of a certain age group, depending on what educational level the individual is studying on. For instance, postponement for secondary school students can only be given until the age of 21, pursuant to Article 14 in the law.⁵⁵

According to the representation of AANES in KRI, an individual who had the Self-Defence Duty postponed beyond the age of 24 due to education is no longer required to serve.⁵⁶ DIS has not been able to corroborate this information from other sources.

The provisions regarding education are generally enforced.⁵⁷ However, in 2018, in conjunction with armed clashes against the Islamic State (IS), there were examples of conscription of men who previously had their duty postponed on education grounds.⁵⁸

⁴⁴ Journalist and writer: 4; Representation of AANES in KRI: 24; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 3

⁴⁵ Expert from International Crisis Group: 2, 4; University professor: 1

⁴⁶ RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁷ Expert from International Crisis Group: 7; Journalist and writer: 5-7

⁴⁸ Journalist and writer: 12

⁴⁹ Fabrice Balanche: 3; Journalist and writer: 5; Local residents: 15; Political analyst: 5; University professor: 2

⁵⁰ Journalist and writer: 14

⁵¹ RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

⁵² Al-Monitor, *In Syria's Deir ez-Zor, SDF conscription 'severs livelihoods'*, 22 February 2021, [url](#)

⁵³ Journalist and writer: 6

⁵⁴ Local residents: 15; ; RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁵ RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁶ Representation of AANES in KRI: 9

⁵⁷ Fabrice Balanche: 3; Expert from International Crisis Group: 7; Local residents: 15

⁵⁸ Enab Baladi, *Compulsory military recruitment in Jazira Region: SDF imposing their authority*, 12 July 2019, [url](#)

2.1.2.2. Medical reasons

A person can either have his duty postponed or be exempt from serving due to medical reasons, depending on the nature of the medical issue.⁵⁹ Persons with major medical issues (i.e. blindness or missing the ability to speak) would be exempt altogether. However, if a visually impaired person were able to see a little bit, he would be asked to perform special tasks such as cooking.⁶⁰ Temporary medical issues (i.e. recovering from a surgery) could mean that the person would have his service postponed.⁶¹

A medical committee will assess the situation of the individual in order to decide whether he is fit for service.⁶² Everyone who are eligible to serve the Self-Defence Duty is required to undergo a medical examination prior to enrolment.⁶³

2.1.2.3. Staying abroad

Individuals of conscription age living abroad can pay a fee of 400 USD to have their Self-Defence Duty postponed for one year in order to visit the AANES-controlled territories and exit the area again. This option is not possible for men living in Iraq and Turkey.⁶⁴ According to the AANES representation in KRI, a person who paid to have his Self-Defence Duty postponed in this way would not be required to serve if he returned to NES after turning 25 years old.⁶⁵

If someone left NES while he was obliged to serve his Self-Defence Duty (i.e. evaded) and returns after turning 25 years old without having paid for postponement, he would be required to serve. However, if he left NES before turning 18 years old and thus was not required to serve when he left NES, he would not be required to serve after turning 25 years old.⁶⁶

Persons required for Self-Defence Duty who return to settle in the AANES territories after a stay abroad can have their duty postponed for six months, according to Article 25 of the Self-Defence Duty Law.⁶⁷

2.1.2.4. Family

If a man is the only son in his family⁶⁸, or if all other brothers are disabled, he can be exempt from serving the Self-Defence Duty. The exemption is not permanent until the mother either has passed away or is above 50 years old. Until then, the individual is temporarily exempt from serving and will have his case reviewed every two years.⁶⁹

⁵⁹ Journalist and writer: 7; Local residents: 11; RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁰ Journalist and writer: 8

⁶¹ Journalist and writer: 8; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 8

⁶² Journalist and writer: 7; Local residents 11

⁶³ Enab Baladi, *Compulsory military recruitment in Jazira Region: SDF imposing their authority*, 12 July 2019, [url](#); RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁴ Journalist and writer: 12; Representation of AANES in KRI: 11; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 8; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 6; Xeber24, *قانون واجب الدفاع الذاتي للإدارة الذاتية لروح آفاي كُردستان... بالتفصيل [In Detail... The Law of Self-Defense Duty of the Autonomous Administration in Rojava, Kurdistan]*, 19 June 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁵ Representation of AANES in KRI: 11

⁶⁶ Representation of AANES in KIR: 11

⁶⁷ RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁸ Journalist and writer: 11; Local residents: 11; RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁹ RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

Family members of a martyr registered in the Committee of the Families of the Martyrs registry are exempt from serving the Self-Defence Duty. A family member of a father or brother who died or was injured in the war, but who is not found in the aforementioned registry, can have his duty postponed for one year.⁷⁰

Article 24 of the Self-Defence Duty Law states that only one brother from each family should serve at a time.⁷¹ However, three residents of NES interviewed by DIS explained that someone, whose brother is already serving, could choose between serving simultaneously with his brother or postponing his service until his brother's service period has ended.⁷²

An individual who has a brother or sister in other security forces (e.g. Asayish or SDF) can apply to have his service postponed. This is not an option, however, if the sibling serves in the Syrian Arab Army (SAA).⁷³ Yet, three residents of NES interviewed by DIS noted that this rule has not been enforced for the last four years.⁷⁴ DIS has not found information that corroborates the statements of these residents.

2.1.2.5. Other reasons

An individual who has served out his contract in SDF (see Chapter 3) is exempt from the Self-Defence Duty.⁷⁵ Contrarily, a person who has completed his military service in the SAA is not exempt from duty.⁷⁶

An expert from International Crisis Group (ICG) noted that previous exemptions for civil society workers, NGO workers, teachers and doctors are no longer enforced systematically.⁷⁷ The AANES representation in KRI confirmed that medical workers, NGO employees and teachers are generally not exempt from the Self-Defence Duty.⁷⁸

It is not possible to omit serving for conscientious reasons, according to the two sources who have been consulted on the topic.⁷⁹

2.1.3. Length of the Self-Defence Duty

The Self-Defence Duty had an initial duration of six months. The period was extended to nine months following amendments of the law in January 2016.⁸⁰ As of June 2022, Article 2 in the law sets the conscription period to one year.⁸¹ Generally, people will be discharged after having served for one year.⁸²

⁷⁰ Local residents: 12; RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

⁷¹ RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

⁷² Local residents: 13

⁷³ Journalist and writer: 10

⁷⁴ Local residents: 11

⁷⁵ Local residents: 14

⁷⁶ Fabrice Balanche: 23; Representation of AANES in KRI: 5

⁷⁷ Expert from International Crisis Group: 7

⁷⁸ Representation of AANES in KRI: 12

⁷⁹ Journalist and writer: 13; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 12

⁸⁰ Enab Baladi, *Compulsory military recruitment in Jazira Region: SDF imposing their authority*, 12 July 2019, [url](#); Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Military and Security Structures of the Autonomous Administration in Syria*, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 26

⁸¹ Journalist and writer: 15; Political analyst: 6; Representation of AANES in KRI: 1; RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

⁸² Journalist and writer: 15; Fabrice Balanche: 3

Conscripts who evade service will be punished with an additional month of service, according to Article 15 in the Self-Defence Duty Law.⁸³ These rules are enforced in practice, although some sources were unaware of any cases where conscripts had to serve additional time due to evasion.⁸⁴ A Syrian-Kurdish journalist and writer interviewed by DIS mentioned that a deserter would be asked to serve longer than one additional month with the exact length being decided depending on the circumstances of the desertion.⁸⁵

In force majeure situations, the service length can be extended. The decision to extend the service period is made in each administrative area.⁸⁶ Two residents of NES interviewed by DIS explained that they had their Self-Defence Duty extended for one month in 2018 due to the situation in Baghouz where SDF was fighting IS.⁸⁷ Similarly, the service period in Afrin was extended two months at three different occasions in 2016 and 2017. This was due to the instability in the Afrin area and fears of a Turkish attack.⁸⁸ The representation of AANES in KRI also informed DIS of cases of persons who had their Self-Defence Duty extended for a couple of months.⁸⁹

Men who have completed their Self-Defence Duty enter the reserves and could be called up by the Defence Office in force majeure situations.⁹⁰ The decision to call up reserves is made by the Military Council in each area.⁹¹ None of the sources consulted by DIS had heard of persons being called up for reserve duty.⁹²

2.2. Conscription process

Call-ups to the Self-Defence Duty happen yearly through media, where it is announced that men of a certain age group are required to serve.⁹³ Individual notifications will not be sent to the homes of the conscripts.⁹⁴

Individuals required to serve should enlist at the Self-Defence Duty office in their area to get a booklet in which a person's Self-Defence Duty status is recorded. For instance, it would appear in the booklet if a person is exempt or discharged from duty.⁹⁵ The booklet is the only document issued in connection with the Self-Defence Duty.⁹⁶ A copy of the Self-Defence Duty booklet has been provided by the AANES representation in KRI and is found in Annex II of this report.

⁸³ RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#); Xeber24, *بالتفصيل... قانون واجب الدفاع*, *الذاتي للإدارة الذاتية لروج أفاني كُردستان* [In Detail... The Law of Self-Defense Duty of the Autonomous Administration in Rojava, Kurdistan], 19 June 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁴ Fabrice Balanche: 3; Journalist and writer: 20; Political analyst: 6; University professor: 2

⁸⁵ Journalist and writer: 20

⁸⁶ Journalist and writer: 15; Representation of AANES in KRI: 1

⁸⁷ Local residents: 16

⁸⁸ Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Military and Security Structures of the Autonomous Administration in Syria*, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 31

⁸⁹ Representation of AANES in KRI: 7

⁹⁰ Journalist and writer: 15-16; Representation of AANES in KRI: 1

⁹¹ Representation of AANES in KRI: 1

⁹² Journalist and writer: 17; Local residents: 16; Political analyst: 7; Representation of AANES in KRI: 6; University professor: 7; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 14

⁹³ Expert from International Crisis Group: 5; Representation of AANES in KRI: 13

⁹⁴ Expert from International Crisis Group: 5

⁹⁵ Journalist and writer: 14; Representation of AANES in KRI: 14, 23

⁹⁶ Representation of AANES in KRI: 23

2.3. Service in the Self-Defence Duty Forces

The Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP) is a force that is administered by the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC).⁹⁷ It is separate from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)⁹⁸ and has its own military commanders. However, SDF assigns tasks to the HXP and decides where HXP is to be deployed.⁹⁹

The HXP are considered to be auxiliary forces to SDF.¹⁰⁰ They are generally not deployed in active battle¹⁰¹ but are rather used for guarding checkpoints¹⁰² and AANES buildings¹⁰³ or conducting other security tasks in the cities.¹⁰⁴ The representation of AANES in KRI explained that HXP could also be used for logistical support to fighting forces.¹⁰⁵ HXP have also been used for guarding prisons.¹⁰⁶ During prison riots in Hasakah in January 2022, HXP was involved in fighting IS. At least nine HXP soldiers died during these battles.¹⁰⁷

A Syrian Kurdish journalist mentioned that the HXP could be used for fighting in times of conflict.¹⁰⁸ Conscripts were e.g. involved in battles against IS in Raqqa in 2016-2017.¹⁰⁹ The AANES representation in KRI and a political analyst noted that some persons serving in HXP fight voluntarily at the frontline.¹¹⁰

The HXP consist of both conscripts and persons who have joined voluntarily.¹¹¹ Conscripts in the HXP are paid a symbolic salary.¹¹² According to three residents of NES interviewed by DIS, the monthly salary for conscripts is 80,000 SYP (approximately 21 USD (unofficial rate) or 28 USD (official rate) by April 2022¹¹³).¹¹⁴ An article in news outlet Enab Baladi from April 2021 put the conscription wage at 50,000 SYP, while a volunteer would be paid 420,000 SYP.¹¹⁵ In addition to the wage, a conscript receives food and free medical treatment.¹¹⁶

Conscripts receive 45 days of initial training during which it is not possible to get a leave of absence. After the initial training, conscripts are allowed a leave of absence for up to seven days per month.¹¹⁷ The training

⁹⁷ Journalist and writer: 3; Representation of AANES in KRI: 4

⁹⁸ Representation of AANES in KRI: 3; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 14; Al-Monitor, *In Syria's Deir ez-Zor, SDF conscription 'severs livelihoods'*, 22 February 2021, [url](#); Wilson Center, *SDF's Arab Majority Rank Turkey as the Biggest Threat to NE Syria*, 2019, [url](#), p. 12

⁹⁹ Aram Hanna: 18; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 16

¹⁰⁰ Fabrice Balanche: 9; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 16

¹⁰¹ Expert from International Crisis Group: 8; Fabrice Balanche: 9; Journalist and writer: 21; Local residents: 17; Representation of AANES in KRI: 6, 18; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 11; University researcher: 11; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 16

¹⁰² Aram Hanna: 19; Expert from International Crisis Group: 8; Fabrice Balanche: 9; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 16

¹⁰³ Aram Hanna: 20; Representation of AANES in KRI: 18

¹⁰⁴ University professor: 7

¹⁰⁵ Representation of AANES in KRI: 18

¹⁰⁶ Local residents: 18; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 17

¹⁰⁷ Local residents: 18

¹⁰⁸ Syrian Kurdish journalist: 11

¹⁰⁹ Local residents: 18; Allsopp, H. and van Wilgenburg, W., *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflict*, 2019, p. 119

¹¹⁰ Political analyst: 8; Representation of AANES in KRI: 18

¹¹¹ Aram Hanna: 23; Representation of AANES in KRI: 27; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 5

¹¹² Local residents: 1; Representation of AANES in KRI: 22; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 15

¹¹³ WFP, *WFP Syria Country Brief*, April 2022, [url](#), p. 5; WFP, *vam: food security analysis*, n.d., [url](#)

¹¹⁴ Local residents: 1

¹¹⁵ Enab Baladi, *Under guise of duty: patterns of coercion enabled by SDF's draft law*, 15 April 2021, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ Representation of AANES in KRI: 22

¹¹⁷ Local residents: 2; Representation of AANES in KRI: 20

consist of basic military training as well as political education.¹¹⁸ Generally, the training that HXP recruits receive depends on the tasks they are going to perform.¹¹⁹

2.3.1. Place of service

The sources disagreed as to whether a conscript in the HXP will be posted to the area where he lives. Some sources, including the representation of AANES in KRI, mentioned that conscripts are assigned to serve in the areas they live in¹²⁰, while others claimed that they may be assigned to serve anywhere in NES.¹²¹ One source mentioned that the purpose of assigning people to areas far from their home area was to secure that they did not have any emotional attachment to where they serve.¹²²

In a 2019 article from news outlet Enab Baladi, it was stated that conscripts who sign up for the Self-Defence Duty within the time announced by the authorities will be trained in Amouda, Hasakah or Qamishli, while those caught at checkpoints will be sent to Raqqa and Deir Ezzour as a form of punishment.¹²³

Fabrice Balanche assessed that it probably would be possible to serve in one's own area by using connections (*wasta* in Arabic).¹²⁴ A Syrian Kurdish journalist also explained that connections or bribes could make it possible for a conscript to serve closer to home.¹²⁵

2.3.2. Violations against civilians

Sources consulted by DIS on this issue mentioned that they had not heard cases of HXP committing violations against civilians¹²⁶, and DIS could neither find written sources reporting about such violations committed by the HXP. It should however be noted that there are records of the SDF (see Chapter 3) having committed different kinds of violations against civilians.¹²⁷

2.3.3. Treatment of ethnic minorities during service

The sources consulted by DIS generally agreed that Arabs or other minorities in NES do not face discrimination in the HXP.¹²⁸

According to a university professor, one cannot rule out the possibility that an individual commander could have a certain discriminating attitude towards persons who do not belong to his ethnic group. However,

¹¹⁸ Local residents: 2; Representation of AANES in KRI: 21

¹¹⁹ Aram Hanna: 22-23

¹²⁰ Expert from International Crisis Group: 8; Representation of AANES in KRI: 19

¹²¹ Fabrice Balanche: 11; Local residents: 19; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 10

¹²² Syrian Kurdish journalist: 10

¹²³ Enab Baladi, *Compulsory military recruitment in Jazira Region: SDF imposing their authority*, 12 July 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁴ Fabrice Balanche: 11

¹²⁵ Syrian Kurdish journalist: 10

¹²⁶ Fabrice Balanche: 10, 13; Local residents: 21

¹²⁷ EASO, *Syria: Targeting of Individuals*, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 39-45; HRW, *Northeast Syria: Fate of Hundreds of Boys Trapped in Siege Unknown*, 2 April 2022, [url](#); SNHR, *At Least 194 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in April 2022, Including Six Children and Three Women*, 7 May 2022, [url](#), p. 10; SNHR, *101 Civilians, Including 17 Children, 14 Women and Six Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in April 2022*, 1 May 2022, [url](#); TIMEP, *Part 2: Violations by Nongovernment Actors*, 4 February 2021, [url](#)

¹²⁸ Expert from International Crisis Group: 6; Fabrice Balanche: 5; Journalist and writer: 20; Local residents: 4-5; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 4; University professor: 3, 6; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 7; Al-Monitor, *In Syria's Deir ez-Zor, SDF conscription 'severs livelihoods'*, 22 February 2021, [url](#), Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Military and Security Structures of the Autonomous Administration in Syria*, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 29

the source had never heard of cases of Arabs or other ethnic groups being subjected to discrimination in the HXP.¹²⁹

According to an expert from ICG, Arab conscripts are dissatisfied with being assigned to serve the Self-Defence Duty in their home areas due to a stronger presence of IS in Arab-majority areas.¹³⁰ The same source mentioned that some discrimination might happen on political grounds as conscripts with political views opposing PKK and PYD would lack influence and privileges.¹³¹

2.4. Evasion and desertion from the Self-Defence Duty

The military police is present at some checkpoints in NES with the purpose of checking a person's documents. If they catch a draft evader, he will be sent to serve his Self-Defence Duty.¹³² Checkpoints are found many places in Hasakah Governorate, mostly at the entrance to a city, but not in the cities themselves.¹³³

The sources disagreed as to whether an evader caught at these checkpoints would be sent directly to serve, or if the person would be allowed to go home before serving.

Wladimir van Wilgenburg explained that a person who is stopped at a checkpoint and cannot provide sufficient documentation (a military booklet) is asked to get the document and come back.¹³⁴ The representation of AANES in KRI stated that an evader who is stopped at a checkpoint would be warned twice, while he would be taken directly to service by the military police if caught for the third time.¹³⁵

Three other sources mentioned that an evader caught at a checkpoint would be sent to serve his duty. They pointed out that there is no policy of detaining draft evaders.¹³⁶

Fabrice Balanche explained that an evader caught at a checkpoint would either be sent directly to a training camp or be detained for one or two days to clarify his conscription status before being sent directly to the Self-Defence Duty.¹³⁷ Three residents of NES interviewed by DIS made a similar statement, though stating that the detention could be for up to two weeks to find a proper location where the evader can serve.¹³⁸

The sources who reported the occurrence of detainment of draft evaders and deserters prior to serving the Self-Defence Duty had not heard of any mistreatment of those detained.¹³⁹

¹²⁹ University professor: 3

¹³⁰ Expert from International Crisis Group: 8

¹³¹ Expert from International Crisis Group: 9

¹³² Expert from International Crisis Group: 6; Fabrice Balanche: 5; Local residents: 4-5; University professor: 3, 6; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 4 Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 7; Al-Monitor, *In Syria's Deir ez-Zor, SDF conscription 'severs livelihoods'*, 22 February 2021, [url](#), Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Military and Security Structures of the Autonomous Administration in Syria*, 24 January 2018, [url](#), p. 29

¹³³ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 9

¹³⁴ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 8

¹³⁵ Representation of AANES in KRI: 15

¹³⁶ Expert from International Crisis Group: 6; Journalist and writer: 20; Political analyst: 9

¹³⁷ Fabrice Balanche: 5

¹³⁸ Local residents: 5

¹³⁹ Fabrice Balanche: 5; Local residents: 7

The sources disagreed on the subject of house searches. Four sources mentioned that the authorities also conducted house raids to find draft evaders and deserters¹⁴⁰, while another three sources explained that house raids do not take place.¹⁴¹ Three residents of NES interviewed by DIS explained that an evader gets two notifications at his house, before the military police will take him by force.¹⁴² The two sources stating that house raids take place, explained that family members are not harmed during these raids.¹⁴³

2.4.1. Consequences of draft evasion

The representation of AANES in KRI stated that draft evaders will not be subject to any punishment.¹⁴⁴ As mentioned in Chapter 2.4, two sources explained that evaders could be detained for a period before being sent to serve.¹⁴⁵ Otherwise, according to the consulted sources, evaders are neither fined nor imprisoned.¹⁴⁶

A journalist and writer interviewed by DIS did not know of any mistreatment of former draft evaders while serving their Self-Defence Duty.¹⁴⁷ Neither had three residents of NES interviewed by DIS heard of such cases.¹⁴⁸

During service, draft evaders can ask for a leave of absence. However, this will only be granted if the authorities do not expect that the evader will flee.¹⁴⁹

2.4.2. Consequences of desertion

Deserters will be asked to resume their Self-Defence Duty in case they are caught by the authorities.¹⁵⁰

However, depending on the circumstances of the desertion, a deserter could be detained. In case the desertion has caused serious damages, the person could be tried before a military court¹⁵¹. Otherwise, the deserter would simply continue his service.¹⁵² A Syrian Kurdish journalist interviewed by DIS confirmed that a deserter could be detained. However, the journalist did not know of cases where this had in fact happened.¹⁵³ Three residents of NES explained that deserters could be detained for one to two months.¹⁵⁴

A person who has been imprisoned due to his desertion would still be required to serve out the rest of his Self-Defence Duty.¹⁵⁵ Sources interviewed by DIS had not heard of mistreatment of former deserters while they served their remaining Self-Defence Duty.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁰ Journalist and writer: 19; Local residents: 4; Political analyst: 10-11; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 4

¹⁴¹ Expert from International Crisis Group: 6; Fabrice Balanche: 6, 8; University professor: 6

¹⁴² Local residents: 4

¹⁴³ Journalist and writer: 19; Political analyst: 10

¹⁴⁴ Representation of AANES in KRI: 15;

¹⁴⁵ Fabrice Balanche: 5; Local residents: 5

¹⁴⁶ Fabrice Balanche: 7; Journalist and writer: 20; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 5

¹⁴⁷ Journalist and writer: 20

¹⁴⁸ Local residents: 8

¹⁴⁹ Political analyst: 9

¹⁵⁰ Representation of AANES in KRI: 17; University professor: 4

¹⁵¹ According to the Representation of AANES in KRI, the law does not stipulate a certain punishment for desertion. It is the military court that decides about the punishment (Representation of AANES in KRI: 17).

¹⁵² Fabrice Balanche: 7; Representation of AANES in KRI: 17

¹⁵³ Syrian Kurdish journalist: 6

¹⁵⁴ Local residents: 22

¹⁵⁵ Representation of AANES in KRI: 17

¹⁵⁶ Journalist and writer: 20; Local residents: 8

2.4.3. Consequences for family members to draft evaders and deserters

Most sources agreed that family members of draft evaders and deserters do not face any consequences due to the evasion/desertion.¹⁵⁷ Fabrice Balanche mentioned that authorities could ask the family members about the whereabouts of the wanted person but would not exert additional pressure on families other than conduct visits to the house of family members.¹⁵⁸ One Syrian Kurdish journalist mentioned that in addition to the questioning, the military police could also put pressure on the family in other ways, but the source did not know what such pressure specifically entailed.¹⁵⁹

2.5. Recruitment of minors

Minors are not asked to serve the Self-Defence Duty.¹⁶⁰ A Syrian Kurdish journalist told DIS that reports from Rudaw, a Kurdish news agency, indicate that some minors, particularly from families who do not support AANES, have been taken to serve the Self-Defence Duty. The source could, however, not provide links to these reports upon request¹⁶¹ and DIS has not been able to identify these articles on the website of Rudaw.

2.6. Recruitment of women

Women are not required to serve the Self-Defence Duty.¹⁶² However, there are women among the volunteers in the HXP¹⁶³, which is possible under Article 3 in the Self-Defence Duty Law.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁷ Fabrice Balance: 12; Local residents: 23; Political analyst: 10 University professor: 4-5

¹⁵⁸ Fabrice Balanche: 12

¹⁵⁹ Syrian Kurdish journalist: 7

¹⁶⁰ International humanitarian coordinator: 10; Journalist and writer: 18

¹⁶¹ Syrian Kurdish journalist: 2

¹⁶² Journalist and writer: 18; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 1; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 5

¹⁶³ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 5

¹⁶⁴ RIC, *Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria*, 10 June 2020, [url](#)

3. Recruitment to SDF

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) is an umbrella organisation comprised of several armed groups, including the People's Protection Unit (YPG; Yekîneyên Parastina Gel) and the Women's Protection Unit (YPJ; Yekîneyên Parastina Jinê). It was established in October 2015, shortly after Russia intervened in the conflict in Syria.¹⁶⁵ It is ethnically diverse with both Arab, Christian and Kurdish soldiers.¹⁶⁶

In the AANES system, the SDF is separate from the Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP)¹⁶⁷; however, in general, many consider the HXP to be a part of the SDF.¹⁶⁸ The SDF falls administratively under the Board of Defence (corresponding to a Ministry of Defence) of the AANES, while the HXP is under the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC)¹⁶⁹, which is the executive body of AANES.¹⁷⁰ The HXP has its own military commanders but the SDF assigns tasks to the HXP and decides where the HXP are deployed to.¹⁷¹

Recruitment to the SDF only takes place on a voluntary basis.¹⁷² Many people decide to join the SDF due to the relatively high wages.¹⁷³ SDF spokesperson Aram Hanna explained that the minimum monthly salary for its employees is 300,000 SYP (approximately 77 USD (unofficial rate) or 106 USD (official rate) by April 2022¹⁷⁴).¹⁷⁵ Other sources mentioned that the monthly salary in SDF is 100-250 USD¹⁷⁶ or 200 USD.¹⁷⁷

In addition, the SDF is not in need of soldiers¹⁷⁸, and a crucial criterion for being allowed into the forces is loyalty.¹⁷⁹ According to an expert from ICG, there are more than 100,000 persons employed in the SDF and in the internal security forces (Asayish).¹⁸⁰

¹⁶⁵ ICG, *Steadying the New Status Quo in Syria's North East*, 27 November 2019, [url](#); Knights, M. and van Wilgenburg, W., *Accidental Allies: The U.S.-Syrian Democratic Forces Partnership Against the Islamic State*, 2021, [url](#), pp. 84-85; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *The Autonomous Administration: A Judicial Approach to Understanding the Model and Experience*, 7 March 2022, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁶⁶ Allsopp, H. and van Wilgenburg, W., *The Kurds of Northern Syria: Governance, Diversity and Conflict*, 2019, p. 66; ECFR, *Syrian Democratic Forces (Syria)*, 10 November 2020, [url](#); Sweden, Migrationsverket, *Syrisk militärtjänst [Syrian military service]*, 22 April 2022, [url](#), p. 17; Wilson Center, *SDF's Arab Majority Rank Turkey as the Biggest Threat to NE Syria*, 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁷ Representation of AANES in KRI: 3; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 14; Al-Monitor, *In Syria's Deir ez-Zor, SDF conscription 'severs livelihoods'*, 22 February 2021, [url](#); Wilson Center, *SDF's Arab Majority Rank Turkey as the Biggest Threat to NE Syria*, 2019, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁶⁸ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 14

¹⁶⁹ Representation of AANES in KRI: 3

¹⁷⁰ Allsopp, H. and van Wilgenburg, W., *The Kurds of Northern Syria*, 2019, p. 96

¹⁷¹ Aram Hanna: 18; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 16

¹⁷² Expert from International Crisis Group: 10; Fabrice Balanche: 14; Journalist and writer: 29; Local residents: 3, 24; Political analyst: 12; Representation of AANES in KRI: 28; University professor: 8; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 19-20

¹⁷³ Expert from International Crisis Group: 10; Fabrice Balanche: 14; Political Analyst: 12; University professor: 1; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 20

¹⁷⁴ WFP, *WFP Syria Country Brief*, April 2022, [url](#), p. 5; WFP, *vam: food security analysis*, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷⁵ Aram Hanna: 11

¹⁷⁶ International humanitarian coordinator: 8

¹⁷⁷ Local residents: 1

¹⁷⁸ Fabrice Balanche: 14; University professor: 9

¹⁷⁹ Fabrice Balanche: 15

¹⁸⁰ Expert from International Crisis Group: 3

Some individuals also join the SDF to protect their local area¹⁸¹, or because the SDF are viewed favourably due to its past records.¹⁸² An ICG expert pointed out that Arab tribes put young men at the SDF's disposal in exchange of status and protection.¹⁸³

A journalist and a university researcher specified that recruitment to the YPG and the YPJ, two of the major SDF groups, is also voluntary.¹⁸⁴ The university researcher mentioned that some might join the YPG and the YPJ due to pressure from their families, and that women could join the YPJ to avoid a marriage.¹⁸⁵

It should be noted that several written sources report about forced conscription to the SDF. However, it appears from the examples and specific cases mentioned in these sources that they sometimes refer to recruitment to the Self-Defence Duty (i.e. to the HXP) or recruitment to other groups than recruitment to the SDF.¹⁸⁶

3.1. Recruitment process

Recruitment to the SDF happens through local military councils¹⁸⁷ found in each area (e.g. Raqqa, Deir Ezzour, Qamishli and Tel Tamer).¹⁸⁸ According to the SDF spokesperson Aram Hanna, the military councils announce if they need new recruits. Representatives from different forces under the SDF are present in the military council buildings, and the recruit can choose which group s/he wants to join.¹⁸⁹

SDF fighters sign contracts with the SDF of varying length.¹⁹⁰ The SDF spokesperson explained that contracts typically last for one year and eight months.¹⁹¹ Other sources mentioned that contracts generally last for two or five years.¹⁹²

As for the YPG and the YPJ, a recruit will receive three months of training, including ideological training, before getting a five-week leave of absence. Subsequently s/he will have to decide whether to sign a contract.¹⁹³ DIS has not looked into whether other SDF groups have a similar process of initial training and leave before entering into an agreement with the SDF.

According to SDF spokesperson, Aram Hanna, it is possible to leave the SDF before the contract period ends. In this case, the person should send a request to the local military council, explaining the reason why s/he wants to stop before the end of the contract period. The local military council will forward the request to the General-Command of the SDF who will decide whether the contract can be terminated. A mere

¹⁸¹ Journalist and writer: 29; Political analyst: 12; University professor: 9

¹⁸² University researcher: 1

¹⁸³ Expert from International Crisis Group: 10

¹⁸⁴ Syrian Kurdish journalist: 13; University researcher: 1

¹⁸⁵ University researcher: 5

¹⁸⁶ Examples of this is for instance found in: COAR Global, *Syria Update (Vol. 4, No. 22): Deadly SDF Crackdown as Conscription Sparks Menbij Unrest*, 7 June 2021, [url](#); New Arab (The), *SDF begins forced conscription campaign amid Turkish security threats*, 26 October 2021, [url](#); SNHR, *At Least 156 Children Still Conscripted by Syrian Democratic Forces*, 16 December 2021, [url](#);

¹⁸⁷ Military councils are mechanisms to coordinate security on a local level. They are organised in three different military regions: Jazire, Euphrates and Eastern (Knights, M. and van Wilgenburg, W., *Accidental Allies: The U.S.-Syrian Democratic Forces Partnership Against the Islamic State*, 2021, [url](#), pp. 185-186)

¹⁸⁸ Aram Hanna: 2

¹⁸⁹ Aram Hanna: 3-4

¹⁹⁰ Aram Hanna: 5-6; Fabrice Balanche: 14; Local residents: 3; University researcher: 2

¹⁹¹ Aram Hanna: 6

¹⁹² Fabrice Balanche: 14; Local residents: 3; University researcher: 2

¹⁹³ University researcher: 2

desire to stop is not sufficient to have the request approved. If the request is approved, the person will be considered a civilian. However, if it is rejected and the person nonetheless leaves the SDF (i.e. deserts), there are legal procedures to follow up on this.¹⁹⁴

3.2. Recruitment of minors

The SDF does not knowingly recruit minors today, according to three of the consulted sources.¹⁹⁵ Professor Fabrice Balanche elaborated that he did not believe that forced recruitment of minors to the SDF takes place due to the many people who wants to join voluntarily.¹⁹⁶

In the past, there were cases of minors joining the SDF voluntarily¹⁹⁷, including girls joining the YPJ.¹⁹⁸ The minors in the SDF underwent military training and performed tasks such as guard duty and combat.¹⁹⁹ However, according to the representation of AANES in KRI and a university professor, recruits who have been identified as minors have now been dismissed.²⁰⁰

However, two consulted sources claimed that there are reports of SDF recruiting minors today, sometimes by force.²⁰¹ One of these sources pointed out that it is not possible to verify these reports, as they are based on the accounts of parents, who could have an interest in altering the story to hide that their children have been recruited voluntarily against the parents' will.²⁰² The other source explained that the SDF could have an interest in intentionally recruiting minors at checkpoints and bringing them to enlistment centres, only to release them less than a day later to demonstrate compliance with a UN agreement on eliminating the use of minors in the SDF (see below).²⁰³

Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) stated in a report from December 2021 that SDF forcibly recruit minors. However, the report counts recruitment by a group separate of SDF, namely the Revolutionary Youth (see Chapter 4.2), as SDF recruitment.²⁰⁴

In June 2019, an agreement between the SDF and the UN was signed, which resulted in the establishment of The Office for Protection of Children in Armed Conflict (hereafter: The Child Protection Office), which is a part of the AANES system.²⁰⁵ The Child Protection Office is present in nine different locations in NES (Qamishli, Hasakah, Deir Ezzour, Raqqa, Tabqa, Manbij, Kobane, Tel Abyad and Al-Shahba).²⁰⁶

Anyone who suspects that there is a minor in SDF can file a complaint to one of these offices, who will forward it to their headquarters in Raqqa, where the case will be investigated. If needed, The Child

¹⁹⁴ Aram Hanna: 7-10

¹⁹⁵ Child protection officer: 9; Fabrice Balanche: 18; University professor: 13

¹⁹⁶ Fabrice Balanche: 18

¹⁹⁷ Aram Hanna: 12; Child protection actor: 2; International humanitarian coordinator: 1; Journalist and writer: 30; University professor: 13; Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 21

¹⁹⁸ University researcher: 4

¹⁹⁹ Child protection actor: 8-9; International humanitarian coordinator: 9; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, June 2021, [url](#), p. 44

²⁰⁰ Representation of AANES in KRI: 29; University professor: 13

²⁰¹ Child protection actor: 2; International humanitarian coordinator: 6

²⁰² International humanitarian coordinator: 6-7

²⁰³ Child protection actor: 3-4

²⁰⁴ SNHR, *At Least 156 Children Still Conscripted by Syrian Democratic Forces*, 16 December 2021, [url](#), pp. 6-10

²⁰⁵ Aram Hanna: 13; Child protection actor: 1; International humanitarian coordinator: 2; Journalist and writer: 31; UN, *Syrian Democratic Forces Sign Action Plan to End and Prevent the Recruitment and Use of Children*, 1 July 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁶ Child protection officer: 1; International humanitarian coordinator: 2

Protection Office will take up communication with the SDF.²⁰⁷ The process from filing a complaint until a minor is returned to her/his family can take up to four months.²⁰⁸ A child that has been released or excluded from duty receives an exit form as proof of her/his service and release.²⁰⁹ As a consequence of the agreement with the UN and the establishment of The Child Protection Office, there has been a decrease in the number of minors in the SDF.²¹⁰

Some families have complained of being prevented from filing a case at The Child Protection Office, allegedly due to busyness.²¹¹ Yet, others view The Child Protection Office as genuine in their desire to return children to their families.²¹²

Recruitment of minors to SDF has also taken place after The Child Protection Office was established. The UN had verified the recruitment of 127 children to SDF in the period between October 2019 and December 2020.²¹³ A confidential source provided information to the Dutch MFA in January 2021, claiming that at least 34 cases of child recruitment to SDF without parental consent had happened since May 2020, of whom 13 had been returned to their families.²¹⁴

Despite the attempts to avoid the presence of minors in SDF, some minors were still in its ranks in the beginning of 2022²¹⁵, while there are allegedly no minors in YPJ anymore, according to a child protection actor interviewed by DIS.²¹⁶

The SDF spokesperson mentioned that economic hardship sometimes made minors forge documents in order to be allowed into SDF and receive a salary.²¹⁷ Similarly, two other sources explained that economy is a major incentive for minors to join SDF, as they receive the same salary as adults. Economic incentives are particularly prevalent among children from rural areas.²¹⁸ A child protection officer from The Child Protection Office added that escaping social issues and the idea of being in the military could also attract minors to SDF.²¹⁹ A Syrian Kurdish journalist also pointed out that social problems could be a reason for a minor to join.²²⁰

Since the enactment of the agreement with the UN, about 700-750 minors have been released from SDF.²²¹ SDF reported to the UN that in the first half of 2021, 71 children were demobilised and 242 additional

²⁰⁷ Child protection officer: 2

²⁰⁸ Child protection officer: 3

²⁰⁹ Child protection actor: 5

²¹⁰ Journalist and writer: 31; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 13; UN, *Children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic: Report of the Secretary-General*, 23 April 2021, [url](#), p. 4

²¹¹ Child protection actor: 10

²¹² Al-Monitor, *Child recruitment leaves parents heartbroken in northeast Syria*, 20 January 2022, [url](#)

²¹³ UN, *Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General*, 6 May 2021, [url](#), pp. 1, 24

²¹⁴ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Country of origin information report Syria*, June 2021, [url](#), p. 44

²¹⁵ Child protection actor: 2; Local residents: 25

²¹⁶ Child protection actor: 6

²¹⁷ Aram Hanna: 12

²¹⁸ Child protection actor: 7; International humanitarian coordinator: 8

²¹⁹ Child protection officer: 10

²²⁰ Syrian Kurdish journalist: 13

²²¹ Child protection actor: 2; International humanitarian coordinator: 2

children were prevented from joining as they were assessed to be minors during the recruitment process.²²²

The Qamishli branch of The Child Protection Office received 90 complaints of minors in the SDF in the period between its inauguration in 2020 and February 2022. Of these, 50 minors were returned to their families, while the minor in some of the remaining cases reached the age of 18 during the processing of the case.²²³

3.3. Recruitment of women

The SDF deny that women have been forced to join the YPJ.²²⁴ Other sources correspondingly explained that the SDF and the YPJ do not forcibly recruit women.²²⁵ The YPJ is reluctant to recruit women in Arab communities, as they fear that it will provoke negative reactions.²²⁶

²²² UN, *Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict*, 4 January 2022, [url](#), p. 5

²²³ Child protection officer: 5

²²⁴ Aram Hanna: 14

²²⁵ Fabrice Balanche: 14; Local residents: 24; Political analyst: 12

²²⁶ Fabrice Balanche: 17

4. Recruitment to the PKK

The Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK; Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan) was established in Turkey in 1978. In written sources, the original ideology of the PKK has been described as a mix of Kurdish nationalism and Marxism-Leninism.²²⁷ At the time of writing, the PKK was sanctioned by the EU under the combating terrorism sanctions regime.²²⁸ AANES and SDF are formally independent, however, several sources pointed to links between them and the PKK.²²⁹

A university professor described the SDF and AANES as having a pro-PKK ideology, and that the PKK has some influence within the leadership ranks of these institutions.²³⁰ This view was shared by a political analyst and a university researcher, who also underlined the ideological similarities between the Kurdish administration in Syria and the PKK.²³¹ The current SDF leader, Mazloum Abdi, was previously a member of PKK.²³² There are many pictures of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in official buildings in North and East Syria (NES). After the establishment of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), many Syrian PKK members joined the YPG.²³³

The university researcher explained that it is easy to distinguish visually between the SDF and the PKK’s military wing, People’s Defence Forces (HPG; Hêzên Parastina Gel), as the former wear military uniforms while the latter wear traditional Kurdish garment.²³⁴ However, two journalists consulted by DIS explained that some people in NES do not distinguish between the SDF and the PKK as they consider them essentially the same.²³⁵ This perception is particularly found among people who oppose the Kurdish authorities in NES.²³⁶

4.1. Recruitment to PKK/HPG

Sources interviewed by DIS did not believe that the PKK, including its military wing, HPG, recruits new members in NES²³⁷, or – if they do – they do it by force.²³⁸

A Syrian Kurdish university professor stated that no forced recruitment to the PKK is taking place in NES. This is partly because force is generally not the method used by the PKK to recruit new members, and

²²⁷ Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *The Autonomous Administration: A Judicial Approach to Understanding the Model and Experience*, 7 March 2022, [url](#), p. 20; White, P., *The PKK – Coming Down from the Mountains*, 2015, pp. 18, 29

²²⁸ European Council, *Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/152 of 3 February 2022 updating the list of persons, groups and entities subject to Articles, 2, 3 and 4 of Common Position 2001/931/CFSP on the application of specific measures to combat terrorism, and repealing Decision (CFSP) 2021/1192*, 4 February 2022, [url](#)

²²⁹ Journalist and writer: 39-40; Political analyst: 2; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 15-16; University professor: 10; EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 24-25; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *The Autonomous Administration: A Judicial Approach to Understanding the Model and Experience*, 7 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 149-150

²³⁰ University professor: 10

²³¹ Political analyst: 2; University researcher: 7

²³² University researcher: 8; ECFR, *Syrian Democratic Forces (Syria)*, 10 November 2020, [url](#)

²³³ University researcher: 7-8

²³⁴ University researcher: 9

²³⁵ Journalist and writer: 40; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 15

²³⁶ Syrian Kurdish journalist: 15

²³⁷ Fabrice Balanche: 19; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 16

²³⁸ Journalist and writer: 39; Local residents: 28; University professor: 14; University researcher: 10

partly because a great number of current PKK members come from NES, and it would be strategically unwise to use force to recruit new members in their own communities.²³⁹

4.2. Recruitment to Revolutionary Youth

The Revolutionary Youth (*Ciwanên Şoreşger*) is an organisation that some sources suspect to be affiliated with the PKK.²⁴⁰ It provides ideological and political training, and encourages young people to join PKK/HPG.²⁴¹ According to Fabrice Balanche, despite the fact that the PKK officially does not recruit new members in NES, they lay the groundwork for future recruitment of members through their influence on AANES and via Revolutionary Youth (see below).²⁴² Three residents of NES interviewed by DIS mentioned that Revolutionary Youth also wants its members to join the SDF.²⁴³

The Revolutionary Youth is a political group²⁴⁴ that has offices several places in the AANES territories, including Qamishli, Hasakah and Raqqa.²⁴⁵

The three residents of NES consulted by DIS stated that members of the Revolutionary Youth are usually below the age of 30. Among other things, they initiate demonstrations and student meetings to influence the youth politically. Their members do not wear uniforms, however they are identifiable by e.g. the way they behave, speak and what music they listen to. Thus, it is easy to identify them. The group uses student meetings and activities at cultural centres to encourage minors to join them.²⁴⁶

The Revolutionary Youth recruits minor boys and girls.²⁴⁷ Today, the majority of its members are boys.²⁴⁸ The UN had verified 31 cases of child recruitment to the Revolutionary Youth in the period between October 2019 and December 2020.²⁴⁹ Syrians for Truth & Justice, an NGO, documented the recruitment of at least 17 minors to the Revolutionary Youth between October and December 2021 alone.²⁵⁰

The circumstances under which the Revolutionary Youth recruits its members are unclear. Some of the consulted sources mentioned the use of force as a way to recruit minors to the Revolutionary Youth.²⁵¹

²³⁹ University professor: 14

²⁴⁰ Fabrice Balanche: 19; Journalist and writer: 33; Local residents: 26; University professor: 10; Al-Monitor, *Child recruitment leaves parents heartbroken in northeast Syria*, 20 January 2022, [url](#)

²⁴¹ Expert from International Crisis Group: 12; Fabrice Balanche: 19; University professor: 10-11; Journalist and writer: 33, 36; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 14; Al-Monitor, *Child recruitment leaves parents heartbroken in northeast Syria*, 20 January 2022, [url](#); Syrians for Truth & Justice, *Northeastern Syria: Complaints about Child Soldiers Falling on the Autonomous Administration's Deaf Ears*, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

²⁴² Fabrice Balanche: 19

²⁴³ Local residents: 25-26

²⁴⁴ Fabrice Balanche: 19; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 14

²⁴⁵ Fabrice Balanche: 19; Journalist and writer: 33; Local residents: 27

²⁴⁶ Local residents: 25, 27

²⁴⁷ International humanitarian coordinator: 3; Journalist and writer: 34; Local residents: 24; Political analyst: 13; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 14; University professor: 12; Al-Monitor, *Child recruitment leaves parents heartbroken in northeast Syria*, 20 January 2022, [url](#); Sweden, Migrationsverket, *Syrisk militärtjänst [Syrian military service]*, 22 April 2022, [url](#), p. 20

²⁴⁸ International humanitarian coordinator: 4

²⁴⁹ UN, *Children and Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General*, 6 May 2021, [url](#), pp. 1, 24

²⁵⁰ Syrians for Truth & Justice, *Northeastern Syria: Complaints about Child Soldiers Falling on the Autonomous Administration's Deaf Ears*, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

²⁵¹ Expert from International Crisis Group: 12; International humanitarian coordinator: 4; Journalist and writer: 35; Political analyst: 14

According to an expert from ICG, it can be difficult to establish whether it has happened through actual force²⁵², an assessment supported by an international humanitarian coordinator.²⁵³

More sources underlined that the available information on forceful recruitment comes from the families of the children. Some of the children who ostensibly have been recruited by force might actually have joined voluntarily without the consent of their families.²⁵⁴ A university professor stated that, generally, the recruitment of youth by force is not the modus operandi of the Revolutionary Youth.²⁵⁵

A number of sources explained that the Revolutionary Youth takes advantage of the different social, economic, cultural and family problems that young people are facing.²⁵⁶

A Syrian Kurdish journalist and writer explained that Revolutionary Youth recruits are sent to particular training centres where they receive ideological training. The source did not know whether the group also train its members militarily.²⁵⁷

Since 2020, several examples of recruitment to the Revolutionary Youth have gone viral.²⁵⁸ The Syrian Kurdish journalist and writer explained that the recruitment of minors by the Revolutionary Youth has created a large amount of discontent in the AANES territories, but that the SDF and the Asayish do not seem to prevent the recruitment of minors.²⁵⁹ An officer at The Child Protection Office explained to DIS that they were unable to react to complaints over recruitment of minors to the Revolutionary Youth as they only deal with recruitment to the SDF.²⁶⁰

²⁵² Expert from International Crisis Group: 1

²⁵³ International humanitarian coordinator: 4

²⁵⁴ International humanitarian coordinator: 4-7; Journalist and writer: 35; Political analyst: 14

²⁵⁵ University professor: 11

²⁵⁶ Expert from International Crisis Group: 12; University professor: 11; Syrian Kurdish journalist: 13; Local residents: 25

²⁵⁷ Journalist and writer: 36

²⁵⁸ Expert from International Crisis Group: 13

²⁵⁹ Journalist and writer: 37-38

²⁶⁰ Child protection officer: 17

5. Recruitment to the Syrian Arab Army

The Government of Syria (GoS) controls small areas in the cities of Qamishli and Hasakah known as *security squares* (*Al-Morab'at Al-Amniya*). There are different functioning GoS public offices, including offices dealing with recruitment to the Syrian Arab Army (SAA).²⁶¹ The Syrian authorities recruit conscripts and reservists in most areas under its control. However, recruitment in the security squares differs from the rest of the GoS-controlled parts of Syria (see below).²⁶²

On 14 April 2022, the SDF and the Asayish took over GoS buildings in the Qamishli security square, but withdrew the following day. The takeover was reportedly a response to a GoS siege of the Kurdish-majority neighbourhood Sheikh Maqsoud in Aleppo City.²⁶³

5.1. Conscription to SAA

The Syrian authorities are generally unable to recruit residents in the AANES-controlled areas for military service.²⁶⁴

There is divergent information as to whether a man living in NES who is wanted for military service in the SAA, could be forcibly recruited if he enters the GoS-controlled security squares in Hasakah and Qamishli.

Four sources explained that a person who evaded his military service or has deserted from the SAA would likely be arrested if he entered the security squares.²⁶⁵ In case the person is detained, the AANES will sometimes detain elements affiliated with the GoS in order to allow for a prisoner exchange.²⁶⁶ According to three residents of NES interviewed by DIS, AANES is only interested in doing so if the detained individual is affiliated with AANES.²⁶⁷

Freelance journalist, political analyst and author of several books on Kurds in Syria, Wladimir van Wilgenburg contrarily explained that there is a de facto ban on recruitment to the SAA in the security squares, as the SDF has opposed this. Rather, as a part of reconciliation agreements, the SAA attempts to recruit Arabs by convincing them of joining the SAA in the GoS-controlled areas outside of Hasakah Governorate.²⁶⁸

Similarly, a journalist explained that men wanted for conscription in the SAA would not face problems when entering the security squares.²⁶⁹ This is concordant to information from a 2020 report from DIS where

²⁶¹ Fabrice Balanche: 22; Journalist and writer: 24; EASO, *Syria: Security Situation*, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 161-162; Sweden, Migrationsverket, *Syrisk militärtjänst [Syrian military service]*, 22 April 2022, [url](#), p. 17

²⁶² Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Military Service*, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 10-11

²⁶³ New Arab (The), *Syrian Kurdish-led forces withdraw from regime zones in Qamishli*, 15 April 2022, [url](#)

²⁶⁴ Journalist and writer: 25; Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Military Service*, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 56, 60; EASO, *Syria: Military Service*, April 2021, [url](#), p. 18; Sweden, Migrationsverket, *Syrisk militärtjänst [Syrian military service]*, 22 April 2022, [url](#), p. 17

²⁶⁵ Fabrice Balanche: 20; Journalist and writer: 27; Local residents: 29; Representation of AANES in KRI: 31

²⁶⁶ Journalist and writer: 27; Local residents: 29; Representation of AANES in KRI: 31

²⁶⁷ Local residents: 29

²⁶⁸ Wladimir van Wilgenburg: 24-25

²⁶⁹ Syrian Kurdish journalist: 17

consulted sources unanimously stated that no conscription to the SAA took place in the GoS-controlled areas of Hasakah Governorate.²⁷⁰

Meanwhile, a political analyst explained that a Kurd wanted for military service in the SAA would most likely not be forced to serve, while a person of Arab origin faces a high risk of being taken.²⁷¹

As regards conscription of residents of the security squares, Fabrice Balanche informed DIS that persons living in the GoS-controlled parts of Hasakah Governorate are required to serve in the SAA²⁷², while a Syrian Kurdish writer and journalist claimed that persons living in those areas would not be forcefully recruited to the SAA.²⁷³

One would not be exempt from performing the mandatory military service in the SAA even if he finished his Self-Defence Duty.²⁷⁴

5.2. Voluntary recruitment to the SAA

Residents of the AANES-controlled areas can choose to join the SAA voluntarily. The SAA has recruitment offices in the security squares in Qamishli and Hasakah City.²⁷⁵ In a 2020 report by DIS, several sources confirmed that voluntary recruitment to the SAA took place in the GoS-controlled territories in NES.²⁷⁶

South of Qamishli there are villages where the inhabitants sympathise with GoS and who might decide to join the SAA voluntarily.²⁷⁷ According to Fabrice Balanche, these SAA recruits will serve in their own villages rather than elsewhere in Syria.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁰ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Military Service*, May 2020, [url](#), p. 10

²⁷¹ Political analyst: 15

²⁷² Fabrice Balanche: 21

²⁷³ Journalist and writer: 25

²⁷⁴ Fabrice Balanche: 23; Representation of AANES in KRI: 5

²⁷⁵ Fabrice Balanche: 22; Journalist and writer: 25

²⁷⁶ Denmark, DIS, *Syria: Military Service*, May 2020, [url](#), pp. 10-11

²⁷⁷ Fabrice Balanche: 21; Journalist and writer: 28

²⁷⁸ Fabrice Balanche: 21

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Annex I: Meeting minutes

WhatsApp meeting with Aram Hanna, SDF spokesperson, 31 January 2022

Syrian Democratic Forces

1. There is no forced recruitment to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). All its members have joined voluntarily.
2. SDF recruits through local military councils that are found in each area (e.g. Raqqa, Deir Ezzour, Qamishli and Tell Tamer). When the council identifies a need for new forces, they announce that they need more people to join voluntarily.
3. The local military council covers a specific area. Representatives of all SDF forces as well as the Self-Defence Forces (HXP) are present in the local military council. The local military council is under the General Military Council of North and East Syria (NES), where the SDF is in charge and where the high command of the HXP also is represented. It is the General Military Council that decides on military defence, operations and war.
4. Representatives of the different forces under the SDF are present in the military council buildings. The person can decide himself/herself which of the SDF forces (e.g. YPG, Syriac Military Council, Northern Brigade, Army of Revolutionaries) to join.
5. The recruit signs a contract that is being sent to the General-Command Office of the SDF for approval.
6. The contract is signed between the recruit and the SDF. It contains a specified period for which the person is working for the SDF. The length of the contract is individual, but generally, a contract could last for one year and eight months. The contract also contains provisions about free medical service for the recruit as well as for the recruit's family.
7. It is possible to stop before the contract period ends. In this case, the person can send a request to local military council explaining the reasons for wanting to leave his work. The request will be sent to the General-Command, which decides on the case.
8. The possibility to get an approval for terminating the work in the SDF depends on the reason for wanting to stop. A mere desire to stop is not sufficient for getting an approval to stop.
9. If the person is being allowed to stop, he/she will be considered a civilian again.
10. It is not possible to stop before the contract period, unless the person sends a request. If the person does not have an approved request and deserts, there are legal procedures to follow up.

The military police could be involved.

11. SDF pays its employees a salary of minimum 300,000 SYP per month. The salary can be higher, and depends on several factors, including what force the person joins and to where he is assigned geographically.
12. There have been cases of minors who have joined the SDF. Due to economic hardship in the region, some children or their families have resorted to faking or forging some documents that will show them older to join the force.
13. SDF has been honest about the organisational shortcomings that have existed during the recruitment process on the part of some commanders. Training courses have been set up to make the commanders aware of the recruitment process to avoid recruiting persons who do not meet the conditions. This training was intensified after the agreement with the UN and the Office of Protection of Children in Armed Conflict was also established. SDF makes these courses to prevent the shortcomings of the past and which might still happen.
14. Some of SDF's adversaries have claimed that YPJ forcefully recruits adult women to its ranks, however no adult women have been forcefully recruited. It has always been based on the woman's own decision. There are sometimes social issues in the society, e.g. disputes with husband or family members that are factors making the woman want to join the YPJ.
15. All SDF members will have some form of documentation that proves membership of the SDF. During the service, they will have an identity card. While on leave, they will also have papers that confirm the time of their leave. After one year of SDF membership, the person will also get a document that confirms his/her continued service or dismissal from the force.
16. In an October 2019 cease fire agreement between the US and Russia, it was decided that the SDF generally had to withdraw from the area between the Turkish-backed groups and NES, e.g. in Tell Tamer. This means that only members of the local military councils in these areas can be deployed there, and the soldiers present there can only carry individual weapons such as small firearms. SDF do not have heavy weapons divisions in that area. However, the SDF still supports these military councils.

Self-Defence Forces

17. The Self-Defence Forces (HXP) are both linked to the SDF and to the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES).
18. SDF and HXP are militarily linked. It is the SDF that gives the HXP the assignments and decides to where they should be deployed. However, HXP has its own commanders.
19. Under normal circumstances, the SDF will be deployed to the frontline as the primary fighting forces to attack or defend an area. Once an area has been liberated or protected, the HXP is

deployed to guard the area, but not to fight. This has happened in e.g. Afrin, Tell Abyad and north of Tell Tamer.

20. HXP also falls organisationally under the AANES, because they guard the AANES buildings. The HXP is also linked to the AANES as the law on Self-Defence Duty is founded and amended by the AANES, including provisions on whom is being recruited.
21. HXP has different branches and divisions, and perform a range of tasks. Most of the HXP forces guard the borders to areas controlled by the Government of Syria, and the border to Iraq.
22. The training that the HXP recruits undergoes depends on the duties they are going to perform. HXP in the northern areas will receive training in how to defend the areas in which they are located, while those in Deir Ezzour where there are more IS sleeping cells will receive training to deal with them.
23. There is both forced and voluntary recruitment to the HXP. Professional soldiers within the HXP will likely get more training than those who are conscripted.

Skype meeting with a child protection actor, 27 January 2022

The child protection actor works in Syria, and monitors the recruitment of children to armed forces in North-East Syria.

1. SDF and AANES signed an agreement with the UN to facilitate the release of children recruited within their ranks, as well as excluding new recruits. The agreement was implemented in 2019. A part of the agreement with the UN was to implement an age assessment tool that could estimate the age of the recruits.
2. Since the agreement was signed, about 700 minors, who have gone through military training, have been released from the SDF. However, the international humanitarian actor believes that the number of children in the SDF continues to be relatively high, even if the SDF claims otherwise. Many of the children enlisted have done so voluntarily, though reports circulate that children have been abducted and or forced to enlist.
3. There are many informal reports of minors being picked-up at checkpoints and taken to SDF enlistment centres for the purpose of excluding them from training. This is particularly prevalent in Hasaka City, Raqqa City and in certain pockets of Deir Ezzour. The minor in such cases is usually being excluded less than a day after being taken at the checkpoint.
4. The international humanitarian actor believes that the SDF deliberately does this to demonstrate compliance with the UN agreement.

5. Released and excluded minors alike should receive an exit form upon release/exclusion as proof of service and release.
 6. Recruitment of girls has allegedly stopped, and those having been released from the YPJ have gone through a rehabilitation programme at a boarding school. The SDF recently announced all girls had completed their schooling and returned to their homes.
 7. There is a high number of children trying to join the SDF for economic reasons. This is more common in rural areas where jobs are scarce and there are few economic or educational opportunities. The age range of those wanting to join is between 8 and 17 years old.
 8. Minors going through military training are being treated as adults, and are being paid like adults as well.
 9. The most common work tasks within the SDF that the released minors performed were for boys (in order): Guarding, fighting, administrative work, cooking and cleaning; and for girls: cooking, cleaning, administrative work, guarding and fighting.
 10. There are many reports of parents going to the Child Protection in Armed Conflicts Office of the SDF (the complaint mechanism to facilitate the release of children) to submit a complaint about the recruitment of their children to the SDF. However, the parents may wait in line for even a whole day and then be told that the office does not have time that day, and that they should come back in following day. It varies between cases whether the minors are in contact with their families after having joined SDF.
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Whatsapp meeting with a child protection officer, 31 January 2022

The source is working at the Office for Protection of Children in Armed Conflict in Qamishli. The office was established after an agreement between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the UN in 2020. The main assignment is to protect children in armed conflict and remove them from any force falling under the SDF. The office is present in different cities in North and East Syria, including in Hasaka Governorate.

Office for Protection of Children in Armed Conflict

1. The Office for Protection of Children in Armed Conflict falls under the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). The Office deals with minors that have joined any force under the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), including the YPG and YPJ. The Office communicate directly with SDF.
2. The Office is present in 9 different locations in the AANES territories: Qamishli, Hasaka, Deir Ezzour, Raqqa, Tabqa, Manbij, Kobane, Tel Abyad and Al-Shahba. The headquarters is located in Raqqa city.

3. Anyone, who want to file a complaint about a minor in SDF, can visit the Office in any of its locations. The officers present will gather information regarding names, dates, documents (ID cards and/or family booklets), when the child left the family, what has happened, and will occasionally also be provided a picture of the child. Once the file is made, it will be sent to the headquarters in Raqqa that will take up communication with SDF. It is then the responsibility of SDF to identify the minor. SDF relies on the information provided by the Office and does not conduct its own investigation of the minor's age.
4. It can take up to 3-4 months from the complaint has been received before the minor has been returned to the family. Occasionally, the minor has provided false information to the SDF upon recruitment, which can delay the case processing time.
5. The number of complaints filed in Qamishli since the inauguration of the office is 90. Of these, 50 minors has been returned to their families. Some of the remaining 40 persons reached the age of 18 after the complaint was filed. A quarter of the 90 cases are girls. One of the 90 cases concerned a Christian family while the remaining cases concerned either Arabs or Kurds.
6. It varies over time, how many complaints the Qamishli office receives. There are times when the office does not receive any complaints for two or three weeks, and other times when a couple of cases are reported in one week. The child protection officer has no information about why there is this variation over time.
7. The Qamishli office has not had cases where the minors were Ajanib or Maktoumin, and who had no ID documents, and therefore the Office has not established procedures for processing complaints for these groups.
8. The Office does not visit military camps to check if they have minors, but only report and document cases based on complaints filed to them.

Recruitment of minors to armed forces in North and East Syria

9. The SDF does not forcibly recruit minors by kidnapping them or take them from their houses.
10. The minors who have joined the SDF have done so voluntarily. There are three main reasons for minors to join the SDF. The primary reason is due to family issues, where the child decides to run away from a dispute to join the SDF. Second, minors might join for the salaries in order to provide economic support for their families. Third, some join because they are attracted to the idea of being a part of a military force.
11. Some minors will provide false documents to the SDF when joining. Others will say that they do not have any identity documents. In this case, the SDF will rely on the physical appearance of the person to determine his/her age. In most cases, it has been difficult to see if the person has been minor or adult, and SDF has therefore allowed them into its ranks; however, there are examples of minors who have been returned to their families after having been with the SDF for one-two days,

because they were assessed to be below 18 years old. In these cases, the families would not have had time to complain to the Office for Protection of Children in Armed Conflict.

12. The source does not know what groups within the SDF the minors join, as the SDF does not provide this information.
13. The majority of minors who join the SDF are from Hasaka Governorate, while there are fewer cases from Arab areas such as Raqqa and Deir Ezzour governorates.
14. The minors who join SDF are mainly between 15-18 years old.
15. Some minors are detected before they have received any military training, i.e. they have only received ideological training, while others manage to receive military training before being detected. Either way, the SDF will dismiss the minor when he/she is detected. A few minors, mainly 17-year-olds who turn 18 one or two months later, refuse to leave the SDF. They will not be armed but perform civil work until they turn 18.
16. There are different ways that the family of a minor become aware that the minor has joined an armed force. Sometimes, the minor has stated before joining that he or she would join a military force. At other times, relatives or friends of the minor tell the family that their child has been seen at a military camp.
17. The child protection officer is aware of families who have complained about their children having joined the Revolutionary Youth, however, it is not until the child joins an SDF force that the Office can intervene.

Skype meeting with Fabrice Balanche, 9 February 2022

Fabrice Balanche is an associate professor and research director at the University of Lyon 2. He has conducted field studies and research and written books and articles about Syria, including the Kurdish areas of Syria. His last field study in the Kurdish areas of Syria was carried out in January-February 2022.

The local population's support for the Self-Defence Duty

1. There are many young men who flee the AANES-controlled areas and go to neighbouring countries to avoid the Self-Defence Duty. This is not because of the duty itself, but rather due to the dire socio-economic situation in the area with severe poverty and a high unemployment rate. During the Self-Defence Duty, the conscript receives a very low salary (approximately 10 USD/month), which is far from enough to cover his and his family's basic living expenses during the service.
2. In general, an atmosphere of despair is dominating the Kurdish-controlled areas of North and East Syria, and people have lost their hopes for a better future, even among those working in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). This combined with the area's poor economic conditions have pushed many young people to leave the country in order to find better living conditions in neighbouring countries or in Europe as soon as they can afford paying a human trafficker. There are well-organised smuggling networks in the area facilitating smuggling of people for different prices depending on the destination (e.g. 1,000 USD for Turkey and 15,000 USD for Germany or Sweden).

Implementation of the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty Law

3. The Mandatory Self-Defence Duty Law is enforced and respected by AANES in the areas under its control. It means that conscripts are discharged upon completing their one-year Self-Defence Duty, and that those who according to the law are to be exempted from the duty (e.g. only sons, persons with medical issues etc.) are exempted, and that students can have their service delayed due to their studies.
4. Persons from Afrin, which is under Turkish control, are considered to be from AANES territories and are also obliged to serve the Self-Defence Duty.
5. At checkpoints, people's ID-cards are checked, and if a person evades his Self-Defence Duty, he will be caught by the military police and sent directly to training camps to serve his duty. Sometimes, it may take one-two days before the Self-Defence Duty status of a person caught at a checkpoint is clarified, and the person is detained during the clarification process. The source has not heard of cases of ill-treatment during the detention.
6. The AANES authorities do not conduct house searches to find draft evaders or deserters. A draft evader in a village or neighbourhood does not risk being taken to the Self-Defence Duty as long as he stays in his area, but he will be caught as soon as he approaches a checkpoint.
7. A draft evader is not fined or imprisoned. Deserters will be trialled and punished with imprisonment; however, the source have not heard of specific cases of deserters being trialled.
8. The source has not heard of cases of the military police doing house searches in order to find evaders or deserters.

9. The conscripts are not used in active fighting as the Self-Defence Forces (HXP) are auxiliary forces, which for instance are used for guarding checkpoints etc. However, there are cases of conscripts being killed while guarding a checkpoint. The source mentioned the case of a conscript in from Kahtanieh east of Qamishli who was killed by a sniper in Deir Ezour area.
10. The source has not heard of cases of violations against civilians committed by the HXP, e.g. attacking a civilian area etc.
11. Conscripts may also be sent to other areas to do their duty. The source assumes that by using a mediator with connections to the Kurdish authorities (so-called *Wasta* in Arabic), it is possible to be assigned to do the Self-Defence Duty in one's own area.
12. Evading or deserting from the mandatory Self-Defence Duty does not have consequences for one's family. The authorities may ask family members about the evader's/deserter's whereabouts, but they do not put pressure on family members or bother them in any other way in order to make the evader/deserter to report.
13. The source has not heard about any discrimination of Arabs or other minorities in the HXP. Neither has the source heard of any human rights violations against civilians committed by the HXP.

Recruitment to SDF

14. Recruitment to SDF takes place on a voluntary basis, and there are many men and women who are willing to join the force, which among others is due to the relatively high salaries paid to those who are recruited. There are two types of contracts, which the new recruits can enter into with SDF: two-year and five-year contracts. The salary in both types of contracts are good, but you are better paid if signing a five-year contract compared to those of two years.
15. It is generally not so easy to join SDF forces, as loyalty is a crucial criterion for recruiting new members. However, using a mediator with connections in SDF (so-called *Wasta* in Arabic) could ease the process.
16. Upon completing the mandatory Self-Defence Duty, the conscripts are encouraged to join SDF forces.
17. In Arab communities of northeast Syria, AANES does not try to encourage women to join YPJ, as they do not want to provoke the local people who are not in favour of their women joining SDF. Previously, AANES tried to change the local culture in the Arab communities, for instance through campaigns against polygamy or efforts to promote the Kurdish language, but due to negative reactions from these communities, they stopped doing this.
18. Regarding recruitment of minors in SDF, the source does not believe that SDF or AANES authorities kidnap minors to make them join the SDF forces, as there are already many volunteers who are interested in joining SDF

19. The source assumes that Revolutionary Youth, which is a PKK-affiliated political group with offices in for instance Qamishli, Hasakah and Raqqa, tries to politically and ideologically encourage and prepare minors to join PKK in Qandil Mountains. Despite the fact that PKK officially does not recruit new members in northeast Syria, the organisation lay the groundwork for future recruitment of new members through their significant influence on AANES and via activities of Revolutionary Youth.

Conscription to the Syrian Arab Army

20. A person, who has evaded or deserted from the military service in the Syrian Arab Army (SAA), will be arrested if he enters the areas controlled by the Government of Syria (GoS) in Hasakah Governorate. Because of this, if such a person wants to have a document issued by either GoS, he or she would have to get a family member or a legal representative to go into these areas and do the paperwork.
21. Persons living in the security squares in Qamishli and Hasakah must serve in the Syrian Arab Army. There are 12 Arab villages south of Qamishli belonging to the pro-regime Tay tribe that are under control of GoS as well. The villagers from there must serve in the SAA; however, the recruits will serve in their own villages and not elsewhere in Syria. In case an inhabitant from the mentioned villages or from the security squares, who is obliged to serve the Self-Defence Duty, enter the AANES-controlled areas, he will be taken to serve in the HXP.
22. SAA has recruitment offices in the security squares in Qamishli and Hasakah.
23. A person, who has completed the mandatory Self-Defence Duty, is still obliged to do military service in the SAA, and vice versa.

Local militias

24. Each village has a local militia (so-called *Mahalliyin* in Arabic) consisting of volunteers. The volunteers are also women and elderly people. The local militias are not a part of the SDF but they have a close relationship.
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Skype meeting with an expert from the International Crisis Group, 17 February 2022

The source has worked on Syria in the past seven-eight years, and has worked for the International Crisis Group for last three years. The source travels to Syria regularly, particularly to northeastern and northwestern Syria.

Self-Defence Duty

1. The mandatory Self-Defence Duty was enforced in North and East Syria (NES) as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) needed a large military force in order to fight the Islamic State (IS). Initially, the conscription only applied to Kurdish communities as the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) did not want to antagonise the Arab population of NES. This created a backlash among the Kurdish communities who complained over that they were forced to serve while the Arabs were not.
2. In the last two years, the mandatory Self-Defence Duty has been gradually imposed on the Arab areas as well. Initially, this was confined to the periphery like Raqqa countryside, but subsequently it was also imposed in Raqqa city and Deir Ezzour city. This led to demonstrations, and many young men decided to flee the area to avoid the compulsory conscription.
3. Today, the fight against IS is a security rather than a military issue, so the need for a large military force does not exist any more. There are more than 100,000 employed in the SDF and a large security apparatus (i.e. Assayish) as well. However, the Self-Defence Duty is still mandatory, which has created controversies among both Arab and Kurdish communities.
4. In 2020, the AANES announced a decision saying that the Self-Defence Duty was going to be universal across all cantons under its control. However, it is still erratically enforced and not implemented in all areas. Sometimes, when there is public uproar against the Self-Defence Duty, the conscription will be halted periodically and then at some point implemented again.
5. Conscription takes place through the media, where it will be announced what age group is required to serve. It is then the obligation of the person to enlist. Individual notifications will not be sent to homes of the wanted recruits. The age groups that are required to serve sometimes differ from area to area, which can confuse a person as to whether he is required for service.
6. There are makeshift checkpoints where IDs are checked. In the event a draft evader is stopped, he will be taken to serve his duty. There is no policy of detaining draft evaders. There are no house raids to find draft evaders, and family members are not being harassed in order to find draft evaders.

7. Exemption rules regarding medical issues and postponement of service based on education are enforced. However, previous exemptions for civil society workers, NGO workers, teachers and doctors are no longer enforced consequently, as there have been sporadic recruitment among medical personnel and teachers throughout 2021. This has created discontent among the population and protests against this have taken place in Deir Ezzour.
8. The Self-Defence Duty conscripts are assigned to serve in their own province, usually manning checkpoints. Arabs complain that the provinces they serve in are less secure, as there are more IS attacks there than other areas of NES. They believe that the SDF leadership does not invest enough in securing these areas.
9. The source has not heard of ethnic discrimination during service, however discrimination takes place on political groups; a person who is opposed to the PKK or PYD will be considered as second-tier and will lack influence and privileges.

Recruitment to SDF

10. Today, recruitment to SDF takes place on a voluntary basis. There are relatively good salaries, so there are many people who volunteer.
11. The SDF has also made use of deals with Arab tribes, who put their young men at their disposal in exchange of protection and status.

Recruitment to PKK

12. PKK and Kurdistan Communities of Women (KJK) often recruits minors in North and East Syria through a proxy group called the Revolutionary Youth. The Revolutionary Youth recruits by both exploiting a social vacuum that children face when having social issues, and by forceful recruitment. The source pointed out that it can be difficult to establish whether a minor has been recruited by actual force or whether he or she has been lured into joining in another way. Once recruited, the child will often be sent to PKK camps outside of Syria.
13. Some cases of recruitment to the Revolutionary Youth have gone viral, particularly in late 2020 and in 2021, where parents reported of their children being recruited by the Revolutionary Youth.

Skype meeting with an international humanitarian coordinator, 27 January 2022

The source works in Syria on the issue of child protection and recruitment of minors to armed groups.

1. Child recruitment had happened at a high level in North and East Syria (NES), both by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Islamic State. Child recruitment used to be more prevalent in

Hasaka city and Hasaka Governorate than elsewhere in NES.

2. SDF has signed an action plan with the UN and have begun releasing minors. The number of released and excluded has reached 750.
3. The international humanitarian coordinator still receive reports about recruitment of minors taking place. These cases revolve around the Revolutionary Youth, which is allied with the SDF but has not signed the action plan.
4. Today, it is almost only males who face forced recruitment. The recruitment happens to Revolutionary Youth. The cases of forced recruitment are rare, and it is impossible to conclude that a child has been forcibly abducted into an armed group, unless the child is being interviewed, as the information comes from the parents of the children,
5. It is the families of the minors that reach out to the international humanitarian coordinator and explain that the minor has been forcibly recruited. The parents usually explain that the minor suddenly disappeared, and that they later learned from friends that the minor was taken by a specific force.
6. There are also reports by families that SDF has forcibly recruited children, but the international humanitarian coordinator has been unable to verify that. The source pointed out that in a conflict situation it can be difficult to find out to where a minor has been recruited.
7. However, the source further pointed out that the international humanitarian organisation does not receive information from the minors themselves and its information is solely bases on the reports from the minors' families. The families could have an interest in telling an altered story, and that the minors could have decided to join voluntarily against their parents' will. Sometimes, the parents also explain that their children have been subject to some sort of propaganda.
8. Some minors join SDF for economic reasons. SDF pay its employees between 100-250 USD/month, which is a high salary by local standards. Due to the lack of livelihood opportunities and a high number of female-headed households, children, particularly boys, are pressured to join SDF. At least 500 minors reach out to SDF each month. The source believes that SDF rejects most of these children.
9. Before the action plan was signed, children as young as 12-13 years old were deployed by SDF to battles. However, when the child was very young, he/she was used to guard checkpoints, distribute food and for logistical tasks. From the age of 15 and above, when they could carry weapons, the minors were also placed at the frontline.
10. The source has not heard of recruitment of minors to the Self-Defence Forces (HXP).

11. In an assessment of minors associated with armed groups in NES from April 2021, 87% on the respondents had poverty as their main fear and 61% of the minors were engaged in child labour. 98% of the children explained that they could not leave the armed groups when they wanted to, as the armed groups did not allow them to do that.

Meeting with a journalist and writer, Erbil, 27 January 2022

The source is a Kurdish-Syrian journalist and writer from Qamishli, who has been living in Erbil for nine years. He travels to Syria regularly. He has worked as a journalist since 1990.

Implementation of the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty Law

1. Self-Defence Duty is mandatory for men between the ages of 18 and 24. The Self-Defence Duty Law was lastly amended in December 2021, when the age criteria was lowered from 18-40 years to the current one.
2. Women are not required to serve, but can join the Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP) voluntarily.
3. HXP falls under the supervision of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).
4. The Self-Defence Duty law applies to anyone who comes from Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) areas, irrespective whether the person is Kurd, Arab, Christian, Syrian citizen, Ajanib or Maktoumin. The law does not apply to people who come from outside AANES areas but who live there.
5. The rules in the Self-Defence Duty Laws with regard to both exemptions and postponements are being respected and implemented in practice.
6. It is possible to postpone the Self-Defence Duty for persons studying at pre-university and university level until the studies have finished.
7. Depending on the individual circumstances and the type of disease or disability, a person with medical issues can have his Self-Defence Duty postponed or be exempt. There are medical committees who assess the medical situation of the individual to determine whether he is fit for serving.
8. Those with major medical issues (e.g. cannot see or speak) would be exempt altogether. If the person can see a little bit, he might be used in what is called *stable services* e.g. as a cook, but not for military tasks. If the medical issue is temporary, for instance the person has to recover from a surgery, he can have his service postponed.

9. The Syrian Arab Army has a similar system, but is more strict in granting exemptions to person with major medical issues.
10. A man who has a brother in other military or security forces (e.g. Asayish and the SDF) can apply for postponement of his service. This does not apply if the brother serves in the Syrian Arab Army (SAA).
11. The only son in the family will be exempt from Self-Defence Duty.
12. Men, who originate from the territories administered by AANES, and who live abroad, can pay a certain amount of money on arrival to North and East Syria (NES), to get a 1-year exemption from service and travel around without fearing to be conscripted. This rule does not apply to men living in Iraq and Turkey. The source has not heard of any cases where a person was taken to serve his Self-Defence Duty despite having paid for this exemption.
13. Conscientious objection to Self-Defence Duty is not an option.
14. When a person is exempted or discharged from the Self-Defence Duty, this will be noted in his Self-Defence Duty booklet. The booklet is green on the outside.
15. The length of the Self-Defence Duty is one year. The person would usually be discharged after this period. However, if a major conflict arises, the Office of Defence has the right to order the recruit to serve for longer.
16. After being discharged, a person would be a part of the reserve, which the Office of Defence has the right to call up in force majeure situations, e.g. in case of war.
17. The source has not heard of people being called up for service from the reserve, or of cases of extension of service beyond the one year duty.
18. No one has been taken to Self-Defence Duty outside the provisions of the law. There are no women or minors who have been required to serve the Self-Defence Duty.
19. Draft evaders and deserters can be found at checkpoints or through house raids. House raids are conducted by Asayish. There have been no consequences for family members during these house raids.
20. A person caught by the AANES authorities for having evaded or deserted from his Self-Defence Duty will not be detained irrespective of whether his is a draft evader or a deserter. Instead he will be taken to the HXP to serve his Self-Defence Duty. A draft evader will be asked to serve his Self-Defence Duty for an additional month, while a deserter will also be asked to serve longer – the exact length will depend on the circumstances of his desertion. The source has not heard of mistreatment of draft evaders or deserters during their service because of their evasion or

desertion.

21. Generally, HXP does not engage in active fighting, which is done by other and more trained forces. However, considering the fact that Self-Defence Duty is a military service, it is possible that military commanders decide that HXP should be used for fighting as well.
22. According to the source, most people serve their Self-Defence Duty without objections, however there are also opponents to the duty in the AANES areas.
23. HXP does not discriminate against Arabs during the service. In many places in NES, such as Deir Ezzour, there is an Arab majority, and many members of the SDF are Arabs.

Conscription to the Syrian Arab Army

24. There are so-called *security squares* in the cities of Qamishli and Hasaka, where the Government of Syria (GoS) has the authority. There are different GoS offices in these areas, for instance courts, intelligence offices and other offices such as passport offices that provide public services to anyone living in the AANES areas.
25. The GoS is not able to recruit people to SAA in the areas controlled by AANES forcefully. Neither does GoS conscript persons living in the *security squares*. However, it is possible to join the SAA voluntarily, and there are recruitment offices in the *security squares* in cities of Hasakah and Qamishli.
26. The relationship between AANES and the GoS is a neutral and two-sided relationship. On the one hand, the GoS does not recognise any of the AANES institutions; on the other, there is an understanding that persons from AANES territories can go to the *security squares* to do government paperwork without the GoS preventing them to do so.
27. However, if a person – Kurd or Arab – who is wanted for military service in SAA enters the *security squares*, he could be detained by the GoS. There have been cases of individuals in both Qamishli and Hasakah who have been detained for this reason, and although the AANES cannot officially put pressure on the GoS, they have detained elements affiliated with the GoS in order to make a prisoner exchange with those detained by the GoS.
28. South of Qamishli there are a number of villages inhabited by tribes that are sympathetic to GoS, and who do not recognize AANES. Individuals from these villages could join the SAA voluntarily. There might be some Kurds who would do the same.

Recruitment to SDF

29. Recruitment to the SDF takes place on a voluntary basis and the SDF does not recruit any soldier by force. The main reason for persons wanting to join the SDF is that the people of the region want to

protect their area and their people.

30. There have previously been cases of minors having joined the SDF, however, this has only been on a voluntary basis.
31. After a memorandum of understanding was signed between the SDF and UN agencies, an office was established within the SDF called the Office for Protection of Children. This office has returned a large number of minors back to their families in the last two years.
32. The source is not aware of minors still serving within SDF ranks, but he does not rule out the possibility that there are still some minors in the SDF despite the SDF's effort to release them.

Revolutionary Youth

33. The Revolutionary Youth is an organisation for young people that has offices in North and East Syria. The organisation is not a part of the SDF or any other AANES institutions, however they have offices all over the AANES area. The source believes that the Revolutionary Youth is affiliated with the PKK.
34. The Revolutionary Youth has recruited young men and women, including minors, to their ranks for ideological purposes.
35. According to the families of the recruits, the recruitment happens through groups of young people driving by schools in cars or vans taking the recruits by force from there. The source pointed out that this information is solely based on the accounts of the families of the recruited children, and that it is possible that some of the children have been ideologically encouraged to join the Revolutionary Youth without the consent of their families.
36. The recruits are taken to particular training centres where they receive ideological training. The source is unaware of whether the minors also receive military training, as the public does not have access to these camps.
37. The practices of the Revolutionary Youth have created a large amount of discontent in the AANES areas, however, the SDF and the Asayish have not taken any measure to prevent the organisation from recruiting young people. The general-commander of the SDF, Mazloun Abdi, visited the offices of the Revolutionary Youth recently.
38. There are tens of minors who have disappeared in recent years and the families are unaware of their whereabouts and thus do not know whether they have been recruited by the Revolutionary Youth or another group. However, the only group that the source is aware of who recruits minors is the Revolutionary Youth. The official institutions of AANES, including the Asayish and the SDF has not been able to follow up on it.

Recruitment to PKK

39. PKK has a major influence in the AANES territories, but HPG , which is the military wing of PKK, does not recruit forcefully in these areas. The only forced recruitment taking place in North and East Syria is the recruitment to the Revolutionary Youth.
40. There is a lack of differentiation between the PKK and AANES/PYD among people, particularly those who are opposed to AANES/PYD as they consider the PKK to be behind AANES/PYD and everything they do.

Other information

41. There are so-called neighbourhood watches that take care of the security in their local area. These consist of adult civilians, both men and women.
42. The Afrin region was almost solely inhabited by Kurds before the Turkish invasion in March 2018. After the invasion, more than 70 % of the Kurds in the areas fled, and today only 25-30 % of the population there are Kurds.

Meeting with a political analyst, Erbil, 31 January 2022

The source is a Syrian Kurd with many years of experience as a political analyst. He resides in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. He has commented on the political situation in North and East Syria (NES) on several Kurdish, Arabic and international media.

The local population's support for the Self-Defence Duty

1. In the beginning of 2010s, when the Autonomous Self Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) was established, a majority of the North and East Syria (NES) population was in favour of having strong security forces, which could protect the NES society against several national and international security threats at that time. By the emergence of the Islamic State, YPG, YPJ and the newly established Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP) gained further support both from the international community and among the population in NES, and many joined these forces voluntarily. Due to this massive popular support, the failure and shortcomings of the AANES and the security forces were ignored.
2. However, when the IS was defeated and the NES society were not facing threats to the same extent as before, the AANES failed to maintain the broad popular support and convert it to establishing a unity among different ethnic and political groups living in NES. This was partly due to the lack of leadership experience and partly because of the divisive ideology of the PKK, which has a huge influence on the AANES and its policies. As a result, the NES society was politically polarised between two antagonistic groups: those who support the AANES and the ruling PYD on the one hand and the opposition groups on the other.

3. At the same time, the AANES' further pushed to implement a mandatory recruitment of young people to the HXP in a population, who were used to join the security forces voluntarily, and at a time when the socio-economic situation worsened, an increasing opposition to the Self-Defence Duty emerged and a considerable number of young people fleeing to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Europe.
4. With the political field polarized between the pro- and anti-AANES groups, the information and the reports about the Self-Defence Duty is often subject to manipulation and exaggeration. Whilst the AANES try to make light of the shortcomings in the HXP and the Self-Defence Duty, the opposition groups tend to manipulate and exaggerate about the negative aspects of the Self-Defence Duty law and the HXP. For instance, if someone appears on TV and complains about a situation related to the AANES or the Kurdish forces, the opposition groups may exploit and manipulate the person's statement and present it as if the statement is about the negative consequences of the Self-Defence Duty although the complaint is about something else. On the other hand, the supporter of the ruling party and the AANES ignore the fact that their insisting on compulsory conscription in an area, which is suffering from socio-economic problems (unemployment, damaged infrastructure, lack of education etc.), have led to many people fleeing the area.

Implementation of the law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty

5. The political analyst has not heard of cases of persons being conscripted despite being eligible for exemption from the Self-Defence Duty. The exemption provisions of the Self-Defence Duty Law are being implemented.
6. The source has not heard of conscripts being forced to do service longer than the one year stipulated by the law.
7. The political analyst has not heard of persons being called up for reserve duty.
8. The source knew of persons, who during their service in HXP were deployed to the frontline, but they did it voluntarily.
9. If an evader is caught by the authorities, he would immediately and directly be taken to a HXP training camp to start his Self-Defence Duty. He would not be allowed to go home, collect his stuff and say goodbye to his family. The person can ask for permission to leave and visit his family during his service. However, if the authorities suspect that he may take advantage of the leave to desert and flee the area, he will not be given permission to leave. After completing his service, the person will though be discharged and his evasion does not have any impact on the length of his service.
10. Evasion or desertion would not have any consequences for the evader's family members in the sense that the authorities would harass the family or take a family member. However, the authorities would conduct house searches to find the evader. The political analyst has five siblings

who all evaded their Self-Defence Duty. The authorities once searched for the evading siblings at the analyst's mother's house.

11. The military authorities made house raids in a village in Derek in 2017 to find evaders from the Self-Defence Duty. 552 young men from the village fled the area to evade the Self-Defence Duty. The political analyst did not know of similar cases of house raids taking place in recent years.

Recruitment to SDF

12. SDF, including YPG and YPJ, does not recruit people by using force in the sense that they would harm the person or his/her family if the person does not join them. In fact, the people of NES are generally not opposed to these forces, because persons serving in these forces are from the local area, they defend the area and they earn salaries to support their families.
13. However, within the last three years, a group called the Revolutionary Youth has contacted boys and girls aged 15-17 and brainwashed them into leaving their families to join them. They do it by inculcating their militant ideology into the minds of youth by using an emotional Kurdish-patriotic terminology, e.g. "fighting against our enemies", "homeland", "resistance" etc., in order to encourage them to join their ranks. There is a widespread discontent among the local population with the activities of the Revolutionary Youth as people are afraid that the group convince their children to follow their militant path and leave their families.
14. The Revolutionary Youth mostly encourage the youth to join them, but they may resort to using force if they do not succeed in convincing the minor to join them. The source knew of a case where a 16-year-old girl in a village close to the Iraqi border was, according to her father, recruited forcefully to the Revolutionary Youth. The source did however not have specific information about the forcible nature of the girl's recruitment.

Conscription to the Syrian Arab Army

15. If a person of Kurdish origin, who is wanted by the Government of Syria (GoS) for military service, enters the areas in Qamishli and Hassakah controlled by the Syrian forces, he will most likely not be taken and sent to military service in the Syrian Arab Army. This is because the Syrian authorities do not want to provoke the AANES by detaining Kurdish residents of the area. However, if the person is an Arab, the risk of being taken would be high.

Ajanib

16. As far as the political analyst knows, all Ajanib have obtained Syrian citizenship and Syrian documents after the implementation of Decree 49 in 2011. The political analyst was a part of the Kurdish delegation that was consulted by the GoS in connection with the implementation of Decree 49.

Meeting with Representation of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Suleimania, 29 January 2022

The office of Representation of the AANES in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is the diplomatic representation of the AANES in the Kurdish region of Iraq. The office was established in 2015.

Implementation of the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty Law

1. According to the Self-Defence Duty Law, the Self-Defence Duty takes 12 months. The length of the service can be extended (so-called *Ehtefaz* احتفاظ in Arabic) in emergency situations. In addition, after completing the Self-Defence Duty and being discharged, a certain group of persons (for instance a certain age group) can be recalled to serve in the Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP) as reservists for a certain period of time (so-called *Ehtiat* احتياط in Arabic), which also happens in *force majeure* situations. The decision on *force majeure* or special emergency circumstances, which determines the extension of the Self-Defence Duty or calling up reservists in each area is taken by the Executive Council of the area based on a proposal from the area's Military Council. In each area, there is a Military Council, Executive Council and Legislative Council. In each area, there is also a Committee of Defence which is also involved and consulted in discussions about approval of *force majeure* in the area.
2. By "area", the source means the seven administrative areas defined by the AANES, that is Jazire, Euphrates (*Furat*), Manbij, Deir Ezzor, Tabqa and Raqqa (the seventh area is Afrin, which is currently under the control of Turkish-backed Syrian National Army). Jazire has almost the same boundaries as the Government of Syria (GoS)-defined Hasakah Governorate.
3. The HXP and the SDF are two separate forces. Whilst the SDF is administratively under the Board of Defence (corresponding to a Ministry of Defence) of the AANES, the HXP is administered by the Syrian Democratic Council (*Majlis Syria Al-Dimoqratiya* in Arabic; SDC), which is the political wing of the SDF. SDC is a council for advising and conducting dialogue and talks in order to resolve the challenges faced by all Syrians with regard to establishing a democratic system in Syria.
4. The Self-Defence Duty Law is being enforced in all six areas under the control of the AANES mentioned above. However, due to the discontent with the law in some Arab-populated areas, particularly in Manbij, the AANES had to show some flexibility and adjust the law and its implementation in these areas in order to stem the discontent. For example, when there were protests in Manbij in 2021, the representatives of the AANES met with the protesters and the elders in the area in order to have the protests stopped. Based on these talks with the community, the AANES paused the implementation of the Self-Defence Duty Law in Manbij and started reviewing the implementation of the law in Manbij. This resulted, for instance, in a change of the age criterion in Manbij from 18-40 to 18-24. However, the amendment of the law in Manbij, including the new age criterion, was later also implemented in other areas.

5. Conducting military service in the Syrian Arab Army does not exempt the person from the Self-Defence Duty and vice versa. This is because the GoS does not recognise the AANES, and there is no coordination between the GoS and the AANES on such issues.
6. No reservist has ever been recalled to serve in the HXP. This is because there are other and more professional forces, i.e. the SDF, that are used in the *force majeure* situations, and the HXP are mainly not used as a fighting force.
7. There have been cases of extension of the Self-Defence Duty. In such extension cases, the person had to serve another couple of months upon completing his Self-Defence Duty.
8. If a person got a medical issue after being discharged from the Self-Defence Duty, he would not be recalled for reserve.
9. Previously, persons between 18 and 40 were obliged to do Self-Defence Duty, but after an amendment of the law in 2021, the age limit changed, so now it is persons between 18 and 24 who are called up. A person who had his Self-Defence Duty postponed due to education and is older than 24 years when he finishes his studies is not obliged to serve the Self-Defence Duty.
10. If a person evades his Self-Defence Duty and flees to another country, he must still do his Self-Defence Duty upon return to North and East Syria (NES) even if he is older than the maximum age of the Self-Defence Duty. If the person was younger than 18 when he left Syria and returns to Rojava after turning 25, he will not be required to do the Self-Defence Duty.
11. Original residents of NES, who stay in other countries (except Turkey and Iraq), and who are obliged to do the Self-Defence Duty, can have their service delayed for one year by paying a 400 USD fee. By paying this fee, the person can enter Rojava and leave again without any problem. The delay can be extended by paying 400 USD every year until the person complete the maximum age of 24. After this age, he will be completely exempted. The complete exemption by paying a fee is not an option according to the Self-Defence Duty Law, and the individual can only have his Self-Defence Duty delayed by paying the 400 USD fee.
12. Medical workers, NGO employees and teachers are currently not exempted from the Self-Defence Duty.
13. Calling up to the Self-Defence Duty is announced every year through different public media in NES such as newspapers, TV etc. For instance, it is announced that persons born between this year and that year should enlist for the Self-Defence Duty.
14. The individuals liable for the Self-Defence Duty must report to the Self-Defence Duty offices in their areas and obtain a Self-Defence Duty booklet in which the person's Self-Defence Duty status is recorded.

15. If a person does not enlist and obtain the Self-Defence Duty booklet in due time and he approaches a checkpoint, he will be alerted by the military police present at checkpoints about his duty to enlist. After being alerted twice, if he still has not enlisted, he will be taken to the Self-Defence Duty directly by force if he is caught by the military police for the third time.
16. There is no punishment for individuals evading the Self-Defence Duty; they are merely required to do their Self-Defence Duty.
17. As regards deserters caught by the authorities, depending on the conditions of desertion, the deserter may be brought before the military court. If his desertion has caused serious damages, he might be punished; otherwise, he will merely be required to complete his service. The law does not stipulate a certain punishment for desertion; it only says that the military court decides about the punishment. If the military court decides that a deserter should be detained, for instance, for 15 days, these 15 days will not count as a part of the remaining duty period.
18. In general, the mission of the HXP is to fill the security vacuum in NES, i.e. to carry out the security tasks not undertaken by the professional forces primarily responsible for defending the region. For instance, in the urban areas, the HXP is responsible to guard the public buildings and the AANES's institutions. The HXP may also be deployed to the frontlines to provide support to professional forces fighting at the forefront (e.g. logistics, guarding the captured areas etc.). Generally, the HXP are generally not used for or required to fight at the forefront, and any participation of individual HXP members in fighting is merely based on the individual's voluntary decision.
19. Under normal circumstances, Self-Defence conscripts receive their training and do their duty in their own area, and will not be deployed to other areas. For instance, Self-Defence conscripts from Hasakah will not be deployed to Deir Ezzour to do their service there. However, in *force majeure* situations and in special circumstances, the conscript can be requested to do his service in other areas.
20. The Self-Defence conscripts stay at the HXP headquarters in the area they service. After completing the initial 45 days training, conscripts can request and be granted leaves for seven days per month to go home. During the training period, conscripts are not allowed to leave their training camp.
21. During the training period, conscripts receive military training as well as training in political orientation. In the political training, the individual is taught in the political system in NES, and questions such as "why are we doing Self-Defence Duty?" are answered.
22. During the Self-Defence Duty, conscripts receive a symbolic salary, which changes occasionally. In addition, they are provided with food while serving in the HXP, and they receive free medical treatments during their service at certain hospitals that have agreement with the HXP. The free treatment only covers the conscript, and not his family.

23. The Self-Defence Duty booklet is the only document issued in connection with the Self-Defence Duty. When the conscript finishes, his booklet is stamped as a proof of completing the Self-Defence Duty.
24. The Self-Defence Duty also applies to every original resident of NES living within the boundaries of the AANES, including Ajanib and Maktumin Kurds. This means that the AANES consider Ajanib and Maktumin Kurds equal to all other residents of NES, and does not recognise the statelessness of these groups imposed by the GoS.
25. However, there are not many Ajanib Kurds left in NES as the vast majority of them have obtained Syrian citizenship and Syrian documents after the law passed in 2011 made it possible. There might still be some Ajanib, who have deliberately refrained from obtaining Syrian citizenship to avoid military service in the Syrian Arab Army. The source assumes that around 20,000 Maktumin Kurds are presently living in NES.
26. The Self-Defence Duty Law does not apply to Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs) who are not original residents of NES. If a person has an ID card issued in NES, for instance in Hasakah, and he has always lived outside NES, e.g. in Damascus, he will be considered an original resident in NES, and the Self-Defence Duty Law applies to him. The law also applies to individuals from outside NES, who have resided in NES for more than five years; this rule is still in force after the 2021 amendment to the law. An IDP from Afrin would currently not be required to serve the Self-Defence Duty.
27. A person from outside NES residing in NES can join the HXP and do the Self-Defence Duty on a voluntary basis.

Recruitment to SDF

28. Recruitment to all forces under the SDF takes place on a voluntary basis.
29. There have been cases of minors manipulating their ID documents in order to meet the SDF minimum age criterion (18 years) and join the SDF. However, whenever the SDF finds out about such cases, the individual will be dismissed immediately.
30. The Revolutionary Youth considers itself as a civil organisation, whose activities are focused on young people in NES, for example preventing the youth from being dragged into drug abuse, immoral actions or deeds etc. In addition, the Revolutionary Youth sees it as tis duty to promote the general idea of self-defence in the NES society.

Conscription to the Syrian Arab Army

31. Individuals, who are wanted by the GoS for military service, will most likely be taken by the GoS authorities if they enter the areas in NES controlled by the GoS. If the GoS authorities detain such person in for example Qamishli, they will send him to other areas under their control, for instance to Damascus, and he will not be allowed to do his military service in Qamishli. The AANES security

forces occasionally intervene in such cases by detaining some of the GoS personnel and exchanging them with the NES residents taken by the GoS.

Meeting with a Syrian Kurdish journalist, Erbil, 31 January 2022

The source is a Syrian Kurdish journalist working for a large international news company covering Syria. The source is located in Erbil.

Implementation of the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty Law

1. The Self-Defence Duty is compulsory for adult men. The Syrian Kurdish journalist did not know of any women having been forced to serve the Self-Defence Duty.
2. Reports from the news agency Rudaw indicate that some minors have been taken to serve the Self-Defence Duty. However, the source could not provide links to these reports on the delegation's request. It is especially families who are not affiliated with or sympathetic to the Kurdish authorities whose children risk being conscripted to the Self-Defence Duty.
3. Theoretically, the Self-Defence Duty Law covers all areas of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) equally. However, since May 2021, conscription in Manbij has been suspended following protests there. The Syrian Kurdish journalist has not heard of any suspension being in force in other places in the AANES territory.
4. Draft evaders can be taken at checkpoints and through house raids.
5. If a draft evader is caught, he will be taken to the military headquarters. The evader will then be sent to an area that is located far away from his home and given hard tasks. Draft evaders are not fined.
6. A deserter could be detained. However, the Syrian Kurdish journalist did not know of any cases where a deserter was actually caught and detained.
7. If the wanted recruit does not show up, the military police will visit his house to take him to the service or gather information about his whereabouts. This puts a psychological pressure on the family. It is possible that family members are called in for questioning as well. During the questioning, the family members will be asked about the evader's whereabouts and why the evader did not appear for service. If the military police are unhappy with the answers they will try another way of pressure. However, the source did not specify what kind of pressure this is. This practice is ongoing. The source has this knowledge from eyewitnesses and from stories of people who the source knows.
8. Anyone from North and East Syria who is obliged to serve his Self-Defence Duty can pay 400 USD to visit these areas and leave again without risk of being taken and forced to serve. This exemption is valid for a year. It does not apply to persons living in Turkey and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Persons who have paid this amount has not faced any problems when visiting the AANES territories.

9. The majority of people in North and East Syria opposes the Self-Defence Duty, which is reflected in the number of people fleeing the service.
10. Conscripts in the Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP) are assigned to duties in other areas than their home area, in order for them not to have an emotional attachment to where they serve. However, persons with connections or money can take advantage of this to serve close to their home.
11. HXP is usually not deployed to the frontline; however, the force can be used for fighting in times of conflict.
12. The Syrian Kurdish journalist has not heard of any discrimination of minorities during the in HXP.

Recruitment to SDF

13. There is no forced recruitment to the YPJ or the YPG. However, there are cases of minors who have been encouraged to join. The encouragement can happen if there is a social vacuum in the minor's personal life (e.g. love problems or family disputes) or through cultural activities. The agreement between the UN and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) led to a decrease in the number of minors in the SDF.

Revolutionary Youth

14. The Revolutionary Youth is a political organisation. It does not have weapons, but it is used to recruit minors to military forces. The organisation was established to relieve pressure from the SDF, as it essentially has taken over the role of the SDF with regard to recruiting children.

Recruitment to PKK

15. PKK is the actual decision maker in the AANES. Some people in North and East Syria do not distinguish between the SDF/AANES and the PKK, as they are considered as essentially the same.
16. There is no recruitment, forced or voluntary, to PKK/HPG in the AANES territories, but cadres from PKK take up positions in AANES.

Conscription to the Syrian Arab Army

17. The Syrian Kurdish journalist does not expect that young men wanted for conscription in the Syrian Arab Army will face problems when entering the security squares in Qamishli and Hasakah.
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Skype group meeting with three local residents, 1 February 2022

*The sources are three individuals living in the area under the Kurdish self-administration.*²⁷⁹

Source 1: A 40-year-old man from the city of Kobane.

Source 2: A 35-year-old from the city of Amuda. In 2018, he had to stop at his work and enlist for Self-Defence Duty.

Source 3: A 35-year-old man from the township of Jawadieh in Hasaka Governorate. He has served the Self-Defence Duty together with source 2.

The local population's support for the Self-Defence Duty

1. The vast majority of persons conducting the Self-Defence Duty are those who are recruited at checkpoints. One of the main reasons why people refrain from enlisting for the Self-Defence Duty is the very low salary received during the duty. While the monthly salary in the Self-Defence Forces (HXP) is approximately 22 USD (80.000 SYP), the salary of a SDF fighter is around 200 USD/ month.

Implementation of the law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty

2. At the beginning of Self-Defence Duty, one receives 45 days of training, which consists of classes in politics and ideology, physical training and military training.
3. There is a big difference between the mandatory Self-Defence Duty and serving in the SDF. For instance, while the Self-Defence Duty is compulsory, serving in the SDF is voluntary. In addition, the length of the service is different in these forces; whereas you only serve for one year in the HXP, members of the SDF sign contracts of at least two years. Moreover, whilst SDF are professional fighters, the HXP members are only trained for simple military tasks. Because of these differences, the training received in these two forces is very different. Unlike the training in SDF, the military training in the HXP is a very basic training, which means basic military exercises and a rudimentary training in how to use an AK47. On the other hand, the SDF members receive training in different types of weaponry. Source 2 mentioned that the military training received during his Self-Defence Duty was so basic that even at the end of his Self-Defence Duty, he was not able to use an AK47 in a professional way.
4. The authorities notify an evader twice about his duty to enlist by sending a notice to his house, and if he does not show up, the military police will search for him at his address. However, most draft evaders are identified and caught at checkpoints.
5. When an evader is identified and caught by the authorities, he may be detained one-two weeks (depending on how the evasion has been and how the person is taken) until a proper training location is found for him.

²⁷⁹ In addition to their personal experience from serving the Mandatory Self-Defense Duty, three residents have general knowledge on recruitment in the NES based on their civil and social activities. For reasons of anonymity, these activities will not be further elaborated on.

6. Source 2 received two written notices sent to his residence. As he ignored the notices, the Asayish searched for him at his address, but because he was not home, they looked for him at his workplace and detained him near his workplace. He was in detention for five days after which he was taken to a training camp and started serving his Self-Defence Duty.
7. Detained evaders are not subjected to ill-treatment during the detention period. Source 2 was not beaten or ill-treated, and he was provided the same food as other inmates. The detention period is not reduced from the detainee's Self-Defence Duty period. The Self-Defence Duty period starts the day, a person is deployed to a training camp.
8. According to what the sources have experienced during their Self-Defence Duty and what they have heard from others, evasion will not have any impact on treatment of the conscripted evader during the Self-Defence Duty, and the evaders will not be treated differently during the Self-Defence Duty than other conscripts. What is important for the authorities is that people enlist and do their Self-Defence Duty, and once they have started their duty, they do not care about whether the person has been an evader or not.
9. No discrimination against minority groups (Arabs, Christians etc.) takes place during the Self-Defence Duty, and the sources have not heard of or seen cases of discrimination against Arabs or other minorities during their service. Source 3 mentioned that on the contrary, the ethnic minorities could even be treated slightly better than Kurds during their service, because the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) is a predominantly Kurdish administration, and the authorities are not interested in being known for ill-treating ethnic minorities. For example, a Kurdish conscript may have to ask for permission to leave (to visit his family etc.) three-four times before he is permitted, whilst an Arab conscript can be granted permission immediately. According to source 3, the only discrimination, which the source has heard of, is that well-educated conscripts may receive a relatively better treatment during their service compared to those with a lower educational background. An example of this difference in treatment is that a well-educated conscript can become commander of a small group whilst a lower educated conscript cannot.
10. As regards the age of conscription, in 2018, the authorities called up persons born between 1986 and 2000. Now, due to a recent decision, they conscript persons born in 1997 and later.
11. In the event a person can present evidence and convince the authorities that he suffers from certain disabilities or diseases (e.g. cancer or other chronic diseases), which according to the Self-Defence Duty Law makes him eligible for exemption, he will go through medical examination. Slight diseases, e.g. scars after an accident, would not lead to medical exemption. Only sons are still being exempted. Previously, if a person had a brother or sister, who were serving or had served in other forces [e.g. YPG, YPJ etc.], he could according to the law be exempted from the Self-Defence Duty, but this exemption has not been enforced within the last four years.

12. Family members to a martyr are being exempted from the Self-Defence Duty.
13. Two brothers in a family, who are in the Self-Defence Duty age and are thus obliged to do their service, can either do their service one by one or they can do it simultaneously depending on their own preferences.
14. A person, who joins SDF and serves the period stipulated in his contract with SDF (e.g. two years), will be exempted from the Self-Defence Duty after leaving the SDF.
15. The law provision regarding delaying the Self-Defence Duty is being enforced and students can have their Self-Defence Duty delayed by one year at a time.
16. There have been cases of Self-Defence Duty period being extended. The Self-Defence Duty period of source 2 and 3 was extended with one month in 2018 due to the extraordinary security situation in Baghouz where the SDF were fighting against the Islamic State. The sources have not heard of cases of persons being called up as reservists upon completing their Self-Defence Duty.
17. In general, the HXP are not used for fighting at frontlines. For instance, the main task of the group within the HXP, which source 2 and 3 belonged to during their service, was to protect and secure the road between the Al-Omar oil field and Al-Tanak oil field in the Deir Ezzour Governorate. Another example of tasks conducted by the HXP is the protection of the three main dams in Syria, which are located in the areas controlled by the AANES.
18. However, there have been situations where the authorities have used the HXP for fighting, for example during the operation in Raqqa in 2017 and in the recent prison riot in Hasakah in January 2022. During the prison riot in Hasakah, nine members of the HXP who were guarding the prison, were killed during the clashes with the IS.
19. It is the authorities, who decide where a conscript should serve his Self-Defence Duty, and this decision is taken on the basis of the individual's assignment. Although both source 2 and 3 are from the Hasakah Governorate, they served their Self-Defence Duty in the Deir Ezzour Governorate.
20. After October 2019, as a part of ceasefire deal, two agreements were concluded between Turkey and Russia and between Turkey and the USA. According to these agreements, the AANES forces should keep a distance of at least three kilometres from Kobane. Because of this, around 70 % of the HXP in Kobane have had to conduct their Self-Defence Duty in the Hasakah Governorate despite that Kobane is a part of the Aleppo Governorate.
21. The sources have never heard of cases of violation against civilians, e.g. attacks against civilian areas, arbitrary arrests or torturing civilians etc., committed by the HXP. These forces have their well-defined rules, duties and activities, which is mainly focused on defending and protecting buildings, roads, installations etc. and are thus not involved in activities, which could lead to violations against civilians.

22. The sources knew of many cases of persons who deserted from their Self-Defence Duty upon completing the initial training. As an example, source 2 and 3 mentioned that when they started their Self-Defence Duty training, they were part of a group of around 1,200 conscripts. After completing the training, many asked for a short leave to visit their families. However, there were only 500 who returned to their duties; the rest had deserted. Whilst some deserters, particularly in Arab populated areas, go to their villages and stay with their families until they are caught, others flee the area and leave the country. There are formal penalties for deserters who are caught, and they may be sentenced to two months imprisonment. However, the authorities at certain occasions, e.g. Nawrooz (the Kurdish new year), issue amnesties lifting the punishment against deserters. There are also amnesties addressing evaders or deserters who are not caught yet. In such cases, the authorities forgive evasion or desertion if the evaders or deserters in turn enlist for the Self-Defence Duty within a given deadline.
23. Evasion or desertion has no consequences for the evader's or deserter's family members and the authorities will not touch the parents or the relatives of the person. The authorities may conduct house search to find a deserter or evader, but they will, based on the sources' experiences, never take family members. Previously, it was the Asayish that conducted house raids, but since the establishment of the military police department three-four years ago, it is the military police who carry out house searches. In the sources' experiences, that the AANES are generally very sensitive about their reputation in the media and among the population, and are not interested in doing something, which may damage their reputation. This applies not only to how their behaviour is perceived with regard to the implementation of the Self-Defence Duty, but also to other fields of administration.

Recruitment to SDF

24. Recruitment of men and women to the SDF takes place on a voluntary basis and the sources have not heard of any case of forced recruitment to these forces. The only forced recruitment occurring in the areas under AANES is the recruitment to the HXP. The Kurdish forces and their affiliates may take advantage of the poor socio-economic conditions or the family issues, which young men and women face to encourage them to join their forces as a way to escape from these problems. However, they never grab and kidnap anyone in order to recruit him or her by force.
25. One finds minors in the ranks of SDF. However, the minors join the SDF because they are encouraged to join, and not because they or their families have been terrorised. An organisation called 'the Revolutionary Youth' (RY) use meetings with students and activities at cultural centres such as music to encourage the minors to join them. Even though these activities may not necessarily lead to the individual minor deciding to join the SDF, he or she would gradually get convinced that he or she could join the SDF as the first place of refuge whenever facing social, economic or family issues.
26. The RY will not immediately use their new members for military purposes. They are instead ideologically prepared through training courses to advance within the ranks of the RY and gradually

get the impression of being important to the group. Eventually, some of these young recruits will end up joining SDF. According to the sources, although the RY would like to present and identify itself as a civil group or organisation, the fact that the activities would eventually lead to recruitment of some of minors to military groups raises suspicion about the true nature of the organisation. The sources do not believe that the RY is affiliated with any parts of the AANES; they rather assume that the organisation is connected to some unknown shadow groups or organisations. This is because there are even persons in the AANES, whose children have joined the RY, and the parents do not know what happens to their children in the RY, what they do and where they are. However, even if it is difficult to know for certain that the RY are affiliated to the PKK, the lack of connection to the AANES and the similarity of the RY's symbols and flags to those of PKK makes it difficult to conclude otherwise.

27. The RY has offices in almost all cities in NES. Their members are young people (mostly under 30 years old). The members run their offices, and they for instance initiate demonstrations and student meetings to agitate the youth whenever there is a political issue going on. Their members do not wear uniforms, however they are identifiable by the way they carry themselves around, the way they gather, the way they speak, the special terminology used by them, the music they listen to etc. Thus, it is easy for normal people to identify them and to distinguish between them and other youth.

Recruitment to the PKK

28. The PKK has never recruited members by force in NES, neither in the past nor at present.

Conscription to the Syrian Arab Army

29. If a person, who is wanted by the Government of Syria (GoS) for military service or for other reasons, enters the areas controlled by the GoS in Qamishli and Hasakah, he will be in high risk of being arrested by the Syrian authorities. There have been cases of persons being arrested when entering into these areas, but then released because the Asayish succeeded in exchanging them with GoS-affiliated persons whom the Asayish had in their custody. However, in such cases, the person detained by the GoS is usually affiliated with the AANES, i.e. serving in the AANES or being connected to someone in the AANES. The AANES will not interfere and try to release a civilian who is not affiliated with the self-administration.

Meeting with a university professor, Erbil, 28 January 2022

The source is a Syrian Kurdish university professor and lecturer in politics and philosophy at a university in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The source has written several books and articles about Kurds in Syria. He is used as an expert by a number of international media on the political and military situation in the North and East Syria (NES).

The local population's support for the Self-Defence Duty

1. Due to the Kurdish-ideological nature and foundation of the Self-Defence Duty, the population in the Arab-populated areas of North and East Syria (NES), e.g. Deir Ezzour, Raqqa, has rejected to do service in the Self-Defence Duty Forces (HXP), and the Self-Defence Duty has not been implemented in these areas to the same extent as in the Kurdish-populated areas (e.g. Hasakah). In addition, because of the dire socio-economic situation and high employment, the Arab population prefer to join the ranks of the SDF to receive better salaries and services offered to the SDF members. Many Arab members of the SDF were previously members of the Syrian opposition groups.

Implementation of the mandatory Self-Defence Duty Law

2. The exemption rules stipulated in the Self-Defence Duty Law are implemented in practice. The source has not heard of cases of extension of the Self-Defence Duty beyond the mandatory service of one year. Generally, there is a very sensitive public opinion in Rojava and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) authorities are very careful about their reputation in media with regard to implementation of the AANES laws and regulations
3. Arabs or other minority groups are not being subjected to discrimination during the Self-Defence Duty. One cannot rule out the possibility that an individual commander could have a certain discriminating attitude towards persons who do not belong to his ethnic group. But the source has never heard of cases of Arabs or other ethnic groups being subjected to discrimination in the HXP.
4. Evaders will be forced to do their Self-Defence Duty if they are caught by the military police. The source assumes that Arab evaders would not be forced to join the HXP to the same extent as Kurdish evaders would. Evasion will not have any impact on the family members of the evader. The source know of several young Syrian Kurds, who evaded the Self-Defence Duty, fled to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and joined the Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces whilst their families are still living in NES, and nothing has happened to their families.
5. Deserters will be forced to resume their Self-Defence Duty and complete it in the event they are caught by the authorities. There is a large number of Self-Defence Duty deserters who have fled to and live in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Desertion will not have any consequences for the family members of the deserter. This is because the authorities in general are not interested in having the society turned against them by subjecting the families of deserters or evaders to a type of treatment, which would provoke protests and discontent. In addition, in most families in NES, there is at least one family member who has voluntarily joined one of the Kurdish forces in NES. Against this background, it would be very difficult for the authorities to put pressure on the families because of the desertion or evasion of a family member.
6. The source has not heard of cases of house raids where the authorities try to find evaders or deserters at their home. Evaders and deserters are usually taken at checkpoints.

7. HXP is not meant to be used for fighting at the forefront. The ideological purpose of the Self-Defence Duty is to prepare the youth for emergency security situations. The Self-Defence conscripts are mainly used for internal security tasks in the cities. The source has not heard of cases of Self-Defence conscripts being deployed to the forefront for fighting.

Recruitment to SDF

8. The source has not heard of specific cases of individuals being recruited into the ranks of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) by force.
9. After the battle of Kobane in January 2015, YPG and YPJ achieved a huge international popularity, and many Kurdish men and women wanted to join these forces. Later on, the SDF was built on this popularity, which further increased by the emergence of the Islamic State and the necessity to protect the Kurdish population against such threats. Thus, the SDF has so far not faced challenges with regard to recruitment of people wanting to join them voluntarily.
10. However, the SDF as well as the AANES in general are ideological institutions, whose pro-PKK ideology makes them vulnerable to PKK's influence and interference in their decisions and practice as an independent force or an independent bureaucratic state administration respectively. The PKK has thus some influence within the leadership ranks of the SDF and the AANES. Because of this influence, pro-PKK groups such as the Revolutionary Youth have free hands to recruit and train young people and prepare them ideologically and militarily to join the PKK outside NES (i.e. Qandil Mountains). The reason why the PKK tries to recruit young members through the Revolutionary Youth in NES is that they cannot do it as freely in the Kurdish areas of Turkey as in NES, due to the strict monitoring and control measures the Turkish authorities have adopted on the Turkish side.
11. There is, in general, no forced recruitment of young people to groups like the Revolutionary Youth by a car coming and kidnapping them on the street. There might be a few cases like this, but in general, mafia-like methods of terrorising people or kidnapping is not the modus operandi of such groups. It is rather a combination of a number of social and psychological factors, which makes young people to join these groups voluntarily; factors like poor educational background, social problems, which the individual is facing in his or her community and in Syria in general, ideological propaganda by the Revolutionary Youth etc. For instance, when a girl leaves her family because of social and cultural issues, she faces a vacuum, which is filled and exploited by the Revolutionary Youth. Once a young person is recruited to the Revolutionary Youth and has been through their ideological programs and training in their training camps, his or her mind will be so affected by the group's ideology, he or she will not even wish to return to his or her community and family. The fact that new recruits live in a training camp and see other young people like themselves, and that they are constantly bombarded by the group's ideology has a huge psychological impact on their minds. Those, who join the Revolutionary Youth, will eventually join the PKK and not the SDF.
12. Among the pro-PKK groups, it is only the Revolutionary Youth who recruit minors into their ranks.

13. As far as the source is informed, the SDF do currently not recruit minors. Previously, the source knew of individual cases of minors being recruited to the SDF, as these cases came to public attention. However, those identified cases were resolved as the minors in question were dismissed. The source does not know of new cases of SDF recruitment of minors. According to the source, reports about the recruitment of minors are sometimes politically motivated by the political fractions who are opposed to the AANES and the SDF.

Recruitment to the PKK

14. No forced recruitment to the PKK is taking place in NES, partly because using force is generally not the method used by the PKK to recruit new members, but also because a great number of current PKK members come from NES, and it would be strategically unwise to use force to recruit new members in their own communities.

Ajanib Kurds

15. There are not many Ajanib Kurds left in NES as they have obtained Syrian Citizenship and documents after the implementation of Decree 49 in 2011. The source was a participant in the delegation that negotiated the issue of Ajanib with the GoS at the Republican Palace in 2007.

Skype meeting with a university researcher, 19 January 2022

The source is a Danish researcher. The source has done research on Kurdish forces in Syria and Iraq.

Recruitment to SDF

1. Recruitment to the YPG and YPJ is voluntary. Soldiers are given a salary of 200 USD/month. In addition, YPG and YPJ soldiers are seen as heroes by many who want to join them
2. A recruit to YPG/YPJ is initially given three months of training, including a lot of ideological training, before being given a five-week leave. After this period, the person can sign a 2-year agreement with YPG/YPJ. It is not possible to become a cadre already after the initial training.
3. Cadres can fulfil military as well as civilian assignments. It is possible to stop working as a cadre, but the person risk being condemned by others.
4. The source has never personally met a minor soldier in YPG or YPJ. However, the source interviewed once a 20 years old YPJ member, who said that she had joined YPJ when she was 15. The woman underlined that at that time, the YPJ did not want her to join the force at that time because of her age, however she insisted on staying in the forces and refused to go home. As far as the source was informed by the YPG and YPJ members during his research, these forces generally did not recruit minors. Nevertheless they added that some minors were recruited by the YPG and

YPJ during the fights against the Islamic State.

5. There can be a sort of social pressure for a person to join the YPG/YPJ, for instance if other family members are or have been a part of these forces. Some women also decide to join the YPJ in order to avoid marriage.
6. In addition to Kurds, the SDF also has Christians, Arabs and other minorities under its umbrella. More than half of the Asayish are Arabs.

Recruitment to PKK/HPG

7. It is difficult to prove if there is an organisational link between YPG and HPG or between PYD and PKK; however, they share the same ideology. There are many pictures of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in official buildings in North and East Syria (NES).
8. The SDF leader Mazloum Abdi is a former member of the PKK. After the establishment of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), many Syrian PKK members joined YPG.
9. There is a visual difference between HPG and SDF forces, as the former wear traditional Kurdish garments while the latter wear military uniforms.
10. PKK/HPG do not recruit members by force in AANES.

The Mandatory Self-Defence Duty

11. There is a mandatory Self-Defence Duty in the Kurdish-administered areas in NES. The purpose of the duty is to prepare people to defend themselves, and the conscripts are not used at the frontlines.

Meeting with Wladimir van Wilgenburg, Erbil, 26 January 2022

Wladimir van Wilgenburg is a freelance journalist, political analyst and author of several books on Kurds in Syria. He has worked on the topic since 2005 and has been based in Erbil since 2014.

Implementation of the law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty

1. The Self-Defence Duty is mandatory in every region governed by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). However, in recently taken (Arab-majority) areas like in Deir ar Zour, Raqqa, and Manbij, the AANES have been more careful to implement conscription, since they do not want the population to turn against them
2. The rules of the Self-Defence Duty Law are being implemented differently in different parts of the AANES-controlled area. For instance, the age limit of those wanted for military service differs from

area to area. However, the AANES tries to change this to have only one age range.

3. Arabs are also called up for the Self-Defence Duty, and they are treated similarly to Kurds during their service. Maktoumin and Ajanib are also required to serve the Self-Defence Duty. But in some majority Arab areas they are more careful to fully implement the duty.
4. Recently, the AANES has made some exemptions to conscription in some the Arab-majority areas, e.g. all of Deir Ezzour. There have also been suspensions of conscription in areas in Manbij.
5. Women are not required to serve the Self-Defence Duty, however, there are women who join the Self-Defence Forces (HXP) voluntarily.
6. It is possible for individuals residing abroad, who are obliged to do the Self-Defence Duty, to pay money to postpone the duty in order to be allowed to visit the AANES territory and leave again. Wladimir van Wilgenburg is not aware of whether it only applies to people in Europe or also for those in KRI, and does not have detailed information on the enforcement of exemption rules.
7. There is a special military police who sometimes check IDs at checkpoints to see whether the males passing through the checkpoint are wanted for the Self-Defence Duty. This is not conducted at all checkpoints, but happens randomly.
8. If the person stopped at a checkpoint does not have the necessary document (i.e. military booklet) showing that he is serving or have served the Self-Defence Duty, he will be asked to get the document and come back.
9. There are checkpoints many places in the Hasaka Governorate. They are mostly located at the entrance or exit a city, but not in the city itself. It is difficult to omit these checkpoints unless you live by a small village road or similar.
10. The source has not heard about the possibility of conscientious objections to conscription in the HXP.
11. Wladimir van Wilgenburg has not heard of examples of house raids in order to find draft evaders or deserters.
12. The source has not heard of cases of persons being called up again as reservists after being discharged from the Self-Defence Duty.
13. The Self-Defence Duty is partly an ideological move to get people to know the AANES system and ideology.

Self-Defence Forces

14. In the AANES system, the HXP is not a part of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). There is a special commander for the HXP. However, in general and in the media, HXP is regarded as a part of the SDF.
15. The HXP pay their conscripts a symbolic amount during the service.
16. Generally, HXP is meant to be an auxiliary force, which means that it is not an active fighting force used at the frontline; its main task is to protect supply lines in the background. When the SDF needs forces, the HXP can be allocated to a specific area, e.g. for guarding checkpoints. Initially, the HXP was also meant to be border guards, but it is no longer part of their tasks to guard the borders.
17. The HXP is not a law enforcement force and it is not its duty for instance to imprison people. There have been reports of arbitrary arrests of the KNC supporters. However, these arrests have been conducted by the Assayish or proxy groups, and not by the HXP.
18. As far as Wladimir van Wilgenburg is aware, there are no HXP forces inside the IS camps, e.g. Al-Hol Camp, in Hasaka governorate. However, HXP might be placed around those camps for guarding. Asayish is responsible for the security inside Al-Hol Camp. There were also reports HXP was involved in guarding prisons.

Recruitment to SDF

19. The SDF has enough soldiers and do not need to recruit by force.
20. There is no forced recruitment to any of the SDF groups. People sometimes join the SDF for economic reasons, i.e. good salary.
21. There have been examples of minors who wanted to join the SDF without their parents' approval. These minors ran away and joined the SDF voluntarily, whilst their parents called it kidnapping. According to the source, it is often a matter of definition when it is reported by the parents that their child has been "kidnapped"; the parents tend to consider recruitment of minors without their consent as "kidnapping" although the minor has joined the SDF by his or her own will.

Violations committed by SDF

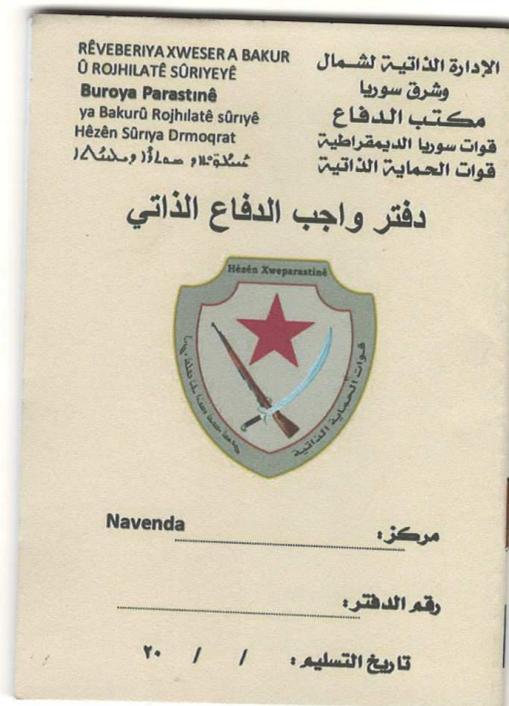
22. There have been areas where the Islamic State was present (Manbij and Tishreen Dam), which was the reason why the SDF did not allow displaced civilians from these areas to return for a certain period. The SDF was accused of discriminatory treatment of people. However, according to the UN Secretary-General, the lack of IDPs access to the areas was not based on a discriminatory treatment of them due to their ethnic origin. Now, those IDPs they have been allowed to return to their areas.

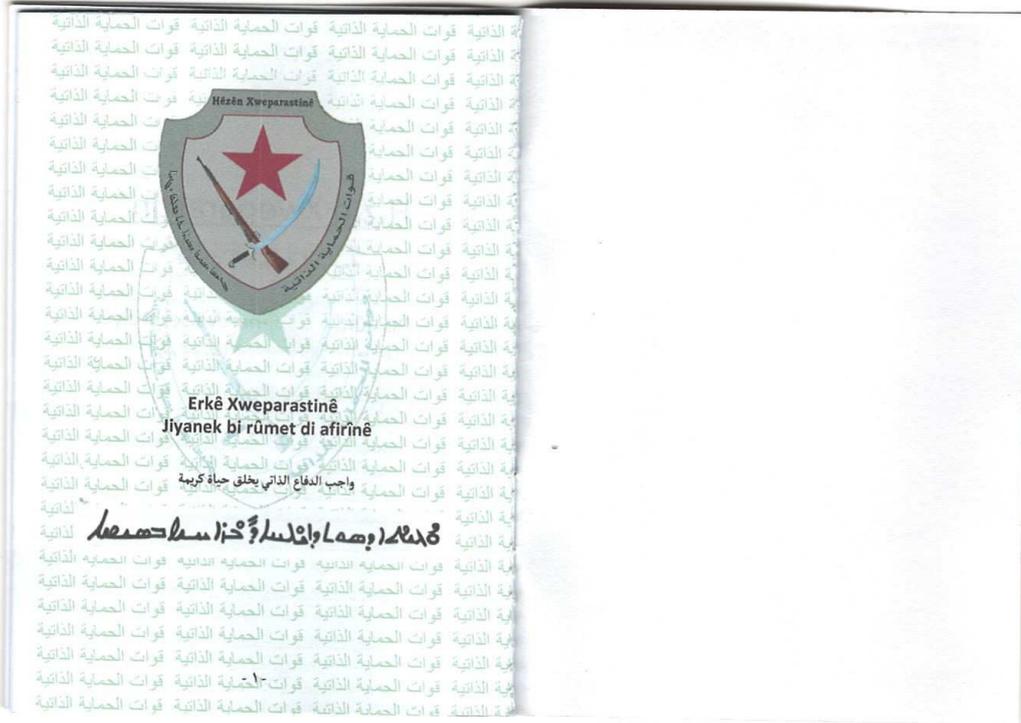
23. Wladimir von Wilgenburg has not heard of reports of SDF jailing people without trial, but noted that it is possible that it could happen. However on the contrary, media has reported that thousands of suspected Islamic State members are put on trial by the AANES.

Conscription to the Syrian Arab Army

24. The SDF does not allow the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) to conscript people in the areas in Hasakah Governorate where the Syrian authorities are in control. In the past there has been some issues with that, but there has a *de facto* ban on the recruitment by the SAA based on the SDF control, but that does not mean that the Government of Syria (GoS) is not trying to conscript in AANES. Previously, there have been fights and discussions between SDF and SAA regarding recruitment in the AANES areas.
25. As a part of reconciliation agreement, the SAA asked Arabs from AANES areas to travel to areas where the GoS is in control to join the SAA.

Annex II: Copy of military booklet







1- Xêzikirin zêdekirin jêbirin an sere
Rastkirin çi gotinê gotinê li ser lênûsa erka
Xweparastinê qedexeye her wiha
Pêwîste ji wendabûn û bertelefbûnê

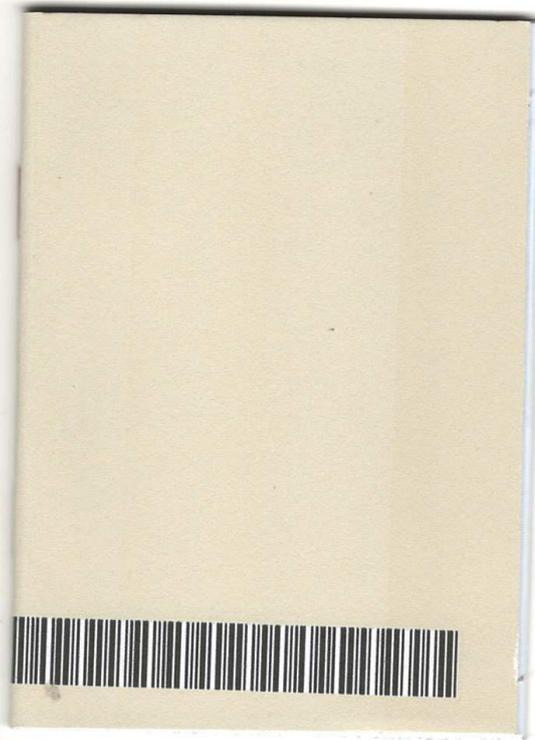
2-Kesê pêspartî yêku ji tomarkirina
Denezanên xwe li navenda erka
Xweparastinê li herêmên xweseriya
mokratîk dereng maye – paşve
mayî ji erkê tê dîtin

3-Her kesê ku ji vexwendina tevlêbûna
Erka Xweparasyinê paşvemayî ye û
Ew dema diyarkirî li gorî zagona erka
xweparastinê û namesaziyên wê yên
pêkane li ku bê dîtin dê bê girtin û
li gorî yasayan tê cezakirin.

4- her pêspartiyek niştecihbûna xwe
Biguhere.pêwişt e di nava 15 rojan
De serî
Bide navenda erka xweparastinê ya
li herêma wî û wê navendê bi vê
guhertinê agahdar bike

5-pêwîst e kesên ji bo xwendinê
Pa.vexistî ne : di dema betlaneyên
Navberan û
Dema agahdarîkirinê de li navenda
Erka xweparastinê amade bibin.

6-pêwîst e hemû pêspartiyên
pêkanina erka xweparastinê di
dîroka
(1-5) û (1-11) ji her salê.serî bidin
Navendan.



Annex III: Terms of Reference

1. Military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate

1.1. Implementation of the Law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty

- 1.1.1. Discharge of conscripts upon completing Self-Defence Duty
- 1.1.2. Prevalence of reconscription after being discharged
- 1.1.3. Enforcement of exemption rules with regard to recruitment to the Self-Defence Forces (HXP)
- 1.1.4. Prevalence of forced recruitment of women to HXP
- 1.1.5. Prevalence of forced recruitment of minors to HXP
- 1.1.6. Ethnic groups recruited to HXP and treatment of minority groups (e.g. Arabs) while serving the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty
- 1.1.7. Consequences of draft evasion and desertion from the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty, including consequences for the person's family
- 1.1.8. Documentation of having performed Mandatory Self-Defence Duty
- 1.1.9. Involvement of HXP in active fighting
- 1.1.10. Involvement of HXP in violations against civilians or other types of human rights violations

1.2. Prevalence of forced recruitment to SDF

- 1.2.1. Prevalence of forced recruitment of men
- 1.2.2. Prevalence of forced recruitment of women
- 1.2.3. Prevalence of forced recruitment of minors

1.3. Prevalence of conscription to the Syrian Arab Army (SAA)

1.4. Prevalence of recruitment to HPG (PKK)