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Introduction

This Country of Origin Information (COI) Report was drawn up on the basis of the points for attention mentioned in the Terms of Reference (ToR) compiled by the Ministry of Asylum and Migration. The ToR for this Country of Origin Information Report were adopted on 12 August 2024.

This COI Report describes the situation in Syria up to the start of the large-scale ground offensive on 27 November 2024. This offensive led to the departure of President Bashar al-Assad (hereinafter: Assad) from Syria. It is an update of the COI Report from August 2023.¹ The reporting period is from 1 August 2023 to 27 November 2024. This COI report is a factual, neutral and objective representation of the findings that were made during the period under consideration. It is not a policy document and does not reflect the vision or policy of the Dutch government towards Syria. The report does not contain any conclusions concerning immigration policy.

This COI Report has been compiled on the basis of public and confidential sources, using carefully selected, analysed and verified information. In the compilation of this report, use was made of information from various United Nations organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), reports from the European Country of Origin Information (COI) organisations, specialist literature and media reporting. Except where the facts are generally undisputed or unless stated otherwise, the content in this COI report is based on multiple sources. The public sources that were consulted are listed in Chapter 8 of this COI Report.

This COI Report also uses information obtained from interviews conducted with relevant and expert sources. These were conducted partly in person – in particular during a fact-finding mission to Türkiye, Jordan and Switzerland – and partly online during the research for this COI report. Some information also originates from the foreign diplomatic missions of the Netherlands. The information gleaned in this way was mainly used to support and augment passages founded on publicly available information. Each of these sources is marked as a 'confidential source' in the footnotes and accompanied by a date. Where possible, information obtained from confidential sources is supported by information from other sources.

Chapter 1 discusses the security situation. Chapter 2 discusses the human rights situation. Chapter 3 covers living conditions in Syria. Chapter 4 discusses freedom of movement. Chapter 5 explores legal protection. Chapter 6 addresses the situation of displaced persons. The Country of Origin Information Report concludes with a chapter on return.

¹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, [URL](#).

1 The security situation

1.1 Developments in the security situation

During the reporting period, the security situation in large parts of Syria remained unpredictable. This was partly due to the ongoing civil war in Syria. Regional tensions also had an impact on stability in Syria (see Section 1.6).² Syria ranked among the least peaceful countries in the world. This was reflected in various reports, including the Global Peace Index 2024 of the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), in which Syria ranked 156th out of 163 countries.³

In the fourth quarter of 2023, there was a spike in the number of security incidents. This declined in the first quarter of 2024, before rising again from the beginning of October 2024.⁴ Towards the end of the reporting period, Syria experienced the most significant military escalation in years. On the morning of 27 November 2024, a broad coalition of armed opposition groups, led by the Organisation for the Liberation of the Levant (*Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham*, HTS),⁵ from north-western Syria, launched a large-scale ground offensive against government forces towards the city of Aleppo.⁶

1.2 Armed conflict

Anti-government demonstrations broke out in March 2011. The Syrian military and security apparatus, led by President Assad, cracked down hard on these protests. This led to a civil war that escalated into a complex, internationalised armed conflict involving the Russian Federation, Iran, Türkiye, the United States and Israel.⁷

As a result of the conflict, millions of Syrians fled abroad. According to UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency, there were 5.1 million refugees and asylum seekers from Syria in 2023.⁸ According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the country had a population of approximately 23.6 million in 2023.⁹

Most Syrian refugees were registered with the UNHCR or the authorities in one of the neighbouring countries.¹⁰ According to UNHCR figures dated 30 November 2024,

² Atlantic Council, *Economic recovery in opposition-held Syria is challenging but still possible*, 4 June 2024; OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 23 October 2024; UNHCR, *Syria Arab Republic. Operational update (June-July 2024)*, 16 September 2024; UNHCR, *Syria Arab Republic. Operational update (August-September 2024)*, 30 October 2024.

³ IEP, *Global Peace Index 2024*, 12 June 2024, p. 9.

⁴ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024, p. 1; UN, *As Syria's humanitarian crisis worsens, delegates in Security Council stress need for Damascus to re-engage with Constitutional Committee*, 27 February 2024; OHCHR, *UN Commission of Inquiry: "Syria, too, desperately needs a ceasefire"*, 11 March 2024; WHO, *Unprecedented number of Syrians in need of aid after 13 years of war*, 16 March 2024; INSO, *Safety and access review Q4 2023, 2024*, p. 31; OSES, *United Nations special envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 30 May 2024; OHCHR, *Syria being pulled into the catastrophic conflict engulfing the region, UN Commission warns*, 1 November 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, October 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁵ In Arabic, *al-Sham* can refer to Damascus, Greater Syria or to the Levant. The latter is a region east of the Mediterranean Sea, which is often said to include Syria, Lebanon, Israel, the Palestinian territories, Jordan, the Hatay province in Türkiye and part of Iraq.

⁶ The Guardian, *Syrian rebels enter Aleppo three days into surprise offensive*, 30 November 2024.

⁷ CFR, *Conflict in Syria*, 13 February 2024; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Country Report. Syria*, 19 March 2024, p. 6.

⁸ UNHCR, *Syria situation*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁹ WHO, *Syrian Arab Republic*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹⁰ By comparison: In 2023, slightly fewer than 150,000 people of Syrian origin (migrants and their children) were living in the Netherlands; Netherlands Research and Data Centre (WODC), *Syrische Nederlanders op sommige gebieden nu minder goed af dan eerste jaren na aankomst*, 21 September 2023.

there were 4,963,814 registered Syrian refugees in the region. Türkiye had the most, with 3,085,056 individuals (62.2%),¹¹ followed by Lebanon with 768,353 (15.5%), Jordan with 619,559 (12.5%), Iraq with 299,124 (6.0%) and Egypt with 148,439 (3.0%). Another 43,283 registered Syrian refugees (0.9%) were living in the rest of North Africa.¹²

In reality, the number of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries was considerably higher, as by no means everyone had been registered. According to various sources, the number of Syrians staying in Jordan and Lebanon was almost twice the number officially registered there (see Sections 7.4 and 7.5).¹³ In addition to neighbouring countries, hundreds of thousands of Syrians have also fled to Europe and beyond since the start of the conflict. Within the European Union, Germany was the country that accommodated the most Syrians. In 2024, this amounted to 972,000 individuals.¹⁴ Furthermore, millions of Syrians had been displaced as a result of the conflict. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), there were approximately 7.2 million internally displaced persons at the end of 2023.¹⁵

During the reporting period, several armed conflicts took place in Syria. Examples include the conflicts between the Syrian government forces (supported by the Russian Federation and Iran)¹⁶ and HTS in north-western Syria.¹⁷ In the north, there were conflicts between government forces and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and factions of the Syrian National Army (SNA).¹⁸ Furthermore, for some time, Türkiye had been conducting a major military operation against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK). According to Türkiye, the SDF was affiliated with the PKK. For this reason, the Turkish armed forces and SNA factions carried out military operations against the SDF in north-eastern Syria. These operations caused extensive damage to civilian infrastructure.¹⁹ In the east of the country, there were conflicts between the SDF, Arab tribal militias and the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). In the south, conflicts occurred between government forces, tribal (and other) militias and local armed groups.²⁰

The armed conflicts and fighting were sometimes accompanied by artillery fire and airstrikes, including drone attacks. They were usually intended to gain control of a

¹¹ In the case of Türkiye, the UNHCR bases its figures on Turkish government information.

¹² UNHCR, *Operational data portal. Syria Regional Refugee Response*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹³ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Syrian refugees in Jordan: A crisis of dwindling humanitarian aid*, 9 January 2024; FP, *Syrians in Lebanon are stuck in limbo*, 9 July 2024; UNHCR, *UNHCR Lebanon: Fact sheet, July 2024*, 6 August 2024, p. 1; TIMEP, *Syrian refugees in Lebanon face a crisis within a crisis*, 10 October 2024.

¹⁴ Statistisches Bundesamt, *Foreign population by selected citizenships and years*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹⁵ IDMC, *Global report on internal displacement 2024*, 14 May 2024, p. 124.

¹⁶ These forces included the Syrian government army (the Syrian Arab Army, SAA), the Syrian naval forces, the Syrian Air Force, the Syrian air defence forces, the Military Intelligence Service, the General Intelligence Service, the Political Security Directorate and the National Defence Forces (NDF).

¹⁷ AA, *Syrian army, Iranian-backed groups attack Syria's Idlib*, 19 March 2024; Jusoor for Studies, *Map of foreign forces in Syria, mid-2024*, 2 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *HTS claims retaliatory strikes on Hezbollah in Syria's Idlib*, 21 September 2024; North Press Agency, *Iranian militia sends reinforcements to Idlib amid military tension*, 14 October 2024.

¹⁸ This should not be confused with the government army, the Syrian Arab Army (SAA).

¹⁹ HRW, *Northeast Syria: Turkish strikes disrupt water, electricity*, 26 October 2023; The New Humanitarian, *Turkish airstrikes in northeast Syria leave millions short of power, fuel, and water*, 21 February 2024; INSO, *Safety and access review Q1 2024*, 2024, p. 31; Asharq Al-Awsat, *Syrian army confronts attack by SDF in Deir Ezzor, state news agency says*, 3 December 2024.

²⁰ The Syrian Observer, *After targeting of commander. Clashes between Eighth Brigade and Popular Committees in Daraa*, 10 June 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 3; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: South Syria. July 2024*, 8 August 2024; SOHR, *For "carrying out operations against SDF". Three people, including leader, arrested in eastern Deir Ezzor countryside*, 22 November 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Turkish soldier 'killed' in fighting with Kurds in northern Syria*, 25 November 2024.

territory.²¹ In some cases, they were motivated by retaliation.²² Tribal disputes sometimes escalated into prolonged fighting between armed groups.²³

In addition, the US-led Global Coalition to Counter the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (hereinafter: International Coalition), of which the Netherlands was also a member, focused on defeating ISIS.²⁴ US troops also clashed with Iran-backed militias.²⁵ Airstrikes were carried out as well, primarily against the Lebanese Shia militia *Hezbollah*, Iran-backed militias and Iranian military targets in Syria, which were attributed to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).²⁶

Between 1 August 2023 and 27 November 2024, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)²⁷ recorded 1,788 airstrikes and drone attacks in Syria. ACLED attributed most of these to the air forces of Syria and the Russian Federation (890), followed by the Turkish armed forces (365), the Israeli Air Force (259) and the International Coalition (92).²⁸

Civilians were severely affected by the armed conflict. Some civilians were killed, and others were injured. Tens of thousands of civilians and internally displaced persons were forced to flee their homes on multiple occasions ('secondary displacement'), and homes and civilian infrastructure were destroyed.²⁹ According to the IDMC, around 174,000 people were displaced in 2023.³⁰

1.3 International peace initiatives

On 18 December 2015, the UN Security Council (UNSC) unanimously adopted Resolution 2254, aimed at paving the way for lasting peace in Syria. During the reporting period, there was no progress in the UN-led process to reach a political solution to the conflict, in line with UNSC Resolution 2254.³¹ Some of the most important international initiatives are discussed below.

²¹ Syria Civil Defence, *Suicide drone attacks in northwest Syria: A new threat to civilians*, 30 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²² ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: North-East Syria (June 2024)*, 30 June 2024; Al Jazeera, *Northwest Syria witnesses most intense military escalation in three years*, 31 October 2023; Rudaw, *Two dead in suspected Turkish shelling of north Syria: Reports*, 23 October 2024; SOHR, *Dramatic military escalation in NE Syria. Turkish forces attack nearly 40 vital institutions in four days and aerial and ground attacks leave 77 civilian casualties*, 27 October 2024; The Guardian, *Turkey strikes in Syria and Iraq after attack on defence firm near Ankara*, 24 October 2024.

²³ ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: South Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024.

²⁴ Global Coalition, *Partners*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

²⁵ North Press Agency, *Islamic Resistance targets Coalition bases in Syria, Iraq*, 2 January 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: North-East Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *US-led forces' strike Syria's Iran-backed militias following attack on base*, 23 October 2024; AP News, *US military strikes Iranian-backed militia targets in Syria*, 12 November 2024; Al Jazeera, *US military strikes 'Iranian-backed' fighters in Syria for a second day*, 13 November 2024; Syria Weekly, *Special: Syria. Nov 26-Dec 3, 2024*, 3 December 2024.

²⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Israeli strike in southwestern Syria kills 'officer'*, 19 June 2024; The New York Times, *How Israeli forces destroyed a secret weapons facility in Syria*, 13 September 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Exploding devices target Hezbollah members in Syria again*, 19 September 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Iran IRGC officer killed in suspected Israeli strike in Syria*, 3 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Israel bombs 'military sites', 'missile stores' in central Syria*, 7 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria state media report casualties in Israel raids on Damascus, Homs*, 24 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Death toll from Israeli strike on Syria rises to 68, including pro-Iran fighters*, 21 November 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Syrian opposition outlet says most people killed in Palmyra attack were officers*, 21 November 2024.

²⁷ ACLED is an NGO that collects, analyses and charts conflict data. Additional information about ACLED is available at the following website: <https://acleddata.com>.

²⁸ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Sub-event type: Air/drone strike | Country: Syria.

²⁹ IDMC, *Syria. Disasters compound challenges for IDPs and drive first increase in displacements in four years*, 14 May 2024; SNHR, *Investigation proving two Russian forces' attacks in Idlib. A massacre in which 11 civilians were killed & the destruction of a power station depriving thousands of civilians of water*, 23 October 2024; The New Arab, *Massive displacement in Syria's Idlib amid Assad regime attacks*, 31 October 2024.

³⁰ IDMC, *Global report on internal displacement 2024*, 14 May 2024, p. 124.

³¹ UN, *13 years on, Syria's war requires political solution, sustained aid, end to impunity, secretary-general says, stressing entire generation 'already paid too high a price'*, 9 March 2024; Arab News, *Why Syria's wars fell off the radar despite continued crisis and suffering*, 30 April 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 2.

1.3.1 *United Nations Human Rights Council*

Since 2011, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (UNCOI) has been charged with investigating actual or suspected human rights violations in Syria in general, and especially in several specific incidents.³² On 4 April 2024, the Human Rights Council renewed the UNCOI's mandate for one year.³³ In its report covering the period from 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2023, the UNCOI reported that Syria had experienced the most significant escalation in hostilities since 2019/2020. In this document (dated 9 February 2024), the UNCOI reported serious violations of fundamental human rights and international humanitarian law throughout the entire country.³⁴ Furthermore, in its report covering the period from 1 January 2024 to 30 June 2024, the UNCOI noted that humanitarian needs were at their highest level since the start of the conflict.³⁵

1.3.2 *Special Envoy for Syria*

Resolution 2254 established the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria (OSES).³⁶ The Norwegian Geir O. Pedersen has been serving as the Special Envoy for Syria since 31 October 2018. He summed up the year 2023 in Syria as follows:

- In 2023, the worst violence in three years took place. Many civilians were killed as well.
- Syrians were grappling with the consequences of developments in the occupied Palestinian territories and Israel, including airstrikes.
- Humanitarian needs were greater than ever. Food insecurity increased.
- The economy hit a new low.
- The prospects for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of Syrian refugees and displaced persons did not improve.³⁷

During his briefing to the UN Security Council on 23 October 2024, Pedersen stated the following:

- The broadest-ranging campaign of Israeli airstrikes in the last thirteen years took place in October 2024. The Israeli attacks also resulted in civilian casualties and damage to some civilian and economic infrastructure.
- In October 2024, Russia resumed airstrikes in the north-west for the first time in months.
- Drone attacks and shelling by pro-government forces increased significantly in the north-west as well.
- The north-east was also affected by regional escalation, with reports of renewed attacks on US military bases in the area. This led to reports of US artillery fire.³⁸

1.3.3 *Constitutional Committee*

On 30 October 2019, the Syrian Constitutional Committee was established in Geneva, Switzerland, as part of the UN-led political process. In June 2022, this Committee met for the eighth time in Geneva to discuss a draft text of the

³² UN, *Press conference by Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria*, 28 November 2011.

³³ UN HRC, *Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 4 April 2024 (A/HRC/RES/55/22)*, 9 April 2024, p. 6.

³⁴ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024.

³⁵ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 1.

³⁶ UNSC, *Resolution 2254 (2015), S/RES/2254 (2015)*, 18 December 2015, p. 2.

³⁷ OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 21 December 2023.

³⁸ OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 23 October 2024.

Constitution. No ninth meeting took place during the reporting period, due to a lack of consensus on Geneva as the venue for the talks.³⁹

1.3.4 Astana Process

The Astana Process was a set of initiatives and plans launched in 2017 by Iran, the Russian Federation and Türkiye to bring the Syrian civil war to an end. This process continued during the reporting period. In January 2024, the 21st round of talks took place in Astana, Kazakhstan. Representatives of the Syrian government and some opposition groups were also present.⁴⁰ The 22nd round took place on 11 and 12 November 2024. It did not lead to any concrete results.⁴¹

1.4 Normalisation of international relations

During the reporting period, several countries sought to build closer ties with the Assad government in order to restore diplomatic, security and economic relations.⁴² For example, the Arab League's ministerial contact group on Syria met in Cairo on 15 August 2023.⁴³ Furthermore, President Assad attended the Arab leaders' summit in Riyadh in November 2023.⁴⁴ In July 2024, Syrian Airlines operated its first flight to Riyadh in twelve years.⁴⁵ In September 2024, the Saudi Arabian embassy in Damascus opened its doors.⁴⁶ The normalisation process with the member states of the Arab League subsequently stalled due to a lack of progress in negotiations regarding the return of Syrians from neighbouring countries and preventing the smuggling of Captagon and arms from Syria.⁴⁷ In addition to the above, attempts at rapprochement between Türkiye and Syria were also facilitated by the Russian Federation. These attempts did not appear to have led to any progress during the reporting period.⁴⁸

1.5 Sanctions

³⁹ OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen statement at the conclusion of the eighth session of the small body of the Syrian Constitutional Committee*, 3 June 2022; Enab Baladi, *Pedersen heads to Damascus to discuss Constitutional Committee file*, 20 November 2024.

⁴⁰ Daily Sabah, *Astana talks on Syria to commence in Kazakhstan on Jan 24*, 19 January 2024; Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Regarding the High-Level Meeting on Syria held in Astana on 24-25 January 2024*, 25 January 2024; The Astana Times, *Participants of Astana Process call for humanitarian aid, counter-terrorism cooperation in Syria*, 25 January 2024; Enab Baladi, *"Astana 21:" Regime remains obstinate, opposition satisfied with outcomes*, 31 January 2024; Enab Baladi, *Russia prepares for "Astana 22" on Syria*, 10 October 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Will Erdogan use the BRICS summit to restart the normalization process with Damascus?*, 23 October 2024.

⁴¹ The Astana Times, *Kazakh capital hosts 22nd Syria peace talks*, 11 November 2024; AA, *22nd international meeting on Syria begins in Kazakh capital*, 11 November 2024; Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Joint statement by representatives of Iran, Russia and Türkiye on outcomes of the 22nd international meeting on Syria in the Astana format, 11-12 November 2024*, 12 November 2024; AA, *Astana format talks on Syria held in Kazakh capital*, 12 November 2024.

⁴² BBC Monitoring, *Syrian foreign minister in Saudi Arabia as ties improve*, 9 November 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Assad arrives in Riyadh for Arab-Islamic summit*, 11 November 2024.

⁴³ SPA, *Communique of Ministerial Contact Group meeting on Syria*, 16 August 2023; Asharq Al-Awsat, *Arab ministerial contact group stresses 'seriousness' in dealing with repercussions of Syria crisis*, 16 August 2023.

⁴⁴ Enab Baladi, *Assad's presence at Arab-Islamic summit: A show-off opportunity at Gazans' expense*, 14 November 2023.

⁴⁵ The New Arab, *Syria's national airline resumes Saudi flights after 12 years*, 10 July 2024; Saudi Gazette, *First Syrian Air flight arrives in Saudi Arabia after a break of more than 10 years*, 11 July 2024.

⁴⁶ Enab Baladi, *Riyadh appoints charge d'affaires to its embassy in Damascus*, 31 January 2024; BBC Monitoring, *First direct Syrian flight to Saudi Arabia in 13 years lands in Jeddah*, 28 May 2024; SANA, *Embassy of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Damascus resumes its work*, 10 September 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Saudi embassy in Syria officially announces resumption of operations*, 10 September 2024.

⁴⁷ Captagon tablets contain fenethylline. This synthetic drug is similar to amphetamine; Al Jazeera, *What is Captagon, the addictive drug mass-produced in Syria?*, 9 May 2023; The New Arab, *Arab League 'suspends meetings' with Syrian regime amid continuing disputes over Captagon, refugees*, 27 September 2023; TWI, *A year of Arab engagement with Assad has failed*, 15 May 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Assad tells Jordan FM 'safe return of Syrian refugees is priority'*, 20 October 2024.

⁴⁸ BBC Monitoring, *Turkish minister emphasises 'brotherly relations' with Syria at new gate opening*, 13 September 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Turkish FM's remarks on Syria 'normalisation' raise questions*, 4 November 2024; AP News, *Turkey's Erdogan says he remains hopeful about reconciliation with Syria*, 13 November 2024.

Beginning in 2011, various entities imposed sanctions, including on companies and prominent businesspeople who were profiting from their ties to the Syrian government and the war economy. For example, the US imposed sanctions under the Caesar Act, and the European Union (EU) introduced sector-specific restrictive measures.⁴⁹ Furthermore, on 22 January 2024, the EU imposed sanctions on individuals and companies with ties to the Syrian government and involvement in activities including human trafficking operations.⁵⁰ On 28 May 2024, the Council of the European Union extended its sanctions against 316 individuals and 86 entities until 1 June 2025.⁵¹

1.6 Areas of control

During the reporting period, Syria was effectively divided into several areas of control.⁵² Throughout the reporting period, there were reports almost daily of armed confrontations along the front lines between these areas of control (see Section 1.19).

Until 27 November 2024, the four main areas of control were under the influence of the Syrian government led by President Assad (hereinafter: the government-controlled area), the Democratic Autonomous Administration of Northeast Syria (DAANES),⁵³ Türkiye and the Syrian Interim Government (SIG), and the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG).

The following map shows the approximate boundaries of the four areas of control in June 2024, using the following colour codes: red indicates the government area, purple indicates the DAANES area, green with yellow dots indicates the SIG area, and green indicates the SSG area.⁵⁴ In practice, these areas were largely controlled by armed groups: President Assad's military and security apparatus and affiliated militias in the government-controlled area; the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the DAANES area; the Turkish army and SNA factions in the SIG area; and HTS in the SSG area.

⁴⁹ TWI, *How the Caesar Act restricts normalisation with Syria*, 17 June 2023; EUR-Lex, *Restrictive measures in view of the situation in Syria*, 13 September 2024, [URL](#).

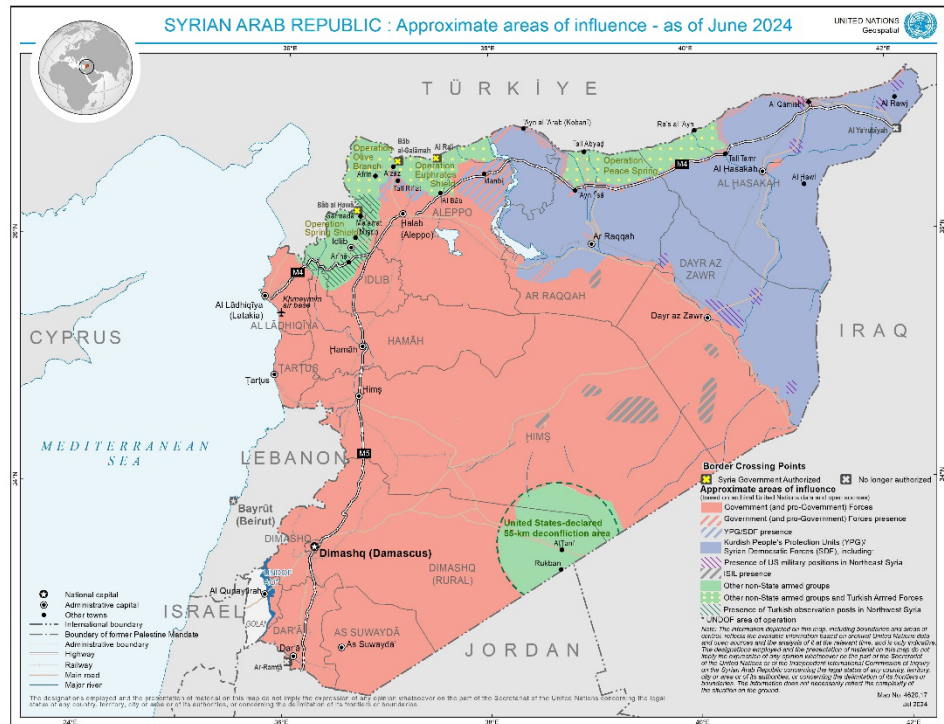
⁵⁰ Dutch government, *Sanctions against people-smuggling network operated by the Syrian regime*, 25 January 2024.

⁵¹ Official Journal of the European Union, *Council decision (CFSP) 2024/1510 of 27 May 2024 amending Decision 2013/255/CFSP concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Syria*, 27 May 2024, [URL](#); Council of the European Union and the European Council, *Syria: Council renews restrictive measures and extends humanitarian exemption for another year*, 28 May 2024.

⁵² UN, *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2024*, 1 July 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024.

⁵³ In December 2023, the de facto administration in the north-east adopted a new name. The abbreviation AANES was accordingly changed to DAANES.

⁵⁴ UN, *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2024*, 1 July 2024.



Source: UN, *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2024*, 1 July 2024.

The four areas of control and the armed groups operating there are described below. This description provides an overview of the situation in these areas from the start of the reporting period up to 27 November 2024. They do not claim to be exhaustive as regards the presence of armed groups within the various power blocs.

1.6.1 Government-controlled area

President Assad remained head of the Syrian Arab Republic until 8 December 2024. He had been ruling the country since July 2000. Following the May 2021 presidential elections, he began his fourth seven-year term in office.⁵⁵ In his capacity as president, he appointed the prime minister, the cabinet and other officials.⁵⁶ He was also commander-in-chief of the government forces⁵⁷ and appointed the commanders of the various units. The key administrative and military posts were generally held by Alawites – the population group to which the Assad family belonged – from the provinces of Tartous and Latakia.⁵⁸

During the reporting period, President Assad’s government, based in the capital Damascus, controlled large parts of the west, centre and south of the country. This area also included the sparsely populated Badia Desert in the centre of the

⁵⁵ Reuters, *Syria’s Assad wins 4th term with 95% of vote, in election the West calls fraudulent*, 28 May 2021.

⁵⁶ Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024, Syria*, 29 February 2024.

⁵⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Syrian army demobilises more reservists*, 5 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁵⁸ Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Power centers in the Syrian army: A sectarian approach*, 31 March 2020; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Country Report. Syria*, 19 March 2024, p. 5; Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024, Syria*, 29 February 2024; Enab Baladi, *Syrian regime appoints Suhail al-Hassan as commander of Special Forces*, 10 April 2024; USDOS, *Syria 2023 international religious freedom report*, 26 June 2024, p. 17; The Economist, *Is Syria’s drug-dealing dictator coming in from the cold?*, 11 September 2024.

country.⁵⁹ The government was largely dependent on financial and military support from Iran and the Russian Federation.⁶⁰ Some parts of the government-controlled area remained under government control throughout the conflict. This mainly concerned Damascus (with the exception of a few neighbourhoods), parts of the province of Suweida, and the towns in the coastal provinces of Latakia and Tartous. These last two provinces were reputed to be strongholds of Alawite support for President Assad (see Sub-sections 1.19.6 and 1.19.7). During the reporting period, public discontent grew in these areas, and the situation remained unstable.⁶¹ In August 2023, peaceful protests broke out in the province of Suweida after cuts to government subsidies had led to higher fuel and food prices. The protests in Suweida soon turned into widespread anti-government demonstrations that also gave voice to anger and frustration over political instability and ongoing oppression. Protests continued in Suweida through the end of the reporting period (see Sub-section 1.19.5).⁶²

On 15 July 2024, parliamentary elections were held in the government-controlled area.⁶³ According to the electoral commission, the turnout amongst Syrian residents in the government-controlled area was 38%. In the election, the Ba'ath Party and its affiliated parties won two-thirds of the seats.⁶⁴ Various sources regarded these elections as neither free nor fair.⁶⁵ The parliament convened for the first time in August 2024. The delegates elected Hamouda Sabbagh as Speaker of Parliament from amongst their ranks. This was his third term as Speaker.⁶⁶ On 23 September 2024, President Assad presented the cabinet led by Prime Minister Mohammad Ghazi al-Jalali.⁶⁷

The Russian army had several military bases scattered across the government-controlled area.⁶⁸ The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) from Iran also had military bases scattered across the area.⁶⁹ Several Iran-backed foreign Shia militias were present as well, including the Fatemiyoun Brigade (composed of Afghans) and the Zainabiyoun Brigade (composed of Pakistanis), as well as various other militias belonging to the Iraqi Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) and the Lebanese

⁵⁹ CFR, *Conflict in Syria*, 13 February 2024; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Country Report. Syria*, 19 March 2024, p. 7; USCIRF, *Annual report 2024*, 2 May 2024, p. 68.

⁶⁰ TWI, *Iran's evolving strategy in eastern Syria*, 18 July 2024; Enab Baladi, *How Russia's involvement in Syria shifted on political and military levels*, 4 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁶¹ Financial Times, *Economic crisis begins to crack the bedrock of Assad's Alawi support*, 13 April 2021; The New Arab, *Dissent spreads to Syria's Latakia as protests intensify in the south*, 22 August 2023; Chatham House, *The illusion of legitimacy: unveiling Syria's sham elections*, 16 July 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁶² France 24, *New protest in regime-held south Syria over living conditions*, 21 August 2023; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, August 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; AP News, *Protesters in southern Syria smash statue as they mark 2015 assassination of anti-government leader*, 4 September 2023; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024, p. 9; ETANA, *Suwayda marks one year of regime resistance*, 19 August 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, September 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁶³ Chatham House, *The illusion of legitimacy: unveiling Syria's sham elections*, 16 July 2024.

⁶⁴ HLN, *Syriërs kunnen in door regering gecontroleerde gebieden stemmen voor nieuw parlement*, 15 July 2024; HLN, *Partij van president Assad wint Syrische verkiezingen*, 18 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Syria announces parliamentary election results, reports 38% turnout*, 18 July 2024.

⁶⁵ AP News, *Syrians vote for their next parliament, which may pave the way for Assad to extend his rule*, 16 July 2024; Chatham House, *The illusion of legitimacy: unveiling Syria's sham elections*, 16 July 2024; SNHR, *The Syrian regime's 2024 parliamentary elections are illegitimate and predetermined by the regime's security apparatus*, 24 July 2024; Atlantic Council, *Syrian elections are decided before election day*, 25 July 2024.

⁶⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria's new parliament sworn in, speaker Sabbagh re-elected*, 22 August 2024.

⁶⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Syrian presidency issues decree naming new cabinet*, 23 September 2024; Reuters, *Syria's Assad appoints a new cabinet*, 23 September 2024.

⁶⁸ ISW, *Iran, Russia, and the Syrian regime are coordinating to expel US forces from Syria*, 3 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Russia sets up new base in Syria's Aleppo province*, 3 August 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Russian warplanes strike 'militant' base in Syria - official*, 28 May 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Russia sets up new military police post in Syria*, 31 August 2024.

⁶⁹ Jusoor for Studies, *Map of foreign forces' military points in Syria. Mid 2023*, 3 July 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Iran confirms colonel's death in coalition strike in Syria*, 15 August 2024.

Hezbollah.⁷⁰ In addition, a multitude of militias were active in the region, including Syrian militias affiliated with the government – and, in several cases, pro-Iranian and pro-Russian militias – including the National Defense Forces (NDF), the Local Defense Forces (LDF), the *Ba'ath* brigades, the Palestinian Jerusalem Brigade (*Liwa al-Quds al-Filastini*), local Shia militias, Arab tribal militias, armed Druze groups and armed groups comprising former members of the opposition who had reconciled with the government (such as the Eighth Brigade). Several intelligence agencies were active as well. The four most important were the Military Intelligence Service,⁷¹ the Air Force Intelligence Service,⁷² the General Intelligence Service⁷³ and the Political Security Directorate.⁷⁴ In addition, several Syrian security forces were active, including the Fourth Division led by Maher al-Assad, the president's brother.⁷⁵ Criminal gangs with ties to the government were also active. These gangs were often referred to as *shabiha*.⁷⁶

According to one source, the government had little influence over the many foreign armed groups present in the government-controlled area.⁷⁷ Furthermore, due to the fragmented security sector – in which numerous foreign and domestic armed groups were active – and the absence of a centralised authority, the government was unable to exercise effective control in parts of the territory under its control. The government had little or no direct control, particularly along the borders and in the rural areas of the provinces of Daraa, Suweida and Homs.⁷⁸

Within the government-controlled area, the conflict zones and active front lines were located mainly in the southern province of Daraa, in the centrally situated Badia Desert, in the north-west along the contact lines with the SSG-controlled area (see Sub-section 1.6.4) and in the Euphrates Valley in Deir ez-Zor. Government forces continued to carry out shelling in north-western Syria, including with missiles and other artillery, sometimes accompanied by airstrikes. The shelling often reached

⁷⁰ FP, *Iran's proxies in Syria move toward escalation with Israel*, 10 November 2023; TWI, *Profile: Liwa al-Tafuf (13th PMF Brigade)*, 3 February 2024; Al Majalla, *How Syria's vast militia network is eroding state sovereignty*, 6 February 2024; Iran International, *Slain militants from Iran-backed Fatemiyoun Division buried in Mashhad*, 7 February 2024; Asharq Al-Awsat, *Fatemiyoun: Iran's 'overlooked' arm in Syria*, 20 February 2024; Iran International, *IRGC 'advisor' killed in Syria during Israeli bombing*, 3 June 2024; Reuters, *Russian aircraft strike fighters' bases in Syria, military official says*, 7 March 2024; CBS News, *Israel accused of killing dozens of Syria troops and Hezbollah fighters with major airstrikes near Aleppo*, 29 March 2024; The Independent, *Everything we know about the exploding pagars in Lebanon and Syria*, 17 September 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Iraqi militia mourns killing of commander in Syria by 'Zionist aggression'*, 21 September 2024; Asharq Al-Awsat, *Iran strengthens its militias in Syria*, 20 November 2024.

⁷¹ In Arabic: *Shubat al-Mukhabarat al-Askariyya*; UN HRC, "No end in sight": torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023 (A/HRC/53/CRP.5), 10 July 2023, p. 5.

⁷² In Arabic: *Idarat al-Mukhabarat al-Jawiyya*. The name 'Air Force Intelligence Service' is somewhat misleading. This intelligence and security service does not, in fact, focus primarily on providing information to the Air Force. According to some, the name was largely due to the fact that Hafez al-Assad, President Assad's father, had once been commander of the Syrian Air Force; The Syrian Observer, *The air force intelligence and its leaders: Who are they?*, 9 December 2019; MEMO, *New Syria intelligence appointments benefit Russia at expense of Iran*, 11 May 2024.

⁷³ In Arabic: *Idarat al-Mukhabarat al-Ammah*; The Syrian Observer, *General Intelligence chief threatens opponents of the settlement in Talbiseh, Homs countryside*, 23 August 2024.

⁷⁴ In Arabic: *Idarat al-Amn al-Siyasi*; Chatham House, *Syria's transactional state: How the conflict changed the Syrian state's exercise of power*, 3 April 2024.

⁷⁵ The Syrian Observer, *Maher al-Assad's Fourth Division distances itself from Hezbollah*, 15 October 2024.

⁷⁶ Al Jazeera, *Syrian government organised feared 'shabiha' militias: Report*, 4 July 2023; Al Majalla, *How Syria's vast militia network is eroding state sovereignty*, 6 February 2024; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Syria Country Report*, 19 March 2024, p. 7; TWI, *Profile: Arab tribal and clan forces*, 15 April 2024; Enab Baladi, *Liwa al-Quds mourns 22 members following attack on military bus in Homs countryside*, 19 April 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁷⁷ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁷⁸ Brookings, *Syria's dissolving line between state and nonstate actors*, 27 January 2023; Enab Baladi, *Kidnappings on the rise in Daraa...Regime's authority is absent*, 20 December 2023; Al Majalla, *How Syria's vast militia network is eroding state sovereignty*, 6 February 2024; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Borders without a nation: Syria, outside powers, and open-ended instability*, 10 September 2024; Enab Baladi, *Imposed by international interests and managed by local forces. Daraa: Stuck in stalemate despite control changes*, 15 September 2024; Le Monde, *Anarchy reigns in Sweida, Syria's main Druze city*, 18 September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

areas located far from the front lines where the armed opposition was present. Some attacks targeted residential areas and vital civilian infrastructure.⁷⁹

In the southern provinces, the security situation deteriorated, partly because of active hostilities along the borders with Israel and Lebanon resulting from the conflict in Gaza and Lebanon. In addition, more than a hundred airstrikes were carried out on military facilities belonging to the IRGC, Hezbollah and Iran-backed militias, which were attributed to the IDF (see Section 1.2).⁸⁰ During the reporting period, airstrikes were also carried out on the international airports in Aleppo and Damascus.⁸¹ From October 2024, these airstrikes increased further.⁸² Targets included several border crossings (see Section 7.1). These airstrikes also resulted in multiple civilian casualties.⁸³

According to UNCOI, living conditions in the government-controlled area deteriorated further during the reporting period. There was also a risk of arbitrary arrest and detention,⁸⁴ along with related human rights violations, against a backdrop of ongoing insecurity and unrest in the south of the country and ongoing military operations in the north-west.⁸⁵

1.6.2

DAANES area

The Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) was the political wing of the SDF and controlled the DAANES area from the city of Hasaka. This area covered about a quarter of Syria's territory.⁸⁶ The de facto administration had divided the DAANES area into seven cantons.⁸⁷ The SDC was a confederation of multi-ethnic political parties, associations, civil society organisations and local activists, established in 2015, at the same time as the SDF.⁸⁸ The dominant political party within the SDC was the Kurdish, left-wing Democratic Union Party (*Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat*, PYD).⁸⁹ The political leaders emphasised that they were not seeking autonomy, but rather a federal system within the state structure of a sovereign Syria.⁹⁰ Partly due

⁷⁹ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 10.

⁸⁰ Crisis24, *Syria: Suspected Israeli airstrikes reported in As-Suwayda and Daraa governates early April 19*, 19 April 2024; Rudaw, *Suspected Israeli strike targets Syria's Daraa: Monitor*, 30 July 2024; Asharq Al-Awsat, *Israeli strike in Syria's Quneitra kills two*, 12 September 2024; AA, *Israeli army says it killed Hezbollah fighter in southwestern Syria*, 10 October 2024; OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 23 October 2024.

⁸¹ Reuters, *Israeli attack on Syrian Aleppo airport puts it out of service*, 14 October 2023; Reuters, *Syria says Israel strike puts Damascus airport out of service*, 26 November 2023; UN, *De-escalation needed as region already in historic crisis, Deputy Special Envoy for Syria tells Security Council, urging confidence-building measures*, 28 November 2023; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, November 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁸² UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024, p. 2; ACLED, *Expanding Israeli operations in Lebanon and the escalation of the Middle East crisis*, 4 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Israeli raids target several sites across western Syria*, 10 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Iran condemns Israel strikes on its field hospital on Syria-Lebanon border*, 11 October 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Israeli raid targets Tal al-Jabiya in Daraa countryside, no official comment issued*, 30 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Death toll from Israeli strike on Syria rises to 68, including pro-Iran fighters*, 21 November 2024.

⁸³ IFJ, *Syria: Israeli airstrike kills state TV anchor in Damascus*, 1 October 2024; Le Monde, *Syria says seven civilians killed in Israel Damascus strike*, 9 October 2024; BBC, *Syria says Israeli strike in Damascus killed civilians*, 9 October 2024.

⁸⁴ Arbitrary arrest and detention is the act of arresting individuals and depriving them of their liberty without legal grounds or the necessary legal safeguards.

⁸⁵ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 4.

⁸⁶ Enab Baladi, *SDC calls on Syrian opposition for dialogue following Aleppo's countryside protests*, 2 July 2024; Syria Direct, *As Ankara and Damascus inch closer, northeastern Syria stands to lose*, 16 July 2024.

⁸⁷ The Syrian Observer, *SDF towards secession from Syria: New political and social contract for the Kurdish administration*, 15 December 2023; Al Majalla, *How Syria's vast militia network is eroding state sovereignty*, 6 February 2024; Syria Direct, *The war over AANES municipal elections in northeastern Syria*, 11 June 2024.

⁸⁸ Enab Baladi, *Mazloum Abdi criticizes Syrian regime and opposition*, 21 December 2023; Enab Baladi, *MSD to open new channels of communication with Arab countries*, 2 May 2024.

⁸⁹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Country Report. Syria*, 19 March 2024, p. 15; The New Arab, *Domestic and foreign threats on the rise for Syria's Kurds*, 2 April 2024; Enab Baladi, *From Germany: Ilham Ahmed promotes Autonomous Administration, attacks Turkey*, 21 June 2024.

⁹⁰ TWI, *Northern Syria's new democratic federal system*, 27 May 2016; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Country Report. Syria*, 19 March 2024, p. 8.

to widespread corruption, the de facto administration in the north-east was plagued by budget deficits and ineffectiveness.⁹¹

In December 2023, the SDC adopted a social contract that served as a provisional constitution. They also decided to add the word 'democratic' to the name of the de facto administration.⁹² In the DAANES area, plans were to hold local elections amongst the estimated 2.6 million inhabitants on 11 June 2024, but several countries (including Türkiye and the US) expressed concerns.⁹³ These elections were subsequently postponed on several occasions.⁹⁴ In September 2024, DAANES announced that it would hold elections in each district.⁹⁵

The SDF served as the armed forces of the DAANES area. The SDF was a coalition comprising Kurdish, Arab and Assyrian armed groups, amongst others.⁹⁶ Mazloum Abdi was the commander of the SDF.⁹⁷ The main components of the SDF were the People's Protection Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*, YPG) and the Women's Protection Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Jinê*, YPJ), against which Türkiye had been fighting for years.⁹⁸

The de facto administration did not have full control over the north-east. This area contained several Syrian government enclaves, including two military enclaves in the cities of Hasaka and Qamishli. These two enclaves were surrounded by SDF checkpoints.⁹⁹ The Syrian government also controlled an area south of Qamishli, as well as Qamishli International Airport and an area east of Hasaka.¹⁰⁰ In addition, government forces and Russian troops were present along the border with Türkiye and in the area around the city of Manbij.¹⁰¹

The International Coalition's predominantly American forces were also present in the area. They supported the SDF in operations against ISIS.¹⁰² The International Coalition had military bases near the oil fields in Rmelan and Deir ez-Zor, as well as in southern Syria around the town of al-Tanf, from which it carried out weekly patrols.¹⁰³ During the reporting period, Iran-backed militias carried out several

⁹¹ Enab Baladi, *Reasons for AANES' budget deficit in eastern Syria*, 14 June 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹² Kurdistan 24, *New administration name adopted for local administration in northeast Syria*, December 2023; The Syrian Observer, *SDF towards secession from Syria: New political and social contract for the Kurdish administration*, 15 December 2023.

⁹³ North Press Agency, *AANES getting ready to hold local elections in NE Syria*, 29 April 2024; USAID, *Syria – Complex emergency*, 28 June 2024; AP News, *Turkey signals a new military intervention in Syria if Kurdish groups hold local elections*, 30 May 2024; AP News, *Turkey's defense minister says planned elections by Syrian Kurdish groups are 'unacceptable'*, 3 June 2024; Syria Direct, *The war over AANES municipal elections in northeastern Syria*, 11 June 2024; USDOS, *Elections in Syria*, 13 September 2024.

⁹⁴ BBC Monitoring, *Municipal polls in Kurdish-held northeast Syria postponed*, 6 June 2024; Rudaw, *Rojava considers delaying local elections indefinitely: Source*, 20 August 2024.

⁹⁵ Enab Baladi, *AANES announces preparations for municipal elections*, 5 September 2024.

⁹⁶ Al Majalla, *How Syria's vast militia network is eroding state sovereignty*, 6 February 2024.

⁹⁷ TWI, *Turkish drone war damages SDF infrastructure in NE Syria, restricts counterterrorism efforts*, 21 November 2023; Enab Baladi, *Mazloum Abdi criticizes Syrian regime and opposition*, 21 December 2023; Enab Baladi, *Political pressures push SDF to seek dialogue with "national parties" in Idlib*, 24 September 2024; AP News, *Kurdish leader in Syria calls for diplomatic solutions to conflict with Turkey*, 29 October 2024.

⁹⁸ Al Majalla, *How Syria's vast militia network is eroding state sovereignty*, 6 February 2024; Hürriyet Daily News, *Turkish forces 'neutralize' 15 PKK members in north Syria*, 27 October 2024; AA, *Türkiye 'neutralizes' 16 PKK/YPG terrorists in northern Iraq, Syria*, 8 November 2024.

⁹⁹ Enab Baladi, *Northern Syria: "Security squares" manage SDF and regime interests*, 9 October 2023; DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, p. 10; SOHR, *Major mobilization. Regime forces demand the release of 20 prisoners including officers*, 11 August 2024; Enab Baladi, *After al-Hasakah, SDF lifts siege on security square in Qamishli*, 15 August 2024.

¹⁰⁰ Levant 24, *SDF reinforces control over regime-controlled Qamishli airport*, 7 June 2023; Enab Baladi, *Northern Syria: "Security squares" manage SDF and regime interests*, 9 October 2023.

¹⁰¹ Enab Baladi, *What are the implications of the resumption of Russian-Turkish patrols in al-Hasakah?*, 30 August 2024.

¹⁰² BBC Monitoring, *Kurdish forces capture suspected IS leader in Syria's Raqqa*, 23 May 2024; SOHR, *In two security operations. "SDF" arrests seven people accused of belonging to "ISIS" in eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor*, 31 July 2024.

¹⁰³ ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: North-East Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *US-led coalition shells Iran-backed militias in east Syria, shoots down drone*, 15 October 2024.

attacks on these bases using drones and missiles.¹⁰⁴ In response, the US military carried out strikes against Iranian militias in Syria.¹⁰⁵

Outside the contiguous DAANES area in north-eastern Syria, there were still a few DAANES-affiliated enclaves in the north of Aleppo province and in the city of Aleppo.¹⁰⁶ The Afrin Liberation Forces (ALF) were active in the enclave surrounding the town of Tel Rifaat in the north of Aleppo province.¹⁰⁷ This Kurdish militia occasionally carried out attacks on the Turkish army and its allied SNA factions.¹⁰⁸

From August 2023, there were several armed confrontations between the SDF and Arab tribal militias along the banks of the Euphrates.¹⁰⁹ The latter received increasing support from government forces, Russian forces and Iran-backed militias.¹¹⁰

Furthermore, in the north and north-east, Turkish forces and SNA factions engaged in ongoing clashes with the SDF.¹¹¹ In addition, airstrikes targeting civilian infrastructure led to widespread power outages and disruptions to the supply of drinking water and fuel for more than a million residents. This was one factor that made it difficult for the inhabitants of the DAANES area to meet their basic needs.¹¹² For example, between 5 and 10 October 2023, drone attacks took place in the north-east in retaliation for an attack in the Turkish capital, Ankara, a few days earlier.¹¹³ These drones were deployed across various locations, contributing to widespread uncertainty and fear throughout the population.¹¹⁴ Several members of the SDF and the internal security forces (*Asayish*) were killed in these attacks, which also claimed the lives of civilians.¹¹⁵

Following an attack near Ankara on 23 October 2024, which was attributed to the PKK, further retaliatory attacks took place in the DAANES area between 23 and 27 October 2024. Airstrikes, including those carried out by suicide drones, took place in

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- ¹⁰⁴ North Press Agency, *Islamic Resistance targets Coalition bases in Syria, Iraq*, 2 January 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: North-East Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *US-led forces 'strike' Syria's Iran-backed militias following attack on base*, 23 October 2024; Syria Weekly, *Special: Syria. Nov 26-Dec 3, 2024*, 3 December 2024.
- ¹⁰⁵ Reuters, *US carried out strikes against Iranian linked targets in Syria*, 11 November 2024; Al Jazeera, *US military says strikes in Syria targeted 'Iranian backed groups'*, 12 November 2024.
- ¹⁰⁶ SNHR, *Distress call to end the suffering of about 2,000 IDP families in al-Shahba area in rural Aleppo who have been struggling for weeks with no access to drinking water*, 4 March 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Turkish newspaper reveals details of Russian meeting with SDF, Assad regime*, 6 March 2024; The National, *Syria's sleepy Aleppo civil war front shows signs of awakening*, 20 August 2024.
- ¹⁰⁷ Rudaw, *Kurdish forces kill five Turkish-backed militants in Afrin: Monitor*, 8 September 2024; The New Arab, *Five Turkish-backed Syrian fighters killed by Kurdish forces near Afrin*, 8 September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.
- ¹⁰⁸ Al-Monitor, *Kurdish forces kill 14 pro-Turkish fighters in north Syria attack*, 18 September 2023; AA, *3 Syrian National Army members killed, 3 injured in PKK/YPG rocket attack in northern Syria*, 16 October 2023; SOHR, *Following infiltration operation by "Afrin Liberation Forces". Three members of Turkish-backed faction killed in northern countryside of Aleppo*, 21 July 2024; The Syrian Observer, *To hinder Damascus-Ankara rapprochement: SDF ignites Turkish occupation fronts north of Aleppo*, 23 July 2024; Rudaw, *Kurdish forces kill five Turkish-backed militants in Afrin: Monitor*, 8 September 2024.
- ¹⁰⁹ Al-Monitor, *Clashes between Arab tribes, SDF forces in Syria pose challenge to US*, 8 August 2024; Syria Direct, *Deir e-Zor civilians under fire as regime-backed groups attack the SDF*, 12 August 2024; Syria Weekly, *Syria: October 29-November 5, 2024*, 5 November 2024; confidential source, October 2024.
- ¹¹⁰ The Syrian Observer, *Syria today – Russia and Turkey "to cooperate in fight against terror"; SDF clashes with Iranian militias; ISIS kills more truffle hunters*, 26 March 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: North-East Syria*, 31 July 2024.
- ¹¹¹ AP News, *Turkish drone strikes in Syria kill 4 U.S.-backed fighters, wound 11 civilians, Kurdish group says*, 31 May 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: North-East Syria (June 2024)*, 30 June 2024; The New Arab, *Five Turkish-backed Syrian fighters killed by Kurdish forces near Afrin*, 8 September 2024.
- ¹¹² HRW, *Northeast Syria: Turkish strikes disrupt water, electricity*, 26 October 2023; The New Humanitarian, *Turkish airstrikes in northeast Syria leave millions short of power, fuel, and water*, 21 February 2024; INSO, *Safety and access review Q1 2024*, 2024, p. 31.
- ¹¹³ VOA, *Turkey intensifies drone attacks on Kurdish-held northern Syria*, 5 October 2023; Al Jazeera, *US shoots down Turkish drone over Syria after attacks near Hasakah*, 6 October 2023; MEI, *Turkish escalation in northeastern Syria amid changes in military strategy*, 11 October 2023.
- ¹¹⁴ Syrian Democratic Times, *Turkish drones return to north-east Syria in force after period of relative calm*, 24 June 2024.
- ¹¹⁵ Reuters, *Turkey says it killed 58 Kurdish militants in northern Syria*, 7 October 2023.

several locations in cities and rural areas of the provinces of Raqqa and Hasaka.¹¹⁶ Dozens of people were killed in the incident. Oil refineries, petrol stations, grain silos, power stations and other vital infrastructure were also damaged.¹¹⁷

Furthermore, the situation in the DAANES area remained tense amidst ongoing protests by the general public against the policies of the de facto administration. These protests included roadblocks, strikes and sit-ins.¹¹⁸

1.6.3

SIG area

The SIG area is located in northern Syria, on the border with Türkiye. It consists of two parts. The western, larger section stretches from Afrin to Jarablus in Aleppo province, with the eastern, smaller section running from Tel Abyad in Raqqa province to Ras al-Ayn in Hasaka province.¹¹⁹ At the head of the self-appointed de facto administration was Prime Minister Abdurrahman Mustafa.¹²⁰ The SIG was based in the city of Azaz in Aleppo province.¹²¹ According to one source, ties between the SIG and local communities were weak.¹²²

Turkish forces and various armed Syrian groups were present in the SIG area.¹²³ In 2017, 41 armed factions from Latakia, Idlib, Hama, Ghouta, Damascus and other cities rallied under the SNA banner.¹²⁴ This pro-Turkish coalition was led by Major General Salim Idris. The SNA factions nevertheless lacked a centralised command structure, although they were officially accountable to the SIG's Ministry of Defence.¹²⁵ These factions were characterised by internal conflicts and rivalries, which made the administration of the SIG area chaotic as well.¹²⁶

The security situation in the SIG area was unstable due to ongoing tensions between armed groups, which sometimes escalated into clashes between them, resulting in

¹¹⁶ ETANA, *Syria military brief: North-East Syria. October 2024*, 31 October 2024. A kamikaze drone is an armed drone that detonates an explosive near an enemy target – either fully automatically or manually – and is destroyed in the process.

¹¹⁷ Rudaw, *Two dead in suspected Turkish shelling of north Syria: Reports*, 23 October 2024; Enab Baladi, *Turkey strikes northern Syria following Ankara attack*, 24 October 2024; BBC, *Turkey strikes Kurdish sites after attack kills five near Ankara*, 24 October 2024; SOHR, *Dramatic military escalation in NE Syria. Turkish forces attack nearly 40 vital institutions in four days and aerial and ground attacks leave 77 civilian casualties*, 27 October 2024; AP News, *Kurdish leader in Syria calls for diplomatic solutions to conflict with Turkey*, 29 October 2024.

¹¹⁸ Enab Baladi, *Farmers protest against AANES' wheat purchase price*, 27 May 2024; Syria Direct, *Wheat price 'disaster' in northeastern Syria spells trouble for next season*, 6 June 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Why is Manbij an obstacle to the SDF?*, 22 October 2024; The Syrian Observer, *SDF arrests five teachers for rejecting curriculum amid protests and tribal threats in Raqqa*, 4 November 2024.

¹¹⁹ Al Majalla, *How Syria's vast militia network is eroding state sovereignty*, 6 February 2024.

¹²⁰ Levant 24, *Levant Front calls for vote of no confidence in SIG prime minister*, 5 September 2024; Enab Baladi, *Demands of Shamiya Front to dissolve Interim Govt meet positive responses from National Coalition*, 6 September 2024.

¹²¹ BBC, *Syria: Seven dead after car bomb tears through market in Azaz*, 31 March 2024; Enab Baladi, *Azaz: Protesters close opposition headquarters rejecting Ankara-Damascus rapprochement*, 13 July 2024.

¹²² Confidential source, October 2024.

¹²³ SOHR, *Under pressure from Turkey. "Al-Shahba'a Gathering" faction announces its dissolution and the integration of its military formations into "Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyyah"*, 5 April 2024.

¹²⁴ GCSP, *The Syrian National Army (SNA): Structure, functions, and three scenarios for its relationship with Damascus*, October 2020, p. 3; HRW, *"Everything is by the power of the weapon". Abuses and impunity in Turkish-occupied northern Syria*, 29 February 2024; Daily Sabah, *Syrian National Army launches first military academy*, 3 June 2024; MEI, *Syrian armed groups divided over Turkey-Syria normalization push*, 11 July 2024.

¹²⁵ Al Majalla, *How Syria's vast militia network is eroding state sovereignty*, 6 February 2024; HRW, *"Everything is by the power of the weapon". Abuses and impunity in Turkish-occupied northern Syria*, 29 February 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁶ HRW, *"Everything is by the power of the weapon". Syria: Abuses, impunity in Turkish-occupied territories*, 29 February 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Turkey-backed Syrian factions declare brief truce after infighting*, 17 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Fighting resumes between Turkey-backed Syrian factions near Aleppo*, 18 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Syrian rebel groups split after infighting*, 19 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

deaths and injuries.¹²⁷ There were also regular armed confrontations with the SDF, particularly along the contact lines in the provinces of Aleppo and Idlib.¹²⁸

In early July 2024, protests broke out across north-western Syria in response to the growing anti-Syrian rhetoric in Türkiye and attempts at rapprochement between Ankara and Damascus (see Section 1.4).¹²⁹ These protests led to clashes with the Turkish army, resulting in seven fatalities and more than twenty casualties.¹³⁰ There were also protests over the opening of the Abu al-Zandeen crossing into government-controlled area, partly because this was seen as a sign of a thaw in relations between Türkiye and the Syrian government (see Sub-section 1.19.11).¹³¹

According to UNCOI, arrests, violence and extortion by SNA factions continued in the SIG area during the reporting period. Kurdish and Arab women and men arriving from the government-controlled area or the DAANES area were routinely summoned by the military police and detained until they were acquitted or tried in military courts run by SNA factions for alleged terrorist offences or for links to the SDF. In its August 2024 report, UNCOI cited several examples, including a Kurdish man and an Arab woman who had been tortured, a fifteen-year-old Kurdish boy who had been subjected to ill-treatment and placed in solitary confinement, and a former YPJ member who had been subjected to sexual violence.¹³²

1.6.4

SSG territory

The SSG controlled parts of the north-west of Idlib province and several areas in the provinces of Aleppo, Latakia and Hama.¹³³ This de facto administration consisted of a prime minister, 11 ministers and several technical directorates and administrative councils.¹³⁴ This densely populated area was home to approximately 3.42 million people, including 1.43 million displaced persons (42% of the SSG area's population).¹³⁵ Around 800,000 displaced people were still living in reception camps or informal settlements. They faced a severe shortage of food, medicines and humanitarian aid. The largest concentration of displaced people was in the Dana sub-district of Idlib province, near the border with Türkiye.¹³⁶

¹²⁷ The Syrian Observer, *Syria today – Israeli attack kills 8; SNA factions clash injures 4*, 26 October 2023; Levant 24, *Disputes by SNA factions over lucrative smuggling corridors in Northern Syria*, 9 April 2024; North Press Agency, *2 SNA factions clash in north Syria on smuggling route*, 12 May 2024; North Press Agency, *Clashes erupt between SNA factions over locals' land in Syria's Afrin*, 3 September 2024; Bianet, *Clashes between Turkish-backed groups in northern Syria spark fire near border*, 17 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Fighting resumes between Turkey-backed Syrian factions near Aleppo*, 18 October 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Hadi al-Bahra condemns infighting among Syrian National Army factions and escalating violence in Northern Syria*, 18 October 2024.

¹²⁸ Enab Baladi, *National Army exchanges prisoners with SDF east of Aleppo*, 20 April 2024; Enab Baladi, *Targeting and infiltration, skirmishes between SDF and National Army*, 20 July 2024; North Press Agency, *SDF foils infiltration attempt by SNA factions in Syria's Manbij*, 21 August 2024; The New Arab, *Five Turkish-backed Syrian fighters killed by Kurdish forces near Afrin*, 8 September 2024.

¹²⁹ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Violent anti-Syrian protests escalate across Turkey*, 2 July 2024; Duvar, *Syrian immigrants in Turkey fearful of leaving homes after flurry of racist attacks*, 7 July 2024; STJ, *Northwest Syria: Local authorities arrest 15 Syrians for protesting near a Turkish convoy*, 9 July 2024; Enab Baladi, *Azaz: Protesters close opposition headquarters rejecting Ankara-Damascus rapprochement*, 13 July 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: North-West Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024.

¹³⁰ Al-Monitor, *Seven protesters killed in north Syria clashes with Turkish forces: new toll*, 2 July 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: North-West Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024.

¹³¹ Enab Baladi, *Opening of Abu al-Zandeen crossing: A step in a Turkish-Russian path*, 30 June 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: North-West Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024; Enab Baladi, *Demands of Shamiya Front to dissolve Interim Govt meet positive responses from National Coalition*, 6 September 2024; The New Arab, *Syrian rebels cut ties with Turkey-backed opposition 'government' amid disputes over crossing*, 6 September 2024.

¹³² UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, pp. 13-15.

¹³³ BBC Monitoring, *Syria militant authority restricts events after Paralympic ceremony sparks anger*, 31 August 2024.

¹³⁴ Al Majalla, *How Syria's vast militia network is eroding state sovereignty*, 6 February 2024; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Country Report. Syria*, 19 March 2024, p. 14; Enab Baladi, *Al-Jolani: The one-man rule*, 22 April 2024.

¹³⁵ UNOCHA, *Northwest Syria Factsheet (As of 23 September 2024)*, 23 September 2024.

¹³⁶ UNOCHA, *North-West Syria. Situation report*, 21 December 2023; UNOCHA, *North-West Syria. Situation Report*, 18 October 2024.

The SSG area was dominated by HTS – a coalition of armed groups formed in 2017 in north-western Syria, of which *Jabhat Fatah al-Sham* (formerly known as *Jabhat al-Nusra*) was the most prominent.¹³⁷ The coalition was under the leadership of Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, who had previously led the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda.¹³⁸ Due to its previous ties to ISIS and al-Qaeda, the UN and several countries have designated HTS as a terrorist organisation. In recent years, HTS has evolved from a former transnational Salafist-jihadist group into a more local Syrian Islamist group, which has occasionally clashed with other radical Islamist groups, including ISIS and the al-Qaeda-affiliated *Hurras al-Din*.¹³⁹

Many security incidents occurred in the SSG area during the reporting period. There was sustained shelling by the government forces, often supported by the Russian Air Force, as well as fighting between HTS and the government forces. Missiles and other artillery were used in these weekly attacks along the front lines in Latakia, Hama, Idlib and Aleppo.¹⁴⁰ Some of these attacks were also aimed at civilian targets (such as schools, medical centres, mosques and markets).¹⁴¹ During 2024, government forces increasingly deployed kamikaze drones. These first-person view (FPV) drones were also used to attack civilian dwellings and farms.¹⁴² There have also been documented cases involving the use of incendiary weapons and cluster munitions by the Syrian and Russian Air Forces.¹⁴³

Government forces and the Russian army stepped up their attacks on the SSG-controlled area following an unclaimed drone attack during a graduation ceremony at the military academy in Homs on 5 October 2023, which killed at least 89 people and injured 277. This military escalation involved airstrikes and artillery attacks,¹⁴⁴ resulting in the displacement of tens of thousands of people.¹⁴⁵ On 21 December 2023, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reported that at least 99 civilians had been killed and 400 others had been injured since 5 October 2023.¹⁴⁶

The number of airstrikes, shelling and drone attacks by government forces and the Russian army targeting the SSG area rose sharply once again from 14 October 2024.¹⁴⁷ This military escalation also resulted in damage to homes, schools and

¹³⁷ VOA, *Syria, Russia increase attacks on rebel bases*, 23 August 2023; North Press Agency, *Government forces use suicide drones in NW Syria causing casualties*, 16 April 2024; North Press Agency, *Government drone attacks on Aleppo kill 2 people*, 27 May 2024.

¹³⁸ STJ, *Between reformist discourse and actual repression: How Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham handled Idlib protests*, 2 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁹ ACLED, *Actor profile: Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)*, 26 July 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Explainer: HTS's multi-layered media operation*, 4 December 2024; confidential source, December 2024.

¹⁴⁰ ETANA, *Syria situation update: North-West Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Russian aircraft bomb rebel-held sites in north-west Syria*, 14 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Escalation reported in north-west Syria as Turkey reinforces troops*, 15 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Russian planes hit 'militant base' in Syria's Homs province*, 8 November 2024.

¹⁴¹ SNHR, *Syrian regime forces bombard Shuhada Afis School in E. Idlib, injuring a teacher and three children*, 2 December 2023; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024.

¹⁴² DW, *Syria: Suicide drones increasingly targeting civilians*, 14 March 2024; Syria Civil Defence, *Suicide drone attacks in northwest Syria: A new threat to civilians*, 30 October 2024; Syria Weekly, *Syria: October 29-November 5, 2024*, 5 November 2024; Syria Weekly, *Special: Syria. Nov 26-Dec 3, 2024*, 3 December 2024.

¹⁴³ HRW, *Northwest Syria: Government uses cluster munitions*, 5 November 2023; INSO, *Safety and access review Q1 2024*, 2024, p. 31.

¹⁴⁴ The Guardian, *More than 100 dead in attack on Syrian military academy*, 5 October 2023; BBC, *Syria war: Dozens killed in drone attack on graduation ceremony*, 6 October 2023; SANA, *Funeral ceremony of martyrs of the terrorist attack on military academy begins with popular and official attendance*, 6 October 2023; Al Jazeera, *Syria mourns Homs drone victims as gov't, Russian attacks in Idlib kill 11*, 6 October 2023; MEE, *Syria: Who is responsible for the Homs Military academy attack?*, 9 October 2023; Al Jazeera, *Northwest Syria witnesses most intense military escalation in three years*, 31 October 2023; AA, *More than 60 civilians killed, 43 public facilities targeted in October attacks in Syria's Idlib*, 1 November 2023.

¹⁴⁵ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: IDP movements (October 2023)*, 22 December 2023.

¹⁴⁶ UNOCHA, *North-West Syria. Situation report*, 21 December 2023.

¹⁴⁷ Levant 24, *Russian jets attack Idlib during UN visit*, 14 October 2024; SOHR, *Death toll update. 10 killed and 30 others, including 14 children, injured under Russian airstrikes on Idlib*, 16 October 2024; Daily Sabah, *At least 10*

power stations.¹⁴⁸ There were dozens of civilian casualties, and thousands of people were displaced.¹⁴⁹

According to UNCOI, protests on an unprecedented scale spread across the SSG area starting in February 2024. Protesters called for the release of political and security detainees, for administrative and socio-economic reforms, and for the removal of HTS leader Abu Mohammad al-Jolani. The demonstrations were sparked by reports of torture and ill-treatment of prisoners by the HTS General Security Service, following months of arrest campaigns by HTS targeting its own members, as well as members of other armed groups and political parties, such as *Hizb al-Tahrir*.¹⁵⁰ On several occasions, HTS violently suppressed these protests, arresting demonstrators and subjecting them to ill-treatment.¹⁵¹

1.7 Civilian casualties

The fighting, bombings, shelling, airstrikes, bomb attacks, landmines and explosive remnants of war also resulted in civilian deaths.¹⁵² Furthermore, large-scale human rights violations took place as a result of the actions of the conflict parties. Civilians fell victim to enforced disappearances¹⁵³ and abductions (see Section 1.8), extrajudicial executions and killings (see Section 1.9), arbitrary arrests and detentions (see Section 1.10) and severe ill-treatment, torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (see Section 1.11).¹⁵⁴ Various UN agencies, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and international NGOs reported that the situation in Syria was unsafe, partly due to the aforementioned human rights violations, the attacks, the fighting, the absence of the rule of law, lawlessness and the extremely poor economic conditions, at times a direct result of military action.¹⁵⁵

1.7.1 Number of civilian deaths

dead, 30 wounded in Russian strikes on northwest Syria, 17 October 2024; UNOCHA, North-West Syria. Situation Report, 18 October 2024; Enab Baladi, 15 civilians killed in Russian-regime shelling since October in northern Syria, 18 November 2024.

- ¹⁴⁸ Levant 24, *White Helmets condemn escalating Russian attacks in Northwestern Syria*, 16 October 2024; Enab Baladi, *Human rights report holds Russia responsible for civilian deaths in Idlib*, 23 October 2024.
- ¹⁴⁹ UNOCHA, *North-West Syria. Situation Report*, 18 October 2024; SOHR, *Amid displacement of civilians from west Aleppo countryside. Regime forces bombard Al-Atareb city*, 31 October 2024; The New Arab, *Massive displacement in Syria's Idlib amid Assad regime attacks*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.
- ¹⁵⁰ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 11.
- ¹⁵¹ VOA, *Despite crackdowns, protests continue in rebel-held NW Syria*, 1 July 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 11; NRC, *Protesten herleven in alle hoeken van Syrië*, 16 August 2024; confidential source, October 2024.
- ¹⁵² SOHR, *Highest annual death toll in three years. 4,361 people killed across Syria in 2023*, 31 December 2023; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 7; SOHR, *War remnants. Man killed and two women injured in explosion of landmine in eastern countryside of Hama*, 19 August 2024; SNHR, *Three children injured by a landmine of unidentified source in N. Aleppo, August 31, 2024*, 2 September 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024.
- ¹⁵³ Enforced disappearance is defined as the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorisation, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge such deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fact itself or of the whereabouts of the disappeared person, thereby placing them outside the protection of the law; Article 2 of the ICPPED.
- ¹⁵⁴ SOHR, *Highest annual death toll in three years. 4,361 people killed across Syria in 2023*, 31 December 2023; SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024.
- ¹⁵⁵ HRW, *No, Syria is still not safe for refugee returns*, 29 September 2023; OHCHR, *"We did not fear death but the life there". The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024; UNHCR, *Syria fact sheet (July 2024)*, 6 August 2024.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported varying figures for the number of civilian deaths in 2022 and 2023. In 2022, the SOHR recorded 3,825 fatalities resulting from the various conflicts (see Section 1.2), including 1,627 civilians.¹⁵⁶ The SOHR recorded 4,361 fatalities resulting from various conflicts in 2023, including 1,889 civilians.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, the SOHR recorded 143 civilian deaths in January 2024, 142 in February 2024, 204 in March 2024, 149 in April 2024, 100 in May 2024, 138 in June 2024, 153 in July 2024, 154 in August 2024, 138 in September 2024, 152 in October 2024, and 176 in November 2024.¹⁵⁸

The SNHR documented 1,057 civilian deaths in 2022.¹⁵⁹ In 2023, this organisation recorded 1,032 civilian deaths resulting from the various conflicts.¹⁶⁰ It further documented more than 761 civilian casualties between 1 January 2024 and 30 November 2024. The SNHR documented only those victims it was able to verify.¹⁶¹

According to the SNHR, the province of Daraa recorded the highest number of civilian deaths in 2023 (225), followed by Deir ez-Zor (203), Aleppo (153), Idlib (145), Homs (121), Hama (77), Hasaka (33), Suweida (24), Rural Damascus (17), Raqqa (17), Damascus (6), Latakia (6) and Quneitra (5). Tartous was the only place for which the SNHR did not record any civilian deaths in 2023.¹⁶²

In addition, the International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO) reported 14,779 incidents in 2023, resulting in 807 civilian deaths and 1,873 injuries. Between 1 January 2024 and November 2024, INSO recorded 15,353 incidents resulting in 731 civilian deaths and 1,743 injuries.¹⁶³

1.7.2

Organisations responsible

Of the 1,032 civilian deaths documented by the SNHR in 2023, government forces and Iran-backed militias were responsible for 225 (21.8%), including 57 children. The Kurdish-led SDF was responsible for 74 deaths (7.2%), including 9 children. The Russian armed forces were responsible for 20 deaths (1.9%), including 6 children. The SNA factions were responsible for 17 deaths (1.7%), including 5 children. HTS was responsible for 16 deaths (1.6%), including 2 children. The US-led coalition forces were responsible for 5 deaths (0.5%) and ISIS for 1 death (0.1%). The remaining 674 civilian deaths (65.3%) were the result of violence perpetrated by unidentified individuals or groups.¹⁶⁴ The number of civilian deaths spiked in

¹⁵⁶ SOHR, *Lowest annual death toll ever. 3,825 people killed across Syria in 2022*, 31 December 2022.

¹⁵⁷ SOHR, *Highest annual death toll in three years. 4,361 people killed across Syria in 2023*, 31 December 2023.

¹⁵⁸ SOHR, *Monthly death toll. 143 civilians among 359 people killed in January 2024*, 1 February 2024; SOHR, *Monthly death toll. 142 civilians among 405 people killed in February 2024*, 1 March 2024; SOHR, *Monthly death toll. 204 civilians among 514 people killed in March 2024*, 1 April 2024; SOHR, *Monthly death toll. 149 civilians among 376 people killed in April 2024*, 1 May 2024; SOHR, *Monthly death toll. 100 civilians among 254 people killed in May 2024*, 1 June 2024; SOHR, *Monthly death toll. 138 civilians among 332 people killed in June 2024*, 1 July 2024; SOHR, *Monthly death toll. 153 civilians among 257 people killed in July 2024*, 1 August 2024; SOHR, *Monthly death toll. 154 civilians among 298 people killed in August 2024*, 1 September 2024; SOHR, *Monthly death toll. 138 civilians among 342 people killed in September 2024*, 1 October 2024; SOHR, *Monthly death toll. 152 civilians among 287 people killed in October 2024*, 1 November 2024; SOHR, *Highest monthly death toll ever in nearly 60 months. 176 civilians among 746 people killed in November 2024*, 1 December 2024.

¹⁵⁹ SNHR, *1,057 civilians, including 251 children, 94 women, and 133 victims who died due to torture, were documented killed in Syria, in 2022*, 1 January 2023, p. 7.

¹⁶⁰ SNHR, *SNHR's 13th annual report: most notable human rights violations in Syria in 2023*, 23 January 2024; SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024.

¹⁶¹ SNHR, *71 civilian deaths, documented in Syria in November 2024, including of 20 children and six women, with three dying due to torture*, 1 December 2024, p. 6.

¹⁶² SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 11.

¹⁶³ INSO, *Conflict data dashboard*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹⁶⁴ SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 10.

October 2023 (161, 16% of the total). This was linked to the military escalation in the SSG area (see Sub-section 1.6.4).¹⁶⁵

In the first half of 2024, a similar image emerged with regard to the parties responsible. Of the 429 civilian deaths documented by the SNHR between the beginning of January 2024 and the end of July 2024, government forces and Iran-backed militias were responsible for 62 (14.5%), including 8 children. The Kurdish-led SDF was responsible for 35 deaths (8.2%), including 9 children. The Russian armed forces were responsible for 5 deaths (1.2%), including 3 children. The SNA factions were responsible for 12 deaths (1.7%), including 1 child. HTS was responsible for 18 deaths (2.8%), including 1 child. ISIS was responsible for 4 deaths (0.9%), including 1 child. The remaining 293 civilian deaths (68.3%) were the result of violence perpetrated by unidentified individuals or groups.¹⁶⁶

1.8 Disappearances and abductions in the various areas of control

Disappearances and abductions occurred in all areas of control during the reporting period.¹⁶⁷ There were weekly reports of disappearances and abductions.¹⁶⁸ The reports revealed that, in addition to the Syrian security apparatus and militias affiliated with the Syrian government, several groups and criminal gangs in the various areas of control were involved.¹⁶⁹ Civilians could fall victim to abduction at various times, for example, on their way to work or while gathering firewood, harvesting crops or tending livestock.¹⁷⁰ The scale on which the disappearances/abductions occurred varied from region to region.¹⁷¹

Between 1 January 2024 and 30 November 2024, the SNHR documented at least 2,274 cases of arbitrary arrest or detention. Of these, 1,862 cases were subsequently classified as enforced disappearances.¹⁷²

There were several reports of Syrians who, following their forced or voluntary return to Syria, had been arrested at checkpoints, detained and subsequently went missing.¹⁷³ In some cases, relatives were informed months or years later that their

¹⁶⁵ SNHR, *161 civilians, including 34 children, 44 women, and two individuals who died due to torture documented killed in Syria in October 2023*, 1 November 2023, p. 5.

¹⁶⁶ SNHR, *429 civilian deaths, including 65 children and 38 women, as well as 53 deaths due to torture, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024*, 1 July 2024, p. 5.

¹⁶⁷ SOHR, *Turkish occupation of Afrin six years on. Over 8,700 kidnappings and arbitrary arrests and over 4,000 other violations by Turkish forces and their proxy factions*, 17 March 2024; SNHR, *SNHR's 13th annual report on enforced disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Disappeared: No end in sight for the crime of enforced disappearance in Syria*, 30 August 2024.

¹⁶⁸ INSO, *Conflict data dashboard*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁶⁹ SOHR, *Ongoing security chaos. Members of gang affiliated with "Shuja'a Al-Ali" kidnap young man near Syria-Lebanon border*, 8 November 2023; The Syrian Observer, *40 cases of kidnapping in HTS-areas, fate of abductees is unknown*, 22 January 2024; USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, pp. 6-8; SOHR, *June 2024. SOHR documents 375 arrests and kidnappings across Syria*, 6 July 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Gang kidnaps five Syrian women on Lebanese border*, 6 August 2024; Syria Direct, *'Liberated Saydnaya': Enforced disappearance and extortion in Syrian National Army prisons*, 19 September 2024; SNHR, *At least 206 arbitrary detentions recorded in September 2024*, 2 October 2024, p. 3; SNHR, *At least 213 arbitrary detentions recorded in October 2024*, 4 November 2024, p. 6; Confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, December 2024.

¹⁷⁰ OHCHR, *"We did not fear death but the life there". The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024; Reuters, *Israeli attack wounds civilians in central Syria, state media says*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁷¹ SOHR, *June 2024. SOHR documents 375 arrests and kidnappings across Syria*, 6 July 2024; Levant 24, *Abduction epidemic escalates in Assad's areas amid security breakdown*, 5 September 2024; SOHR, *October 2024. SOHR documents nearly 360 arrests and kidnappings across Syria*, 6 November 2024.

¹⁷² SNHR, *At least 196 arbitrary detentions recorded in November 2024*, 3 December 2024, p. 5.

¹⁷³ ACHR, *Lebanon's violation of human rights through the forced deportation of refugees*, 19 May 2023; OHCHR, *Statement by Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. 56th Session of the UN Human Rights Council*, 3 July 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024; Trouw, *'Je kunt absoluut niet stellen dat asielzoekers veilig terug kunnen'*, 31 August 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Wanted*

missing relatives had died in detention.¹⁷⁴ There were also instances in which the government had issued death certificates for individuals who were later found to have still been alive at the time.¹⁷⁵

Civilians, including women and children, disappeared or were abducted for various reasons. This was driven by a combination of economic and political factors. Reasons could include suppressing actual or alleged opposition, protests and criticism, punishing the population or the victim, instilling fear amongst the population, extorting money from families, or facilitating prisoner exchange.¹⁷⁶ As a result of militarisation, large quantities of weapons were circulating throughout the country, making it easy for criminals and armed groups to engage in abductions or direct extortion (for example, at the numerous checkpoints that were widespread across Syria).¹⁷⁷

According to various sources, abductions were particularly common in the provinces of Daraa, Suweida, Homs and Rural Damascus, which are under government control.¹⁷⁸ In these areas, some armed groups involved in abductions were reportedly linked to security agencies such as Hezbollah, the military intelligence service, the air force intelligence service and/or the Fourth Division.¹⁷⁹

Abductions served as a source of income for the various armed groups and security forces in Syria (for example, to supplement their meagre salaries).¹⁸⁰ To this end, they targeted civilians whom they believed to have money – either themselves or their relatives (for example, because they had been abroad) – and/or those who did

for military service in Syria Lebanon's hell better than regime's prisons, 11 October 2024; The New Humanitarian, *The risk of return: As Israel bombs Lebanon, Syrian deportees face detention, conscription, or worse*, 16 October 2024; The Guardian, *'Nowhere to go': Syrians fleeing Israeli strikes in Lebanon face perilous return*, 23 October 2024; HRW, *Syrians fleeing Lebanon risk repression upon return*, 30 October 2024.

- ¹⁷⁴ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024; SNHR, *SNHR condemns regime forces for detention, fatal torture of a refugee forcibly deported from Lebanon*, 28 June 2024; SNHR, *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces for detention, fatal torture of a refugee forcibly deported from Lebanon who died in a Damascus hospital*, 9 July 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 6; Syria Weekly, *Syria: October 29–November 5, 2024*, 5 November 2024; confidential source, August 2024.
- ¹⁷⁵ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 6; Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, September 2024.
- ¹⁷⁶ OHCHR, *"We did not fear death but the life there". The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024, p. 12; Syria Direct, *Hostages and siege: Daraa frees detainees by any means necessary*, 13 June 2024; AA, *PKK/YPG terrorists kidnap another child in Syria*, 20 June 2024; Levant 24, *Tensions rise in Syria's Suwayda province amid alleged abduction of religious leader*, 22 June 2024; Al Arabiya, *Syrians' pursuit of freeing loved ones from al-Assad's prisons at any cost*, 26 June 2024; Levant 24, *Abduction epidemic escalates in Assad's areas amid security breakdown*, 5 September 2024; Enab Baladi, *Retaliatory kidnapping threatens Daraa with full explosion*, 18 September 2024; Syria Direct, *'Liberated Saydnaya': Enforced disappearance and extortion in Syrian National Army prisons*, 19 September 2024; SOHR, *August 2024. SOHR documents 280 arrests and kidnappings across Syria*, 6 September 2024; SOHR, *For not being able to pay ransoms. Children and women face unknown fate in "Peace Spring" area*, 2 October 2024; SNHR, *At least 206 arbitrary detentions recorded in September 2024*, 2 October 2024, pp. 3 and 5; Syria Weekly, *Syria: October 29–November 5, 2024*, 5 November 2024; confidential source, October 2024.
- ¹⁷⁷ The New Arab, *Gun ownership rockets in northwest Syria as civilians buy weapons to 'defend against kidnap, theft and murder'*, 7 August 2023; confidential source, October 2024.
- ¹⁷⁸ Enab Baladi, *Kidnappings on the rise in Daraa...Regime's authority is absent*, 20 December 2023; The Syrian Observer, *Kidnappings incite anger in Daraa: A cycle of ransom and release*, 4 March 2024; SOHR, *In response to kidnapping of retired policeman. Passenger bus kidnapped on Homs-Talbisah road*, 29 April 2024; SOHR, *Since early 2024. SOHR documents 113 kidnappings with Homs topping the list*, 19 June 2024; SOHR, *Under public pressure. Kidnapping gang releases young man and hands him over to dignitaries of Talbisah city*, 25 June 2024; SOHR, *June 2024. SOHR documents 375 arrests and kidnappings across Syria*, 6 July 2024; SOHR, *August 2024. SOHR documents 280 arrests and kidnappings across Syria*, 6 September 2024; Enab Baladi, *Retaliatory kidnapping threatens Daraa with full explosion*, 18 September 2024; SOHR, *October 2024. SOHR documents nearly 360 arrests and kidnappings across Syria*, 6 November 2024; SOHR, *Security chaos. Unknown persons kidnap medical student in Daraa countryside*, 19 November 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.
- ¹⁷⁹ Enab Baladi, *Kidnappings on the rise in Daraa...Regime's authority is absent*, 20 December 2023; SOHR, *Under public pressure. Kidnapping gang releases young man and hands him over to dignitaries of Talbisah city*, 25 June 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.
- ¹⁸⁰ SOHR, *Under public pressure. Kidnapping gang releases young man and hands him over to dignitaries of Talbisah city*, 25 June 2024; Levant 24, *Abduction epidemic escalates in Assad's areas amid security breakdown*, 5 September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

not have, or were unable to establish, good connections with other armed groups or influential figures, thereby allowing the abductors to evade consequences.¹⁸¹

Depending on the circumstances of a case (for example, the parties involved), a ransom had to be paid. The amounts demanded were often high, reaching tens of thousands of dollars in some cases.¹⁸² One source referred to instances in which the abductors would kill their victims if the ransom had not been paid.¹⁸³ Abduction cases were sometimes resolved by involving other security agencies or influential figures to negotiate the release of the victim and/or the ransom amount.¹⁸⁴

1.9 Extrajudicial executions and killings

Extrajudicial executions and killings of civilians and security forces occurred during the reporting period. In addition to the Syrian security apparatus and militias affiliated with the Syrian government, several actors in the various areas of control were linked to these events.¹⁸⁵ No statistics were available on the number of extrajudicial executions and killings in the various areas of control. The number of extrajudicial executions and killings for which the various armed groups could be held responsible was also unclear.

During the reporting period, there were attacks on personnel belonging to the Syrian security apparatus and on domestic and foreign militias affiliated with the Syrian government. In addition, there were attacks on human rights activists, civil servants, local tribal leaders, former members of the opposition and members of armed groups.¹⁸⁶ In many cases, it remained unclear who was behind the attacks and what the motives were. Many attacks were not claimed, or no perpetrators were found.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸¹ Confidential source, September 2024, confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁸² SOHR, *In response to kidnapping of retired policeman. Passenger bus kidnapped on Homs-Talbisah road*, 29 April 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. May 2024*, 20 June 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Kidnapping, torture and extortion under Assad rule: What is happening in Tartous?*, 29 July 2024; Levant 24, *Abduction epidemic escalates in Assad's areas amid security breakdown*, 5 September 2024; MEMO, *Syria receives Jordan drivers held hostage by regime-linked gang*, 14 September 2024; Levant 24, *Jordanian nationals kidnapped in Syria return home*, 17 September 2024; SOHR, *Second incident in 24 hours. Unknown gunmen kidnap civilian in Daraa and ask for large ransom*, 30 October 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁸³ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁸⁴ Enab Baladi, *Kidnappings on the rise in Daraa...Regime's authority is absent*, 20 December 2023; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁸⁵ SNHR, *SNHR condemns the assassination of activist Heba Suhaib Haj Aref in eastern rural Aleppo governorate*, 28 February 2024; BBC, *At least 18 Syrian truffle hunters killed in suspected IS attack*, 6 March 2024; USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, pp. 4-5; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, pp. 7 and 12; STJ, *Northwest Syria: Levant Front responsible for executing suspects in A'zaz bombing*, 15 August 2024; SOHR, *New crime. Civilian killed by a member of "SDF" in Deir Ezzor countryside*, 16 September 2024; BBC Monitoring, *IS claims killing local council head in Deir al-Zour, Syria*, 7 November 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: War monitor reports 'ethnic cleansing' against Kurds in north Syria*, 4 December 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁸⁶ The Syrian Observer, *Assad's forces colonel from Tartous killed under mysterious circumstances*, 17 November 2023; Levant 24, *IED attacks target Assad regime and Russian forces in southern Syria*, 13 December 2023; The New Arab, *Turkey announces assassination of prominent Syrian Kurdish commander Sherwan Hassan*, 18 December 2023; MEI, *Locals fight their own war on drugs in Syria's Daraa Province*, 9 January 2024; The Guardian, *Roadside bomb kills seven children in southern Syria, says state media*, 6 April 2024; SOHR, *Amid regime forces' failure to control security situation. 13 people killed in 14 incidents of security disorder in Daraa since early July*, 12 July 2024; Asharq Al-Awsat, *Syria: Sweida tensions rise after assassination of armed faction leader*, 18 July 2024; The National, *Killing of Druze militia leader raises tensions over anti-Assad protests in south Syria*, 19 July 2024; Syria Direct, *Murhij al-Jarmani assassinated: A 'turning point' for Suwayda's uprising?*, 19 July 2024; SOHR, *New assassination. Regime lieutenant shot dead in Tartous countryside*, 10 September 2024; SOHR, *Participated in recruiting females and children. Female leader in IRGC assassinated in Deir Ezzor*, 15 September 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024; Crisis24, *Syria: Explosion reported in Daraa's Al-Qusour neighborhood late Oct. 28*, 28 October 2024.

¹⁸⁷ BBC, *Syria: Seven dead after car bomb tears through market in Azaz*, 31 March 2024; Reuters, *Top Iraqi jihadist killed in suicide bombing in northwest Syria*, 5 April 2024; AA, *9 killed, 14 injured in Syria car bomb attack*, 8 August 2024; SOHR, *24 hours after having been kidnapped. Body of young man found dumped near bread*

1.10 Arrests and detentions of civilians

1.10.1 Numbers and responsible parties

Government forces, the SDF, SNA factions and HTS have all been linked to the arbitrary arrest and detention of civilians.¹⁸⁸

Between 1 January 2024 and 30 November 2024, the SNHR documented at least 2,274 cases of arbitrary arrest or detention. The number of documented cases of arbitrary arrests/detentions fluctuated between 182 and 228 cases per month. This represented an increase compared to 2023, when the figure ranged from 137 to 232. In 2023, the SNHR documented a total of 2,317 cases.¹⁸⁹ In 2022, there were 2,221 cases. The figure fluctuated between 143 and 227 cases per month.¹⁹⁰

In 2023, government forces were held responsible for 1,063 of the 2,317 cases (45.9%) of arbitrary arrests and detentions, the SDF for 641 (27.7%), SNA factions for 365 (15.8%) and HTS for 248 (10.7%).

Most of the cases of arbitrary arrests and detentions documented by the SNHR in 2023 took place in Aleppo Governorate (686), followed by Rural Damascus (306), Deir ez-Zor (259), Idlib (219), Damascus (198), Hasaka (159), Raqqa (128), Daraa (107), Homs (84), Hama (79), Latakia (51), Tartous (26), Quneitra (9) and Suweida (6).¹⁹¹

In this regard, the SNHR noted that, given the exceptional difficulties and the scale of the violations in Syria, its reports reflect only the bare minimum of the violations that have taken place and that the SNHR has been able to document. The SNHR emphasised that the actual figures were much higher.¹⁹²

According to the SNHR, the most notable patterns they had identified in the arbitrary arrests were those related to freedom of expression, those involving returning Syrians and internally displaced persons, those related to military service, and those carried out at immigration and passport offices.¹⁹³

1.10.2 The main reasons for arrests and detentions

According to various sources, the main reasons for arrests and detentions were evasion of compulsory military service, having been classified as a member of the opposition based on place of origin, and extortion.¹⁹⁴ Since 2023, there have been

bakery in western Daraa countryside, 10 September 2024; SOHR, *Al-Hasakah. Assassination attempt targeted civil police official in Ras Al-Ain city*, 3 November 2024; Syria Weekly, *Special: Syria – Nov 26-Dec 3, 2024*, 3 December 2024.

¹⁸⁸ SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024; SOHR, *Including a child. Regime forces arbitrarily arrest two people in the capital Damascus*, 16 November 2024.

¹⁸⁹ SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023*, 2 January 2024, p. 12; SNHR, *At least 196 arbitrary detentions recorded in November 2024*, 3 December 2024, p. 5.

¹⁹⁰ SNHR, *At least 2,221 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in Syria in 2022*, 3 January 2023, p. 17.

¹⁹¹ SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023*, 2 January 2024, p. 13.

¹⁹² SNHR, *No fewer than 194 cases of arbitrary arrest documented in February 2024, including of seven children and five women*, 2 March 2024, p. 4; SNHR, *In Assad's Syria, arbitrary detention is a codeword for torture*, 18 June 2024; SNHR, *At least 206 arbitrary detentions recorded in September 2024, 2 October 2024*, p. 4; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 3.

¹⁹³ SNHR, *In the one year since the ICJ issued its order, the Syrian regime has killed at least 84 individuals through torture, and arrested at least 1,161 civilians, including 18 children and 43 women*, 15 November 2024, pp. 3-4.

¹⁹⁴ YouTube, *TIMEP, Syria and Syrian refugees: From EU migration policies to Israel's war on Lebanon*, 25 November 2024, [URL](#), [27:41-30:02]; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

increasing reports of civilians being arrested by the Syrian authorities for the sole purpose of demanding a ransom for their release.¹⁹⁵

According to one source, people generally tried to estimate whether they were wanted (for example, because they had evaded military service). They adjusted their behaviour accordingly, for example by avoiding certain areas, staying at home or in their immediate neighbourhoods, or avoiding checkpoints.¹⁹⁶ Some men of conscription age would sometimes go into hiding in their homes for years or avoid leaving their villages for fear of being arrested at a checkpoint.¹⁹⁷

According to various sources, certain actors resorted to arbitrary arrests and detentions to suppress the opposition and intimidate the population.¹⁹⁸ There were also reports of civilians having been arrested due to mistaken identity.¹⁹⁹ Other reasons why civilians have been arrested include false or vaguely worded allegations out of revenge or envy, as well as having been named by others under the influence of torture in detention.²⁰⁰

In addition to the reasons mentioned above, the SNA factions in the SIG area focused particularly on Kurds in Afrin, as well as on displaced persons wishing to return to their homes in the city of Afrin, whom they often accused of having ties to the SDF, DAANES or the PKK. On occasion, journalists and human rights activists were also targeted by the SNA factions.²⁰¹ In the SSG area, those targeted by HTS included protesters, members of the public who criticised HTS policies, and journalists.²⁰² According to one source, the SDF continued to carry out raids, during which civilians were targeted for various reasons. It was also striking that women were sometimes targeted as a means of pressuring their husbands into surrendering.²⁰³

1.11 Severe ill-treatment, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment

Instances of severe ill-treatment, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment occurred during the reporting period. In addition to the Syrian security apparatus and militias affiliated with the Syrian government, several actors in the various areas of control (for example, the SDF, HTS and SNA factions) were linked to these events.²⁰⁴ There were no precise figures on the number of cases of severe

¹⁹⁵ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁹⁶ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁹⁷ Enab Baladi, *Syria disowns its children. Lebanon displaced set adrift in Syria*, 21 November 2024; confidential source, July 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

¹⁹⁸ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁹⁹ SNHR, *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces for detention, fatal torture of a refugee forcibly deported from Lebanon*, 28 June 2024; STJ, *Syria: Decision imposing the exchange of \$100 on Syrians: Disguised legalization and extortion of those entering their country*, 29 November 2024; confidential source, August 2024.

²⁰⁰ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 5; Confidential source, October 2024.

²⁰¹ HRW, *"Everything is by the power of the weapon". Abuses and impunity in Turkish-occupied northern Syria*, 29 February 2024; SOHR, *Aleppo. Turkish-backed factions impose royalties and threaten Kurdish landowners who cling to them and refuse to migrate from Afrin*, 13 August 2024; Syria Direct, *'Liberated Saydnaya': Enforced disappearance and extortion in Syrian National Army prisons*, 19 September 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁰² Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁰³ Confidential source, October 2024.

²⁰⁴ UN HRC, *"No end in sight": torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023 (A/HRC/53/CRP.5)*, 10 July 2023; The New Arab, *Syrian regime used Damascus hospital to torture, kill opponents*, 5 October 2023; HRW, *"Everything is by the power of the weapon". Abuses and impunity in Turkish-occupied northern Syria*, 29 February 2024; Amnesty International, *Aftermath. Injustice, torture and death in detention in North-East Syria*, 17 April 2024; SNHR, *68 civilian deaths, including 13 children and three women as well as nine deaths due to torture, documented in Syria in April 2024*, 1 May 2024; SOHR, *After having returned from Lebanon. Young man dies under torture in notorious "Palestine branch" prison in Damascus*, 26 June 2024; OHCHR, *Statement by*

ill-treatment, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in the various areas of control during the reporting period. It was also unclear how many cases of severe ill-treatment, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in the reporting period could be attributed to the various armed groups. In late 2023, however, UNCOI stated that, since 2011, tens of thousands of people had been arbitrarily detained, tortured, mistreated, disappeared and killed in Syrian detention centres.²⁰⁵

In the government-controlled area, torture usually began at the time of arrest and continued throughout the period of detention.²⁰⁶ The officials in question deliberately used torture to extract confessions (in many cases, false), to punish, to humiliate and to intimidate.²⁰⁷ Given the many factors that could have been at play, it was not possible to provide a precise description of the differences in the extent and nature of the treatment, of the circumstances in which civilians might have faced torture, of the reasons why civilians came into contact with the officials in question, or of where and when such torture took place, and in what form.²⁰⁸

On 16 November 2023, the *International Court of Justice* (ICJ) issued a ruling on the interim measures in the case brought by the Netherlands and Canada against Syria concerning the gross, systematic torture taking place in all detention facilities in Syria, as well as in hospitals and at checkpoints. The ICJ ordered Syria to take all necessary measures to cease its practices of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.²⁰⁹ Torture was particularly prevalent in the detention facilities of the military intelligence service, the air force intelligence service, the Political Security Directorate, the General Intelligence Service, the Criminal Security Department of the police, and the military police prisons, including the notorious Sednaya prison.²¹⁰ Several organisations reported that there was no evidence to suggest that the Syrian authorities had ceased their practices of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment following the ICJ ruling.²¹¹ On 1 July 2024, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment stated that torture was still widespread in Syrian government detention centres.²¹² In its report on the period from 1 January 2024 to 30 June 2024, UNCOI reported that arbitrary detention, torture, ill-treatment and other abuses continued unabated in Syrian prisons. This also applied explicitly to the detention centres run by HTS, the SNA

Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. 56th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, 3 July 2024; UN HRC, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86), 12 August 2024, pp. 4, 5, 11, 13; SNHR, SNHR's 13th annual report on enforced disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Disappeared: No end in sight for the crime of enforced disappearance in Syria, 30 August 2024, p. 3; SJAC, Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024, 21 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁰⁵ OHCHR, *UN Syria Commission welcomes landmark ICJ order to Syria to prevent torture and destruction of evidence*, 16 November 2023.

²⁰⁶ SNHR, *In the one year since the ICJ issued its order, the Syrian regime has killed at least 84 individuals through torture, and arrested at least 1,161 civilians, including 18 children and 43 women*, 15 November 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁰⁷ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁰⁸ Confidential source, October 2024.

²⁰⁹ ICJ, *Order of 16 November 2023*, [URL](#); OHCHR, *UN Syria Commission welcomes landmark ICJ order to Syria to prevent torture and destruction of evidence*, 16 November 2023.

²¹⁰ UN HRC, *"No end in sight": torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023 (A/HRC/53/CRP.5)*, 10 July 2023; HRW, *Syrians fleeing Lebanon risk repression upon return*, 30 October 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²¹¹ SNHR, *Three months after the ICJ's ruling, the Syrian regime has blatantly breached it, killing more Syrian citizens under torture*, 22 February 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, pp. 4, 5, 11, 13; SNHR, *In the nine months since the ICJ issued its order, the Syrian regime has killed at least 43 individuals due to torture, and arrested at least 756 civilians, including nine children and 24 women*, 15 August 2024; SNHR, *SNHR's 13th annual report on enforced disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Disappeared: No end in sight for the crime of enforced disappearance in Syria*, 30 August 2024, p. 3; SNHR, *In the one year since the ICJ issued its order, the Syrian regime has killed at least 84 individuals through torture, and arrested at least 1,161 civilians, including 18 children and 43 women*, 15 November 2024; HRW, *Syria violating world court order*, 20 November 2024.

²¹² OHCHR, *Torture allegations continue in Syria despite ICJ order: UN expert*, 1 July 2024.

factions and the SDF. The victims also included Syrians who had been forcibly deported and men who had evaded compulsory national service or deserted.²¹³

There were numerous reports of deaths resulting from torture in detention.²¹⁴ In 2023, the SNHR documented at least 59 civilians who had died as a result of torture. Of these civilian deaths, the Syrian authorities were responsible for 34, including 1 woman and 1 child. The SDF was responsible for 10 deaths, including 1 child. HTS was responsible for 8 deaths, including 1 woman. The SNA factions were responsible for 3 deaths. Other parties were responsible for 4 deaths.²¹⁵

Compared to 2023, the SNHR's figures for deaths resulting from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment showed an increase in 2024. Between 1 January 2024 and 30 June 2024, the SNHR documented at least 53 civilians who had died as a result of torture. Of the 53 civilian deaths documented by the SNHR in the first half of 2024, government forces were responsible for 26. HTS was responsible for 15 deaths. The SDF was responsible for 7 deaths, including 1 child. The SNA factions were responsible for 5 deaths.²¹⁶

On 29 October 2024, the SNHR reported that it had documented 26 cases of Syrians who had fled to Syria to escape Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon and had been arrested there between 23 September 2024 and 25 October 2024. According to the SNHR, 11 of these arrests were related to illegal entry, 8 to compulsory national service and 4 to summonses issued by an intelligence agency. In 3 cases, no reason for the arrests was given. As far as was known at the time, at least one of them had died in custody as a result of torture.²¹⁷

1.12 Crime and impunity

During the reporting period, Syria still lacked a functioning rule of law. Throughout the country, there was a high degree of impunity for crimes committed against civilians. Many crimes – including enforced disappearances and abductions, extrajudicial executions, killings and torture – went unpunished. There was no independent judicial system capable of holding perpetrators to account.²¹⁸ According to one source, there was no overarching, centralised security authority that could ensure a safe and stable environment in the various areas of control.²¹⁹ Many tribal groups and families therefore took the law into their own hands. This was

²¹³ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, pp. 4, 5, 11 and 14.

²¹⁴ SNHR, *68 civilian deaths, including 13 children and three women as well as nine deaths due to torture, documented in Syria in April 2024*, 1 May 2024; SOHR, *After having returned from Lebanon. Young man dies under torture in notorious "Palestine branch" prison in Damascus*, 26 June 2024; SOHR, *After four years of detention. Young man dies under torture in regime's prisons*, 14 August 2024; SNHR, *Man named Abdul Aziz al-Dahik dies due to torture in regime detention centers, September 30, 2024*, 3 October 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: Widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

²¹⁵ SNHR, *1,032 deaths, including 181 children and 150 women as well as 59 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 14.

²¹⁶ SNHR, *429 civilian deaths, including 65 children and 38 women, as well as 53 deaths due to torture, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024*, 1 July 2024, p. 11.

²¹⁷ SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: Widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, pp. 4-6.

²¹⁸ HRW, *"Everything is by the power of the weapon". Abuses and impunity in Turkish-occupied northern Syria*, 29 February 2024; Enab Baladi, *Interim Govt's Defense Ministry calls on Aleppo countryside factions to join National Army*, 21 March 2024; USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, p. 8; STJ, *In the absence of accountability: Torture as a systematic policy in Northern Syria*, 26 June 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²¹⁹ Confidential source, October 2024.

particularly the case in the rural areas of the provinces of Homs, Daraa and Suweida.²²⁰

Across Syria, numerous groups were engaged in criminal activities, including domestic and foreign armed groups, tribal militias and drug gangs.²²¹ Organised crime was also active in this area, focusing on matters including the national and international drug and arms trade.²²² One major source of revenue for the government was the production and illicit trade in Captagon.²²³

Many smaller criminal gangs were active at a local level.²²⁴ For example, there was a considerable amount of drug-related violence and arms trafficking in Daraa and Suweida.²²⁵ In addition, crime in general appeared to be increasing.²²⁶ As in 2023, Syria ranked 8th out of 197 countries in the Numbeo Crime Index of countries with the highest crime rate in 2024.²²⁷

Widespread corruption in Syria contributed to a climate of impunity. Corruption was one of the main causes of the deterioration in the economic situation and public services during the reporting period.²²⁸ In the south of the country, local criminal groups, including drug gangs, even collaborated with the intelligence and security services to extort money from the local population or to abduct people for ransom (See Section 1.8).²²⁹

Due to the lack of specific crime statistics, it was not possible to make a clear comparison between the different areas of control. According to one source, there was a noticeable difference between rural and urban areas in terms of crime and impunity. In urban areas, the security situation was generally perceived as more stable, and the presence of security forces was stronger than in rural areas. The latter were more prone to lawlessness and crime.²³⁰

1.13 Protection and extraction

²²⁰ Syria Direct, *Communities in southern Syria take on the drug trade*, 29 March 2024; Syria Direct, *Daraa residents turn to clan reconciliation over the court system*, 4 April 2024; Levant 24, *Abduction epidemic escalates in Assad's areas amid security breakdown*, 5 September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²²¹ The Syria Report, *Rise of Shia militias and drug trade in Homs informal area push Alawites out*, 14 May 2024; Levant 24, *Syria ranked eight in global crime*, 15 September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²²² Enab Baladi, *Drugs is a gateway for arms smuggling from Syria to Jordan*, 18 December 2023; MEI, *Locals fight their own war on drugs in Syria's Daraa Province*, 9 January 2024; Enab Baladi, *Drug flood from Syria, Jordan decides to confront*, 21 January 2024; Syria Direct, *How Suwayda became a drug-smuggling hub*, 26 March 2024; MEI, *Smoke and mirrors: The Syrian regime's dubious anti-drug campaigns*, 11 July 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²²³ North Press Agency, *Assad has turned Syria into a narco factory*, 30 April 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Jordan seizes Captagon pills 'smuggled from Syria in flying object'*, 19 July 2024; The Economist, *Is Syria's drug-dealing dictator coming in from the cold?*, 11 September 2024.

²²⁴ The Syria Report, *Rise of Shia militias and drug trade in Homs informal area push Alawites out*, 14 May 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²²⁵ Confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, August 2024.

²²⁶ OHCHR, *"We did not fear death but the life there". The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024, p. 12; Levant 24, *Syria ranked eight in global crime*, 15 September 2024; Enab Baladi, *Activists: Regime's intelligence is behind spread of crime in As-Suwayda*, 22 October 2024.

²²⁷ Numbeo describes itself as the world's largest cost-of-living database. It also manages databases on quality of life: housing indicators, perceived crime figures, quality of healthcare, quality of transport, and other statistics. The overall crime rate is calculated by dividing the total number of reported crimes of any kind by the total population and multiplying the result by 100,000; WPR, *Crime rate by country 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024.

²²⁸ Enab Baladi, *Attempts to cover up corruption: Syrian regime looks for monetary savings*, 29 December 2023; Syria Direct, *Syrian students' futures hostage to brokers and state employee bribes*, 25 March 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²²⁹ Brookings, *Syria's dissolving line between state and nonstate actors*, 27 January 2023; SOHR, *To pressure regime forces: Local people siege security building in Inkhil and military checkpoint near Jassem in Daraa*, 30 June 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Gang kidnaps five Syrian women on Lebanese border*, 6 August 2024; Enab Baladi, *Activists: Regime's intelligence is behind spread of crime in As-Suwayda*, 22 October 2024.

²³⁰ Confidential source, October 2024.

According to the sources consulted, partly due to the lack of an independent judicial system, the high level of impunity and widespread corruption, the ruling parties could generally provide little or no protection in response to threats or following criminal acts against individuals.²³¹ In various parts of Syria, there was also little or no protection against corruption, arrests, detentions or abductions involving government departments and militias affiliated with the de facto authorities.²³²

According to various sources, civilians were often unable to seek safety by moving to another area of control, as they risked encountering other security issues there. As a result, they risked being viewed as suspects or as a security risk when moving from one area of control to another (for example, from the SIG area or from the DAANES area to the government-controlled area).²³³

1.14 Passing through border crossings and checkpoints

1.14.1 *Border crossings into the government-controlled area*

The treatment people faced at an international border crossing into government-controlled territory depended largely on whether the crossing had any incriminating information about them and whether they appeared on any of the numerous lists of wanted persons. During the reporting period, several reports indicated that people had encountered difficulties at border crossings. These difficulties included intimidation, ill-treatment, interrogation, thorough body searches, extortion, the seizure of belongings, the confiscation of property, arrest, torture, detention and conscription for compulsory military service or reserve duty (see Section 7.13).²³⁴

1.14.2 *Checkpoints*

Across the country, the Syrian government, the SDF, SNA factions, HTS and other domestic and foreign armed groups restricted freedom of movement by setting up permanent and temporary, official and unofficial checkpoints (see Chapter 4).²³⁵ Temporary checkpoints were usually set up during recruitment drives for military service and reserve duty.²³⁶

According to one source, checkpoint density could vary from area to area. Checkpoints were usually located along the access routes to major cities, as well as along the main roads in rural areas. In general, there were more checkpoints in the former opposition-controlled areas – which had been back under the control of the Syrian government since 2018 (such as the north of Homs province and Eastern Ghouta, east of Damascus) – than in the areas that had never been in opposition

²³¹ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²³² Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²³³ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

²³⁴ L'Orient Today, *What risks do Syrians returning home face?*, 17 May 2024; HRW, *Lebanon/Cyprus: Refugees pulled back, expelled, then forced back to Syria*, 4 September 2024; SOHR, *Amid dire living conditions. Regime forces impose levies on returnees from Lebanon and arrest 35 others*, 2 October 2024; The New Humanitarian, *The risk of return: As Israel bombs Lebanon, Syrian deportees face detention, conscription, or worse*, 16 October 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024; The Guardian, *'Nowhere to go': Syrians fleeing Israeli strikes in Lebanon face perilous return*, 23 October 2024; Enab Baladi, *Regime arrested 26 Syrian returnees from Lebanon*, 30 October 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, December 2024.

²³⁵ Enab Baladi, *Military barriers restrict Aleppo countryside residents*, 29 April 2024; Al-Monitor, *Clashes between Arab tribes, SDF forces in Syria pose challenge to US*, 8 August 2024; Enab Baladi, *Economic lifeline for Turkey, Syrian opposition, and regime Abu al-Zandeen crossing charts future of northern Syria*, 30 August 2024; DW, *Why the Lebanon crisis is good business for Syrian military*, 10 September 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. August 2024*, 10 October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

²³⁶ OHCHR, *"We did not fear death but the life there". The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024; Syria Weekly, *Special: Syria – Nov 26-Dec 3, 2024*, 3 December 2024; Reuters, *Syrian military and rebels battle north of Hama*, 4 December 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

hands.²³⁷ According to another source, there were usually checkpoints around the neighbourhoods where many Alawites lived.²³⁸ Yet another source noted that there were generally more checkpoints in the north-east, in Raqqa province, than there were in Hasaka province.²³⁹ According to another source, there were relatively large numbers of checkpoints in the north of Aleppo province.²⁴⁰ Checkpoints were also set up to restrict the flow of goods and people into areas where the government had no effective control. For example, this was the case in parts of the Suweida province.²⁴¹

When travelling within the country, people usually had to pass through several checkpoints. Sometimes, the inspections were limited to checking the national identity card or taking a quick look inside the car.²⁴² Depending on personal circumstances and location, bribes had to be paid at checkpoints.²⁴³ There were numerous reports of people being extorted at checkpoints. According to one source, these practices were particularly prevalent in government-controlled areas and in areas where SNA factions were active.²⁴⁴ Failure to comply with the requirements could result in arrest, detention, torture, false charges and enforced disappearance.²⁴⁵

At checkpoints in the government-controlled area, identity cards were often used to check whether people's names appeared on one of the many lists of wanted persons (for example, for having participated in a demonstration or for evading compulsory military service).²⁴⁶ In some cases, this led to name mix-ups, resulting in the arrest and detention of people who were not on the wanted lists.²⁴⁷ Sometimes, photos and messages were viewed on mobile phones, and attempts were made to recover deleted messages.²⁴⁸ There were also instances in which people were refused entry because the authorities, for logistical reasons, did not want them to enter or leave certain areas.²⁴⁹ This was particularly the case in the two coastal provinces, where outsiders were generally denied access.²⁵⁰

People were sometimes subjected to completely arbitrary treatment when passing through checkpoints. It was therefore difficult to make an accurate advance

²³⁷ The Syrian Observer, *Talbiseh: Regime brings in military reinforcements, pushes to storm the town*, 26 May 2023; SOHR, *Amid removing checkpoints in different provinces. Regime forces remove the largest checkpoint in Damascus*, 29 September 2023; SOHR, *Amid growing public panic. Regime forces besiege Talbiseh city and start military fortifications in and around the city*, 24 April 2024; Enab Baladi, *After Luka's meetings, security campaign targets Talbiseh city*, 5 September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²³⁸ Confidential source, August 2024.

²³⁹ Confidential source, October 2024.

²⁴⁰ Confidential source, October 2024.

²⁴¹ Syria Direct, *Suwayda sidesteps a 'spiral of violence' following clashes*, 26 June 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 8; Confidential source, October 2024.

²⁴² Confidential source, August 2024.

²⁴³ DW, *Why the Lebanon crisis is good business for Syrian military*, 10 September 2024; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; Syria: *Decision imposing the exchange of \$100 on Syrians: Disguised legalization and extortion of those entering their country*, 29 November 2024; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁴⁴ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

²⁴⁵ UN HRC, "No end in sight": *torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023 (A/HRC/53/CRP.5)*, 10 July 2023, p. 20; Enab Baladi, *Military barriers restrict Aleppo countryside residents*, 29 April 2024; UN, *Syria being pulled into the catastrophic conflict engulfing the region, UN Commission warns*, 1 November 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

²⁴⁶ HRW, *Syrians fleeing Lebanon risk repression upon return*, 30 October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

²⁴⁷ SNHR, *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces for detention, fatal torture of a refugee forcibly deported from Lebanon*, 28 June 2024; STJ, *Syria: Decision imposing the exchange of \$100 on Syrians: Disguised legalization and extortion of those entering their country*, 29 November 2024; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁴⁸ SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

²⁴⁹ Enab Baladi, *Displaced people from Lebanon prevented from entering northern Syria*, 3 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

²⁵⁰ Confidential source, October 2024.

assessment of the risk of problems arising.²⁵¹ In some cases, people were denied entry or arrested, for example, because they did not have the correct documents, because they failed to pass through security checks, or because they were travelling to or from an area controlled by the armed opposition.²⁵² Furthermore, men of conscription age were at risk of forced conscription into the army to fulfil their compulsory military service.²⁵³ There were also instances in which people were subjected to ill-treatment at the checkpoints.²⁵⁴ Women could be subjected to sexual harassment or other forms of violence at the checkpoints.²⁵⁵ In addition, people were at high risk of being shot if they refused to stop at the checkpoints or tried to bypass them.²⁵⁶

Furthermore, people entering the government-controlled area from other areas of control could encounter mistrust due to their origins or time spent in those areas.²⁵⁷ People entering the SIG area could face detention on suspicion of having ties to the SDF, DAANES or the PKK.²⁵⁸ Young men passing through checkpoints in the DAANES area could be approached by SDF recruiters.²⁵⁹ There were also reports of arrests at checkpoints in the SSG area.²⁶⁰

Attacks were carried out on military checkpoints (for example, airstrikes on SDF checkpoints) during the reporting period.²⁶¹ In the provinces of Daraa and Homs, armed groups attacked government checkpoints.²⁶² In the east and centre of the country, ISIS carried out attacks on government checkpoints and SDF checkpoints (see Section 1.19).²⁶³

²⁵¹ SOHR, *Arbitrary arrest. Members of regime security services arrest civilian at checkpoint in Rif Dimashq*, 10 November 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

²⁵² UN HRC, "No end in sight": torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023 (A/HRC/53/CRP.5), 10 July 2023, p. 20; AP News, *Some Syrian refugees risk returning to opposition-held areas as hostility in host Lebanon grows*, 12 June 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. May 2024*, 20 June 2024; SNHR, *Man named Fahd al-Aqra arrested by Syrian regime forces in Hama city, August 4, 2024*, 7 August 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 5; Confidential source, October 2024.

²⁵³ HRW, *Syrians fleeing Lebanon risk repression upon return*, 30 October 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

²⁵⁴ ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁵⁵ OHCHR, "It is a forever stigma: the role of gender discrimination in the Syrian government's detention and torture system", 26 June 2024; EuroMed Feminist Initiative, *Violence against women and girls in Syria*, 31 July 2024, p. 6; Confidential source, November 2024.

²⁵⁶ SNHR, *Man named Ayman Abdul Kafi shot dead by SDF personnel in E. Aleppo, May 21, 2024*, 24 May 2024; SOHR, *For refusing to stop. Members of "Eighth Brigade" open fire on two people in Daraa countryside*, 10 September 2024.

²⁵⁷ SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

²⁵⁸ Rudaw, *10,000 Palestinians settled in Afrin: Kurdish politician*, 2 January 2024; Ceasefire & YASA, *Escalating human rights violations in Syria's Afrin: 2024 update*, 14 May 2024, p. 2; STJ, *In the absence of accountability: Torture as a systematic policy in northern Syria*, 26 June 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024; USDOS, *Syria 2023 international religious freedom report*, 26 June 2024, p. 19; Confidential source, November 2024.

²⁵⁹ SNHR, *SDF arrests multiple civilians in E. Aleppo, August 6, 2024*, 7 August 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. July 2024*, 8 August 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 11; Confidential source, November 2024.

²⁶⁰ SNHR, *At least 213 arbitrary detentions recorded in October 2024*, 4 November 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

²⁶¹ Kurdistan 24, *Three SDF fighters killed in Turkish drone strike in Ain Issa: SDF*, 9 January 2024; Enab Baladi, *Turkey strikes northern Syria following Ankara attack*, 24 October 2024; SOHR, *SDF-held areas in October 2024. 47 fatalities in acts of violence...unprecedented escalation by Turkish forces in 2024 leaves heavy human and material losses*, 5 November 2024.

²⁶² SOHR, *Grenade attack. Unidentified gunmen target the checkpoint of the 18th division in Homs*, 20 October 2024; SOHR, *Following demands to release a detainee. Gunmen attack two checkpoints of airforce intelligence in Daraa*, 7 November 2024; SOHR, *Following attacks on military checkpoints. Regime forces release a civilian and his son after two days of detention*, 19 November 2024.

²⁶³ Rudaw, *ISIS kills SDF member in Deir ez-Zor: Monitor*, 20 August 2024; The New Arab, *IS attack kills two Syrian regime troops near Palmyra*, 31 August 2024; North Press Agency, *ISIS launches multiple attacks against SDF in Deir ez-Zor*, 15 October 2024; SOHR, *With machineguns. "ISIS" cells attack military checkpoint in Deir Ezzor countryside*, 19 October 2024; SOHR, *New attack. Member of SDF killed and others injured by ISIS cells at a military checkpoint in Deir Ezzor*, 17 November 2024; North Press Agency, *SDF posts come under attacks in Deir ez-Zor*, 18 November 2024.

1.15 Amnesty schemes

On 16 November 2023, Assad issued Decree No. 36/2023, thereby granting amnesty and reducing sentences for some offences committed prior to the date of publication. Amongst other provisions, this decree purportedly involved the release of prisoners with life-threatening illnesses and prisoners over the age of 70, the commutation of death sentences to life sentences, and the reduction of life sentences to twenty years' imprisonment. This amnesty did not apply to charges such as terrorism and high treason, nor to people who were still in pre-trial detention. As a result, most political prisoners and human rights activists were not eligible for this scheme.²⁶⁴ Under this decree, deserters in Syria had three months to come forward if they wished to avail themselves of this amnesty scheme. Deserters who were outside Syria were given six months to come forward.²⁶⁵ Under this scheme, deserters were not eligible for exemption from military service. They could nevertheless avoid criminal prosecution for desertion.²⁶⁶ According to one source, however, deserters who had defected to the opposition for political reasons were subject to prosecution under other legal provisions.²⁶⁷

On 22 September 2024, Assad issued Decree No. 27/2024, thereby granting amnesty for certain offences committed prior to the date of publication, including desertion.²⁶⁸ Like the previous amnesty schemes, this one did not apply to charges such as terrorism and high treason.²⁶⁹ According to one source, in practice, the amnesty schemes were of little significance to people who had been arrested and detained (for example, for desertion). This was because, six months after the amnesty was granted, they were still required to serve in the army if no further grounds for exemption were found.²⁷⁰ According to another source, there was little transparency, and a relatively large number of amnesty cases involved minor offences (for example, traffic violations).²⁷¹ Furthermore, there was little confidence in these schemes, as some people who had been granted amnesty were subsequently prosecuted under different legal provisions.²⁷²

1.16 Bribes and ransom

In Syria, it was common practice to pay bribes for a wide range of services.²⁷³ For example, bribes were typically demanded of people being sought by particular security agencies, those wanted for compulsory military service or reserve duty,

²⁶⁴ SNHR, *Amnesty decree no. 36 of 2023 excludes political prisoners*, 21 November 2023; Enab Baladi, *Decree 36: A sham amnesty ignores 135,000 detainees and forcibly disappeared persons*, 29 November 2023; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁶⁵ AP News, *Syria's president grants amnesty, reduced sentences on anniversary of coup that put father in power*, 16 November 2023; Enab Baladi, *Assad issues decree allowing exemption fees for reserve service*, 3 December 2023; SNHR, *SNHR's 13th annual report: most notable human rights violations in Syria in 2023*, 23 January 2024, pp. 19-20; DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 28.

²⁶⁶ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 28; Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, December 2024.

²⁶⁷ Confidential source, October 2024.

²⁶⁸ Article 101 of the Military Penal Code; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Turkish media link Syria's 'amnesty' to potential migrant returns*, 23 September 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Assad issues general amnesty amid continued detainee crisis and political repression*, 23 September 2024.

²⁶⁹ HRW, *Another hollow amnesty will not solve Syria's detainee crisis*, 26 September 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Syrian amnesty decree 27: Old policy, no progress*, 5 November 2024.

²⁷⁰ Confidential source, October 2024.

²⁷¹ Confidential source, October 2024.

²⁷² For example, under Article 103 of the Military Penal Code; DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 54; The New Arab, *Syrians wary as Assad issues amnesty decree for deserters*, 23 September 2024; Al Jazeera, *Do not believe the Syrian regime's promises of amnesty*, 10 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁷³ *Syria: Decision imposing the exchange of \$100 on Syrians: Disguised legalization and extortion of those entering their country*, 29 November 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

those wishing to transport goods from one area to another, or those seeking to cross a border or pass through a checkpoint.²⁷⁴

Extortion and blackmail were amongst the motives behind the arrest and detention operations carried out by the Syrian intelligence and security services and government-affiliated militias.²⁷⁵ Due to the fragmented security sector and the lack of a centralised authority, they operated largely autonomously. They were therefore free to extort money from the population in the areas under their control.²⁷⁶ Bribes, kickbacks, extortion and blackmail – including from returning Syrians – constituted a major source of income for many security actors. Another factor was that salaries were insufficient, forcing the actors to seek additional sources of income.²⁷⁷ Large sums of money were demanded from family members in exchange for information about the whereabouts or release of their missing relatives.²⁷⁸ In addition, businesspeople loyal to the Syrian government were subjected to extortion and blackmail by the Syrian security apparatus or militias (for example, when returning from business trips abroad).²⁷⁹

1.17 Recruitment of minors

During the reporting period, there were numerous reports of the recruitment of Kurdish and Arab minors and young adults – both boys and girls – in the north-east by the Kurdish group Revolutionary Youth Movement of Syria. These recruits often ended up with armed groups affiliated with the SDF.²⁸⁰ Several sources mentioned the YPG/YPJ in this regard.²⁸¹ A UN report documented 231 cases of children recruited by the SDF and 203 by the YPG/YPJ in 2023. According to this report, other armed groups – including HTS and the SNA factions – also recruited

²⁷⁴ DW, *Syrians in Lebanon: Not safe to stay, not safe to go home*, 6 January 2024; DW, *Why the Lebanon crisis is good business for Syrian military*, 10 September 2024; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; Syria: *Decision imposing the exchange of \$100 on Syrians: Disguised legalization and extortion of those entering their country*, 29 November 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁷⁵ YouTube, *TIMEP, Syria and Syrian refugees: From EU migration policies to Israel's war on Lebanon*, 25 November 2024, [URL](#), [27:41-30:02].

²⁷⁶ Al Arabiya, *Syrians' pursuit of freeing loved ones from al-Assad's prisons at any cost*, 26 June 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 2; UN, *Syria being pulled into the catastrophic conflict engulfing the region, UN Commission warns*, 1 November 2024.

²⁷⁷ SOHR, *Demanding huge amounts of money. Military intelligence blackmail people returning to Syria*, 20 August 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁷⁸ UN HRC, *"No end in sight": torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023 (A/HRC/53/CRP.5)*, 10 July 2023, pp. 19-20; BBC, *Back from the dead: Desperately searching for Syria's missing prisoners*, 14 September 2023; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024.

²⁷⁹ UN HRC, *"No end in sight": torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023 (A/HRC/53/CRP.5)*, 10 July 2023, p. 10; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁸⁰ STJ, *Syria: Over 50 children recruited in AANES areas in 2023*, 21 January 2024; SNHR, *Girl named Maya Shaker abducted by the SDF in Hasaka, January 20, 2024*, 29 January 2024; SNHR, *Girl named Samira Ali abducted by the SDF in Aleppo, January 30, 2024*, 31 January 2024; Enab Baladi, *Child recruitment by SDF raises concerns in Germany*, 1 February 2024; Enab Baladi, *Al-Hasakah: Revolutionary Youth Movement kidnaps minor girls and recruits them*, 14 March 2024; SJAC, *"She is still a child". Investigating child recruitment practices by the Revolutionary Youth in NE Syria*, 24 April 2024, p. 1; DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, p. 26; MEMO, *Kurdish militia in Syria forcibly recruited over 200 children in 2023, UN report reveals*, 13 June 2024; AA, *PKK/YPG terrorists kidnap another child in Syria*, 20 June 2024; The Syrian Observer, *SDF arrests hundreds of young men for conscription in Northern and Eastern Syria*, 2 July 2024; Kurdistan 24, *Revolutionary Youth Movement allegedly kidnaps, recruits children in Qamishli, Hasakah*, 9 July 2024; SNHR, *Girl named Mariam Ibou abducted by the SDF in Aleppo governate, August 2, 2024*, 5 August 2024; SNHR, *SDF arrests multiple civilians in E. Aleppo, August 6, 2024*, 7 August 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, pp. 16 and 20; SNHR, *Boy named Akid Muslim abducted by the SDF in E. Aleppo, August 28, 2024*, 30 August 2024; Levant 24, *Child recruitment by militias in Syria persists*, 1 September 2024; HRW, *Northeast Syria: Military recruitment of children persists*, 2 October 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024; SNHR, *Boy named Hanan Hassan abducted by SDF in Aleppo, November 22, 2024*, 25 November 2024.

²⁸¹ SNHR, *SNHR's 12th annual report on violations against females in Syria*, 25 November 2023, p. 39; UNSC, *Children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic - Report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/805)*, 28 November 2023, p. 2; STJ, *Syria: Over 50 children recruited in AANES areas in 2023*, 21 January 2024.

children.²⁸² Minors and young adults were sometimes persuaded to join local armed groups for the pay, for protection and/or for the status.²⁸³

1.18 ISIS

According to the US Department of Defense, there was an increase in ISIS attacks in 2024 compared to 2023.²⁸⁴ The coordination capacity and complexity of ISIS attacks appeared to have increased during the reporting period.²⁸⁵

In 2014, ISIS still controlled a third of Syria. As they were pushed back in subsequent years and lost their last stronghold in Syria in 2019, ISIS militants mainly went into hiding in remote desert areas.²⁸⁶ During the reporting period, ISIS cells carried out attacks in various parts of the country. In most cases, the SDF was the target.²⁸⁷ Other targets of attacks, assaults and abductions included individuals who had served on a governing body affiliated with DAANES, government forces and civilians.²⁸⁸ ISIS ambushed government troops in the Badia Desert,²⁸⁹ where it also attacked shepherds and truffle hunters.²⁹⁰ There were also attacks on tankers in the provinces of Deir ez-Zor, Hasaka and Raqqa.²⁹¹ The epicentre of ISIS's activities was in the desert regions of Deir ez-Zor province.²⁹² ISIS also had training facilities in the Badia Desert.²⁹³ In the east, particularly in Deir ez-Zor, ISIS operated as a kind of shadow administration for the local population, focusing on matters including the collection of religious taxes (*zakat*), the enforcement of public morality and a brief seizure of control in some areas.²⁹⁴ On 7 September 2024, ISIS reported that it had executed two people in Raqqa province on charges of collaborating with the

²⁸² UNGA & UNSC, *Children and armed conflict (A/78/842-S/2024/384)*, 3 June 2024, p. 27.

²⁸³ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁸⁴ The New York Times, *Why the Pentagon is warning that ISIS attacks could double this year*, 17 July 2024; The New Arab, *Islamic State attacks on track to double in Iraq and Syria compared to last year, US military says*, 17 July 2024; ABC News, *US airstrikes target multiple sites in Syria, killing up to 35 ISIS militants*, 30 October 2024.

²⁸⁵ MEI, *CENTCOM says ISIS is reconstituting in Syria and Iraq, but the reality is even worse*, 17 July 2024.

²⁸⁶ Al Jazeera, *ISIL attacks kill 30 in Syrian desert*, 8 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *HTS-linked authority announces crackdown on IS 'cell' in northwest Syria*, 25 August 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁸⁷ Rudaw, *ISIS kills SDF member in Deir ez-Zor: Monitor*, 20 August 2024; BBC Monitoring, *IS claims 'killing and injuring' 10 SDF members in Syria*, 24 November 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian Kurdish forces report four dead fighters amid rising IS attacks*, 24 November 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁸⁸ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024; Rudaw, *ISIS kills SDF member in Deir ez-Zor: Monitor*, 20 August 2024; The New Arab, *IS attack kills two Syrian regime troops near Palmyra*, 31 August 2024; BBC Monitoring, *IS claims killing two SDF forces in Syria in 'revenge for al-Hol'*, 24 September 2024; SOHR, *New attack. ISIS members assassinate the head of local council in northern Deir Ezzor countryside*, 4 November 2024; Syria Weekly, *Syria: October 29-November 5, 2024*, 5 November 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁸⁹ BBC, *At least 18 Syrian truffle hunters killed in suspected IS attack*, 6 March 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: North-East Syria (June 2024)*, 30 June 2024; NOS, *Aantal IS-aanslagen verdubbeld, terreurgroep 'probeert zich te hergroeperen'*, 17 July 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Domestic media report IS attack on Syrian army in north-eastern Syria*, 21 August 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024.

²⁹⁰ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 7; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁹¹ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: IS claims attacking over a dozen oil tankers in Syria*, 20 September 2024; North Press Agency, *ISIS targets fuel tankers in Deir ez-Zor, causing damage*, 13 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *IS claims series of attacks on oil tankers in Syria*, 1 November 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Analysis: Islamic State targets fuel tankers in bid to disrupt Syria oil trade*, 20 November 2024; Syria Weekly, *Special: Syria - Nov 26-Dec 3, 2024*, 3 December 2024.

²⁹² ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: North-East Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁹³ VOA, *Recent US strikes spotlight growing Islamic State threat in Syria*, 1 November 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁹⁴ Aaron Y. Zelin & Devorah Margolin, *The Islamic State's shadow governance in eastern Syria since the fall of Baghruz*, in: *CTC Sentinel*, Volume 16, Number 9, September 2023, pp. 22-29; SOHR, *For "refusing to pay zakat". ISIS cells threaten a civilian with a grenade in Deir Ezzor countryside*, 7 March 2024; Rudaw, *ISIS attacks in SDF-held areas a dangerous escalation: Monitor*, 26 September 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

SDF's intelligence service.²⁹⁵ ISIS cells were also present in other parts of Syria during the reporting period (see Section 1.19).²⁹⁶

During the reporting period, the International Coalition and the SDF carried out several attacks on ISIS training camps and prominent ISIS militants.²⁹⁷ To a lesser extent, government and Russian forces also carried out military operations to eliminate ISIS militants in the central desert regions.²⁹⁸

In the north-east, which is controlled by the SDF, around 10,000 ISIS militants (current or former) were being held captive.²⁹⁹ The prisons where the men were being held provided fertile ground for radicalisation.³⁰⁰ In July 2024, the de facto administration released nearly 400 Syrian ISIS militants (current or former) as part of an amnesty scheme. A screening process established that these individuals had not committed any serious offences.³⁰¹ On 2 September 2024, the de facto administration released another group of Syrian (former) ISIS militants.³⁰²

The wives and children of ISIS militants (current or former) were held in the sprawling and overcrowded al-Hol detention camp and the smaller al-Roj detention camp in the east of Hasaka province. These camps were under the supervision of the SDF.³⁰³ According to various sources, in September 2024, more than 40,000 people from dozens of nationalities were living there in tents. Iraqis and Syrians constituted the majority there.³⁰⁴ The al-Hol camp also included a high-security annex where foreign women and children were housed.³⁰⁵ For years, experts have described the al-Hol camp as a ticking time bomb where ISIS ideology was being kept alive. There were many pregnancies, and weapons and militants (active or potential) were smuggled in and out of the camp.³⁰⁶

In the detention camps, the SDF separated teenage boys from their mothers when they reached puberty. The SDF placed them in the al-Houri rehabilitation centre or the Orkesh rehabilitation centre in the north of Hasaka province. As soon as the

²⁹⁵ SOHR, *After being ambushed by "ISIS" cells. Two persons executed by slaughtering on charged of cooperating with "SDF" intelligence in Al-Raqqa desert*, 8 September 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024.

²⁹⁶ North Press Agency, *ISIS seeks to establish foothold in southern Syria*, 8 February 2024; SOHR, *Leaving three dead and wounded. HTS-backed General Security Service carries out security operation targeting ISIS cell in Idlib countryside*, 25 August 2024; Levant 24, *Two killed as security forces clash with ISIS cell in Idlib*, 26 August 2024.

²⁹⁷ BBC Monitoring, *IS announces another faceless leader*, 3 August 2023; Reuters, *Islamic State confirms death of its leader, names replacement*, 3 August 2023; U.S. Central Command, *U.S. Central Command conducts airstrikes against several ISIS camps in Syria*, 30 October 2024; North Press Agency, *SDF captures 79 ISIS members in major sweep in NE Syria*, 13 November 2024.

²⁹⁸ SOHR, *Despite its continuation for about 20 days with complete absence of Iranian militias: Combing campaign in Syrian desert fails to kill any "ISIS" member*, 23 June 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: North-East Syria (June 2024)*, 30 June 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Syrian-Russian air strikes reported on Islamic State desert hideout in Homs*, 13 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Islamic State reportedly attacks Russia-backed force in Syrian desert*, 20 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

²⁹⁹ PBS, *Prisons holding ISIS members in Syria a breeding ground for radicalization, officials say*, 3 May 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Three jihadists still at large after prison break in Syria's Raqqa*, 6 September 2024.

³⁰⁰ PBS, *Prisons holding ISIS members in Syria a breeding ground for radicalization, officials say*, 3 May 2024.

³⁰¹ VOA, *AANES's amnesty for ISIS-related prisoners sparks mixed reaction*, 26 July 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

³⁰² The Arab Weekly, *As part of amnesty deal, Syria Kurds release 50 ISIS-linked detainees*, 3 September 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

³⁰³ Syria Direct, *Women returning from al-Hol face an uphill battle in Raqqa*, 13 November 2023; Enab Baladi, *Al-Hol camp returns to the fore: Does SDF deliberately keep ISIS alive?*, 9 January 2024.

³⁰⁴ VOA, *Iraq repatriates nearly 700 more citizens linked to Islamic State group from Syrian camp*, 29 April 2024; HLN, *"Of ik spijt heb van keuze voor IS? Nee, waarom zou ik?" Spraakmakende reportage uit kamp voor vrouwen en kinderen van IS-strijders*, 12 June 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

³⁰⁵ CNN, *'In prison because of our parents': Children of ISIS fighters coming of age in detention ask what they're being punished for*, 11 June 2024.

³⁰⁶ CNN, *'In prison because of our parents': Children of ISIS fighters coming of age in detention ask what they're being punished for*, 11 June 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria's Kurdish forces arrest IS suspects in raids in al-Hol camp*, 7 November 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

boys turned eighteen, they were transferred to detention centres.³⁰⁷ During the reporting period, a small number of people were repatriated abroad from the al-Hol camp.³⁰⁸

1.19 Security situation by province

The security situation in the various provinces is described below, highlighting differences within each province. It should be noted that the descriptions are not exhaustive; they are merely intended to provide a general view. Furthermore, it is difficult to compare the data across provinces, as comparable data are not always available for all provinces.

1.19.1 Damascus

The Damascus Governorate is located in south-western Syria, approximately 50 km from the border with Lebanon, and is surrounded by the Rural Damascus Governorate. It is subdivided into the districts of Damascus City³⁰⁹ and Yarmouk, covering approximately 116 km².³¹⁰ According to UNOCHA, the province had a population of 1,812,911 in July 2023, including 589,880 internally displaced persons.³¹¹

Historically, Damascus was the centre of power for President Assad and his military and security apparatus.³¹² The IRGC and the Russian army had several military bases within the city.³¹³

The central districts of Damascus had remained under the control of the Syrian authorities throughout the armed conflict in Syria, which began in 2011–2012. Since the last major military offensives in the provinces of Damascus and Rural Damascus in 2018, the entire capital and neighbouring areas have remained under the control of government forces and allied armed groups.³¹⁴ Several less central neighbourhoods and towns around the capital were severely damaged by fighting and bombing between 2011 and 2018.³¹⁵ No large-scale reconstruction had taken place there by the end of the reporting period. In many cases, basic functional facilities were lacking.³¹⁶ This was also true of the Yarmouk district, south of central

³⁰⁷ VOA, *Boys from Islamic State families undergo rehabilitation in Syria, but future uncertain*, 30 May 2023; UN HRC, *Punishing the innocent: Ending violations against children in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic*, 19 March 2024, p. 5; Amnesty International, *Aftermath. Injustice, torture, and death in detention in North-East Syria*, 17 April 2024, p. 47; CNN, *'In prison because of our parents': Children of ISIS fighters coming of age in detention ask what they're being punished for*, 11 June 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

³⁰⁸ CNN, *'In prison because of our parents': Children of ISIS fighters coming of age in detention ask what they're being punished for*, 11 June 2024; Rudaw, *Kyrgyzstan repatriates another 22 nationals from Rojava camp*, 19 July 2024.

³⁰⁹ The city of Damascus comprises 15 sub-districts: Old Damascus, Midan, Dummar, al-Qadam, Burza, Ash-Shaghour, Rukn ad-Din, Mezzeh, Salhiyeh, Qaboun, Sarouja, Kafr Sousa, Muhajerin, al-Qanawat and Jobar. Jobar is partly administered by the Rural Damascus Governorate; UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic, Governorates Profile (June 2014)*, 6 August 2014, pp. 2–3.

³¹⁰ UNOCHA, *Home; Datasets; Syrian Arab Republic – Subnational administrative boundaries – SYR_AdminBoundaries_TabularData.xlsx (modified: 4 April 2023)*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

³¹¹ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024, p. 9.

³¹² TWI, *Damascus control emboldens Assad nationally*, 2 August 2016.

³¹³ According to the research institute Jusoor for Studies, by mid-July 2024, the IRGC had seven military bases in Damascus, while Russian troops were present at two locations; Jusoor for Studies, *Map of foreign forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024.

³¹⁴ The Carter Center, *Syria Map. Exploring historical control in Syria*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

³¹⁵ MEI, *Inside Damascus's reconstruction lab: Navigating the framework of return and recovery*, October 2024, pp. 11–13.

³¹⁶ The Syria Report, *Bribes, security services, major obstacle to return in Al-Tadhamon*, 14 November 2023; Syria Direct, *'Exacerbating the crisis, not managing it': Basic services scarce in Moadamiyat al-Sham*, 2 September 2024; MEI, *Inside Damascus's reconstruction lab: Navigating the framework of return and recovery*, 31 October 2024, pp. 4–5; confidential source, 29 October 2024.

Damascus, which was home to around 160,000 Palestinian refugees at the outbreak of the conflict. This was the largest concentration in Syria at that time.³¹⁷

During the reporting period, the security situation in Damascus was characterised, amongst other things, by regular airstrikes targeting the IRGC and affiliated groups and individuals, as well as military infrastructure in and around the capital (see Sub-section 1.19.2), which sources attributed to the IDF.³¹⁸ Within Damascus, this involved the districts of Mezzeh and Kafr Sousa, south-west of the city centre, which were regularly hit by air raids. Both districts are known as heavily secured, partly residential areas, where, in addition to various Syrian intelligence and security services, the IRGC and affiliated groups had their headquarters.³¹⁹ As far as is known, no airstrikes took place in other districts during the reporting period. Airstrikes near the capital are mentioned in the description of the security situation in the Rural Damascus Governorate (see Sub-section 1.19.2).

In addition, during the reporting period, several small-scale attacks took place in Damascus, targeting members of the military and security apparatus or members of affiliated militias, using explosives or light weapons. For example, Syrian state media reported that, on 25 May 2024, a car exploded in the Mezzeh district, killing one person. According to the SOHR, the person in question was an SAA officer. A month earlier, on 13 April 2024, a car also reportedly exploded in Mezzeh, although there were no casualties at the time.³²⁰ Earlier in April, an explosive device was reportedly detonated in the Shaalan neighbourhood in the city centre.³²¹ In March 2024, a member of a security service was reportedly shot and killed on the street in the Baramkeh neighbourhood, which is also centrally located.³²² It was generally unclear who could be held responsible for these violent incidents.³²³

There were also regular reports from Damascus of human rights violations against civilians committed by the government's military and security apparatus, including arbitrary arrests (see Sub-section 1.10.1) and enforced disappearances following arrest.³²⁴

³¹⁷ UNRWA, *Yarmouk (unofficial camp)*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Starving the Palestinian Yarmouk camp*, 28 April 2014; The Syria Report, *Property fraud and poor services in the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp*, 9 July 2024; MEI, *Inside Damascus's reconstruction lab: Navigating the framework of return and recovery*, 31 October 2024; Syria Direct, *No return to Yarmouk for Syrian-Palestinians fleeing Lebanon*, 25 November 2024.

³¹⁸ ICG, *Golan Heights and South/West Syria*, 3 June 2024; Reuters, *Eyeing showdown with Hezbollah, Israel presses shadow campaign in Syria*, 10 June 2024; Reuters, *Syria says soldier killed, three wounded in Israeli strikes*, 14 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *War monitor reports Israeli strikes on Hezbollah-controlled areas in Syria*, 3 August 2024; The Syria Report, *Israel strikes pro-Iranian militias in Mazzeh district, raising residents' fears*, 19 November 2024.

³¹⁹ Le Monde, *Israel-attributed strike on Syrian capital kills Iranian officials*, 20 February 2024; The National, *Israel strikes 'security square' in Damascus in latest Gaza war spillover*, 14 July 2024; Syria Direct, *As Israel strikes Iran-linked figures in Damascus, civilians pay the price*, 10 October 2024; The Syrian Observer, *The transformation of Damascus' Mezzeh neighborhood amid Iranian influence and Israeli strikes*, 28 October 2024; EUSA, *Syria. Security Situation*, 22 October 2024, pp. 130-131; The Syria Report, *Israel strikes pro-Iranian militias in Mazzeh district, raising residents' fears*, 19 November 2024.

³²⁰ Al Arabiya, *Explosive device blows up car in Syria's Damascus*, 13 April 2024; Al Jazeera, *Car explosion kills at least one in Syria's Damascus*, 25 May 2024; BBC Monitoring, *One person killed in car bomb in Syria's Damascus*, 25 May 2024.

³²¹ Al Majalla, *Surge in bomb attacks show fragile security in regime-held areas of Syria*, 21 April 2024.

³²² SOHR, *Ongoing security chaos. Member of criminal security service shot dead in the capital Damascus*, 16 March 2024.

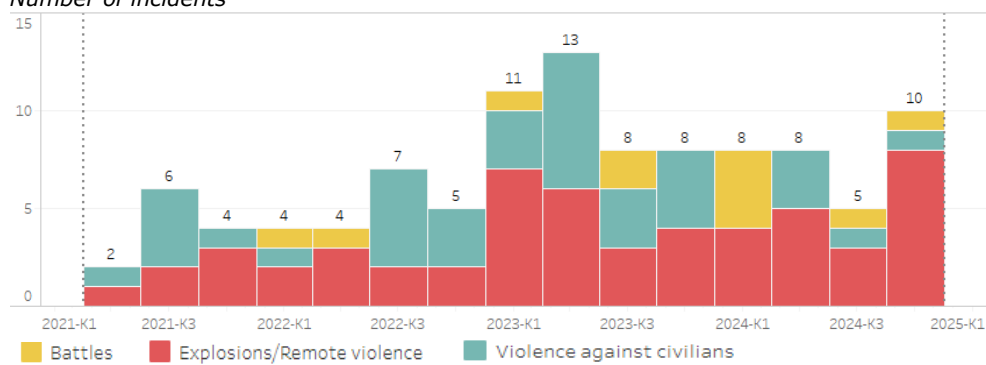
³²³ Al Majalla, *Surge in bomb attacks show fragile security in regime-held areas of Syria*, 21 April 2024; ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Rural Damascus | Actor1: Unidentified Armed Group (Syria).

³²⁴ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Damascus; SNHR, *Man named Hareth Yousef Rahil arrested by Syrian regime forces in Damascus city, March 5, 2024*, 8 March 2024; SNHR, *Man named Abdul Latif Tou'ma arrested by regime personnel in Damascus city, March 9, 2024*, 19 March 2024; SNHR, *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces' arrest of two women and two boys in Damascus city on June 2, 2024*, 5 June 2024; SNHR, *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces for detention, fatal torture of a refugee forcibly deported from Lebanon*, 28 June 2024; SJAC, *Human Rights Violations in Syria - August 2024*, 10 October 2024; SJAC, *Human Rights Violations in Syria - October 2024*, 19 November 2024.

According to the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), between September 2023 and August 2024 (a period almost identical to the reporting period covered by this COI Information Report), the SNHR had documented eight civilian deaths in the Damascus Governorate.³²⁵ Throughout 2023, the SNHR documented six civilian deaths in Damascus.³²⁶ There had been 3 such instances in 2022.³²⁷

ACLED data show fluctuating numbers of recorded violent incidents in Damascus for the reporting period (beginning in the third quarter of 2023, referred to as 2023-Q3 in the charts below) and in previous years, with figures that are relatively low compared to other Syrian provinces. No clear trend was observed.³²⁸

Number of incidents³²⁹



According to ACLED, the violent incidents recorded by the organisation could be attributed primarily to government forces and security services, unidentified armed groups and the Israeli army. The following provides an overview of several trends and incidents of violence during the reporting period. This list is by no means exhaustive.

During the reporting period, ACLED recorded several incidents of violence in Damascus as 'violence against civilians'. According to ACLED data, these incidents included cases of arbitrary arrests, sometimes followed by torture in detention resulting in death, at the hands of the Syrian authorities.³³⁰ It should be noted that the limited number of cases of these human rights violations against civilians recorded by ACLED represents an under-reporting of the actual situation, given the ongoing patterns of arbitrary arrests and disappearances in the government-controlled area, as well as widespread torture and deaths in prisons and detention centres run by the Syrian authorities, as reported by the UN and human rights organisations (see Section 1.11).³³¹

³²⁵ EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 133.

³²⁶ SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 11.

³²⁷ SNHR, *1,057 civilians, including 251 children, 94 women, and 133 victims who died due to torture, were documented killed in Syria, in 2022*, 1 January 2023, p. 10.

³²⁸ ACLED, data via *ACLED Access Portal*, accessed 11 December 2024 (data updated through 6 December 2024). Selected criteria: Period from: 2021-Q2 | Through: 2024-Q4 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Damascus.

³²⁹ Many of the incidents that ACLED coded as 'battles' in the provinces of Damascus and Rural Damascus refer to Israeli (and other) airstrikes, which are also coded as 'remote violence', depending on context. A description of ACLED's methodology is available at: ACLED, *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) Codebook*, 3 October 2024, [URL](#).

³³⁰ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Damascus.

³³¹ OHCHR, *Torture allegations continue in Syria despite ICJ order: UN expert*, 1 July 2024; HRW, *Syrians fleeing Lebanon risk repression upon return. Arrests, torture, deaths in custody persist*, 30 October 2024.

According to the SNHR, on 2 June 2024, two women and two underage boys from Kanaker (in the Rural Damascus Governorate) were arrested in Damascus during the reporting period. The SNHR reported that, according to local sources, they had been arrested to be used as hostages to put pressure on a relative to surrender to the authorities.³³²

There were also reports of Syrians returning from Lebanon who were arrested in Damascus at hotels or bus stations while travelling through to their hometowns.³³³

Israeli airstrikes were frequently recorded (ACLEED recorded some of these as combat and others as explosions/remote violence).³³⁴ The following is a non-exhaustive list of Israeli airstrikes (actual or alleged) during the reporting period.

During the night of 6–7 August 2023, Israel reportedly carried out missile strikes on several locations near Damascus. According to Syrian state media, at least four Syrian soldiers were killed, and four others were injured.³³⁵

On 20 January 2024, Israel reportedly carried out an airstrike on a building in the Mezzeh district, killing (according to the IRGC) five members of an IRGC unit, as well as an unknown number of Syrian soldiers.³³⁶

On 21 February 2024, Israel reportedly carried out an airstrike on a residential complex in Kafr Sousa, killing two people, according to Syrian state media. It was unclear whether the victims were civilians.³³⁷

On 1 April 2024, Israel reportedly carried out an airstrike on an Iranian consulate building, located next to the Iranian embassy in Mezzeh. It has been reported that sixteen people were killed, including an IRGC general, other senior Iranian officers, and two civilians.³³⁸

On 14 July 2024, Israel carried out airstrikes on Kafr Sousa and other locations, targeting an underground site. According to Syrian state media, one soldier was killed in the attacks. According to other sources, at least five people were killed in Kafr Sousa. This time, the IDF confirmed that it had carried out strikes, reporting that it had targeted a command centre and other sites, including air defence installations and other military infrastructure, in response to a drone attack on Israel launched from Syrian territory.³³⁹

³³² SNHR, *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces' arrest of two women and two boys in Damascus City on June 2, 2024*, 5 June 2024.

³³³ X.com, *Al-Jumhuriya English*, 7 October 2024, [URL](#); SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 8; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, 12 November 2024.

³³⁴ Many of the incidents that ACLEED coded as 'battles' in the provinces of Damascus and Rural Damascus refer to Israeli (and other) airstrikes, which are also coded as 'remote violence', depending on context. A description of ACLEED's methodology is available at: ACLEED, *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLEED) Codebook*, 3 October 2024, [URL](#).

³³⁵ Al Jazeera, *Four Syrian soldiers killed in Israeli missile attack: report*, 7 August 2023.

³³⁶ Al Jazeera, *Iran's IRGC says 5 members killed in Israeli attack on Syria's Damascus*, 20 January 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, January 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

³³⁷ Al Jazeera, *Israeli air strikes kills two people in Syria's capital: State media*, 21 February 2024.

³³⁸ AP News, *Israeli strike on Iran's consulate in Syria killed 2 generals and 5 other officers, Iran says*, 2 April 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/57/86*, 12 August 2024, Section 47.

³³⁹ BBC Monitoring, *Syria says soldier killed in Israeli strikes on military sites, residence*, 14 July 2024; The National, *Israel strikes 'security square' in Damascus in latest Gaza war spillover*, 14 July 2024.

On 1 October 2024, Israel reportedly carried out airstrikes in Mezzeh, killing three civilians, including a TV presenter from the state news agency SANA, according to Syrian state media.³⁴⁰

On 8 October 2024, Israel reportedly carried out an airstrike on a residential complex in Mezzeh. According to Syrian state media, at least seven civilians were killed, including women and children.³⁴¹

On 21 October 2024, Israel carried out a guided missile strike on a car in Mezzeh. According to the IDF, a Hezbollah commander responsible for the transfer of Iranian weapons to the group was killed in the operation.³⁴²

1.19.2 Rural Damascus

The Rural Damascus Governorate is located in south-western Syria. The province stretches from the Lebanese border in the west to the Jordanian border in the east, covering an area of 26,268 km².³⁴³ Rural Damascus surrounds the separate Damascus Governorate, which is described above (see Sub-section 1.19.1). According to UNOCHA, the province had a population of 3,386,173 in July 2023, including 985,957 internally displaced persons.³⁴⁴

Rural Damascus was originally a largely agricultural province, where rapid, unplanned urbanisation took place in the Ghouta region surrounding Damascus in the few decades leading up to the outbreak of the conflict in 2011. These largely Sunni suburbs of the capital became strongholds for protest and military activity against Assad early in the conflict. Until 2018, Eastern Ghouta, which lies to the east of central Damascus, was one of the largest and most heavily fortified enclaves in Syria controlled by armed opposition groups.³⁴⁵ Following a years-long siege of the enclave, its ultimate recapture in 2018 by government forces and affiliated militias – backed by Russian airstrikes – was accompanied by widespread destruction and displacement.³⁴⁶ As far as is known, no large-scale reconstruction had taken place in this region or other former opposition-held areas in Rural Damascus by the end of the reporting period. In general, basic amenities were lacking.³⁴⁷

Since 2018, the entire province has been under government control, except for a strip of land in the far south-east, bordering the province of Homs and Jordan. This strip was part of the US-controlled 'deconfliction zone' surrounding the American military base in al-Tanf (see Sub-section 1.19.8).³⁴⁸ A wide range of armed groups affiliated with the Assad government were active in the province: government forces

³⁴⁰ Al Jazeera, *Israeli strikes kill three civilians in Syria's Damascus, state TV says*, 1 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Syria TV presenter among three killed in Israeli strikes on Damascus*, 1 October 2024.

³⁴¹ BBC Monitoring, *Embassy says no Iranians hurt in Damascus strike*, 8 October 2024; Reuters, *Israeli strike on residential building in Syria's Damascus kills seven civilians, state media says*, 9 October 2024.

³⁴² BBC Monitoring, *Two 'civilians' killed in suspected Israeli strike on Syrian capital*, 21 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian media speculate on targets of Mezzeh attack*, 22 October 2024; Al Jazeera, *Israel strikes Syrian capital Damascus, military site near Homs*, 24 October 2024.

³⁴³ UNOCHA, *Home; Datasets; Syrian Arab Republic – Subnational administrative boundaries - SYR_AdminBoundaries_TabularData.xlsx (modified: 4 April 2023)*, accessed 11 December 2024.

³⁴⁴ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024, p. 9.

³⁴⁵ The Century Foundation, *Into the tunnels*, 21 December 2016, pp. 4-6; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Going south in East Ghouta*, 17 February 2017.

³⁴⁶ OHCHR, *UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria: The siege and recapture of eastern Ghouta marked by war crimes, crimes against humanity*, 20 June 2018; Atlantic Council, *Breaking Ghouta*, September 2018.

³⁴⁷ Syria Direct, *Darayya's al-Khalij neighborhood 'unoccupied, destroyed houses' as hopes of return fade seven years into regime control*, 2 June 2023; STJ, *Syria: Role of international agreements in forced displacement (2). The four towns agreement: Demographic change on a sectarian basis*, 17 October 2023, p. 13; North Press Agency, *Syria's Ghouta residents battle worsening living conditions*, 20 February 2024; Enab Baladi, *Harasta's devastation bears witness to battles eight years after displacement*, 5 March 2024; Syria Direct, *'Exacerbating the crisis, not managing it': Basic services scarce in Moadamiyat al-Sham*, 2 September 2024; MEI, *Inside Damascus's reconstruction lab: Navigating the framework of return and recovery*, 31 October 2024, pp. 4-5; confidential source, 29 October 2024.

³⁴⁸ Jusoor for Studies, *Map of foreign forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024.

(including the Fourth Division); intelligence and security services; the Iranian IRGC; Hezbollah; other Iran-backed (foreign) militias; and (to a lesser extent) the Russian army.³⁴⁹ According to one report, many checkpoints are still staffed by government forces, as well as by intelligence and security services scattered across Douma – the main city in the former opposition enclave of Eastern Ghouta, where civilians continue to face intimidation and extortion.³⁵⁰

According to the EUAA, the SNHR had documented fifteen civilian deaths in the Rural Damascus Governorate between September 2023 and August 2024.³⁵¹ For 2023 as a whole, the SNHR had documented seventeen civilian deaths in the province.³⁵² There had been 80 such instances in 2022.³⁵³

Data from ACLED show an increase in violent incidents recorded in Rural Damascus in early 2022. The figures continued to fluctuate during the reporting period, and no clear trend was apparent.³⁵⁴

³⁴⁹ Jusoor for Studies, *Map of foreign forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Security Situation*, 22 October 2024, pp. 136-137.

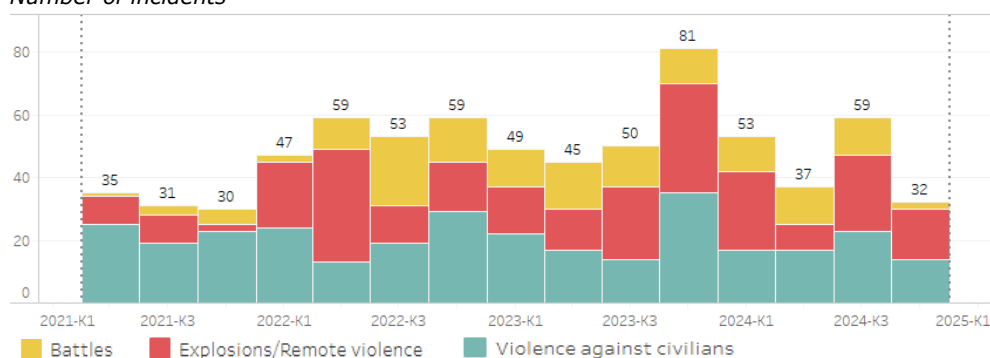
³⁵⁰ North Press Agency, *Syria's Ghouta residents battle worsening living conditions*, 20 February 2024.

³⁵¹ EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 141.

³⁵² SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 11.

³⁵³ SNHR, *1,057 civilians, including 251 children, 94 women, and 133 victims who died due to torture, were documented killed in Syria, in 2022*, 1 January 2023, p. 10.

³⁵⁴ ACLED, data via *ACLEDAccess Portal*, accessed 11 December 2024 (data updated through 6 December 2024). Selected criteria: Period from: 2021-Q2 | Through: 2024-Q4 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Rural Damascus.

Number of incidents

The incidents recorded by ACLED during the reporting period were spread across the entire western half of the province, including the suburbs of Damascus, areas bordering the southern province of Daraa, and areas along the border with Lebanon. In the south-eastern part of Rural Damascus, ACLED recorded significantly fewer incidents. This is a very sparsely populated area, which gives way to desert-like terrain towards the Jordanian border.³⁵⁵

According to ACLED, the violent incidents recorded by the organisation could be attributed primarily to government forces and affiliated armed actors, unidentified armed groups and the Israeli army. The following provides an overview of several trends and incidents of violence during the reporting period. This list is by no means exhaustive.

The Israeli army reportedly carried out airstrikes on a regular basis against IRGC, Hezbollah and affiliated targets near Damascus (see Sub-section 1.19.1), in the south of the province, as well as along the border with Lebanon.³⁵⁶ During the reporting period, ACLED recorded 90 actual or alleged Israeli attacks (with each recorded incident often involving multiple airstrikes aimed at different targets) in Rural Damascus, resulting in 132 deaths.³⁵⁷ According to data compiled by experts at the Carnegie Middle East Center, between 2013 and 2024, Rural Damascus was by far the province that was most affected by Israeli airstrikes: more than three times as many (100) as the second-most affected province, Quneitra (30).³⁵⁸ According to these figures, the number of airstrikes has increased every year since 2019.³⁵⁹ Alleged Israeli airstrikes also hit Damascus International Airport, located south-east of the capital, in November 2023, resulting in the temporary closure of

³⁵⁵ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Rural Damascus.

³⁵⁶ ICG, *Golan Heights and South/West Syria*, 3 June 2024; Reuters, *Eyeing showdown with Hezbollah, Israel presses shadow campaign in Syria*, 10 June 2024; Reuters, *Syria says soldier killed, three wounded in Israeli strikes*, 14 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *War monitor reports Israeli strikes on Hezbollah-controlled areas in Syria*, 3 August 2024.

³⁵⁷ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles, Explosions/Remote violence, Violence against civilians | Actor1: Military Forces of Israel (2022-) | Country: Syria | Admin1: Rural Damascus.

³⁵⁸ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Why Iranian entrenchment in southern Syria worries neighboring countries*, 21 March 2024, p. 5.

³⁵⁹ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Why Iranian entrenchment in southern Syria worries neighboring countries*, 21 March 2024, p. 6.

the airport.³⁶⁰ This hampered both civil aviation and the UN's humanitarian operations.³⁶¹

Several attacks targeted locations in Sayyida Zeinab, south of Damascus, and west of the airport.³⁶² This densely populated district, which is home to a large Shia community, was known for the presence of the IRGC and Iran-backed (Shia) militias (such as Hezbollah).³⁶³ For example, in December 2023, a reported Israeli airstrike resulted in the death of IRGC Brigadier General Sayyed Razi Mousavi, who was one of the IRGC's most senior commanders in Syria.³⁶⁴

There were also several airstrikes, which multiple sources attributed to Israel, targeting vehicles on the Damascus–Beirut route, between the capital and the Lebanese border, with targets reportedly including individuals linked to Hezbollah.³⁶⁵

According to ACLED data, dozens of violent incidents with unknown perpetrators took place throughout the reporting period.³⁶⁶ Most of these incidents involved attacks or assaults using light weapons against government forces or armed groups affiliated with them, as well as the killing of actual or alleged collaborators. There were also civilian casualties, including children, in Rural Damascus due to landmines and explosive remnants of war.³⁶⁷

In various parts of Rural Damascus, the local security situation was fragile, and local conflicts occasionally escalated into armed clashes between local groups and government forces.³⁶⁸ For example, in August 2023, fighting broke out in Zakia (a town south of Damascus) between local residents and a militia affiliated with the Fourth Division. According to reports on pro-opposition websites, this happened after a man had been shot by this militia. Five people were reportedly killed in this fighting. In October 2024, clashes broke out once again between members of the Fourth Division or affiliated militias and local residents of the town. The immediate trigger was reportedly the arrest of two young men.³⁶⁹ In Kanaker, not far from Zakia, tensions also escalated into confrontations between armed residents and government forces in the summer of 2024. Armed clashes had already taken place in June 2024. In July 2024, local armed groups reportedly attacked government

³⁶⁰ Reuters, *Syria says Israel strike puts Damascus airport out of service*, 26 November 2023; UN, *De-escalation needed as region already in historic crisis, Deputy Special Envoy for Syria tells Security Council, urging confidence-building measures*, 28 November 2023; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, November 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

³⁶¹ UN, *Violence raging 'in all theatres of Syria', UN Special Envoy tells Security Council, urging return to political track inclusive of all actors, all issues*, 21 December 2023; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024, Section 5.

³⁶² The Guardian, *Two Revolutionary Guards members killed by Israeli strike in Syria, says Iran*, 2 December 2023; Al Jazeera, *Israeli air strike in Syria kills top Iranian military adviser*, 25 December 2023; The Guardian, *Several people killed in Israeli strikes on Iran-linked site in Syria*, 29 January 2024; Enab Baladi, *Israeli airstrikes target Damascus and Aleppo*, 29 March 2024; Reuters, *Israel says it struck Hezbollah target near Damascus, Syria says civilian sites hit*, 4 November 2024.

³⁶³ The New Arab, *Syria quarantines town known to house pro-regime foreign fighters, but insists Covid-19 cases low*, 4 April 2020; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Why Iranian entrenchment in southern Syria worries neighboring countries*, 21 March 2024, p. 5; Reuters, *Israel says it struck Hezbollah target near Damascus, Syria says civilian sites hit*, 4 November 2024.

³⁶⁴ Al Jazeera, *Israeli air strike in Syria kills top Iranian military adviser*, 25 December 2023.

³⁶⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Hezbollah responds after senior member killed in Israeli strike*, 10 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Israeli strikes reported near Damascus, four killed*, 28 August 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian media react to Israeli strikes on Syria-Lebanon border*, 29 August 2024.

³⁶⁶ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles, Explosions/Remote violence, Violence against civilians | Actor1: Unidentified Armed Group (Syria) | Country: Syria | Admin1: Rural Damascus.

³⁶⁷ SNHR, *Two children named Walid al-Sfouq and Mohammad al-Dleim killed by war remnants of unidentified source in E. Rural Damascus, January 25, 2024*, 28 January 2024; SOHR, *In two separate incidents in less than 24 hours. Six children killed in explosion of war remnants in regime-held areas*, 19 June 2024; SNHR, *Man killed, two others injured by a landmine of unidentified source in E. Rural Damascus, August 11, 2024*, 14 August 2024.

³⁶⁸ Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Monthly briefing on the events of the Syrian scene. July 2024*, 21 August 2024.

³⁶⁹ BBC Monitoring, *Syrian army-linked militia, locals clash in Rif Dimashq – media*, 30 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Iran-backed Syrian forces, locals reportedly clash south of Damascus*, 20 October 2024.

positions following arrests in the city. Government forces then fired several artillery shells at the city. Three civilians were killed in the incident.³⁷⁰

According to various reports, in April 2024, two people were killed in an attack in Douma targeting members of a security service.³⁷¹

There were also reports of widespread crime in Rural Damascus (see Section 1.12). Killings, abductions and other incidents reportedly occur on a regular basis.³⁷²

During the reporting period, there were regular reports of arrest campaigns by the Syrian authorities, in which dozens of civilians were reportedly detained.³⁷³ According to various sources, on 3 September 2024, around two hundred civilians, including women and children, were arrested at an official checkpoint outside Damascus, along the M5 motorway linking Damascus with the north. The group from Damascus and Rural Damascus had been travelling back by bus from a visit to relatives in an area controlled by armed opposition groups in north-western Syria, having also passed through the SDF area.³⁷⁴ According to *Enab Baladi*, this incident involved a route organised by transport companies between the three areas of control, with buses running back and forth on a weekly basis.³⁷⁵ At the time of writing, it was not clear whether the authorities had released any individuals. According to pro-opposition websites, the relatives of those arrested whom they contacted were afraid to share any information for security reasons.³⁷⁶ According to the SNHR, there were also widespread arrests of civilians in the first half of 2024 for evading military (or reserve) service, including in Rural Damascus.³⁷⁷ In 2023, the SNHR further documented arrests of civilians who had regularised their status at an earlier stage (also known as individual reconciliation).³⁷⁸ The organisation cited Rural Damascus as one of the four provinces in which these arrests were most frequent.³⁷⁹

According to human rights organisations, Syrians returning to Syria from Lebanon after fleeing Israeli airstrikes were also arrested in Rural Damascus.³⁸⁰ This took place at sites including official and unofficial border crossings, checkpoints along roads, and hotels where returning Syrians were staying (at least temporarily).³⁸¹ According to the SNHR, the Syrian authorities had set up new checkpoints along the usual travel routes from Lebanon.³⁸² Additional information on returning from abroad is provided in Chapter 7.

³⁷⁰ SNHR, *Three civilians, including a child, killed in a ground regime attack in W. Rural Damascus, July 2, 2024*, 3 July 2024; SOHR, *Amid concerns about storming Kanaker town. Regime forces send military reinforcement to checkpoints in Rif Dimashq*, 4 July 2024; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Monthly briefing on the events of the Syrian scene. July 2024*, 21 August 2024.

³⁷¹ SOHR, *New assassination. Unidentified gunmen shoot officer and member of state security branch dead in Douma city*, 17 April 2024; X.com, *QalaatAlMudiq*, 17 April 2024, [URL](#).

³⁷² Al-Jumhuriya, *Teenagers in Damascus, The dead ends facing Syria's youth*, 16 August 2024; Le Monde, *Syrian Diaries, Journey through a shattered country*, 15 September 2024; confidential source, 29 October 2024.

³⁷³ The New Arab, *200 Syrians missing after arrest by regime forces near Damascus*, 8 September 2024; SOHR, *Ongoing arrest campaigns. Joint security patrol of regime security services arrest four young men in Rif Dimashq*, 5 November 2024.

³⁷⁴ Enab Baladi, *Around 200 civilians detained near Damascus after crossing three control zones*, 7 September 2024; The New Arab, *200 Syrians missing after arrest by regime forces near Damascus*, 8 September 2024.

³⁷⁵ Enab Baladi, *Around 200 civilians detained near Damascus after crossing three control zones*, 7 September 2024.

³⁷⁶ Enab Baladi, *Around 200 civilians detained near Damascus after crossing three control zones*, 7 September 2024; Levant 24, *Mass arrests following 'crime' of visiting liberated Syria*, 8 September 2024.

³⁷⁷ SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 12.

³⁷⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, pp. 17-18.

³⁷⁹ SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023*, 2 January 2024, p. 4.

³⁸⁰ SNHR, *Three men arrested by Syrian regime forces after returning from Lebanon, October 9, 2024*, 11 October 2024; HRW, *Syrians fleeing Lebanon risk repression upon return*, 30 October 2024.

³⁸¹ SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 5-6; HRW, *Syrians fleeing Lebanon risk repression upon return*, 30 October 2024.

³⁸² HRW, *Syrians fleeing Lebanon risk repression upon return*, 30 October 2024.

1.19.3 Quneitra

Quneitra is located in the far south-west of Syria, bordering Israel and Lebanon. According to data from UNOCHA, this province covers an area of 1,718 square kilometres.³⁸³ According to UNOCHA, the province had a population of 149,326 in July 2023, including 3,373 internally displaced persons.³⁸⁴

The eastern part of the province belonged to the government-controlled territory. According to multiple sources, the IRGC and Hezbollah were also present in that area, which is partly situated at high altitude and is therefore of strategic importance in relation to Israel.³⁸⁵ There were also Russian army observation posts.³⁸⁶ The IDF has occupied the western part of the province since 1967, when Israel captured the strategic Golan Heights.³⁸⁷ In addition, there was an 80-kilometre-long demilitarised buffer zone along the demarcation line, which is monitored by UN troops from the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF).³⁸⁸

During the reporting period, there were conflicting reports regarding the extent of Hezbollah's presence in the government-controlled part of Quneitra. Towards the end of 2023, there were initial reports that Iran-backed militias were reinforcing their positions in Quneitra.³⁸⁹ Subsequently, in 2024, there were reports that the IRGC and Hezbollah had withdrawn from the province following actual or alleged Israeli attacks.³⁹⁰ According to various sources, however, despite the sharp increase in attacks against the group, Hezbollah was reportedly still present in Quneitra and western Daraa, along the Golan Heights, by the end of the reporting period.³⁹¹

Since 2018, when government forces recaptured the parts of the province controlled by armed opposition groups, the security situation in Quneitra has been characterised primarily by small-scale violence between local armed groups and by actual or alleged Israeli attacks. During the reporting period, however, the security situation deteriorated following the escalation of the war between Israel and Hezbollah, resulting in a significant increase in violent incidents.³⁹²

The EUAA stated that the SNHR had documented one civilian death in the province of Quneitra between September 2023 and August 2024.³⁹³ For 2023 as a whole, the SNHR had documented five civilian deaths in the province.³⁹⁴ In 2022, there was one.³⁹⁵

³⁸³ UNOCHA, *Home; Datasets; Syrian Arab Republic – Subnational administrative boundaries – SYR_AdminBoundaries_TabularData.xlsx* (modified: 4 April 2023), accessed 11 December 2024.

³⁸⁴ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview* (February 2024), 3 March 2024, p. 9.

³⁸⁵ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Why Iranian entrenchment in southern Syria worries neighboring countries*, 21 March 2024, pp. 1, 3-4; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: South Syria* (July 2024), 31 July 2024.

³⁸⁶ Enab Baladi, *Russia establishes third military post on borders of occupied Golan Heights*, 2 April 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: South Syria*, 31 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Joint Russia-Syrian military training reported on Golan Heights*, 21 October 2024.

³⁸⁷ BBC, *Golan Heights profile*, 29 August 2023.

³⁸⁸ Al Jazeera, *Israel army says it hit Syrian 'structures' in Golan Heights*, 21 September 2023.

³⁸⁹ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, October 2023*, URL, accessed 13 December 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. January 2024*, 12 February 2024.

³⁹⁰ Al-Monitor, *Iran cuts Syria presence after strikes blamed on Israel: monitor*, 24 April 2024; Syria Direct, *Will Iran's proxies in Syria mobilize in support of Hezbollah?*, 3 October 2024.

³⁹¹ MEI, *Assad and Hezbollah hunker down in Syria*, 15 November 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. October 2024*, 5 November 2024.

³⁹² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, August 2023, p. 26; Enab Baladi, *Residents of Quneitra fear Israeli army entry*, 7 October 2024.

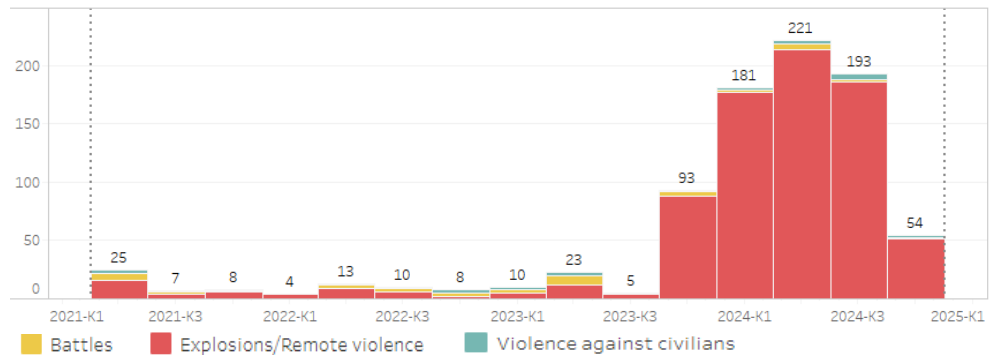
³⁹³ EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 161.

³⁹⁴ SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 11.

³⁹⁵ SNHR, *1,057 civilians, including 251 children, 94 women, and 133 victims who died due to torture, were documented killed in Syria, in 2022*, 1 January 2023, p. 10.

As shown by ACLED data, there was a sharp rise in the number of violent incidents recorded in Quneitra during the reporting period, starting from the final quarter of 2023:³⁹⁶

Number of incidents



By far the majority of incidents recorded by ACLED in Quneitra during the reporting period involved explosions and remote violence. An overview of the geographic distribution of these incidents shows that they occurred in all parts of the province. According to ACLED, the airstrikes, drone attacks and artillery fire were carried out primarily by the IDF and were directed against Hezbollah and affiliated groups.

In addition, unidentified armed groups regularly carried out attacks and assassinations in Quneitra, targeting checkpoints and members of the government’s military and security apparatus, as well as former members of armed opposition groups.³⁹⁷

The following provides a summary of several violent incidents during the reporting period. This list is by no means exhaustive.

On 8 December 2023, three members of Hezbollah and a Syrian affiliated with them were reportedly killed in an alleged Israeli drone strike in the town of Madinat al-Ba’ath (Ba’ath City).³⁹⁸

On 12 September 2024, two people were reportedly killed in a drone strike on a car on the road from Quneitra to Damascus. According to the SOHR, they were members of Hezbollah.³⁹⁹

On 9 October 2024, the IDF reportedly carried out an airstrike on the outskirts of the city of Quneitra, killing one Syrian police officer and injuring another.⁴⁰⁰

Although the actual or alleged Israeli activities in Quneitra were directed against Hezbollah and affiliated groups, Israeli forces are reported to have, in some cases, also fired on Syrian civilians approaching the border and detained civilians for

³⁹⁶ ACLED, data via *ACLED Access Portal*, accessed 11 December 2024 (data updated through 6 December 2024). Selected criteria: Period from: 2021-Q2 | Through: 2024-Q4 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Quneitra.
³⁹⁷ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. January 2024*, 12 February 2024; UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic. Humanitarian overview: As Sweida, Dar’a and Quneitra Governorates*, 21 March 2024; ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Actor1: Unidentified Armed Group (Syria) | Country: Syria | Admin1: Quneitra; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria – October 2024*, 5 November 2024.
³⁹⁸ Al Arabiya, *Israeli drone strike kills four pro-Hezbollah fighters in Syria: Monitor*, 8 December 2023; Reuters, *Israeli drone strike in Syria killed three Hezbollah members*, 9 December 2024.
³⁹⁹ Asharq Al-Awsat, *Israeli strike in Syria’s Quneitra kills two*, 12 September 2024; BBC Monitoring, *‘Israeli drone strike’ in Syria kills two*, 12 September 2024.
⁴⁰⁰ BBC Monitoring, *Two Syrian police officers reported hit in Israeli strikes on Quneitra*, 9 October 2024.

questioning before returning them across the border to Syria.⁴⁰¹ According to UNDOF, Israeli military vehicles and personnel entered the buffer zone during the reporting period. The IDF reportedly was also clearing mines, digging trenches and moving fences.⁴⁰²

1.19.4 Daraa

Daraa is located in the far south of Syria. It borders Jordan. According to data from UNOCHA, the province covers an area of 3,833 km².⁴⁰³ According to UNOCHA, the province had a population of 1,075,114 in July 2023, including 66,868 internally displaced persons.⁴⁰⁴

Daraa was of particular strategic importance due to its location on the M5 motorway, which links Damascus with Amman in Jordan. The first large-scale demonstrations against the government took place in the city of Daraa in 2011. The city is regarded as the cradle of the Syrian revolution.⁴⁰⁵

Between 2011 and 2018, parts of Daraa were controlled by armed opposition groups. From 2018, the entire province has once again been in the government-controlled area. The authorities have nevertheless failed to regain effective control across the entire province. During the reporting period, Daraa remained fragmented: local armed groups continued to exercise de facto control over large parts of the province, where they controlled villages and cities with the central government unable to intervene.⁴⁰⁶ According to one source, more than two hundred armed groups and gangs contributed to the high degree of power fragmentation.⁴⁰⁷ Some of these groups were affiliated with the authorities to varying degrees, and others were not. In April 2024, Enab Baladi reported that factions affiliated with the 'Central Committees' were controlling large portions of the rural areas in the west of Daraa, and that the factions of the Eighth Brigade held a dominant position in the east.⁴⁰⁸ The government has reportedly been playing only a limited role in the administration of the city of Daraa. For example, the only police station in Daraa al-Balad (the southern part of the city) is said to be involved primarily with administrative matters and to have no authority outside the station itself, according to reports by the independent Syrian media organisation *Syria*

⁴⁰¹ SOHR, *Al-Quneitra. Israeli forces cross border with occupied Syrian Golan and arrest civilian in southern countryside*, 19 July 2024; Enab Baladi, *Expansion or securing borders. Israel moves in Quneitra, Damascus turns a blind eye*, 28 October 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. October 2024*, 5 November 2024.

⁴⁰² Reuters, *Israel's demining near Golan signals wider front against Hezbollah, sources say*, 15 October 2024; SNHR, *SNHR condemns Israeli occupation of Syrian lands in Quneitra in Syrian Golan since September 15, 2024*, 15 October 2024; BBC, *Israeli construction along buffer zone with Syria violates ceasefire, UN says*, 13 November 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. October 2024*, 5 November 2024.

⁴⁰³ UNOCHA, *Home; Datasets; Syrian Arab Republic – Subnational administrative boundaries - SYR_AdminBoundaries_TabularData.xlsx (modified: 4 April 2023)*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024.

⁴⁰⁴ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024, p. 9.

⁴⁰⁵ International IDEA, *Explainer: Syria's 2024 legislative elections*, 8 July 2024; Chatham House, *The illusion of legitimacy: unveiling Syria's sham elections*, 16 July 2024.

⁴⁰⁶ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Why Iranian entrenchment in southern Syria worries neighboring countries*, 21 March 2024; Syria Direct, *The short arm of the law: Daraa police absent or constrained*, 11 July 2024; FP, *Another uprising has started in Syria*, 18 July 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: South Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, pp. 6-7; BBC Monitoring, *Six injured in roadside bomb attack on governor's convoy in Syria's Deraa*, 5 September 2024; Enab Baladi, *Imposed by international interests and managed by local forces Daraa: Stuck in stalemate despite control changes*, 15 September 2024; Abdullah al-Jabassini, *Syria Policy Brief: Understanding violence in postwar southern Syria*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, November 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁴⁰⁷ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁴⁰⁸ Enab Baladi, *Two military streams complicate security situation in southern Syria*, 16 January 2024; Enab Baladi, *Central Committees in the west and Eighth Brigade in the east, Who controls Daraa?*, 8 April 2024; Enab Baladi, *Imposed by international interests and managed by local forces Daraa: Stuck in stalemate despite control changes*, 15 September 2024.

Direct.⁴⁰⁹ Militias linked to Iran and the Russian army also had a presence in Daraa, particularly in the west and south.⁴¹⁰

Due to the fragmentation, the security situation in Daraa continued to be characterised by unrest and a high degree of instability and insecurity during the current reporting period.⁴¹¹ Multiple sources described the situation with terms such as 'chaos and unrest', 'a steadily deteriorating security situation', 'a tense and uncertain situation', 'a complete lack of security', 'a total security vacuum' and 'endemic social violence'.⁴¹² Compared to other provinces, Daraa experienced many civilian deaths. Furthermore, the number of civilian fatalities documented by the SNHR rose in 2023 compared to the previous year. In 2022, the SNHR documented 207 civilian deaths in Daraa. Only Aleppo had more civilian deaths that year.⁴¹³ In 2023, the SNHR documented 225 civilian deaths in Daraa. This made Daraa the deadliest province in the country for civilians. The SNHR attributed the vast majority of civilian deaths to 'unidentified actors'.⁴¹⁴ In the first half of 2024, there were still many civilian deaths in Daraa: 114 were recorded. That was once again the highest figure in Syria, accounting for around 27% of the total number of recorded civilian deaths.⁴¹⁵ According to the EUAA, the SNHR documented 214 civilian deaths in Daraa between September 2023 and August 2024.⁴¹⁶

Data from ACLED show the following trend in the number of violent incidents recorded in Daraa:⁴¹⁷

⁴⁰⁹ Syria Direct, *The short arm of the law: Daraa police absent or constrained*, 11 July 2024.

⁴¹⁰ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Why Iranian entrenchment in southern Syria worries neighboring countries*, 21 March 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: South Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024; Jusoor, *Map of Foreign Forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024.

⁴¹¹ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Why Iranian entrenchment in southern Syria worries neighboring countries*, 21 March 2024; Syria Direct, *The short arm of the law: Daraa police absent or constrained*, 11 July 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: South Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, pp. 6-7; BBC Monitoring, *Six injured in roadside bomb attack on governor's convoy in Syria's Deraa*, 5 September 2024; Enab Baladi, *Imposed by international interests and managed by local forces Daraa: Stuck in stalemate despite control changes*, 15 September 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. October 2024*, 5 November 2024; Abdullah al-Jabassini, *Syria Policy Brief: Understanding violence in postwar southern Syria*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, November 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁴¹² ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. March 2024*, 7 April 2024; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Why Iranian entrenchment in southern Syria worries neighboring countries*, 21 March 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, pp. 6-7; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. September 2024*, 23 October 2024; Abdullah al-Jabassini, *Syria Policy Brief: Understanding violence in postwar southern Syria*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, November 2024.

⁴¹³ SNHR, *1,057 civilians, including 251 children, 94 women, and 133 victims who died due to torture, were documented killed in Syria, in 2022*, 1 January 2023, p. 10.

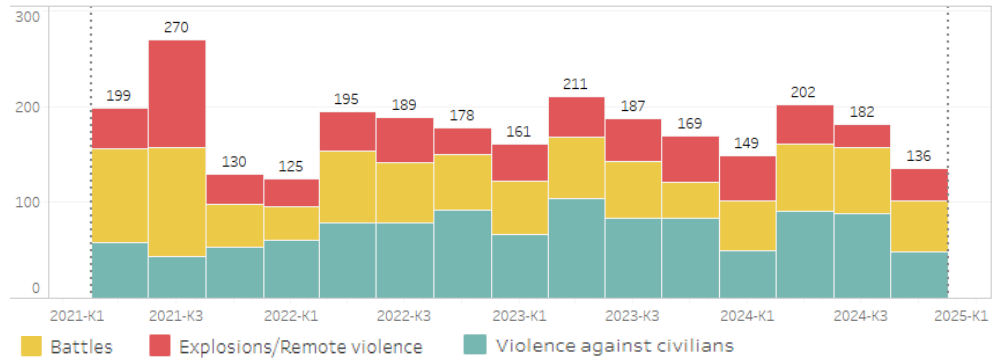
⁴¹⁴ SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 11.

⁴¹⁵ SNHR, *429 civilian deaths, including 65 children and 38 women, as well as 53 deaths due to torture, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024*, 1 July 2024, pp. 8-9.

⁴¹⁶ EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 67.

⁴¹⁷ ACLED, data via *ACLED Access Portal*, accessed 11 December 2024 (data updated through 6 December 2024). Selected criteria: Period from: 2021-Q2 | Through: 2024-Q4 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Dara.

Number of incidents



Daraa is divided into three districts. To the north lies al-Sanamayn, with Izra in the centre and, to the south, the Daraa district, which is home to the provincial capital, Daraa. During the reporting period, ACLED recorded the highest number of violent incidents in Daraa (420), followed by Izra (339) and al-Sanamayn (136). The violent incidents were attributed to a multitude of armed groups and army units. In the vast majority of cases, however, it was not sufficiently clear which group was responsible for the violence: Of the 895 incidents it recorded during the reporting period, ACLED attributed 670 to ‘unknown actors’.⁴¹⁸

The following is a summary of a number of trends and incidents of violence during the reporting period. This list is by no means exhaustive.

During the reporting period, there were mutual attacks in Daraa between pro-government forces and armed groups, fighting between rival armed groups – including violence between tribal militias – and attacks involving improvised explosive devices (IED), drug-related violence, the presence of ISIS and security operations carried out by pro-government forces. In addition, Daraa struggled with widespread crime.⁴¹⁹

Pro-government forces carried out attacks in Daraa against individuals and groups affiliated with the armed opposition. The two incidents that were most prominent during the reporting period, and which were described by UNCOI and other entities, took place in January and April 2024, respectively.

On 8 January 2024, fighters from the Eighth Brigade and the government army surrounded the town of al-Yadudah and then attacked the home of an opposition leader there. At least two civilians were killed in the attack.⁴²⁰

On 7 April 2024, a militia affiliated with the government carried out house raids in al-Sanamayn. Militia members executed ten civilians, including seven men, one woman and two children. In addition, nine members of an opposition group were killed, including two minors. Government forces, who were standing about fifty

⁴¹⁸ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Daraa.

⁴¹⁹ Abdullah al-Jabassini, *Territorial fragmentation, violence, and local governance in Syria’s Daraa governorate*, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 5 August 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: South Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, pp. 6-7; North Press Agency, *Clashes in Syria’s Daraa leave 6 casualties*, 20 August 2024; North Press Agency, *IED blast in Syria’s Daraa kills, injures government soldiers*, 14 October 2024; Abdullah al-Jabassini, *Syria Policy Brief: Understanding violence in postwar southern Syria*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, November 2024.

⁴²⁰ Enab Baladi, *Two military streams complicate security situation in southern Syria*, 16 January 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, pp. 6-7.

metres away, reportedly did not intervene. After the raids, the militiamen looted the homes and set them on fire. Three civilians were killed in the blaze.⁴²¹

During the reporting period, government troops, pro-government militia members and government-affiliated figures were also regularly targeted in attacks and assassinations carried out by armed opposition groups. These attacks continued throughout the reporting period.⁴²² In March 2024, there was a noticeable increase in IED attacks in western Daraa. In early March 2024 alone, eight IEDs reportedly struck government army convoys, killing at least nine soldiers.⁴²³ In April 2024, the escalation continued. Particularly in the east of Daraa, along the road towards Suweida, armed groups carried out ambushes against the government army and affiliated militias.⁴²⁴ In the summer of 2024, the armed groups further intensified their attacks on government forces. There were countless ambushes and attacks involving IEDs.⁴²⁵

In late 2024, the security situation in Daraa remained unstable. For example, on 4 September 2024, six people were injured when a roadside bomb exploded as the governor's convoy was passing along the road between Alma and Khirbet Ghazaleh.⁴²⁶ Furthermore, ambushes and attacks involving improvised explosive devices (IEDs) took place, particularly along the roads in the north and east of the province, resulting in casualties among both military personnel and civilians.⁴²⁷

There was also fighting between rival armed groups during the reporting period. For example, skirmishes reportedly broke out between fighters from the Eighth Brigade and forces affiliated with the Syrian military intelligence and security apparatus in both March and April 2024, as well as in September 2024.⁴²⁸ The city of Jassim in the Izra district also experienced unrest at various times during the reporting period. Fighting broke out between rival groups in both April 2024 and July 2024. At least six people were killed in July 2024. Thirteen hundred residents fled the violence in the city. The government army and the Eighth Brigade moved into Jassim to restore calm.⁴²⁹

In addition, ISIS cells were active in Daraa, albeit on a smaller scale than in some other provinces. In turn, the cells were targeted by both local armed groups and the government army and its affiliated militias. This regularly led to outbreaks of violence, including in January 2024 in the towns of al-Yadudah and Nawa, where several ISIS fighters were killed, as well as in February 2024 in al-Sanamayn.⁴³⁰ In

⁴²¹ MEE, *Syria: At least 20 killed in clashes between rival groups in Daraa*, 7 April 2024; VOA, *Report: 20 killed in clashes in Syria's restive Daraa province*, 7 April 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, April 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 7.

⁴²² UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024, p. 3 and 9; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. March 2024*, 7 April 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. April 2024*, 7 May 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. May 2024*, 5 June 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. July 2024*, 8 August 2024.

⁴²³ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. March 2024*, 7 April 2024.

⁴²⁴ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. April 2024*, 7 May 2024.

⁴²⁵ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. May 2024*, 5 June 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. July 2024*, 8 August 2024.

⁴²⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Six injured in roadside bomb attack on governor's convoy in Syria's Deraa*, 5 September 2024.

⁴²⁷ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. September 2024*, 23 October 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. October 2024*, 5 November 2024.

⁴²⁸ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. March 2024*, 7 April 2024; SOHR, *After attacking house with RPG shell | Eighth Brigade attacks group of "regime" in Daraa countryside*, 25 September 2024; Syrian Observer, *Tension between Eighth Brigade & Air Force Intelligence east of Daraa*, 26 September 2024.

⁴²⁹ Enab Baladi, *Daraa: Tribal dispute escalates into factional conflict in Jassim*, 18 April 2024; Enab Baladi, *Dignitaries' intervention stops clashes in Daraa's Jassim*, 20 April 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: South Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. July 2024*, 8 August 2024.

⁴³⁰ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. January 2024*, 12 February 2024; Enab Baladi, *Five Islamic State leaders killed by local factions in Daraa*, 31 January 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. February 2024*, 3 March 2024.

turn, ISIS carried out attacks on targets linked to its opponents. For example, in April 2024, fighters in al-Sanamayn attacked the joint local headquarters of the security services and Hezbollah. Around twenty people were killed, including civilians.⁴³¹

Daraa also experienced high levels of crime during the reporting period. Assassinations occurred almost every day. In some cases, there was a link between criminal incidents and the armed conflicts in the province; in others, the incidents involved conflicts between drug gangs or personal feuds. The victims (actual or intended) included civilians, people associated with local armed groups, former members of opposition groups, activists, mayors, members of the government's military and security apparatus, and people involved in drug trafficking. The perpetrators largely remained unknown.⁴³² For example, in March and April 2024 alone, 32 assassination attempts reportedly took place in Daraa, targeting both prominent figures and civilians.⁴³³ It has been reported that 38 people were killed in July 2024 and 19 in September 2024. The victims included civilians, government officials, militia members, government soldiers, former ISIS fighters and drug traffickers.⁴³⁴

In addition, numerous abductions were carried out by armed groups in Daraa. According to various sources, abductions were particularly common in the provinces of Daraa, Suweida, Homs and Rural Damascus.⁴³⁵ One source reported that there had been at least 126 abductions in Daraa in 2023.⁴³⁶ Motives for abduction could include collecting ransom, acting out of retaliation, or exerting political influence. Increases in the number of abductions were reported, particularly in the second half of 2024, and especially in al-Lajat in the east of the province.⁴³⁷

According to the SNHR, civilians were also reportedly arrested on a large scale in the first half of 2024 for evading military (or reserve) service, including in Daraa.⁴³⁸ In addition, in 2023, the SNHR documented arrests of civilians who had regularised their status at an earlier stage (also known as individual regularisation).⁴³⁹ The

⁴³¹ Al Jazeera, *Fighting in southern Syria following bombing kills 17: War monitor*, 7 April 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. April 2024*, 7 May 2024.

⁴³² Al Majalla, *Dara'a locals fight drug dealers head-on*, 9 August 2023; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *From settlement to captagon: The security dynamics in Syria's Daraa*, 28 December 2023; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. March 2024*, 7 April 2024; SOHR, *Amid regime forces' failure to control security situation. 13 people killed in 14 incidents of security disorder in Daraa since early July*, 12 July 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, pp. 6-7; SOHR, *Daraa. Mayor of Atman assassinated by unknown gunmen in western countryside*, 24 October 2024.

⁴³³ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. March 2024*, 7 April 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. April 2024*, 7 May 2024.

⁴³⁴ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. July 2024*, 8 August 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. September 2024*, 23 October 2024.

⁴³⁵ Enab Baladi, *Kidnappings on the rise in Daraa...Regime's authority is absent*, 20 December 2023; The Syrian Observer, *Kidnappings incite anger in Daraa: A cycle of ransom and release*, 4 March 2024; SOHR, *In response to kidnapping of retired policeman. Passenger bus kidnapped on Homs-Talbisah road*, 29 April 2024; SOHR, *Since early 2024. SOHR documents 113 kidnappings with Homs topping the list*, 19 June 2024; SOHR, *Under public pressure. Kidnapping gang releases young man and hands him over to dignitaries of Talbisah city*, 25 June 2024; SOHR, *June 2024. SOHR documents 375 arrests and kidnappings across Syria*, 6 July 2024; SOHR, *August 2024. SOHR documents 280 arrests and kidnappings across Syria*, 6 September 2024; Enab Baladi, *Retaliatory kidnapping threatens Daraa with full explosion*, 18 September 2024; SOHR, *October 2024. SOHR documents nearly 360 arrests and kidnappings across Syria*, 6 November 2024; SOHR, *Security chaos. Unknown persons kidnap medical student in Daraa countryside*, 19 November 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁴³⁶ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Why Iranian entrenchment in southern Syria worries neighboring countries*, 21 March 2024.

⁴³⁷ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. July 2024*, 8 August 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. September 2024*, 23 October 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. October 2024*, 5 November 2024.

⁴³⁸ SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 12.

⁴³⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, pp. 17-18.

organisation cited Daraa as one of the four provinces where these arrests were most common.⁴⁴⁰

There was also large-scale drug trafficking along the border between Daraa and Jordan. This was also a source of insecurity during the reporting period, including for members of the public. For example, in December 2023 and January 2024, armed confrontations took place between drug gangs and government forces. Targets linked to drug gangs were also bombed, reportedly by the Jordanian Air Force.⁴⁴¹

Due to the absence of a functioning rule of law in Syria and an independent judicial system capable of holding perpetrators to account, tribal (or other) groups and families – particularly in the rural areas of Daraa – regularly resorted to their own methods of resolving problems or conflicts. This could take the form of assistance for victims and addicts, attempts at reconciliation between families or clans, and sometimes the punishment of criminals.⁴⁴²

In August and September 2023, protests broke out in southern Syria against the government after cuts to state subsidies had led to a rise in fuel and food prices. The protests were said to have spread to other parts of the country. Thousands of demonstrators called for the Syrian government to step down.⁴⁴³ The SNHR reported that at least 57 people had been arrested in connection with the protests, but did not specify how many of those arrests occurred in Daraa.⁴⁴⁴

During the reporting period, airstrikes and shelling attributed to the IDF also took place in Daraa. These attacks were aimed primarily at military targets associated with the government army, Hezbollah and other Iran-backed militias.⁴⁴⁵ During the reporting period, ACLED recorded seventeen airstrikes in Daraa, which the organisation attributed to the IDF.⁴⁴⁶

1.19.5 Suweida

The province of Suweida is located in the far south of Syria. It borders Jordan. According to data from UNOCHA, the province covers an area of 6,358 km².⁴⁴⁷ According to UNOCHA, the province had a population of 446,493 in July 2023, including 70,842 internally displaced persons.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁰ SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023*, 2 January 2024, p. 4.

⁴⁴¹ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. January 2024*, 12 February 2024; BBC, *Suspected Jordanian air strikes in southern Syria kill 10 – activists*, 18 January 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024, p. 9; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Jordan launches strikes on drones in southern Syria*, 18 March 2024.

⁴⁴² Syria Direct, *Communities in southern Syria take on the drug trade*, 29 March 2024; Syria Direct, *Daraa residents turn to clan reconciliation over the court system*, 4 April 2024; Levant 24, *Abduction epidemic escalates in Assad's areas amid security breakdown*, 5 September 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁴⁴³ France 24, *New protest in regime-held south Syria over living conditions*, 21 August 2023; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024, p. 9; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, September 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁴⁴⁴ AP News, *Syria protests spurred by economic misery stir memories of the 2011 anti-government uprising*, 29 August 2023; SNHR, *The Syrian regime is responding to the August 2023 protests with the same savage mindset with which it reacted to the protests of March 2011*, 26 August 2023; France 24, *Syria protests spurred by economic misery stir memories of 2011 uprising*, 30 August 2023.

⁴⁴⁵ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, January 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, March 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, April 2024*, [U](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, June 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. October 2024*, 5 November 2024.

⁴⁴⁶ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles, Explosions/Remote violence | Actor1: Military Forces of Israel (2022-) | Country: Syria | Admin1: Dara.

⁴⁴⁷ UNOCHA, *Home; Datasets; Syrian Arab Republic – Subnational administrative boundaries - SYR_AdminBoundaries_TabularData.xlsx (modified: 4 April 2023)*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024.

⁴⁴⁸ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024, p. 9.

Suweida had remained under government control since the start of the armed conflict in Syria. The province was inhabited mainly by Druze (a religious community), whose local leadership sought to adopt a largely neutral stance in the conflict.⁴⁴⁹ As the government has, on several occasions, been dependent on their support against the predominantly Sunni opposition, it has granted the Druze limited freedoms and autonomy since 2011.⁴⁵⁰

During the reporting period, various armed groups had a strong power base in Suweida. The largest of these was the armed Druze faction known as *Rijal al-Karama* ('Men of Dignity'). Other local militias aligned themselves with this faction.⁴⁵¹ According to one source, these militias generally had no political motives but were concerned with protecting their own community. Some nevertheless aligned themselves with the authorities in order to exert influence.⁴⁵²

The number of civilian fatalities documented by the SNHR fell slightly in 2023 compared to the previous year. In 2022, the SNHR documented 32 civilian deaths in Suweida.⁴⁵³ In 2023, there had been 24.⁴⁵⁴ After that, there was apparently another increase: in the first half of 2024, the SNHR documented 25 civilian deaths.⁴⁵⁵ According to the EUAA, the SNHR documented 42 civilian deaths in Suweida between September 2023 and August 2024.⁴⁵⁶

As shown by ACLED data, the number of violent incidents recorded in Suweida declined during the reporting period:⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁴⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, pp. 12.

⁴⁵⁰ MEI, *Manufacturing division; The Assad regime and minorities in South-West Syria*, March 2020; Mazen Ezzi, *Syria Policy Briefs. The regime's reach. Analyzing Damascus' approach to Suwayda after 2011*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 3 December 2023.

⁴⁵¹ Enab Baladi, *Will the Men of Dignity initiative towards Jordan see the light?*, 26 January 2024; MEI, *Growing unrest in Syria's Suwayda as Jordanian airstrikes and civilian deaths increase*, 1 February 2024.

⁴⁵² Al Majalla, *How Syria's vast militia network is eroding state sovereignty*, 6 February 2024.

⁴⁵³ SNHR, *1,057 civilians, including 251 children, 94 women, and 133 victims who died due to torture, were documented killed in Syria, in 2022*, 1 January 2023, p. 10.

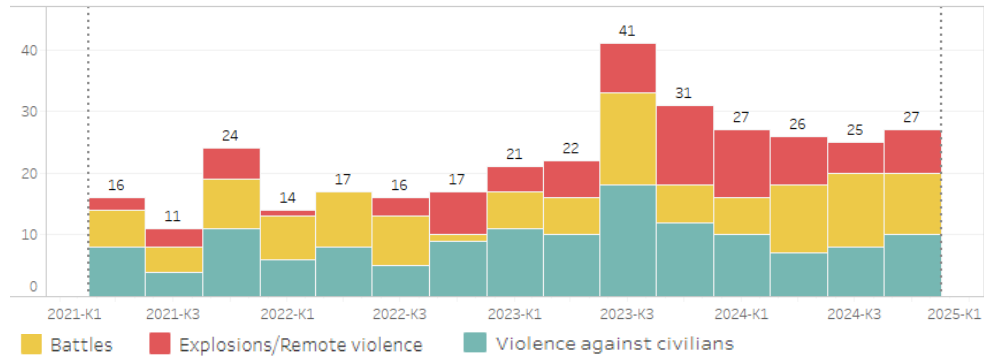
⁴⁵⁴ SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 11.

⁴⁵⁵ SNHR, *429 civilian deaths, including 65 children and 38 women, as well as 53 deaths due to torture, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024*, 1 July 2024, pp. 8-9.

⁴⁵⁶ EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 67.

⁴⁵⁷ ACLED, data via *ACLED Access Portal*, accessed 11 December 2024 (data updated through 6 December 2024). Selected criteria: Period from: 2021-Q2 | Through: 2024-Q4 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Suweida.

Number of incidents



During the reporting period, ACLED recorded roughly the same number of incidents in Suweida that were classified as ‘fighting’, ‘explosions and remote violence’ and ‘violence against civilians’. More than half of the incidents took place in the southern district of Suweida, which is also home to the provincial capital, Suweida. A wide range of parties were involved in the violent incidents.⁴⁵⁸ The following is a summary of a number of trends and incidents of violence during the reporting period. This list is by no means exhaustive.

Much of the fighting involved either attacks by local militias on targets linked to the government army (particularly in the west of the province towards Daraa) or skirmishes between militias. In many cases, it was not clear which militias were involved in the fighting. By the spring of 2024, the situation had clearly escalated. In April 2024, armed groups carried out ambushes against the government army and affiliated militias along the road to Daraa.⁴⁵⁹ In June 2024, fighting broke out between the government army and local militias after the army had attempted to set up a checkpoint on the outskirts of the city of Suweida.⁴⁶⁰

The most notable development in Suweida during the reporting period was the sharp increase in peaceful demonstrations against the government. In August and September 2023, protests broke out in the south after cuts to government subsidies led to higher fuel and food prices. Soon, however, the group broadened to encompass discontent over political instability and ongoing oppression. Thousands of protesters demanded political reforms, exemptions from military service and the removal of Iranian and Hezbollah influence from southern Syria.⁴⁶¹ The relatively sudden resurgence of the protest movement in Suweida in the second half of 2023 is evident from the number of demonstrations recorded by ACLED over the past three reporting periods:⁴⁶²

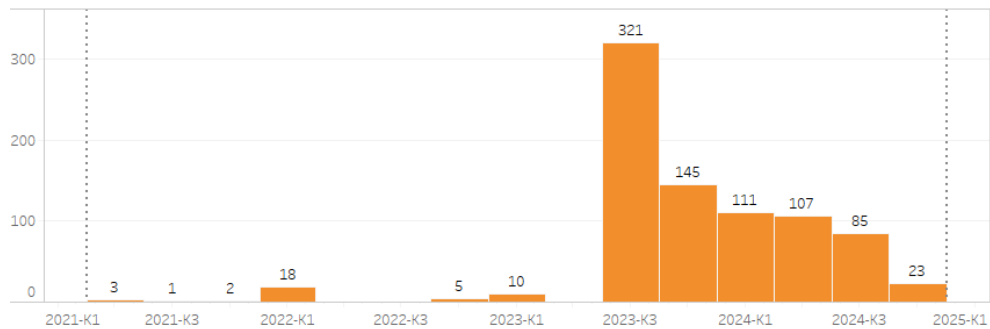
⁴⁵⁸ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: As Sweida.

⁴⁵⁹ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. April 2024*, 7 May 2024.

⁴⁶⁰ SOHR, *After attacks on security headquarters. Regime forces bring military reinforcements to Al-Suwaydaa*, 25 June 2024; Syria Direct, *Suwayda sidesteps a ‘spiral of violence’ following clashes*, 26 June 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 8.

⁴⁶¹ France 24, *New protest in regime-held south Syria over living conditions*, 21 August 2023; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, August 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; AP News, *Protesters in southern Syria smash statue as they mark 2015 assassination of anti-government leader*, 4 September 2023; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024, p. 9; ETANA, *Suwayda marks one year of regime resistance*, 19 August 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, September 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁴⁶² ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/04/2021 | To: 6/12/2024 | Event type: Protests | Country: Syria | Admin1: As Sweida.



There were numerous anti-government protests, particularly in the third quarter of 2023.⁴⁶³ Between August and October 2023, the Syrian non-profit organisation ETANA recorded around five hundred demonstrations across the country. More than three-quarters of these demonstrations took place in Suweida.⁴⁶⁴ In the fourth quarter of 2023, the demonstrations in Suweida continued, albeit on a smaller scale than in the previous three months.⁴⁶⁵ The protests continued in 2024 as well, although their frequency continued to decline.⁴⁶⁶

Despite the large-scale anti-government protests in Suweida, there does not appear to have been any large-scale violent repression by the authorities during the reporting period.⁴⁶⁷ The authorities reportedly preferred negotiating with leading figures within the Druze community to quell the demonstrations.⁴⁶⁸ At the same time, reports emerged of government intimidation of the protest movement, for example by accusing participants of treason in order to divide or destabilise the movement, or by deploying government-affiliated militias to patrol the streets of Suweida.⁴⁶⁹ There were also incidents of state-sponsored violence against the protest movement. For example, on 13 September 2023, security forces intervened with force when demonstrators attempted to storm the local office of the Ba'ath Party in Suweida. Three protesters were injured.⁴⁷⁰ In late February 2024, a protester was killed by a stray bullet when security forces fired into the air during a demonstration.⁴⁷¹ This was the only fatality directly linked to the demonstrations that was reported during the reporting period. In July 2024, unidentified assailants shot and killed a commander of the Al-Jabal Brigade at close range. The attack sparked outrage amongst the demonstrators, but the background to the incident was not clarified during the reporting period.⁴⁷² The SNHR also reported that at least

⁴⁶³ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, September 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁴⁶⁴ ETANA, *Suwayda marks one year of regime resistance*, 19 August 2024.

⁴⁶⁵ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. November 2023*, 4 December 2023; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, December 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁴⁶⁶ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. April 2024*, 7 May 2024; ETANA, *Suwayda marks one year of regime resistance*, 19 August 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 8.

⁴⁶⁷ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, September 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ETANA, *Suwayda marks one year of regime resistance*, 19 August 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 8.

⁴⁶⁸ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, September 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ETANA, *Suwayda marks one year of regime resistance*, 19 August 2024.

⁴⁶⁹ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. April 2024*, 7 May 2024; ETANA, *Suwayda marks one year of regime resistance*, 19 August 2024.

⁴⁷⁰ Reuters, *Three wounded as gunshots disperse anti-government protest in Syria's Sweida*, 13 September 2023; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, September 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁴⁷¹ The Syrian Observer, *First demonstrator in Suweida uprising killed by Syrian regime*, 29 February 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. February 2024*, 3 March 2024; Al Jazeera, *One person killed at anti-government protest in Syria's Sweida province*, 28 February 2024; ETANA, *Memo: Protest killing & unrest in Suwayda*, 5 March 2024; SJAC, *Human Rights Violations in Syria. May 2024*, 20 June 2024; Levant 24, *Suwayda mourns first protester's death*, 3 March 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, February 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 8.

⁴⁷² Asharq Al-Awsat, *Syria: Sweida tensions rise after assassination of armed faction leader*, 18 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Anti-Assad protesters in Sweida mourn death of local leader*, 19 July 2024; Enab Baladi,

57 people had been arrested nationwide in connection with the protests, but did not specify how many of those arrests occurred in Suweida.⁴⁷³

One incident linked to the demonstrations in Suweida, which received considerable attention during the reporting period, concerned the February 2024 arrest of a university student in Latakia. The student was originally from Suweida and was arrested after posting on social media that he supported the demonstrations there. His relatives in Suweida then tried to secure the student's release. When they were unable to achieve this through the authorities, they called on a local armed militia for help. This group subsequently abducted three government officials in order to secure a prisoner exchange. The plan worked: both the student and the three officials were released in April 2024.⁴⁷⁴

Suweida also continued to face high levels of crime during the reporting period. Abductions, assassination attempts, extortion, robberies and car thefts were reportedly a daily occurrence.⁴⁷⁵ For example, Enab Baladi reported that, in September 2024 alone, there were eight murders and four abductions in Suweida.⁴⁷⁶ According to various sources, abductions were particularly common in the provinces of Daraa, Suweida, Homs and Rural Damascus.⁴⁷⁷ Many abductions were carried out by armed groups. According to one source, most were aimed at obtaining ransom. In 2023, around fifty such incidents reportedly occurred in Suweida.⁴⁷⁸ According to the SOHR, there were also cases of children being abducted.⁴⁷⁹ During the reporting period, ACLED recorded eighteen abductions, almost all of which were attributed to unidentified armed groups.⁴⁸⁰ Some sources attributed the rise in crime to the military intelligence service and Hezbollah. These groups were reportedly fuelling the violence in Suweida through criminal gangs they had established or supported.⁴⁸¹

"Your assassinations will not kill our peaceful means".. *As-Suwayda's protest movement enters its 12th month*, 19 July 2024.

⁴⁷³ AP News, *Syria protests spurred by economic misery stir memories of the 2011 anti-government uprising*, 29 August 2023; SNHR, *The Syrian regime is responding to the August 2023 protests with the same savage mindset with which it reacted to the protests of March 2011*, 26 August 2023; France 24, *Syria protests spurred by economic misery stir memories of 2011 uprising*, 30 August 2023.

⁴⁷⁴ SOHR, *After detention of officers. Regime forces bring military reinforcements to Al-Suwaydaa*, 25 April 2024; Enab Baladi, *Syrian regime deploys additional military reinforcements to As-Suwayda*, 26 April 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria*, April 2024, 7 May 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, April 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 5.

⁴⁷⁵ SOHR, *Security chaos. Civilian killed in regime-held areas in centre of Al-Suwaydaa City*, 22 October 2023; Asharq Al-Awsat, *Chinese citizen missing in Syria's Suweida*, 21 July 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 166; Enab Baladi, *Activists: Regime's intelligence is behind spread of crime in As-Suwayda*, 22 October 2024.

⁴⁷⁶ Enab Baladi, *Activists: Regime's intelligence is behind spread of crime in As-Suwayda*, 22 October 2024.

⁴⁷⁷ Enab Baladi, *Kidnappings on the rise in Daraa...Regime's authority is absent*, 20 December 2023; The Syrian Observer, *Kidnappings incite anger in Daraa: A cycle of ransom and release*, 4 March 2024; SOHR, *In response to kidnapping of retired policeman. Passenger bus kidnapped on Homs-Talbisah road*, 29 April 2024; SOHR, *Since early 2024. SOHR documents 113 kidnappings with Homs topping the list*, 19 June 2024; SOHR, *Under public pressure. Kidnapping gang releases young man and hands him over to dignitaries of Talbisah city*, 25 June 2024; SOHR, *June 2024. SOHR documents 375 arrests and kidnappings across Syria*, 6 July 2024; SOHR, *August 2024. SOHR documents 280 arrests and kidnappings across Syria*, 6 September 2024; Enab Baladi, *Retaliatory kidnapping threatens Daraa with full explosion*, 18 September 2024; SOHR, *October 2024. SOHR documents nearly 360 arrests and kidnappings across Syria*, 6 November 2024; SOHR, *Security chaos. Unknown persons kidnap medical student in Daraa countryside*, 19 November 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁴⁷⁸ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Why Iranian entrenchment in southern Syria worries neighboring countries*, 21 March 2024, pp. 2–3.

⁴⁷⁹ SOHR, *Al-Suwaydaa. Armed gang kidnaps child and another gang attempts to kidnap another child*, 10 June 2024.

⁴⁸⁰ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Violence against civilians | Sub event type: Abduction/forced disappearance | Country: Syria | Admin1: As Sweida.

⁴⁸¹ MEI, *Manufacturing division; The Assad regime and minorities in South-West Syria*, March 2020; Syria Direct, *In Suwayda, 'organized gangs' serve as an arm of Damascus and violence threatens to ignite interfamilial conflicts*, 15 June 2022; Enab Baladi, *Activists: Regime's intelligence is behind spread of crime in As-Suwayda*, 22 October 2024.

Due to the absence of a functioning rule of law in Syria and an independent judicial system capable of holding perpetrators to account, as in Daraa, tribal (or other) groups and families regularly resorted to their own methods of resolving problems or conflicts. This could take the form of assistance for victims and addicts, attempts at reconciliation between families or clans, and sometimes the punishment of criminals.⁴⁸²

ACLEED also attributed airstrikes in Suweida to the Jordanian Air Force and the IDF.⁴⁸³ The incidents attributed to Jordan took place along the border between Suweida and Jordan, where large-scale smuggling (for example, of Captagon and weapons) was taking place. Airstrikes were carried out there on targets linked to drug gangs. Civilians were reportedly killed as well.⁴⁸⁴ The airstrikes that ACLEED attributed to the IDF were directed at military targets affiliated with the government army or with Iran-backed militias.⁴⁸⁵

1.19.6 Tartous

Tartous is located in western Syria, on the Mediterranean coast. It borders Lebanon. According to data from UNOCHA, the province covers an area of 1,873 km².⁴⁸⁶ According to UNOCHA, the province had a population of 939,889 in July 2023, including 171,149 internally displaced persons.⁴⁸⁷

The entire province of Tartous had remained under government control since the start of the conflict.⁴⁸⁸ Alawites – the population group to which the Assad family belongs – constituted a large proportion of the province's population.⁴⁸⁹ Members of this group usually occupy the key administrative and military posts in Syria.⁴⁹⁰ Since the start of the armed conflict, Tartous had been spared from large-scale acts of war and destruction. This was also the case during the reporting period.

According to one source, Iran purportedly has nine military bases in the province, and the Russian Federation has two.⁴⁹¹ One of these is the Russian naval base in the city of Tartous, on the Mediterranean Sea.⁴⁹²

⁴⁸² Syria Direct, *Communities in southern Syria take on the drug trade*, 29 March 2024; Syria Direct, *Daraa residents turn to clan reconciliation over the court system*, 4 April 2024; Levant 24, *Abduction epidemic escalates in Assad's areas amid security breakdown*, 5 September 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁴⁸³ ACLEED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Explosions/Remote violence | Country: Syria | Admin1: As Sweida.

⁴⁸⁴ SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024; L'Orient Today, *Arms trafficking accelerates, fueling Jordan-Syria border tension*, 15 January 2024; MEI, *Growing unrest in Syria's Suwayda as Jordanian airstrikes and civilian deaths increase*, 1 February 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, pp. 8-9; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, January 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁴⁸⁵ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. September 2024*, 23 October 2024; ACLEED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Sub-event type: Air/drone strike | Country: Syria | Admin1: As Sweida.

⁴⁸⁶ UNOCHA, *Home; Datasets; Syrian Arab Republic – Subnational administrative boundaries - SYR_AdminBoundaries_TabularData.xlsx (modified: 4 April 2023)*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024.

⁴⁸⁷ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024, p. 9.

⁴⁸⁸ German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA), *GIGA Focus Middle East; Syria is not safe: A look to its regions (Number 5)*, 23 August 2024.

⁴⁸⁹ Foreign Affairs, *Alawites for Assad*, 16 April 2012.

⁴⁹⁰ MEI, *Divided Syria: An examination of stabilization efforts and prospects for state continuity*, 26 April 2022; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Power centers in the Syrian army: A sectarian approach*, 31 March 2020; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Country Report. Syria*, 19 March 2024, p. 5; Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024, Syria*, 29 February 2024; Enab Baladi, *Syrian regime appoints Suhail al-Hassan as commander of Special Forces*, 10 April 2024; USDOS, *Syria 2023 international religious freedom report*, 26 June 2024, p. 17; The Economist, *Is Syria's drug-dealing dictator coming in from the cold?*, 11 September 2024.

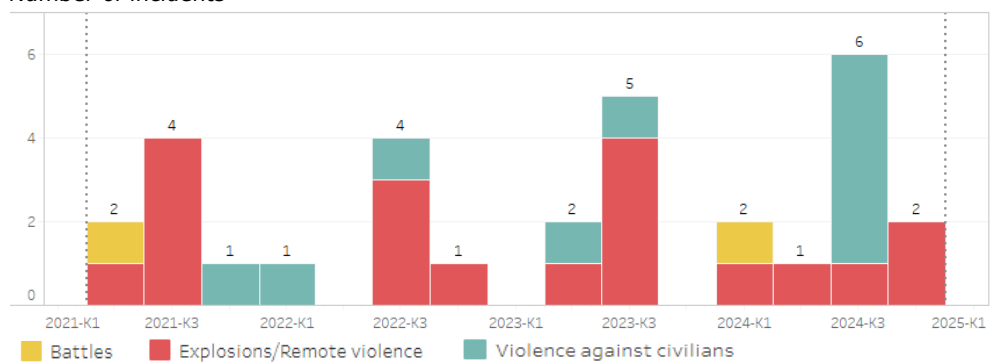
⁴⁹¹ Jusoor for Studies, *Map of Foreign Forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024.

⁴⁹² Al Majalla, *Syria has 830 foreign military sites. 70% belong to Iran*, 19 August 2023; SANA, *A joint Syrian-Russian drills at naval base in Tartous*, 23 April 2024; Enab Baladi, *Under Russian auspices, Turkish-Syrian meeting at Hmeimim base in Latakia*, 17 June 2024.

The SNHR documented no civilian deaths in Tartous in either 2023 or the first half of 2024.⁴⁹³ According to the EUAA, this was also the case during the period up to and including August 2024.⁴⁹⁴ The SNHR had also not documented any civilian deaths in 2022.⁴⁹⁵ Tartous was the only province where the organisation had not recorded any civilian deaths since 2022.

As in previous years, ACLED data for the reporting period show fluctuating and relatively low numbers of recorded incidents of violence (compared to other Syrian provinces). No clear trend was observed.⁴⁹⁶

Number of incidents



The majority of incidents recorded by ACLED in Tartous during the reporting period involved ‘explosions and remote violence’ and ‘violence against civilians’ (for example, abductions). ACLED recorded eleven fatalities in connection with those incidents. These were predominantly soldiers from the government army and members of Hezbollah or other government-affiliated militias, most of whom were killed in airstrikes that ACLED attributed to the IDF. ACLED also recorded two killings committed by unidentified perpetrators, and one death caused by an improvised explosive device. According to ACLED data, there were no deaths or injuries resulting from combat operations.⁴⁹⁷

During the reporting period, ACLED recorded six airstrikes and drone attacks in Tartous, which the organisation attributed to the IDF.⁴⁹⁸ On 13 September 2023, the IDF reportedly carried out an airstrike on the city of Tartous, in which, according to Syrian state media, two soldiers were killed and six were injured.⁴⁹⁹ On 29 May 2024, there was an airstrike on residential buildings in the city of Baniyas. According to one source, a girl was killed, and at least ten other civilians were injured.⁵⁰⁰ On 9 July 2024, the IDF reportedly carried out airstrikes in the area around Arab al-Mulk, north of Baniyas, targeting two military bases belonging to government forces and Iran-backed militias. Various media outlets reported two major explosions near

⁴⁹³ SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024; SNHR, *429 civilian deaths, including 65 children and 38 women, as well as 53 deaths due to torture, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024*, 1 July 2024.

⁴⁹⁴ EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 87.

⁴⁹⁵ SNHR, *1,057 civilians, including 251 children, 94 women, and 133 victims who died due to torture, were documented killed in Syria, in 2022*, 1 January 2023.

⁴⁹⁶ ACLED, data via *ACLED Access Portal*, accessed 11 December 2024 (data updated through 6 December 2024). Selected criteria: Period from: 2021-Q2 | Through: 2024-Q4 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Tartous.

⁴⁹⁷ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Tartous.

⁴⁹⁸ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Sub-event type: Air/drone strike | Country: Syria | Admin1: Tartous.

⁴⁹⁹ Reuters, *Syrian army says Israel hits targets along coast and Hama region*, 13 September 2023; Al Jazeera, *Israel attacks Syria's west coast, killing two soldiers: Syrian state media*, 13 September 2023.

⁵⁰⁰ BBC Monitoring, *Israeli airstrikes across Syria kill girl, six Hezbollah fighters*, 30 May 2024; Rudaw, *Syria says Israeli strike on Baniyas kills girl, injures 10*, 30 May 2024.

Baniyas.⁵⁰¹ The Syrian Ministry of Defence reported only material damage, with no casualties.⁵⁰²

In addition, there were abductions in Tartous, in some cases accompanied by demands for ransom. Between January and October 2024, the SOHR recorded thirteen crime-related killings in the province.⁵⁰³ The following provides a summary of several incidents. This list is by no means exhaustive.

On 28 July 2024, unknown armed men reportedly abducted a 21-year-old woman in Safita. According to one source, the perpetrators demanded a ransom of 60,000 USD.⁵⁰⁴

According to the SOHR, on 11 August 2024, an unidentified armed group abducted a twelve-year-old girl in al-Safsafa. The perpetrators reportedly demanded five hundred million Syrian pounds (SYP)⁵⁰⁵ for her release. The girl's family called on the authorities to intervene. It is not known what happened after that.⁵⁰⁶

According to the SOHR, around October 2024, a man was shot and killed by unknown assailants who stormed his clothing shop in the al-Gadeer neighbourhood of Tartous. The motives and identities of the perpetrators remained unknown.⁵⁰⁷

The Assad government's military and security apparatus had a firm grip on the province, as evidenced by the repression of critical residents.⁵⁰⁸ Since 2023, there have been protests (mainly on social media) against the government, partly due to the economic situation.⁵⁰⁹ Unlike in Suweida, most protests in Tartous were individual in nature, taking place mainly through social media posts.⁵¹⁰ Reports emerged that the authorities had arrested people who had expressed themselves in this way. In both its 2023 annual report and its semi-annual report covering the first half of 2024, the SNHR stated that it had documented arrests and detentions in Tartous of civilians who had criticised the deteriorating living conditions in government-controlled areas, or who had expressed their support for the protest movement in Suweida.⁵¹¹ For example, in November 2023, the organisation documented the arrest in Baniyas of a former journalist who had criticised living conditions and corruption in government-controlled territory on Facebook.⁵¹² On 25 February 2024, a journalist from the Al-Thawra newspaper (published by the ruling Ba'ath Party) was arrested in Tartous. He is said to have expressed support on social media for the protest movement in Suweida, and was accused of supporting armed resistance, violating the constitution and undermining the prestige of the

⁵⁰¹ SOHR, *Third targeting since beginning of year. Israeli airstrikes target two buildings near Baniyas city*, 9 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Contrasting reports over explosions in Syria's Baniyas*, 9 July 2024.

⁵⁰² SANA, *Material damage in Israeli aggression on the vicinity of Baniyas*, 9 July 2024.

⁵⁰³ SOHR, *New murder crime. Civilian in his fifties shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Tartus*, 17 October 2024.

⁵⁰⁴ The Syrian Observer, *Kidnapping, torture and extortion under Assad rule: What is happening in Tartous?*, 29 July 2024.

⁵⁰⁵ At the exchange rate of 3 December 2024, approximately €36,200.

⁵⁰⁶ SOHR, *Tartous. Girl kidnapped and gang demands 500,000,000 Syrian liras for her release*, 11 August 2024.

⁵⁰⁷ SOHR, *New murder crime. Civilian in his fifties shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Tartus*, 17 October 2024.

⁵⁰⁸ Financial Times, *Economic crisis begins to crack the bedrock of Assad's Alawi support*, 13 April 2021; Enab Baladi, *Arrests campaign tracks Latakia activists; Anticipation and caution prevail on coastal region*, 22 August 2024; Syria Direct, *'Ambiguous relationship': Where does Latakia stand on Suwayda's movement?*, 26 January 2024.

⁵⁰⁹ Enab Baladi, *Arrests campaign tracks Latakia activists; Anticipation and caution prevail on coastal region*, 22 August 2024; Syria Direct, *'Ambiguous relationship': Where does Latakia stand on Suwayda's movement?*, 26 January 2024.

⁵¹⁰ MEI, *Alawites in Syria breaking silence?: Criticizing the dictatorship from within*, 11 August 2023; Enab Baladi, *Arrests campaign tracks Latakia activists; Anticipation and caution prevail on coastal region*, 22 August 2024; Syria Direct, *'Ambiguous relationship': Where does Latakia stand on Suwayda's movement?*, 26 January 2024.

⁵¹¹ SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023*, 2 January 2024, p. 4; SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 12.

⁵¹² SNHR, *Government employee was arrested by Syrian regime forces in Tartus governorate, November 2, 2023*, 5 November 2023; SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023*, 2 January 2024, p. 17.

state. It was not known whether he was still in custody at the end of the reporting period.⁵¹³ In September 2024, the SOHR documented another arrest of a civilian, whom it described as a human rights activist.⁵¹⁴

1.19.7 *Latakia*

The province of Latakia is located in north-western Syria, on the Mediterranean coast. It borders Türkiye. According to data from UNOCHA, the province covers an area of 2,388 km².⁵¹⁵ According to UNOCHA, the province had a population of 1,296,899 in July 2023, including 447,336 internally displaced persons.⁵¹⁶

During the armed conflict, the province was largely spared from large-scale acts of war and destruction.⁵¹⁷ Latakia had a reputation for being a key government stronghold.⁵¹⁸ As in Tartous, Alawites in Latakia constituted a large population group.⁵¹⁹

During the reporting period, the majority of the province belonged to the government-controlled area. In the mountainous north-east, bordering the SSG area, a small section was under the control of HTS and affiliated armed groups.⁵²⁰ There were also military posts belonging to the Turkish armed forces. In addition, a Russian air base is located in Hmeimim, south-east of the city of Latakia.⁵²¹

The EUAA reported that between September 2023 and August 2024, the SNHR documented three civilian deaths in Latakia.⁵²² In 2023, the SNHR documented six civilian deaths, with four civilian deaths in 2022.⁵²³

The number of violent incidents recorded by ACLED since 2021 has fluctuated. An increase has been evident since the third quarter of 2022.⁵²⁴

Number of incidents

⁵¹³ CPJ, *Syrian journalist Mahmoud Ibrahim arrested after post on anti-Assad protests*, 17 May 2024; SOHR, *Arbitrary arrest | Regime security services arrest humanitarian activist in Tartous, amid demands to disclose the fate of political prisoners*, 19 September 2024.

⁵¹⁴ SOHR, *Arbitrary arrest | Regime security services arrest humanitarian activist in Tartous, amid demands to disclose the fate of political prisoners*, 19 September 2024.

⁵¹⁵ UNOCHA, *Home; Datasets; Syrian Arab Republic – Subnational administrative boundaries - SYR_AdminBoundaries_TabularData.xlsx (modified: 4 April 2023)*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024.

⁵¹⁶ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024, p. 9.

⁵¹⁷ Financial Times, *Economic crisis begins to crack the bedrock of Assad's Alawi support*, 13 April 2021; Syria Direct, *'Ambiguous relationship': Where does Latakia stand on Suwayda's movement?*, 26 January 2024.

⁵¹⁸ Financial Times, *Economic crisis begins to crack the bedrock of Assad's Alawi support*, 13 April 2021; The New Arab, *Dissent spreads to Syria's Latakia as protests intensify in the south*, 22 August 2023; Chatham House, *The illusion of legitimacy: unveiling Syria's sham elections*, 16 July 2024; confidential source, August 2024.

⁵¹⁹ MRGI, *Alawis in Syria*, March 2018.

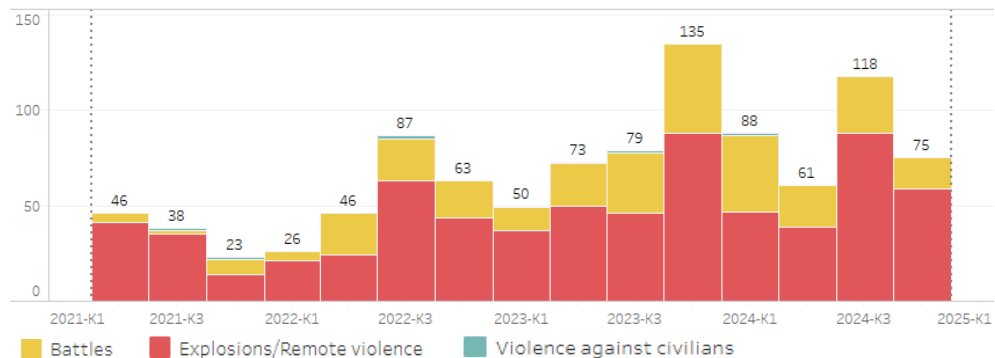
⁵²⁰ UNSC, *Letter dated 23 January 2024 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2024/92*, 29 January 2024, par. 56-57.

⁵²¹ Jusoor for Studies, *Map of Foreign Forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024; The New Arab, *Did Israel target Russia's Hmeimim airbase in Syria missile strikes?*, 4 October 2024.

⁵²² EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 83.

⁵²³ SNHR, *1,057 civilians, including 251 children, 94 women, and 133 victims who died due to torture, were documented killed in Syria, in 2022*, 1 January 2023, p. 10; SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 11.

⁵²⁴ ACLED, data via [ACLED Access Portal](#), accessed 11 December 2024 (data updated through 6 December 2024). Selected criteria: Period from: 2021-Q2 | Through: 2024-Q4 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Latakia.



An overview of the geographic distribution of the incidents recorded by ACLED shows that they were concentrated along the active front lines in the north-east of the province.⁵²⁵

The majority of incidents were classified by ACLED as ‘explosions and remote violence,’ followed by ‘fighting.’ In part, this involved artillery shelling along the front line. Government forces, HTS and affiliated armed groups were involved in these attacks. Airstrikes also took place near the front line in October and November 2023, which the organisation attributed to the Russian army (near the front line).⁵²⁶ In addition, there were sporadic media reports of Israeli airstrikes in the province. The following provides a summary of several violent incidents during the reporting period. This list is by no means exhaustive.

On 1 September 2023, HTS reportedly launched a surprise attack against government forces on the front line in the north-east of the province. According to the SOHR, nine soldiers and three HTS fighters were killed in the incident.⁵²⁷ On 3 September 2024, HTS reportedly killed twelve soldiers from the government army during a new attack on military positions. The SOHR described this as the deadliest infiltration operation in Syria since the start of 2024.⁵²⁸

On 3 October 2024, Syrian media and the SOHR reported on Israeli drone attacks on an arms depot not far from the Russian Hmeimim airbase.⁵²⁹ Later that month, Syrian media reported that two civilians had been injured in an ‘Israeli’ airstrike in a suburb of the city of Latakia.⁵³⁰

The Assad government’s military and security apparatus had a firm grip on the province, as was evident from the crackdown on critical residents.⁵³¹ Around August and September 2023, there was a noticeable increase in expressions of protest (mainly on social media) against the government, partly due to the economic

⁵²⁵ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Latakia.

⁵²⁶ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Latakia.

⁵²⁷ The New Arab, *Nine regime soldiers killed in Latakia, Syria rebel attack: monitor*, 1 September 2023.

⁵²⁸ Levant 24, *Retaliatory operation hits regime forces in Latakia*, 4 September 2024; BBC Monitoring, *HTS attack kills or injures 12 Syrian troops in Latakia*, 5 September 2024; Rudaw, *Rebels kill 15 regime soldiers in northwest Syria clashes: Monitor*, 5 September 2024.

⁵²⁹ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian media report drone attack on coastal site near Russian base*, 3 October 2024; The New Arab, *Did Israel target Russia’s Hmeimim airbase in Syria missile strikes?*, 4 October 2024.

⁵³⁰ BBC Monitoring, *Two civilians injured in suspected Israeli raid in west Syria*, 17 October 2024; The Independent, *Middle East latest: An Israeli strike wounds 2 civilians in Syria, its military says*, 17 October 2024; Al Jazeera, *Israeli strike hits Syria’s Latakia, state media reports*, 17 October 2024.

⁵³¹ Financial Times, *Economic crisis begins to crack the bedrock of Assad’s Alawi support*, 13 April 2021; MEI, *Alawites in Syria breaking silence?: Criticizing the dictatorship from within*, 11 August 2023; Enab Baladi, *Arrests campaign tracks Latakia activists; Anticipation and caution prevail on coastal region*, 22 August 2024; Syria Direct, *‘Ambiguous relationship’: Where does Latakia stand on Suwayda’s movement?*, 26 January 2024.

situation.⁵³² Unlike in Suweida, most protests in Latakia were individual in nature, taking place mainly through social media posts.⁵³³ Calls for demonstrations circulated on social media reportedly went unanswered. Enab Baladi reported that a 'climate of fear' had gripped Latakia. Fearing arrest, residents were said to be cautious about speaking openly about the anti-government protests in Suweida. According to Enab Baladi, military patrols were also conducted at night in the streets of Jableh during this period in response to the unrest.⁵³⁴ Reports emerged that the authorities had arrested people who had expressed criticism on social media. In both its 2023 annual report and its semi-annual report covering the first half of 2024, the SNHR stated that it had documented arrests and detentions in Latakia of civilians who had criticised the deteriorating living conditions in government-controlled areas, or who had expressed their support for the protest movement in Suweida.⁵³⁵ The following provides a summary of several incidents. This list is by no means exhaustive.

In August 2023, the intelligence and security services arrested a farm worker following a Facebook post in which he criticised the rising cost of living.⁵³⁶

In August and September 2024, three prominent activists, including two Alawites, were arrested in Latakia. According to the SNHR, attempts by prominent dignitaries in the city of Latakia to persuade the authorities to release the three detainees (or at least to clarify the charges against them) were rejected.⁵³⁷

The case of a university student from Suweida who was arrested in Latakia after posting on social media that he supported the demonstrations in Suweida is described in Sub-section 1.19.5.⁵³⁸

1.19.8 Homs

Homs province is located in central Syria. It borders Lebanon to the west and Iraq to the east. According to data from UNOCHA, the province covers an area of 43,233 km²,⁵³⁹ making it the largest province in the country. According to UNOCHA, the province had a population of 1,500,351 in July 2023, including 290,269 internally displaced persons.⁵⁴⁰

The western part of the province consists of fertile farmland. It is also where the city of Homs is located. The eastern part of the province lies within the vast, sparsely populated Badia desert. Homs was one of Syria's most important industrial centres,

⁵³² The New Arab, *Dissent spreads to Syria's Latakia as protests intensify in the south*, 22 August 2023; MEI, *Alawites in Syria breaking silence?: Criticizing the dictatorship from within*, 11 August 2023; Enab Baladi, *Arrests campaign tracks Latakia activists; Anticipation and caution prevail on coastal region*, 22 August 2024; Syria Direct, *'Ambiguous relationship': Where does Latakia stand on Suwayda's movement?*, 26 January 2024.

⁵³³ MEI, *Alawites in Syria breaking silence?: Criticizing the dictatorship from within*, 11 August 2023; Enab Baladi, *Arrests campaign tracks Latakia activists; Anticipation and caution prevail on coastal region*, 22 August 2024; Syria Direct, *'Ambiguous relationship': Where does Latakia stand on Suwayda's movement?*, 26 January 2024.

⁵³⁴ Enab Baladi, *Arrests campaign tracks Latakia activists; Anticipation and caution prevail on coastal region*, 22 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Anti-government group launched in Latakia for 'all Syrians'*, 22 August 2023.

⁵³⁵ SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023*, 2 January 2024, p. 4; SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 12.

⁵³⁶ The New Arab, *Dissent spreads to Syria's Latakia as protests intensify in the south*, 22 August 2023.

⁵³⁷ SNHR, *SNHR condemns the Syrian regime's detention of three activists, including two Alawites, in Latakia governorate over voicing criticism of the regime*, 17 September 2024; Enab Baladi, *Human rights report condemns regime's arrest of three activists in Latakia*, 18 September 2024.

⁵³⁸ SOHR, *After detention of officers. Regime forces bring military reinforcements to Al-Suwaydaa*, 25 April 2024; Enab Baladi, *Syrian regime deploys additional military reinforcements to As-Suwaydaa*, 26 April 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: South Syria. April 2024*, 7 May 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, April 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 5.

⁵³⁹ UNOCHA, *Home; Datasets; Syrian Arab Republic – Subnational administrative boundaries – SYR_AdminBoundaries_TabularData.xlsx (modified: 4 April 2023)*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024.

⁵⁴⁰ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024, p. 9.

with businesses including the country's largest oil refinery. The province was also at the centre of a rail and road network linking the various parts of the country.⁵⁴¹ The city of Homs and the surrounding areas were key strongholds of the opposition to the Assad regime, particularly in the early years of the armed conflict. The province was therefore one of the areas of the country most severely affected by the war. The city of Homs was besieged by the government army between 2011 and 2014. The army devastated large parts of the city, using bombs (including barrel bombs and cluster munitions), as well as heavy tank and artillery fire. The government army's recapture of the city and an opposition enclave in the rural area north of Homs led to a mass exodus of rebels and their families from the province in 2018.⁵⁴²

Since 2018, virtually all of Homs province has belonged to the government-controlled area. During the reporting period, a strip of land in the far south-east, bordering the Rural Damascus Governorate and Iraq, was part of the US-controlled 'deconfliction zone' around the US military base in al-Tanf. There was a Russian military base near Tadmor (Palmyra). Furthermore, the Iranian army had a significant presence in Homs. For example, IRGC troops were present at the military base known as T4, west of Tadmor, where government forces and the Russian Air Force were also stationed. The IRGC also had a military base near the city of Homs. In the Tadmor district, Iran-backed militias were also active. In the al-Qusayr district, on the border with Lebanon, Hezbollah and other Iran-backed militias were present.⁵⁴³

The number of civilian deaths documented by the SNHR in Homs increased between 2022 and 2023: in 2022, the SNHR documented 37 civilian deaths; in 2023, there had been 121.⁵⁴⁴ In the first half of 2024, there were 34 civilian deaths.⁵⁴⁵ In 2023 and 2024, the fifth-highest numbers of civilian deaths were documented in Homs, following Daraa, Idlib, Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor. The EUAA also noted that the number of civilian deaths documented by the SNHR in Homs remained relatively high: between September 2023 and August 2024, there were 98 fatalities.⁵⁴⁶

As shown by ACLED data, the number of violent incidents recorded in Homs increased during the reporting period:⁵⁴⁷

Number of incidents

⁵⁴¹ BBC, *Homs: Syrian revolution's fallen 'capital'*, 9 December 2015.

⁵⁴² Pax, The Syria Institute, *No return to Homs; A case study in demographic engineering in Syria*, 21 February 2017; BBC Monitoring, *Syrian forces launch operation to seize weapons in former rebel bastion*, 5 September 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, pp. 90-92.

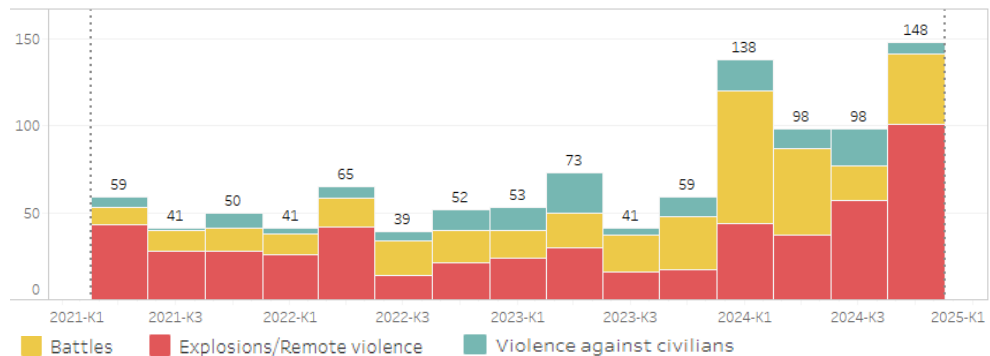
⁵⁴³ UN, *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2023*, 1 January 2024; Jusoor for Studies, *Map of foreign forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Media report IS attacks in Syrian desert amid Russian strikes*, 18 August 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, pp. 90-92.

⁵⁴⁴ SNHR, *1,057 civilians, including 251 children, 94 women, and 133 victims who died due to torture, were documented killed in Syria, in 2022*, 1 January 2023, p. 10; SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 11.

⁵⁴⁵ SNHR, *429 civilian deaths, including 65 children and 38 women, as well as 53 deaths due to torture, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024*, 1 July 2024, p. 8.

⁵⁴⁶ EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 97.

⁵⁴⁷ ACLED, data via *ACLEDAccess Portal*, accessed 11 December 2024 (data updated through 6 December 2024). Selected criteria: Period from: 2021-Q2 | Through: 2024-Q4 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Homs.



Most of the incidents recorded by ACLED in Homs during the reporting period were classified as 'fighting' and 'explosions and remote violence'. More than half of all incidents were recorded in the Tadmor district, which covers the entire – largely desert – central and eastern part of the province. According to ACLED, the violent incidents recorded by the organisation could be primarily attributed to ISIS, followed at some distance by the Russian Air Force and the government army.⁵⁴⁸ The following is a summary of a number of trends and incidents of violence during the reporting period. This list is by no means exhaustive.

The most serious violent incident during the reporting period was the drone attack on the military academy in Homs during a graduation ceremony on 5 October 2023. At least 89 people were killed, and at least 277 were injured. The victims also included many civilians.⁵⁴⁹ The attack in Homs led to a series of retaliatory strikes by the government army and the Russian Air Force on the SSG area, particularly in the provinces of Idlib and Aleppo (see Sub-sections 1.19.10 and 1.19.11).

Almost all the incidents attributed to ISIS took place in the Tadmor district. Most of ISIS's bomb attacks and armed assaults were directed against government forces and members of Iran-backed militias. For example, in November 2023, ISIS killed several Afghan fighters from the Iran-backed Fatemiyoun Brigade and at least thirty members of the NDF militia in a series of attacks in north-eastern Homs. In October and November 2023, fierce fighting took place along the route between al-Sukhnah and Raqqa.⁵⁵⁰ In February 2024, militants killed nine government soldiers in al-Sukhnah.⁵⁵¹ In March 2024, ISIS carried out at least four ambushes against government forces and an attack using an improvised explosive device. At least six soldiers were killed.⁵⁵² In the spring of 2024, too, dozens of government troops were killed in attacks and ambushes carried out by ISIS in the north-east of Homs.⁵⁵³ In an April 2024 incident in which ISIS attacked a military bus near the village of al-Tayibah, 22 people were killed, including at least nine members of the Palestinian Jerusalem Brigade.⁵⁵⁴ In May, ISIS carried out bomb attacks in which at

⁵⁴⁸ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Homs.

⁵⁴⁹ Enab Baladi, *Homs military college attack: Assad's chance to re-manage own crises*, 12 October 2023; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024, pp. 3 and 5; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, October 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁵⁵⁰ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, October 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, November 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Homs.

⁵⁵¹ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, February 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁵⁵² ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. March 2024*, 7 April 2024.

⁵⁵³ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, April 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. April 2024*, 7 May 2024.

⁵⁵⁴ The National, *ISIS kills at least 28 pro-government fighters in Syria*, 19 April 2024; AP News, *Attack blamed on IS militants kills 22 pro-government fighters in central Syria*, 19 April 2024.

least twenty government soldiers were killed.⁵⁵⁵ The attacks continued in the summer of 2024, and dozens more soldiers were killed.⁵⁵⁶

Attacks carried out by ISIS also resulted in civilian deaths. For example, ISIS was responsible for firing on civilians, as well as for bomb attacks that killed civilians, attacks on shepherds to steal their livestock, and attacks on truffle hunters. Civilians were also killed by landmines laid by ISIS.⁵⁵⁷

During the reporting period, the Russian military carried out airstrikes in Homs, targeting ISIS positions in particular.⁵⁵⁸ During the reporting period, ACLED recorded 194 airstrikes and drone attacks in the province, attributing 105 to the Russian Air Force.⁵⁵⁹

During the reporting period, there were also reports of incidents linked to internal strife within the government camp, as well as amongst government-affiliated militias. These incidents reportedly also resulted in fatalities.⁵⁶⁰ In addition, Iran-backed militias regularly launched attacks on the US military base in al-Tanf throughout the reporting period.⁵⁶¹

During the reporting period, airstrikes attributed to the IDF also took place in Homs. These attacks were aimed primarily at military targets linked to Hezbollah and other Iran-backed militias.⁵⁶² Most of the victims of the attacks were members of Hezbollah and other Iran-backed militias.⁵⁶³ The attack with the highest number of casualties took place in November 2024, when dozens of fighters from an Iran-backed militia were killed in an airstrike in Tadmor.⁵⁶⁴

The SNHR reported that government forces had arrested civilians who were on their way to cross the border with Lebanon illegally. The main aim was reportedly to extort ransom payments from the relatives of these detainees. According to the SNHR, civilians were also reportedly arrested on a large scale in the first half of 2024 for evading military (or reserve) service, including in Homs.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁵⁵ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, May 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁵⁵⁶ Rudaw, *ISIS kills 19 regime soldiers in Syria amid combing operation: Monitor*, 13 June 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, June 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, August 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; North Press Agency, *Government forces find 11 bodies of fallen soldiers in Syrian desert*, 25 August 2024; BBC Monitoring, *IS claims killing eight pro-Syrian government militia members*, 9 September 2024.

⁵⁵⁷ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. April 2024*, 7 May 2024; BBC Monitoring, *IED explosion outside Syrian university wounds four*, 30 May 2024; ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles, Explosions/Remote violence, Violence against civilians | Actor1: Islamic State (Syria) | Country: Syria | Admin1: Homs.

⁵⁵⁸ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. November 2023*, 4 December 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Russia hits 13 'militant' bases in Syria*, 10 June 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Russia reports strikes on militant bases in Syria*, 11 June 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, December 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, June 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024.

⁵⁵⁹ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Sub-event type: Air/drone strike | Country: Syria | Admin1: Homs.

⁵⁶⁰ SOHR, *SOHR booklet, comprising 13 reports with infographics, summarises all key developments in Syria in February 2024*, 8 March 2024; SOHR, *SOHR booklet, comprising 13 reports with infographics, summarises all key developments in Syria in March 2024*, 8 April 2024.

⁵⁶¹ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, December 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, April 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, June 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁵⁶² ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, November 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Two Hezbollah fighters killed by Israeli strike on Syria - SOHR*, 25 May 2024; North Press Agency, *3 Hezbollah militants killed in airstrikes in Syria's Homs*, 25 May 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, June 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, May 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, August 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; EUSA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 91.

⁵⁶³ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024.

⁵⁶⁴ Reuters, *Israeli attack on Syria's Palmyra kills 36 people, Syrian state media says*, 21 November 2024; Al Arabiya, *Monitor raises toll in Israel strikes on Syria's Palmyra to 92*, 22 November 2024.

⁵⁶⁵ SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 12.

In addition, during the reporting period, Homs was plagued by crime, particularly the abduction of civilians. The SOHR reported 53 abductions in Homs during the first five months of 2024, which is purportedly more than in any other province.⁵⁶⁶ Many of these abductions were purportedly for ransom.⁵⁶⁷

1.19.9 *Hama*

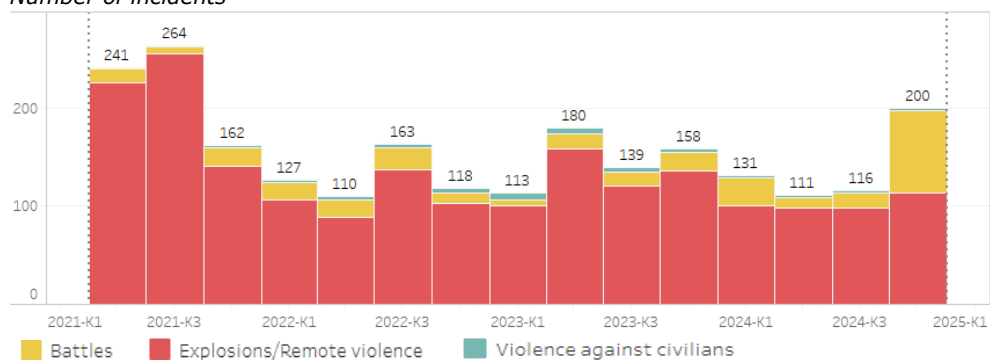
Hama is located in central Syria. According to data from UNOCHA, the province covers an area of 11,094 km².⁵⁶⁸ According to UNOCHA, the province had a population of 1,522,898 in July 2023, including 212,582 internally displaced persons.⁵⁶⁹

Hama was strategically important due to its central location on the M5 motorway, which links Damascus with northern Syria. During the reporting period, the majority of Hama belonged to the government-controlled area. Both the Iranian and Russian armed forces had military bases in this area. ISIS cells were active in the sparsely populated Badia Desert in the east of the province (al-Salamiyah district). Only the north-western tip of the province (in the al-Suqaylabiyah district) was part of the SSG area. Several armed opposition groups were active there, including HTS.⁵⁷⁰

The number of civilian deaths documented by the SNHR in Hama increased between 2022 and 2023: in 2022, the SNHR documented 36 civilian deaths; in 2023, there had been 77.⁵⁷¹ According to the EUAA, the SNHR documented 23 civilian deaths in Hama between September 2023 and August 2024.⁵⁷²

ACLED data show a slight initial decline in the number of incidents recorded during the reporting period. The number increased again during the fourth quarter of 2024:⁵⁷³

Number of incidents



The vast majority of incidents recorded by ACLED during the reporting period (563) took place in the north-western district of al-Suqaylabiyah. That district marked the front line between the SSG territory and the government-controlled territory. This

⁵⁶⁶ SOHR, *Since early 2024. SOHR documents 113 kidnappings with Homs topping the list*, 19 June 2024.

⁵⁶⁷ EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 94.

⁵⁶⁸ UNOCHA, *Home; Datasets; Syrian Arab Republic – Subnational administrative boundaries - SYR_AdminBoundaries_TabularData.xlsx* (modified: 4 April 2023), [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024.

⁵⁶⁹ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024, p. 9.

⁵⁷⁰ BBC Monitoring, *HTS claims capture of two Syrian soldiers in Aleppo raid*, 4 September 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, pp. 71-73.

⁵⁷¹ SNHR, *1,057 civilians, including 251 children, 94 women, and 133 victims who died due to torture, were documented killed in Syria, in 2022*, 1 January 2023, p. 10; SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 11.

⁵⁷² EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 156.

⁵⁷³ ACLED, data via *ACLED Access Portal*, accessed 11 December 2024 (data updated through 6 December 2024). Selected criteria: Period from: 2021-Q2 | Through: 2024-Q4 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Hama.

was followed by the eastern district of al-Salamiyah (85 incidents) and the other three districts (46 incidents) of Hama. Most of the incidents recorded by ACLED were classified as 'explosions and remote violence'. Fighting took place as well, almost exclusively in the districts of al-Suqaylabiyah and al-Salamiyah.⁵⁷⁴

The violent incidents could be largely attributed to government forces, ISIS and the armed opposition. The following provides a summary of several violent incidents and trends during the reporting period. This list is by no means exhaustive.

In the final quarter of 2023, there was an escalation of violence on the al-Ghab plain (Sahel al-Ghab) in the al-Suqaylabiyah district. Government forces attacked villages in the area controlled by HTS and affiliated groups – often with barrages of missiles and artillery fire. At the same time, the Russian Air Force stepped up its bombing campaign in the area, often targeting civilian sites. Dozens of civilians were killed, and thousands more were displaced.⁵⁷⁵ HTS and affiliated groups retaliated with artillery, sniper fire, missiles and armed drones.⁵⁷⁶

In 2024, the government offensive continued along the north-western front lines of Hama, albeit initially with less intensity than in the final months of 2023. Russian airstrikes initially decreased. Reportedly, Iran-backed militias were becoming increasingly involved in the fighting. As before, attacks by government forces were regularly directed at civilian targets – often involving the use of artillery fire. Kamikaze drones were being used for this purpose more often than before. These attacks also resulted in civilian casualties.⁵⁷⁷ Armed opposition groups, in turn, launched counterattacks on government positions, particularly on the al-Ghab plain.⁵⁷⁸

In the al-Salamiyah district in eastern Hama, ISIS fighters carried out regular attacks on positions held by the government army and the NDF.⁵⁷⁹ The Syrian and Russian Air Forces carried out air strikes on ISIS positions.⁵⁸⁰ During the reporting period, ACLED recorded 87 incidents in the province.⁵⁸¹ Fighting between ISIS and the government army flared up in the spring of 2024, as well as in September 2024.⁵⁸² For example, on 4 September 2024, seven government soldiers were reportedly killed in an ISIS ambush in eastern Hama.⁵⁸³

⁵⁷⁴ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Hama.

⁵⁷⁵ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria. September 2023*, 9 October 2023; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria. October 2023*, 6 November 2023.

⁵⁷⁶ Reuters, *Drones strike Syria's Hama after deadly attacks on Idlib -army and rescuers*, 27 October 2023; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, October 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria. November 2023*, 4 December 2023; SNHR, *No fewer than 73 attacks on vital civilian facilities by Syrian-Russian alliance forces in northwestern Syria since October 5, 2023*, 14 November 2023.

⁵⁷⁷ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria. February 2024*, 10 March 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria. March 2024*, 8 April 2024; SNHR, *Most notable human rights violations in Syria in March 2024: Violations recorded across all areas of control are further evidence that Syria in its entirety is unsafe for the return of refugees*, 8 April 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria. April 2024*, 13 May 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria. May 2024*, 10 June 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria. July 2024*, 8 August 2024.

⁵⁷⁸ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria. April 2024*, 13 May 2024.

⁵⁷⁹ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria. March 2024*, 8 April 2024; Rudaw, *ISIS IED kills two pro-regime fighters in central Syria: Monitor*, 12 June 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 74.

⁵⁸⁰ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, December 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁵⁸¹ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Sub-event type: Air/drone strike | Country: Syria | Admin1: Hama.

⁵⁸² ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles | Actor1: Islamic State (Syria) | Country: Syria | Admin1: Hama.

⁵⁸³ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, September 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

During the reporting period, some airstrikes were directed primarily at military targets associated with the government army or Iran-backed militias.⁵⁸⁴ During the reporting period, ACLED attributed six airstrikes to the IDF.⁵⁸⁵ On 8 September 2024, the IDF reportedly carried out a ground operation at a missile factory near the town of Masyaf in Hama. Between 18 and 27 people were reportedly killed. Most of the fatalities were members of Iran-backed militias, but they also included government soldiers and a few civilians.⁵⁸⁶

According to the SNHR, civilians were also reportedly arrested on a large scale in the first half of 2024 for evading military (or reserve) service, including in Hama.⁵⁸⁷

1.19.10 Idlib

Idlib is located in north-west Syria and borders Türkiye. According to data from UNOCHA, the province covers an area of 5,416 km². According to UNOCHA, the province had a population of 3,104,168 in July 2023, including 2,106,929 internally displaced persons.⁵⁸⁸

The large numbers of displaced persons were living in the hundreds of displacement camps across the province, where they were dependent on humanitarian aid.⁵⁸⁹ A large proportion of the population in the north-west reportedly had insufficient access to clean drinking water and sanitation facilities.⁵⁹⁰ During the reporting period, there were several instances in which residents were displaced as a result of drone attacks, bombings and artillery fire.⁵⁹¹ According to one source, unlike the long-term displaced persons in the camps, these people were generally able to return home after a while.⁵⁹²

Idlib was the last remaining stronghold of the Syrian armed opposition, with HTS as the dominant force.⁵⁹³ Part of the province had previously been under opposition control during the conflict, but fell back into government hands following repeated offensives.⁵⁹⁴ In 2019 and 2020, government forces, backed by Russian bombing, launched a major offensive in the province. A ceasefire agreement negotiated between the Russian Federation and Türkiye in March 2020 resulted in ceasefire

⁵⁸⁴ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Israeli strikes hit a series of sites in central Syria*, 24 August 2024; UN, *Meetings coverage Security Council: Tensions in Syria, region 'have reached dangerous new levels', Special Envoy warns Security Council, calling for inclusive political process*, 28 August 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, August 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, September 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁵⁸⁵ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Explosions/Remote violence | Actor1: Military Forces of Israel (2022-) | Country: Syria | Admin1: Hama.

⁵⁸⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Tehran denies Iranian site hit in Israeli strike on Syria, condemns attack*, 9 September 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Death toll rises as Israel targets Syrian research centre*, 9 September 2024; The Independent, *Civilians among 18 killed in Israeli airstrikes on Syria*, 10 September 2024; The New York Times, *How Israeli forces destroyed a secret weapons facility in Syria*, 13 September 2024; De Volkskrant, *Israëlische commando's voeren grondaanval uit op wapenfabriek van Hezbollah in Syrië*, 13 September 2024; BBC, *Israeli special forces' raid missile site in Syria*, 13 September 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, September 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁵⁸⁷ SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 12.

⁵⁸⁸ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024, p. 9.

⁵⁸⁹ AA, *Syrians in Idlib refugee camp struggle to survive in tents as mercury soars to 50°C*, 20 August 2023; AA, *Winter in Syria's Idlib deteriorates living conditions in camps*, 17 January 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁵⁹⁰ Al-Monitor, *Water shortages worsen as funding dries up for northwest Syria displaced*, 10 July 2024.

⁵⁹¹ The New Arab, *Massive displacement in Syria's Idlib amid Assad regime attacks*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁵⁹² Confidential source, October 2024.

⁵⁹³ ECFR, *Guns and governance: How Europe should talk with non-state armed groups in the Middle East. Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (Syria)*, November 2020; ICG, *Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria's North West*, 7 March 2023.

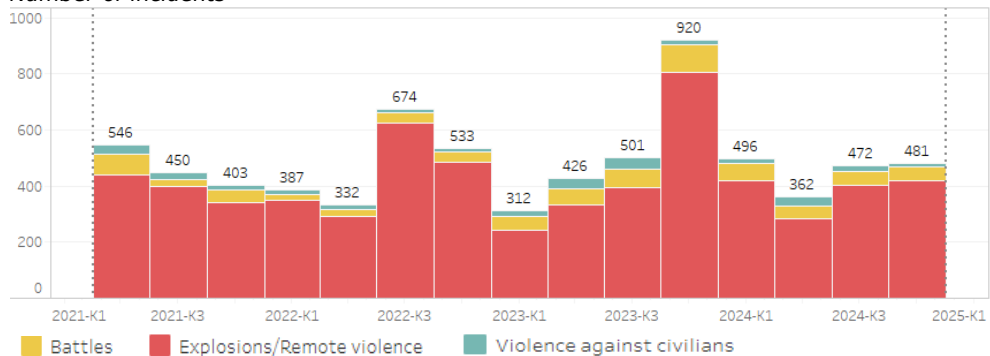
⁵⁹⁴ ICG, *The eleventh hour for Idlib, Syria's last rebel bastion*, 6 February 2020; ICG, *Silencing the Guns in Syria's Idlib*, 15 May 2020, p. 14.

lines that remained largely unchanged until November 2024.⁵⁹⁵ During the reporting period, the northern and western parts of Idlib were still under the control of the SSG. The HTS controlled this area. Rivals of HTS in Idlib included *Hurras al-Din*, a branch of al-Qaeda in Syria. Numerous other armed opposition groups were also active, most of which were affiliated with HTS. In addition, the Turkish armed forces had numerous military bases and observation posts in this area, particularly along the front lines.⁵⁹⁶ There were also ISIS cells in Idlib.⁵⁹⁷ The southern and eastern parts of the province were under government control for most of the reporting period. Hezbollah was also present there.⁵⁹⁸

During the reporting period, Idlib remained one of the Syrian provinces with the highest number of civilian deaths. In 2023, the SNHR documented 145 civilian deaths; in 2022, there had been 147. In 2023, the organisation documented more civilian deaths only in Daraa, Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor.⁵⁹⁹ According to the EUAA, the high number of civilian deaths documented by the SNHR continued into 2024: between September 2023 and August 2024, there were reportedly at least 136 civilian deaths in Idlib.⁶⁰⁰

During the reporting period, ACLED recorded the second-highest number of violent incidents in Syria in Idlib, after Aleppo (see Section 1.2). The data do not show any clear increase or decrease in the number of recorded violent incidents:⁶⁰¹

Number of incidents



By far the majority of incidents recorded by ACLED in Idlib during the reporting period were classified as ‘explosions and remote violence’, followed by ‘fighting’. The highest concentration of incidents classified as ‘explosions and remote attacks’ was along the front lines in the south-east, running alongside the M4 motorway, and in

⁵⁹⁵ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Syria*, 15 May 2020, pp. 10-13; ICG, *Containing Transnational Jihadists in Syria’s North West*, 7 March 2023, p. i.; Carnegie Endowment, *Borders without a nation: Syria, outside powers, and open-ended instability*, 10 September 2024; Global Security, *Operation Spring Shield*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁵⁹⁶ North Press Agency, *HTS dominates all factions in northwest Syria*, 14 November 2023; HRW, “Everything is by the power of the weapon”. *Abuses and impunity in Turkish-occupied northern Syria*, 29 February 2024, p. 20; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian army strikes reported on Turkish posts in Idlib*, 23 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Al-Qaeda acknowledges death of religious official in Syria*, 26 August 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, pp. 49-52.

⁵⁹⁷ BBC, *Iran demonstrates missile capabilities with regional strikes*, 17 January 2024; Enab Baladi, *Idlib: Salvation Govt announces arrest of IS cell responsible for assassinating al-Qahtani*, 31 May 2024; BBC Monitoring, *IS members killed in clashes with HTS militants in Syria’s Idlib province*, 13 August 2024.

⁵⁹⁸ BBC Monitoring, *HTS claims retaliatory strikes on Hezbollah in Syria’s Idlib*, 21 September 2024; Enab Baladi, *Hezbollah positions in Syria target Idlib*, 25 September 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 49; Asarq Al-Awsat, *In a first, Israel strikes Syrian, Hezbollah positions in Idlib*, 10 November 2024.

⁵⁹⁹ SNHR, *1,057 civilians, including 251 children, 94 women, and 133 victims who died due to torture, were documented killed in Syria, in 2022*, 1 January 2023, p. 10; SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 11.

⁶⁰⁰ EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 156.

⁶⁰¹ ACLED, data via *ACLED Access Portal*, accessed 11 December 2024 (data updated through 6 December 2024). Selected criteria: Period from: 2021-Q2 | Through: 2024-Q4 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Idleb.

the area between the M4 and the M5. The fighting was mainly concentrated along the front lines in the area between the M4 and the M5 and in the north of the province.⁶⁰²

The vast majority of violent incidents could be attributed to government forces and affiliated militias, as well as to the Russian Air Force. They primarily involved airstrikes and artillery fire. Many of the attacks targeted areas near the front lines. Other attacks also hit the city of Idlib, as well as villages and towns in the rural south of the province, farther from the front lines. Some of the attacks targeted vital civilian infrastructure, resulting in the death or injury of civilians, as well as damage to civilian and public service facilities.⁶⁰³

The following is a summary of a number of trends and incidents of violence during the reporting period. This list is by no means exhaustive.

Following a period of relative calm after the government offensive of 2019–2020, attacks by government forces and the Russian Air Force on Idlib intensified in late 2023. In late August 2023, HTS carried out an attack on government forces in southern Idlib, killing dozens of soldiers. The government army responded with airstrikes and artillery fire on the HTS-controlled part of Idlib. Following a drone attack on the military academy in Homs on 5 October 2023, which left at least 89 people dead, the situation escalated further. In response to that attack, government forces, in cooperation with the Russian army, stepped up their attacks on the SSG area in Idlib and north-west Aleppo, notably through the use of airstrikes and artillery attacks and, in some cases, incendiary weapons. Following the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza, government forces drastically stepped up their bombing campaign in Idlib.⁶⁰⁴ At the same time as the bombing campaign, ground fighting on the front lines around Idlib also intensified during this period.⁶⁰⁵ The escalation resulted in civilian deaths, reportedly including many children.⁶⁰⁶ In addition, 160,000 residents of the province were reportedly displaced between October 2023 and December 2023.⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰² ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Idlib.

⁶⁰³ SOHR, *Guided missile. Regime forces kill and injure five civilians in Sahl Al-Ghab*, 6 August 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 10; ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Idlib.

⁶⁰⁴ SANA, *Funeral ceremony of martyrs of the terrorist attack on military academy begins with popular and official attendance*, 6 October 2023; MEE, *Syria: Assad forces kill civilians in Idlib shelling as Turkey bombs northeast*, 6 October 2023; VOA, *Syria shells northern rebel-held Idlib region, killing 7*, 7 October 2023; Euronews, *Funeral held for military victims as shelling continues in Syria*, 11 October 2023; Al Jazeera, *Northwest Syria witnesses most intense military escalation in three years*, 31 October 2023; UNOCHA, *North-West Syria. Situation report*, 21 December 2023; SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, pp. 4 and 8; STJ, *Northwest Syria: Syrian-Russian attacks killing civilians and hammering critical infrastructure*, 26 January 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024, pp. 6-8; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 63; UNOCHA, *North-West Syria. Situation Report*, 18 October 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, October-December 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁶⁰⁵ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, September 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁶⁰⁶ MEE, *Syria: Assad forces kill civilians in Idlib shelling as Turkey bombs northeast*, 6 October 2023; VOA, *Syria shells northern rebel-held Idlib region, killing 7*, 7 October 2023; Euronews, *Funeral held for military victims as shelling continues in Syria*, 11 October 2023; Al Jazeera, *Northwest Syria witnesses most intense military escalation in three years*, 31 October 2023; UNOCHA, *North-West Syria. Situation report*, 21 December 2023; SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, pp. 4 and 8; STJ, *Northwest Syria: Syrian-Russian attacks killing civilians and hammering critical infrastructure*, 26 January 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024, pp. 6-8; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 63; UNOCHA, *North-West Syria. Situation Report*, 18 October 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, October 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, November 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, December*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁶⁰⁷ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024; GIGA, *GIGA Focus Middle East: Syria is not safe: A look to its regions (Number 5)*, 23 August 2024.

The escalation of violence by the government army and the Russian army in the second half of 2023 was characterised by a multitude of airstrikes and missile/artillery attacks targeting densely populated urban areas, schools, hospitals, other civilian infrastructure, markets and camps for displaced persons.⁶⁰⁸ One source noted a pattern of attacks on civilian targets, and in particular an increase in attacks on schools.⁶⁰⁹ The city of Idlib was also attacked on several occasions, with civilian targets being hit in particular, and the densely populated town of Turmanin was also struck, reportedly with arms including cluster munitions. The Russian Air Force also carried out dozens of bombing raids during this period.⁶¹⁰

In the first half of 2024, both the ground war and the shelling and airstrikes in Idlib continued, albeit with less intensity than in the second half of 2023.⁶¹¹ Both the Syrian army and the Russian Air Force continued to carry out attacks on targets in the part of the province controlled by the SSG, and civilians continued to be killed in the process. In this case as well, armies used cluster munitions in densely populated areas.⁶¹² Fighting continued between government forces and HTS and affiliated groups, with fighting between HTS and SNA factions in August 2024.⁶¹³ Between July 2024 and October 2024, no airstrikes were reported in Idlib for a period of three months.⁶¹⁴

In October 2024, however, violence once again escalated in north-western Syria, with the government army and the Russian Air Force carrying out further airstrikes in Idlib. Artillery fire, drone attacks and ground fighting also occurred.⁶¹⁵ Houses, schools, power stations and other facilities were damaged.⁶¹⁶ Dozens of civilians were killed, and thousands of people were displaced (once again).⁶¹⁷

Idlib was also one of the provinces where a relatively high number of arbitrary arrests and detentions were documented during the reporting period. The SNHR documented 219 in 2023⁶¹⁸ and 104 in the first half of 2024.⁶¹⁹ Only in Aleppo, Rural Damascus and Deir ez-Zor were more arbitrary arrests documented (see Section 1.10). The SNHR attributed virtually all documented arrests to HTS. In most cases, according to the SNHR, the arrests were in response to criticism of HTS. The organisation also documented that, of the 121 people arrested by HTS in Idlib and Aleppo in the first half of 2024, 33 had been released by July 2024. The remaining

⁶⁰⁸ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024.

⁶⁰⁹ Syria Civil Defence, *Policy Brief: Alarming Surge in Attacks on Schools in Northwest Syria*, November 2024.

⁶¹⁰ Reuters, *Russian forces kill 34 fighters in Syria's Idlib – Interfax agency*, 13 November 2023; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024, pp. 6-8.

⁶¹¹ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024.

⁶¹² North Press Agency, *Government-HTS mutual shelling in Idlib leaves casualties*, 3 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Syrian forces launch new wave of drone attacks on Idlib, outlets say*, 21 July 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024.

⁶¹³ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, January 2024, February 2024, August 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, February 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: August 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁶¹⁴ UNOCHA, *North-West Syria. Situation Report*, 18 October 2024.

⁶¹⁵ UNOCHA, *North-West Syria. Situation Report*, 18 October 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, October 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁶¹⁶ Levant 24, *White Helmets condemn escalating Russian attacks in Northwestern Syria*, 16 October 2024; Enab Baladi, *Human rights report holds Russia responsible for civilian deaths in Idlib*, 23 October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

⁶¹⁷ UNOCHA, *North-West Syria. Situation Report*, 18 October 2024; SOHR, *Amid displacement of civilians from west Aleppo countryside. Regime forces bombard Al-Atareb city*, 31 October 2024; The New Arab, *Massive displacement in Syria's Idlib amid Assad regime attacks*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁶¹⁸ SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023*, 2 January 2024, p. 13.

⁶¹⁹ SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 6.

88 were still in custody.⁶²⁰ Since February 2024, demonstrations against the HTS regime have taken place in Idlib almost every Friday after midday prayers. Amongst other things, the demonstrators were protesting the increasing pressure being exerted by HTS on its critics, their arrest and, in some cases, torture or killing, and they were demanding better governance, economic reforms, the release of political prisoners and the departure of HTS commander Abu Muhammad al-Jolani. On several occasions, HTS violently suppressed these protests, assaulting and arresting demonstrators. This occurred in many places, including the city of Idlib, as well as in Binnish and Jisr al-Shughour.⁶²¹ On 24 May 2024, HTS announced that it would arrest the leaders of the protests.⁶²² According to one source, HTS subsequently arrested more than ninety people during a raid on various displacement camps.⁶²³ On 13 September 2024, protests against HTS broke out again in various locations across the province. Once again, there were calls for Jolani to step down.⁶²⁴

1.19.11 Aleppo

The province of Aleppo is located in north-western Syria, on the border with Türkiye. According to data from UNOCHA, the province covers an area of 19,891 km².⁶²⁵ According to UNOCHA, the province had a population of 4,749,350 in July 2023, including 1,641,306 internally displaced persons.⁶²⁶

During the current reporting period, Aleppo remained a conflict-ridden province, as it had been in the previous period. Various factions and armed groups – each with its own area of influence and control, and some backed by foreign powers – continued to fight there for their strategic and tactical interests.

Throughout the entire reporting period, the central part and the entire southern part of Aleppo belonged to the government-controlled area. This area also included the city of Aleppo. The south of the province was much less densely populated than the north. Several bases belonging to the Russian army and the IRGC were located in the south. The area around the town of Afrin in north-western Aleppo⁶²⁷ – which was previously predominantly Kurdish – as well as the town of al-Bab and the area to the north of it were controlled by the Turkish army and SNA factions. Turkish forces were also stationed in these northern and eastern regions of the province. The westernmost part of Aleppo was part of the SSG areas and was controlled by HTS. The north-eastern region around the towns of Manbij and Ayn al-Arab (in Kurdish: *Kobani*) was largely controlled by the SDF. The SDF also controlled an enclave around the town of Tel Rifaat, as well as several districts in the city of Aleppo. Government forces, affiliated militias and Russian troops were also present around Manbij and Tel Rifaat. The government army was also present in the

⁶²⁰ SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, pp. 6 and 15.

⁶²¹ VOA, *Hundreds join rare protests against Syria's Jihadi rebels*, 1 March 2024; The Guardian, *Protests in north-west Syria mark 13 years since start of fight for democracy*, 15 March 2024; AP News, *Protests against powerful group persist in Syria's last major rebel stronghold*, 17 May 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: HTS cracks down on protests in Syria's Idlib*, 18 May 2024; DW, *Syrian protesters rise up against Islamists in Idlib*, 25 May 2024; VOA, *Despite s, protests continue in rebel-held NW Syria*, 1 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *HTS arrests three at violent protest in Syria's Idlib*, 5 July 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 11; NRC, *Protesten herleven in alle hoeken van Syrië*, 16 August 2024; Enab Baladi, *Did HTS succeed in restricting Idlib's protest movement?*, 21 August 2024; GIGA, *GIGA Focus Middle East; Syria is not safe: A look to its regions (Number 5)*, 23 August 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, May 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁶²² BBC Monitoring, *HTS orders arrests after violent protests in Syria's Idlib*, 24 May 2024.

⁶²³ North Press Agency, *HTS arrests 90 people in Idlib*, 27 May 2024.

⁶²⁴ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Anti-HTS protests break out in north-west Syria*, 14 September 2024.

⁶²⁵ UNOCHA, *Home; Datasets; Syrian Arab Republic – Subnational administrative boundaries - SYR_AdminBoundaries_TabularData.xlsx (modified: 4 April 2023)*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024.

⁶²⁶ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024, p. 9.

⁶²⁷ The Guardian, *'Nothing is ours anymore': Kurds forced out of Afrin after Turkish assault*, 7 June 2018.

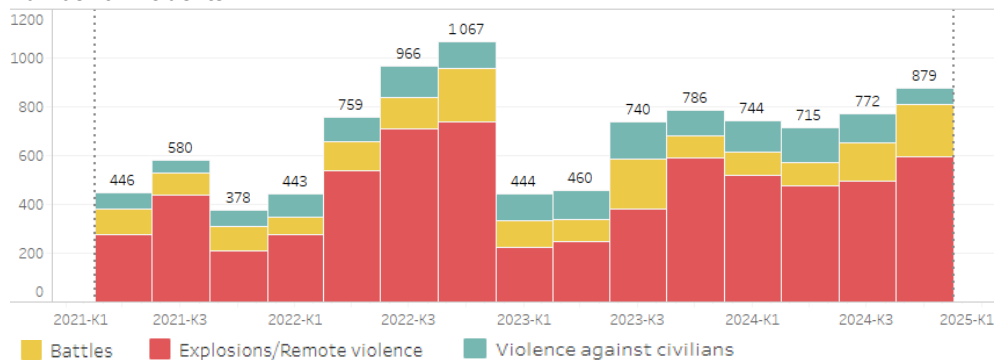
northernmost part of the Ayn al-Arab district, near the Turkish border. A Russian military base was also located there.⁶²⁸

The UN delivered humanitarian aid from Türkiye to north-western Syria through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing. Following the earthquakes in February 2023, the UN and the Syrian authorities agreed that the UN would also be granted humanitarian access through the Bab al-Salamah and al-Ra'i border crossings for a period of three months. During the reporting period, the authorisation to use Bab al-Hawa was extended until 13 January 2025, and that for the other two crossings until 13 February 2025.⁶²⁹

The number of civilian fatalities documented by the SNHR declined in 2023 compared to the previous year. In 2022, the SNHR recorded 224 civilian deaths in Aleppo, making it the deadliest province in the country for civilians.⁶³⁰ In 2023, the SNHR recorded 153 civilian deaths in Aleppo. Only in Deir ez-Zor and Daraa did the organisation document more civilian deaths in that year.⁶³¹ According to data from the SNHR, approximately 14% of the civilian deaths documented nationwide occurred in Aleppo during the first half of 2024. During this period as well, only in Deir ez-Zor and Daraa were more civilian deaths recorded.⁶³² According to the EUAA, the SNHR documented 129 civilian deaths in Aleppo between September 2023 and August 2024.⁶³³

During the reporting period, ACLED recorded the highest number of violent incidents in Syria in Aleppo. The number of incidents recorded remained roughly the same.⁶³⁴

Number of incidents



⁶²⁸ Enab Baladi, *Living conditions deteriorate in northern Aleppo due to regime's siege*, 29 November 2023; Enab Baladi, *Military barriers restrict Aleppo countryside residents*, 29 April 2024; Enab Baladi, *Turkey welcomes Russia's establishment of military base in Ain al-Arab*, 9 August 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 61; Enab Baladi, *How Russia's involvement in Syria shifted on political and military levels*, 4 October 2024; UN, *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2024*, 1 July 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 62.

⁶²⁹ UNOCHA, *Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Martin Griffiths. Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria*, 30 May 2024, 30 May 2024; UNOCHA, *Today's top news: Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Sudan, Haiti*, 11 July 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 3; Enab Baladi, *Syrian regime extends opening of Bab al-Salama, al-Rai crossings for aid delivery*, 13 August 2024; Syria Weekly, *Syria: October 29-November 5, 2024*, 5 November 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

⁶³⁰ SNHR, *1,057 civilians, including 251 children, 94 women, and 133 victims who died due to torture, were documented killed in Syria, in 2022*, 1 January 2023, p. 10.

⁶³¹ SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 11.

⁶³² SNHR, *429 Civilian Deaths, Including 65 Children and 38 Women, as well as 53 Deaths due to Torture, Documented in Syria in the First Half of 2024*, 1 July 2024.

⁶³³ EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 67.

⁶³⁴ ACLED, data via *ACLED Access Portal*, accessed 11 December 2024 (data updated through 6 December 2024). Selected criteria: Period from: 2021-Q2 | Through: 2024-Q4 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Aleppo.

The incidents recorded by ACLED during the reporting period were concentrated in the north and north-west, around the cities of Afrin, Aleppo and Manbij. The fighting took place in areas including along the front lines near Tel Rifaat and Jarablus.⁶³⁵

More than a third of all violent incidents recorded by ACLED took place in the Jebel Saman district (which includes the city of Aleppo), making it the most severely affected district in the province during the reporting period. It was followed by the districts of Azaz, Afrin, Manbij and al-Bab. The violent incidents could be largely attributed to government forces, the YPG, the SDF, the SNA factions, armed opposition groups, the Turkish armed forces and HTS. In the much less densely populated southern part of Aleppo, particularly in the As-Safira district, ACLED recorded significantly fewer incidents.⁶³⁶

The following provides an overview of several trends and incidents of violence during the reporting period. This list is by no means exhaustive.

Most of the incidents recorded by ACLED in Aleppo during the reporting period involved 'explosions and remote violence'. The majority of those incidents involved airstrikes and artillery fire.⁶³⁷ Many of these attacks were part of the military escalation following the drone attack on the military academy in Homs on 5 October 2023 (see Sub-section 1.19.8). In response to that attack, government forces and the Russian Air Force stepped up their shelling and airstrikes (including the use of incendiary weapons) in the SSG area in Idlib and north-west Aleppo. The escalation resulted in the displacement of more than 70,000 people, in addition to dozens of civilian deaths.⁶³⁸ The SNHR recorded October as the deadliest month of 2023 for Syrian civilians.⁶³⁹ In the months that followed, the government army and the Russian Air Force continued to carry out attacks on the SSG area, although the intensity was lower than in October. In addition, HTS continued to carry out attacks (including a missile attack in January 2024) on the villages of Nubl and al-Zahra, west of Aleppo city, in which 3 civilians were killed and around 22 others were injured.⁶⁴⁰ In the spring of 2024, there was another resurgence of violence between HTS and government forces. Government forces deployed weapons including missiles and kamikaze drones in western Aleppo.⁶⁴¹ HTS also remained active, carrying out various attacks, including on a military base in western Aleppo on 27 April 2024.⁶⁴²

⁶³⁵ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Aleppo.

⁶³⁶ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Aleppo.

⁶³⁷ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria.

⁶³⁸ SANA, *Funeral ceremony of martyrs of the terrorist attack on military academy begins with popular and official attendance*, 6 October 2023; Al Jazeera, *Northwest Syria witnesses most intense military escalation in three years*, 31 October 2023; SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 4 and 8; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024, pp. 6-8; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 63; UNOCHA, *North-West Syria. Situation Report*, 18 October 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, October 2023*, [URL](#), Accessed 13 December 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁶³⁹ SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 8.

⁶⁴⁰ SNHR, *Three civilians killed, incl. a woman and a boy, in an HTS bombardment on W. Aleppo, January 1, 2024*, 3 January 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 9; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 63-64.

⁶⁴¹ North Press Agency, *Government forces use suicide drones in NW Syria, causing casualties*, 16 April 2024; North Press Agency, *Government drone attacks on Aleppo kill 2 people*, 27 May 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 64; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, March 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁶⁴² SOHR, *Military escalation. HTS attacks the 46th Regiment frontline and regime kamikaze drone attacks tractor in western Aleppo*, 21 May 2024.

Violence between various armed groups also occasionally flared up in Aleppo during the reporting period. In late September 2023, HTS and the SNA factions fought in Jarablus for control of the border crossing with Türkiye. In October, hostilities subsided once again following the intervention of Türkiye.⁶⁴³ In August 2024, fighting broke out in Afrin between HTS and SNA factions.⁶⁴⁴ In early September 2024, fighting broke out between the SNA factions and the al-Jabha al-Shamiya militia. Demonstrations also took place at the Abu al-Zandeen crossing between the government-controlled area and the SIG area (under SNA control) near the city of al-Bab.⁶⁴⁵ In June 2024, this crossing was briefly opened to commercial traffic. This was met with considerable resistance, partly because the opening was associated with the rapprochement between Türkiye and the Syrian government, which some considered undesirable. It led to protests and acts of vandalism by fighters from the SNA factions and a number of civilians, following which the border crossing was closed.⁶⁴⁶ Although the crossing reopened on 18 August 2024, it came under mortar fire from government-held territory a day later. On 21 August 2024, Türkiye sent military reinforcements to the crossing.⁶⁴⁷ Enab Baladi reported that Abu al-Zandeen remained in custody until October 2024.⁶⁴⁸ On 23 October 2024, the crossing was opened to allow Syrians arriving from Lebanon to pass through.⁶⁴⁹ Once again, local residents staged protests against the opening, according to the UNHCR.⁶⁵⁰

During the reporting period, the conflict between Türkiye and the pro-Turkish SNA factions on one side, and the SDF on the other, also regularly resulted in violence on both sides. For example, during the reporting period, ACLED attributed 142 airstrikes and drone attacks in Aleppo to the Turkish forces.⁶⁵¹ In September 2023, SNA factions carried out attacks in SDF-controlled areas – including the assassination of the head of the Manbij Military Council. The Turkish Air Force carried out airstrikes and drone attacks on locations near Tel Rifaat, Ayn al-Arab (Kobani), Afrin, Manbij and north-east Aleppo. In turn, SDF troops carried out artillery strikes on areas controlled by SNA factions, including al-Bab, Azaz and Marea. In August 2024, further fighting broke out between SDF troops and SNA factions near the city of Azaz. In response, Turkish troops carried out artillery strikes on SDF targets.⁶⁵² On 14 August 2024, the ALF attacked SNA factions near Azaz and Marea.⁶⁵³ In October 2024, the Turkish army carried out further airstrikes on locations in Aleppo, including Tel Rifaat. These actions were reportedly in retaliation for a terrorist attack in Ankara attributed to the PKK.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁴³ EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, pp. 64-65.

⁶⁴⁴ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, August 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁶⁴⁵ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Protests erupt in rebel-held Syria amid internal rifts*, 7 September 2024.

⁶⁴⁶ Enab Baladi, *Opening of Abu al-Zandeen crossing: A step in a Turkish-Russian path*, 30 June 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: North-West Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024; Enab Baladi, *Demands of Shamiya Front to dissolve Interim Govt meet positive responses from National Coalition*, 6 September 2024; The New Arab, *Syrian rebels cut ties with Turkey-backed opposition 'government' amid disputes over crossing*, 6 September 2024.

⁶⁴⁷ BBC Monitoring, *Report says Turkish reinforcements sent to key crossing in Syria after protests*, 22 August 2024.

⁶⁴⁸ UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria short brief: Response to displacement from Lebanon to Syria - Reporting period: 24 September - 30 October 2024*, 31 October 2024.

⁶⁴⁹ Enab Baladi, *Abu al-Zandeen caught between opening and closing*, 4 November 2024.

⁶⁵⁰ UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria Short Brief: Response to Displacement from Lebanon to Syria - Reporting period: 24 September - 30 October 2024*, 31 October 2024.

⁶⁵¹ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Sub-event type: Air/drone strike | Country: Syria | Admin1: Aleppo.

⁶⁵² North Press Agency, *SDF reveals toll of Turkish attacks on NE Syria in 2023*, 31 December 2023; North Press Agency, *AANES condemns Turkish shelling on Syria's Manbij*, 23 May 2024; SOHR, *Military escalation. Turkish ground forces shell two villages in Kurdish areas in Aleppo countryside*, 26 May 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Kurdish forces, Turkey-backed groups clash in northern Syria*, 15 August 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 65.

⁶⁵³ BBC Monitoring, *Kurdish group claims two attacks on Turkey-backed rebels in north Syria*, 14 August 2024.

⁶⁵⁴ Reuters, *Turkey steps up strikes on PKK in Iraq, Syria after Ankara attack*, 24 October 2024; Al Jazeera, *Turkey strikes Iraq, Syria after attack on defence company near Ankara*, 24 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Turkey hits 'PKK targets' in Iraq, Syria following deadly Ankara attack*, 24 October 2024; The Guardian, *Turkey strikes in Syria and Iraq after attack on defence firm near Ankara*, 24 October 2024.

Aleppo was the province with the greatest number of documented arbitrary arrests and detentions in Syria during the reporting period. The SNHR documented 686 in 2023⁶⁵⁵ and 418 in the first half of 2024.⁶⁵⁶ The organisation attributed most of the arrests to SNA factions, followed by the SDF. Examples of arrests carried out by SNA factions and documented by the SNHR included the arrest of individuals from government-controlled or SDF-controlled areas, as well as individuals suspected of collaborating with the SDF.⁶⁵⁷ The SDF, in turn, reportedly arrested people suspected of collaborating with SNA factions. In Aleppo, the SNHR also documented arrests carried out by the SDF with the aim of recruiting men.⁶⁵⁸

During the reporting period, airstrikes were carried out, reportedly by the IDF, directed primarily at Syrian government targets, Hezbollah and Iranian military targets in Aleppo.⁶⁵⁹ Aleppo International Airport was also hit on several occasions.⁶⁶⁰

1.19.12 Raqqa

Raqqa is located in northern Syria. It borders Türkiye. According to data from UNOCHA, the province covers an area of 17,627 km².⁶⁶¹ According to UNOCHA, the province had a population of 847,132 in July 2023, including 152,955 internally displaced persons.⁶⁶²

During the reporting period, Raqqa was divided into various areas of control and influence, where factions and armed groups – some backed by foreign powers – continued to pursue their strategic interests. Like other provinces in northern Syria, Raqqa was also the scene of violent clashes between the parties involved in 2023 and 2024. Most of Raqqa belonged to the DAANES area. This referred to the central part of the province, where the city of Raqqa was also located. The sparsely populated southern part of the province was in the government-controlled area. Russian and Iranian military bases were also located here. The northernmost strip – roughly the area north of the M4 motorway around the city of Tel Abyad – was controlled by Turkish forces and SNA factions. Government forces and Russian troops were stationed in a narrow strip between this area and the DAANES area. Raqqa province is a former stronghold of ISIS, and ISIS cells were still active in the province during the reporting period.⁶⁶³

The number of civilian fatalities documented by the SNHR fell slightly in 2023 compared to the previous year. In 2022, the SNHR documented 27 civilian deaths in

⁶⁵⁵ SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023*, 2 January 2024, p. 13.

⁶⁵⁶ SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 6.

⁶⁵⁷ SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, pp. 15-16.

⁶⁵⁸ SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 14.

⁶⁵⁹ BBC Monitoring, *IRGC officer killed in suspected Israeli strike in Syria: Iran media*, 3 June 2024; NRC, *Meerdere doden na Israëlische luchtaanval op fabriek bij Syrische stad Aleppo*, 3 June 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Syria reports deaths in Israeli strikes near Aleppo*, 3 June 2024; BBC Monitoring, *IRGC officer killed in suspected Israeli strike in Syria: Iran media*, 3 June 2024; Die Welt, *Israel greift Waffenlager in Syrien an; 16 Kämpfer einer proiranischen Terrorgruppe sollen getötet worden sein. Huthi-Miliz feuert Rakete auf Eilat*, 4 June 2024.

⁶⁶⁰ AP News, *Syria says Israeli airstrikes hit airports in Damascus and Aleppo, damaging their runways*, 12 October 2023; ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles, Explosions/Remote violence, Violence against civilians | Actor1: Military Forces of Israel (2022-) | Country: Syria | Admin1: Aleppo.

⁶⁶¹ UNOCHA, *Home; Datasets; Syrian Arab Republic – Subnational administrative boundaries – SYR_AdminBoundaries_TabularData.xlsx (modified: 4 April 2023)*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024.

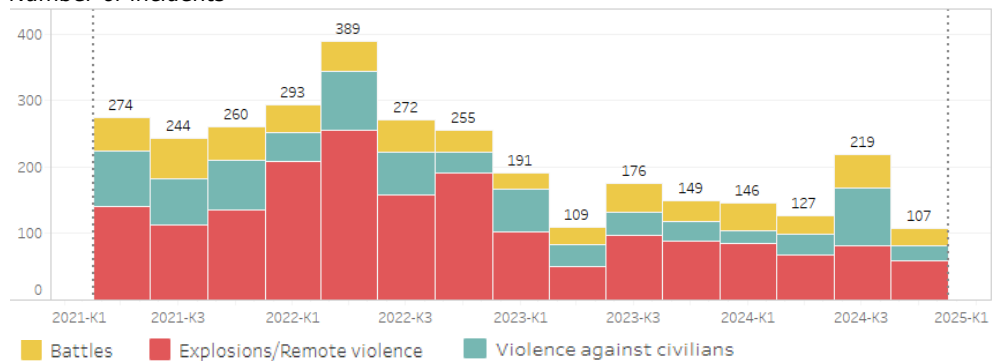
⁶⁶² UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024, p. 9.

⁶⁶³ EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, pp. 112-113; UN, *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2024*, 1 July 2024.

Raqqa.⁶⁶⁴ In 2023, there had been 17.⁶⁶⁵ According to the EUAA, the high number of civilian deaths documented by the SNHR subsequently increased: between September 2023 and August 2024, there were reportedly at least 67 civilian deaths in Raqqa. It was not always possible to identify the perpetrators of violence against civilians.⁶⁶⁶

During the reporting period, the data collected by ACLED fluctuated, and no clear trend was apparent.⁶⁶⁷

Number of incidents



Most of the incidents recorded by ACLED in Raqqa during the reporting period were classified as ‘fighting’ and ‘explosions and remote violence’. A concentration of incidents classified as ‘explosions and remote attacks’ was observed in the northern district of Tel Abyad, along the front line between the DAANES area and the area controlled by Türkiye and the SNA factions. By contrast, ‘fighting’ was concentrated in the Raqqa district, along the banks of the Euphrates in the east of the province. These instances of fighting often involved skirmishes between ISIS and the SDF or local armed groups.⁶⁶⁸

Most of the violent incidents classified as ‘explosions and remote attacks’ were attributed to Turkish forces in northern Raqqa. Türkiye’s involvement in Raqqa was largely driven by its campaign against the YPG – a component of the SDF that Türkiye regards as a terrorist organisation. The Turkish attacks consisted primarily of drone strikes and artillery fire, targeting both SDF/YPG positions and civilian infrastructure.⁶⁶⁹

During the reporting period, the SDF was linked to disappearances and the extrajudicial detention of civilians. This was also the case in Raqqa. In many cases, this was reportedly motivated by the fact that the detainees were suspected of

⁶⁶⁴ SNHR, *1,057 civilians, including 251 children, 94 women, and 133 victims who died due to torture, were documented killed in Syria, in 2022*, 1 January 2023, p. 10.

⁶⁶⁵ SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 11.

⁶⁶⁶ EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, pp. 116-117; ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Ar Raqqa.

⁶⁶⁷ ACLED, data via *ACLED Access Portal*, accessed 11 December 2024 (data updated through 6 December 2024). Selected criteria: Period from: 2021-Q2 | Through: 2024-Q4 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Ar Raqqa.

⁶⁶⁸ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Ar Raqqa.

⁶⁶⁹ HRW, *Northeast Syria: Turkish strikes disrupt water, electricity*, 26 October 2023; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. May 2024*, 5 June 2024; AP News, *Turkish drone strikes in Syria kill 4 U.S.-backed fighters, wound 11 civilians, Kurdish group says*, 31 May 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 114.

collaborating with ISIS or one of the SNA factions.⁶⁷⁰ In addition, according to various sources, the SDF was responsible for arresting young men with a view to recruiting them.⁶⁷¹

In addition, in 2023, the SNHR documented government arrests of civilians who had regularised their status at an earlier stage (also known as individual regularisation).⁶⁷² The organisation cited Raqqa as one of the four provinces where these arrests were most common.⁶⁷³

ISIS remained active in Raqqa, particularly in the south of the province, where ISIS fighters regularly carried out attacks on SDF or government army positions, checkpoints and infrastructure. The attacks also resulted in civilian casualties.⁶⁷⁴ Both the SDF and the government army, in turn, fought against ISIS. With the support of the International Coalition, the SDF managed to arrest several ISIS leaders. The government army and the Russian Air Force carried out airstrikes on ISIS positions in Raqqa. In June 2024, the government army stepped up its operations in the border region between the provinces of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, after ISIS had attacked government forces in that area.⁶⁷⁵

1.19.13 Hasaka

Hasaka is located in the northeastern corner of Syria. It borders Türkiye and Iraq. According to data from UNOCHA, the province covers an area of 23,168 km².⁶⁷⁶ According to UNOCHA, the province had a population of 1,431,461 in July 2023, including 342,701 internally displaced persons.⁶⁷⁷ Hasaka was home to various population groups, including Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Armenians and Yazidis.⁶⁷⁸

The strategic importance of Hasaka is due primarily to the presence of oil fields. The province also has fertile agricultural land, where most of Syria's wheat and cotton was grown before the outbreak of the armed conflict.⁶⁷⁹

During the reporting period, the majority of Hasaka belonged to the DAANES area. The area around the city of Ras al-Ayn had been under the control of Turkish forces and SNA factions since late 2019. Government forces controlled security enclaves in the cities of Hasaka and Qamishli. Government forces were also present in several

⁶⁷⁰ Amnesty International, *Aftermath. Injustice, torture, and death in detention in North-East Syria*, 17 April 2024, p. 101-102; SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 14; ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles, Explosions/Remote violence, Violence against civilians | Actor1: QSD: Syrian Democratic Forces| Country: Syria | Admin1: Ar Raqqa.

⁶⁷¹ SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 14; The Syrian Observer, *SDF arrests hundreds of young men for conscription in Northern and Eastern Syria*, 2 July 2024.

⁶⁷² Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, pp. 17-18.

⁶⁷³ SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023*, 2 January 2024, p. 4.

⁶⁷⁴ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, August 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; Al Jazeera, *ISIL attacks kill 30 in Syrian desert*, 8 November 2023; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, November 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, February 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, July 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, September 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *IS claims attacking oil tanker in Syria's Raqqa, killing driver*, 9 July 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, pp. 114-115.

⁶⁷⁵ Asharq Al-Awsat, *Russia carries out dozens of strikes against ISIS in Syria*, 1 April 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. June 2024*, 15 July 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. July 2024*, 12 August 2024.

⁶⁷⁶ UNOCHA, *Home; Datasets; Syrian Arab Republic – Subnational administrative boundaries - SYR_AdminBoundaries_TabularData.xlsx (modified: 4 April 2023)*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024.

⁶⁷⁷ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024, p. 9.

⁶⁷⁸ Syria Direct, *'Strangers in our own homes': A waning Assyrian community holds on in northeastern Syria*, 21 March 2023; Syria Direct, *Yazidis' long struggle against landlessness and discrimination in rural Hasakah*, 4 April 2023; North Press Agency, *Armenians in NE Syria hold first conference*, 21 July 2024.

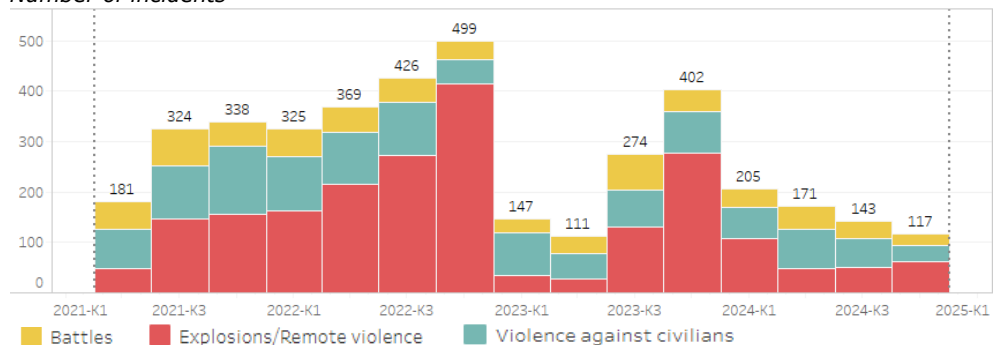
⁶⁷⁹ North Press Agency, *Oil leakage into rivers threatens NE Syria*, 13 February 2024; Enab Baladi, *War shackles al-Hasakah's wheat supply, policies as migration drivers*, 6 September 2024.

villages north-east of the city of Hasaka, as well as along the border with Türkiye and the SIG area.⁶⁸⁰ In the north, there were several Russian military bases, including an airbase near Qamishli. Iranian forces also had bases in the area. In addition, there were several International Coalition military bases in the east, including in the city of al-Shaddadi.⁶⁸¹

The number of civilian fatalities documented by the SNHR declined in 2023 compared to the previous year. In 2022, the SNHR documented 74 civilian deaths in Hasaka.⁶⁸² In 2023, there had been 33.⁶⁸³ According to the EUAA, the number of civilian deaths documented by the SNHR subsequently decreased further: between September 2023 and August 2024, there were reportedly 9 civilian deaths in Hasaka. In most cases, ACLED identified the SDF as the instigator of the violence against civilians, but it was not possible to identify the perpetrators in all cases.⁶⁸⁴

As shown by ACLED data, the number of violent incidents recorded in Hasaka increased in the second half of 2023. In 2024, the number of recorded incidents decreased:⁶⁸⁵

Number of incidents



Most of the incidents recorded by ACLED in Hasaka during the reporting period involved 'explosions and remote violence', followed by 'fighting'. Incidents in the first category were concentrated along the main road from the al-Ya'rubiyah border crossing to Qamishli, and around the cities of Qamishli, Hasaka and Tal Tamr. The incidents classified as 'fighting' took place in various regions, including along the front line with the SIG area, around the city of Hasaka and along the main road between Deir ez-Zor and Hasaka.⁶⁸⁶

The violent incidents could be largely attributed to the SDF, ISIS, the Turkish armed forces and affiliated SNA factions, along with government forces. The following

⁶⁸⁰ Ehab Baladi, *Investigative report documents Turkish military's seizure of Syrian farmers' lands*, 14 March 2024.

⁶⁸¹ Kurdistan 24, *US carries out patrol in Hasakah after two days of Turkish drone strikes in northeast Syria*, 7 October 2023; VOA, *US troops in Middle East: What are they doing and where?*, 3 February 2024; France 24, *Rockets fired from northern Iraq target US-led coalition base in Syria*, 22 April 2024; Jusoor for Studies, *Map of foreign forces in Syria, Mid-2024*, 2 July 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, pp. 101-102.

⁶⁸² SNHR, *1,057 civilians, including 251 children, 94 women, and 133 victims who died due to torture, were documented killed in Syria, in 2022*, 1 January 2023, p. 10.

⁶⁸³ SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 11.

⁶⁸⁴ EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, pp. 108-109; ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Al Hasakeh.

⁶⁸⁵ ACLED, data via *ACLED Access Portal*, accessed 11 December 2024 (data updated through 6 December 2024). Selected criteria: Period from: 2021-Q2 | Through: 2024-Q4 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Al Hasakeh.

⁶⁸⁶ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Al Hasakeh.

provides an overview of several trends and incidents of violence during the reporting period. This list is by no means exhaustive.

Attacks by Turkish forces and SNA factions on targets affiliated with the SDF and, in some cases, the government army were a major source of insecurity in Hasaka during the reporting period. For example, in September 2023, at least twenty people were killed in fighting between SNA factions on one side and the government army and the SDF on the other.⁶⁸⁷ In October 2023, SDF fighters attacked Turkish military posts in the region. The SDF itself stated that at least four Turks were killed in the incident.⁶⁸⁸ Several civilians were reportedly killed in Turkish airstrikes on Qamishli that same month.⁶⁸⁹

In 2024, Türkiye continued to attempt to destabilise the DAANES administration by launching attacks on SDF targets. For example, in February 2024, Turkish forces killed two SDF fighters and a Kurdish civil servant in Qamishli.⁶⁹⁰ On 31 May 2024, the Turkish army carried out drone attacks in and around the city of Qamishli. Four SDF fighters were killed, and at least eleven civilians were injured.⁶⁹¹ On 22 August 2024, the first joint Turkish-Russian patrols since October 2023 took place in various parts of the province. This led to protests in various parts of Hasaka, including Maabda and al-Qahtaniya. On 29 August 2024, a woman in the village of Deiruna Agha was injured when she was struck by a Russian vehicle.⁶⁹² In early September 2024, several SDF fighters, at least one commander of the internal security forces (*Asayish*) and at least one PKK commander were killed in Turkish airstrikes and drone attacks.⁶⁹³ On 23 October 2024, Turkish attacks took place on Qamishli and Amuda. According to the SDF, civilians were also killed in these attacks.⁶⁹⁴

The Turkish armed forces also targeted civilian infrastructure in areas under SDF control. For example, the Turkish Air Force carried out attacks on power stations, oil facilities and gas infrastructure. For example, on 15 January 2024, the power station in Swadiyah was damaged by Turkish airstrikes. Attacks were also reported later in 2024. The attacks affected access to water, fuel and other essential services for more than a million people.⁶⁹⁵

The government army and affiliated militias also carried out attacks on SDF positions. For example, on 21 September 2023, a three-year-old child was killed in the city of Hasaka by mortar shells fired from the government-controlled part of the

⁶⁸⁷ France 24, *Clashes in Northeast Syria between army, pro-Turkey fighters kill more than 20*, 3 September 2023; The Carter Center, *Quarterly review of Syrian political and military dynamics July-September 2023*, October 2023, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁸⁸ North Press Agency, *SDF claims killing 4 Turkish soldiers, injuring 5 in northern Hasakah*, 10 October 2023.

⁶⁸⁹ CNN, *Turkish airstrikes kill at least 11 in northern Syria, Kurdish security forces say*, 5 October 2023.

⁶⁹⁰ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, February 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁶⁹¹ AP News, *Turkish drone strikes in Syria kill 4 U.S.-backed fighters, wound 11 civilians, Kurdish group says*, 31 May 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Turkish drone strike kills four SDF fighters in northeastern Syria*, 1 June 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 17.

⁶⁹² Hürriyet Daily News, *Türkiye, Russia resume joint ground patrols in northern Syria*, 24 August 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Clashes in northern Syria as joint Turkey-Russia patrols resume*, 29 August 2024.

⁶⁹³ BBC Monitoring, *Kurdish commander killed in suspected Turkish drone strike in Syria*, 3 September 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, September 2023*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁶⁹⁴ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Turkish strikes kill 'civilians' in Kurdish-held areas in north Syria*, 24 October 2024; SANA, *Turkish's aggression NE Syria puts Amuda power plant out of service*, 24 October 2024; Enab Baladi, *Turkey continues its escalation in northeastern Syria*, 25 October 2024.

⁶⁹⁵ Reuters, *Turkish strikes hit water, power infrastructure in Syria's Kurdish-held northeast*, 15 January 2024; The New Humanitarian, *Turkish airstrikes in northeast Syria leave millions short of power, fuel, and water*, 21 February 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 17; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 109; BBC News, *Turkish strikes in Syria cut water to one million people*, 19 November 2024.

city.⁶⁹⁶ In August 2024, the SDF laid siege to government-controlled enclaves in Hasaka and Qamishli, after Iran-backed militias had carried out attacks on the SDF. Fighting broke out between the SDF and the government army and affiliated militias. The fighting resulted in dozens of deaths, including civilians.⁶⁹⁷ Following talks on 13 August 2024 between Russian Lieutenant General Sergei Kessel and Mazloum Abdi, the commander of the SDF, the SDF lifted the blockades on the government-controlled enclaves.⁶⁹⁸

Unrest also occurred within the pro-government coalition. For example, fighting broke out in the city of Hasaka between the government army and the NDF militia in September 2023, after a local NDF commander refused to step down. The fighting lasted about a week.⁶⁹⁹

In addition, ISIS cells were still active in Hasaka during the reporting period. In late January and early February 2024, the SDF carried out a security operation at the al-Hol detention camp, targeting suspected ISIS fighters.⁷⁰⁰ On 17 February 2024, ISIS claimed to have fired on a military post in the military enclave in Qamishli. One soldier was killed, and another was injured in the attack.⁷⁰¹ On 16 July 2024, the US Department of Defence stated that between January and June 2024, US forces and the SDF had carried out 59 military operations targeting ISIS. It is reported that 14 ISIS fighters were killed, and 92 were arrested.⁷⁰²

As in the previous reporting period, tensions between the International Coalition and Iran-backed armed groups flared up on a regular basis. In January 2024 alone, militias reportedly carried out nearly thirty attacks on US military bases near al-Shaddadi, al-Rumaylan, al-Malikiyah and Kharab al-Jir.⁷⁰³ On 9 August 2024, a drone attack took place on an international coalition military base near the village of Kharab al-Jir. Eight American soldiers were injured in the incident.⁷⁰⁴ On 11 August 2024, a suspected US drone killed eight members of an Iran-backed militia.⁷⁰⁵

The SDF also arrested political opponents, particularly those affiliated with the Kurdish National Council (KNC). According to ETANA, on 1 July 2024, the SDF arrested Suleiman Asso, a prominent member of the KNC, in Qamishli. This sparked demonstrations that lasted for several days. These demonstrations were violently dispersed by the SDF.⁷⁰⁶ During the reporting period, the SDF was also linked to the disappearance and extrajudicial detention of civilians. This was also the case in Hasaka. Such incidents often took place under the guise of the fight against ISIS

⁶⁹⁶ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024, p. 9.

⁶⁹⁷ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, August 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁶⁹⁸ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Reports differ on Russian-mediated deal on clashes in northeast Syria*, 14 August 2024; BBC Monitoring, *SDF lifts blockade on 'security areas' held by Syrian government*, 16 August 2024.

⁶⁹⁹ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024, p. 9; North Press Agency, *Clashes between government forces, NDF erupt in Syria's Hasakah*, 20 September 2023.

⁷⁰⁰ INSO, *Safety and access review Q1 2024*, 2024, p. 31.

⁷⁰¹ Enab Baladi, *Islamic State claims operation in Qamishli center for first time since 2019*, 18 February 2024.

⁷⁰² X.com, *U.S. Central Command*, 16 July 2024, [URL](#).

⁷⁰³ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, January 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁷⁰⁴ Kurdistan 24, *Drone attack on US base in Hasaka*, 10 August 2024; Reuters, *Eight U.S. troops injured in Syria drone attack last week, Pentagon says*, 13 August 2024; ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, August 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁷⁰⁵ ICG, *CrisisWatch: Syria, August 2024*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁷⁰⁶ ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: North-East Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024.

and the SNA factions.⁷⁰⁷ According to various sources, the SDF was also responsible for arresting young men with a view to recruiting them.⁷⁰⁸

1.19.14 *Deir ez-Zor*

Deir ez-Zor is located in eastern Syria. It borders Iraq. According to data from UNOCHA, the province covers an area of 25,160 km².⁷⁰⁹ According to UNOCHA, the province had a population of 1,200,181 in July 2023, including 166,041 internally displaced persons.⁷¹⁰ The population of Deir ez-Zor is overwhelmingly Sunni Arab. There is a small Shia and Christian minority living in the province.⁷¹¹

Deir ez-Zor is home to oil and gas fields, including the Conoco gas field. Another source of the province's strategic importance is the presence of the border crossing at al-Bukamal, on the land route between Damascus and Baghdad.⁷¹² The sporadic fighting between the predominantly Kurdish SDF and Arab tribal militias, particularly around the city of Deir ez-Zor, the continued presence of ISIS, and the presence of Iran (notably through militias supported by that country) and that of the International Coalition led to tension and an upsurge in armed violence in the province during the reporting period.

Deir ez-Zor is divided into two roughly equal parts by the Euphrates. During the reporting period, the area west of the river belonged to the government-controlled area. This included the city of Deir ez-Zor. The government also had an enclave comprising seven villages on the east bank of the Euphrates, opposite the city of Deir ez-Zor. Along the west bank, Hezbollah and Iran-backed militias were present. In any case, the IRGC was present near the town of al-Bukamal. There were also Russian military bases on the west bank. The part of Deir ez-Zor east of the Euphrates belonged to the DAANES area. In the east, there were several military bases belonging to the International Coalition, including those near the al-Omar and Conoco oil fields. ISIS cells were active in both parts of the province.⁷¹³

During the reporting period, Deir ez-Zor remained one of the Syrian provinces with the greatest number of civilian deaths. Furthermore, the figures documented by the SNHR increased between 2022 and 2023. In 2022, the SNHR documented 125 civilian deaths; in 2023, there had been 203. In 2022, Idlib, Daraa and Aleppo were the only provinces with more documented civilian deaths. In 2023, only Daraa had more.⁷¹⁴ According to the EUAA, the high number of civilian deaths documented by the SNHR subsequently continued: between September 2023 and August 2024, 173

⁷⁰⁷ Amnesty International, *Aftermath. Injustice, torture, and death in detention in North-East Syria*, 17 April 2024, pp. 101-102; SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 14; ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles, Explosions/Remote violence, Violence against civilians | Actor1: QSD: Syrian Democratic Forces| Country: Syria | Admin1: Al Hasakeh.

⁷⁰⁸ SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 14; The Syrian Observer, *SDF arrests hundreds of young men for conscription in Northern and Eastern Syria*, 2 July 2024.

⁷⁰⁹ UNOCHA, *Home; Datasets; Syrian Arab Republic – Subnational administrative boundaries - SYR_AdminBoundaries_TabularData.xlsx (modified: 4 April 2023)*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024.

⁷¹⁰ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024, p. 9.

⁷¹¹ EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 2 July 2021, p. 201.

⁷¹² Reuters, *U.S.-backed forces capture big gas field in Syria's Deir al-Zor - senior commander*, 23 September 2017; Atlantic Council, *Factbox: Iranian presence in Syria's Deir ez-Zor province*, 18 May 2021; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 2 July 2021, p. 201; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Borders without a nation: Syria, outside powers, and open-ended instability*, 10 September 2024; AA, *US troops, Iranian-backed groups trade fire in eastern Syria*, 23 October 2024.

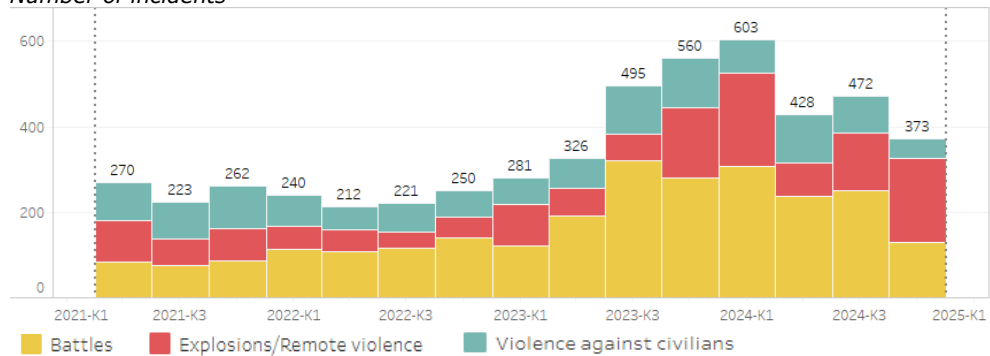
⁷¹³ UN, *Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2024*, 1 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *IS claims killing SDF coalition 'spy' in eastern Syria*, 16 August 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, pp. 120-122.

⁷¹⁴ SNHR, *1,057 civilians, including 251 children, 94 women, and 133 victims who died due to torture, were documented killed in Syria, in 2022*, 1 January 2023, p. 10; SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 11.

civilian deaths were documented in Deir ez-Zor.⁷¹⁵ In most cases, the SDF was responsible for the violence against civilians.⁷¹⁶

As shown by ACLED data, the number of violent incidents recorded in Deir ez-Zor increased during the reporting period: The figures peaked in late 2023 and early 2024. They then fell slightly again, but not to the level observed before 2023:⁷¹⁷

Number of incidents



Most of the incidents recorded by ACLED in Deir ez-Zor during the reporting period involved 'fighting'. During the reporting period, ACLED recorded more combat-related deaths there than in any other province. The recorded incidents were concentrated along the Euphrates and along the main road towards Hasaka in the north. More than half of the recorded incidents took place in the Deir ez-Zor district.⁷¹⁸ The violent incidents could be largely attributed to the SDF, ISIS, government forces, Iran-backed militias and Arab tribal militias. The following is a summary of a number of trends and incidents of violence during the reporting period. This list is by no means exhaustive.

During the reporting period, fighting broke out on several occasions in the DAANES area of Deir ez-Zor between the SDF and the Deir ez-Zor Military Council (DMC). The DMC was a coalition of various local tribal militias established by the SDF in 2016. In the second half of 2023, tensions between the two sides escalated after SDF troops attempted to seize military checkpoints held by the DMC. When the SDF arrested the commander of the DMC, Ahmed al-Khubail (also known as Abu Khawla) in late August 2023, this led to fighting between DMC and SDF fighters. Dozens of people, including civilians were reportedly killed. Some DMC commanders then fled to the western part of Deir ez-Zor, which was under government control.⁷¹⁹ In the months that followed, including in 2024, the conflict between the SDF and local

⁷¹⁵ EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 127.

⁷¹⁶ SNHR, *1,057 civilians, including 251 children, 94 women, and 133 victims who died due to torture, were documented killed in Syria, in 2022*, 1 January 2023, p. 10; SNHR, *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023*, 1 January 2024, p. 11; ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Deir ez Zor.

⁷¹⁷ ACLED, data via *ACLED Access Portal*, accessed 11 December 2024 (data updated through 6 December 2024). Selected criteria: Period from: 2021-Q2 | Through: 2024-Q4 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Deir ez Zor.

⁷¹⁸ ACLED, *Data Export Tool*, [URL](#), accessed 11 December 2024. Selected criteria: From: 01/08/2023 | To: 27/11/2024 | Event type: Battles; Explosions/Remote violence; Violence against civilians | Country: Syria | Admin1: Deir ez Zor.

⁷¹⁹ BBC, *Syria: Dozens killed in fighting between SDF and Arab tribesmen*, 5 September 2023; The Carter Center, *Quarterly review of Syrian political and military dynamics July-September 2023*, October 2023, pp. 1, 6-9; TWI, *The SDF's insurgency challenge in Deir ez-Zor*, 14 November 2023.

militias in Deir ez-Zor continued to flare up from time to time. This continued until the end of the reporting period.⁷²⁰

During the reporting period, fighting also took place between the SDF and the government army and affiliated militias. Syrian government forces carried out mortar and artillery attacks on SDF positions on the eastern bank of the Euphrates. The SDF forces retaliated with similar shelling of government-controlled areas on the west bank. The exchange of fire resulted in civilian casualties on both sides of the river, as well as damage to residential buildings and public facilities.⁷²¹ According to the SNHR, eleven civilians, including six children, were killed during missile and heavy artillery attacks by the government army on the villages of al-Dahla and Jedid in eastern Deir ez-Zor in August 2024. In addition, civilians were killed during an SDF shelling attack on the town of al-Bulil. Hundreds of civilians were displaced during this period.⁷²²

Particularly from October 2023, when the conflict between Israel and Hamas broke out in Gaza, Deir ez-Zor was also the scene of attacks by Iran-backed militias on targets of the US-led international coalition.⁷²³ For example, the militias carried out various attacks on troops and facilities around the Conoco gas field.⁷²⁴ The US Air Force, and reportedly on occasion the IDF as well, carried out air strikes against these militias. For example, during the reporting period, attacks were carried out against positions in Maysulun, al-Bukamal and al-Mayadeen in the east of Deir ez-Zor, as well as against positions in al-Hari and Ayyash in the west of the province.⁷²⁵

ISIS was active in Deir ez-Zor throughout the reporting period. ISIS fighters carried out regular attacks on positions held by the SDF or the government army and affiliated militias, as well as on checkpoints, civilians and infrastructure.⁷²⁶ For example, in August 2023, an army vehicle was ambushed by ISIS between the city of Deir ez-Zor and the Iraqi border. At least 33 people were reportedly killed.⁷²⁷ In

⁷²⁰ Kurdistan 24, *Anti-SDF Arab tribal militia groups in Deir ez-Zor backed by Iran and Syrian regime: Pentagon Report*, 11 February 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. July 2024*, 12 August 2024; Al-Monitor, *Clashes between Arab tribes, SDF forces in Syria pose challenge to US*, 8 August 2024.

⁷²¹ Al-Monitor, *Clashes between Arab tribes, SDF forces in Syria pose challenge to US*, 8 August 2024; UNOCHA, *Syria: North-East Syria flash update. Flash update 1: Hostilities in Deir-Ez-Zor. As of 11 August 2024*, 12 August 2024.

⁷²² Rudaw, *SDF says it killed 20 fighters in Deir ez-Zor*, 12 August 2024; SNHR, *57 civilian deaths, including 13 children and six women, as well as six deaths due to torture, documented in Syria in August 2024*, 1 September 2024.

⁷²³ EUAA, *Syria. Security situation*, 22 October 2024, p. 124.

⁷²⁴ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Pro-Iran groups in Syria accused of latest attack on US base*, 27 July 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Iran-backed militias launch fresh attack on US base in east Syria*, 14 August 2024; Reuters, *Projectiles did not impact US base in Syria, US officials say*, 14 August 2024.

⁷²⁵ CNN, *US carries out airstrikes in eastern Syria targeting IRGC and Iranian-backed groups' weapons storage facility*, 9 November 2023; CNN, *US carries out retaliatory strikes on Iranian-linked militia targets in Iraq and Syria*, 3 February 2024; Al-Monitor, *What we know about latest airstrikes in northeast Syria*, 26 March 2024; Enab Baladi, *Washington denies responsibility for Deir Ezzor airstrikes*, 26 March 2024; Arab News, *Iraqi pro-Iran fighter killed in strike on eastern Syria*, 22 June 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 9; BBC Monitoring, *Drone strike kills two near pro-Iran militia base in eastern Syria*, 5 September 2024.

⁷²⁶ BBC, *Islamic State attack on army bus kills 33 Syrian soldiers*, 12 August 2023; Al Jazeera, *ISIL attacks kill 30 in Syrian desert*, 8 November 2023; Jusoor for Studies, *Islamic State steps up attacks in the Syrian desert*, 16 January 2024; BBC Monitoring, *IS claims deadly Syria suicide attack as 'revenge' for detainees*, 11 May 2024; BBC Monitoring, *IS claims another suicide attack in Syria 'to avenge' al-Hol women*, 6 June 2024; BBC Monitoring, *IS claims attacking SDF oil tanker convoy in eastern Syria*, 27 June 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Syrian soldier killed, two injured in reported IS attack in Palmyra desert*, 5 August 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Domestic media report IS attack on Syrian army in north-eastern Syria*, 21 August 2024; BBC Monitoring, *IS militants shoot dead woman in Syria town – war monitor*, 7 September 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. Januari 2024*, 12 February 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. February 2024*, 7 March 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. March 2024*, 17 April 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. April 2024*, 8 May 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. May 2024*, 10 June 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. June 2024*, 15 July 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. July 2024*, 8 August 2024.

⁷²⁷ BBC, *Islamic State attack on army bus kills 33 Syrian soldiers*, 12 August 2023.

May and June 2024, ISIS killed several SDF fighters in suicide attacks.⁷²⁸ In 2024, there were reportedly signs of an increase in ISIS activity in Deir ez-Zor.⁷²⁹ According to one source, ISIS was also responsible for shelling civilians and attacking herders in order to steal their livestock.⁷³⁰ Both the SDF and the government army, in turn, fought against ISIS, sometimes with US or Russian air support, respectively. In June 2024, the government army stepped up its operations in the border region between Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, following an attack by ISIS on government forces in that area.⁷³¹

Deir ez-Zor was also one of the provinces where a relatively high number of arbitrary arrests and detentions were documented during the reporting period. The SNHR documented 259 in 2023⁷³² and 146 in the first half of 2024.⁷³³ In 2023, only Aleppo and Rural Damascus had more documented arbitrary arrests; in 2024, only Aleppo had more (see Section 1.10). The SNHR attributed the vast majority of the incidents to the SDF, followed by government forces.⁷³⁴ Amongst other things, the SDF has purportedly arrested civilians for criticising living conditions in SDF-controlled areas.⁷³⁵

In addition, in 2023, the SNHR documented cases in which the authorities arrested civilians who had regularised their status at an earlier stage (also known as individual regularisation).⁷³⁶ The organisation cited Deir ez-Zor as one of the four provinces where these arrests were most common.⁷³⁷

⁷²⁸ BBC Monitoring, *IS claims deadly Syria suicide attack as 'revenge' for detainees*, 11 May 2024; BBC Monitoring, *IS claims another suicide attack in Syria 'to avenge' al-Hol women*, 6 June 2024; BBC Monitoring, *IS claims attacking SDF oil tanker convoy in eastern Syria*, 27 June 2024.

⁷²⁹ The New York Times, *Why the Pentagon is warning that ISIS attacks could double this year*, 17 July 2024; The New Arab, *Islamic State attacks on track to double in Iraq and Syria compared to last year, US military says*, 17 July 2024; ABC News, *US airstrikes target multiple sites in Syria, killing up to 35 ISIS militants*, 30 October 2024.

⁷³⁰ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. Januari 2024*, 12 February 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. February 2024*, 7 March 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. March 2024*, 17 April 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. April 2024*, 8 May 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. May 2024*, 10 June 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. June 2024*, 15 July 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. July 2024*, 8 August 2024.

⁷³¹ Asharq Al-Awsat, *Russia carries out dozens of strikes against ISIS in Syria*, 1 April 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. June 2024*, 15 July 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. July 2024*, 8 August 2024.

⁷³² SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023*, 2 January 2024, p. 13.

⁷³³ SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 6.

⁷³⁴ SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023*, 2 January 2024, p. 13; SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 6.

⁷³⁵ SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023*, 2 January 2024, p. 6; SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 17.

⁷³⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, pp. 17-18.

⁷³⁷ SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023*, 2 January 2024, p. 4.

2 Human rights

2.1 Religious and ethnic groups

2.1.1 *Impediments and serious discrimination*

2.1.1.1 Government-controlled area

Sunni Arabs constituted the largest population group in the government-controlled area. In general, Sunnis were able to practise their faith without any problems. According to one source, in the government-controlled area, the primary factor was not characteristics such as religion or ethnicity, but rather ties to the government.⁷³⁸ Many of President Assad's opponents were Sunni.⁷³⁹ Due to their significant presence among opposition groups, Sunnis in the government-controlled area were more likely to face discrimination than other religious groups were. Some sources cited the example that Sunnis were generally less likely to be appointed as civil servants than Alawites or Shias were.⁷⁴⁰ One source claimed that Sunnis were less likely to attain leadership positions or to hold them for long.⁷⁴¹ Some sources indicated that Sunnis were sometimes restricted from entering areas where Alawites and Shias were in the majority.⁷⁴² Furthermore, one source stated that Christian minorities in the south were concerned about being unable to practise their faith.⁷⁴³ There was no evidence, however, that Sunnis and Christians in the government-controlled area generally faced serious discrimination in their daily lives.

2.1.1.2 DAANES area

In the DAANES area, the Kurds comprised a large share of the population, but they did not constitute a majority. Certain areas (such as Manbij, Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa) had Arab majorities.⁷⁴⁴ In addition, members of various Christian denominations, Yazidis and Turkmen lived in the DAANES area.⁷⁴⁵ Ethnic tensions existed in the DAANES area, particularly between Arabs and Kurds. For example, such tensions arose about the school curriculum, representation in the de facto administration, the seizure of property by Kurdish members of the SDF, and compulsory military service.⁷⁴⁶ There is no evidence to suggest that Arabs, Kurds, Christians, Yazidis and Turkmen in the DAANES area faced serious discrimination in their daily lives. According to various sources, however, the Arab population in the DAANES area was disadvantaged in terms of access to basic services and the distribution of revenue from oil production and other activities. This was one of the factors behind the uprisings by Arab tribal militias against the SDF in the southern parts of the provinces of Deir ez-Zor and Hasaka (see Sub-section 1.7.2).⁷⁴⁷

⁷³⁸ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁷³⁹ USDOS, *Syria 2023 international religious freedom report*, 26 June 2024, pp. 11-12; Confidential source, October 2024.

⁷⁴⁰ USDOS, *Syria 2023 international religious freedom report*, 26 June 2024, p. 16; Confidential source, June 2024.

⁷⁴¹ Confidential source, August 2024.

⁷⁴² Confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024

⁷⁴³ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁷⁴⁴ DW, *Syria's Deir el-Zour: Unrest quelled without shared road map*, 9 September 2023; The New Arab, *Domestic and foreign threats on the rise for Syria's Kurds*, 2 April 2024.

⁷⁴⁵ New Lines Magazine, *Syria's Kurdish northeast ratifies a new constitution*, 31 January 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Kurdish-led authority in north Syria declares general mobilisation*, 1 December 2024.

⁷⁴⁶ SOHR, *Expressing their rejection of educational system of Autonomous Administration. Dozens of people participate in protest in Manbij*, 14 October 2024; The Syrian Observer, *SDF arrests five teachers for rejecting curriculum amid protests and tribal threats in Raqqa*, 4 November 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁷⁴⁷ DW, *Syria's Deir el-Zour: Unrest quelled without shared road map*, 9 September 2023; MEI, *After an uprising and violent crackdown, Syria's Deir ez-Zor is at a critical juncture*, 14 September 2023; Daily Sabah, *Arab tribes, PKK terrorists renew clashes in Syria's east*, 7 August 2024.

2.1.1.3 SIG area

In the SIG area, Sunni Arabs constituted the majority. Many of them were originally from the government-controlled area (such as Homs, Eastern Ghouta and Damascus).⁷⁴⁸ Members of other religious and/or ethnic groups – in particular Kurds, Yazidis and Christians – are reportedly victims of human rights violations, discrimination and marginalisation in the SIG area.⁷⁴⁹ The Kurdish population and other minorities in the SIG area are reportedly victims of extortion, ill-treatment, sexual violence, abduction, arrest, detention, torture and killing at the hands of SNA factions, often because they had ties to the SDF, DAANES or the PKK.⁷⁵⁰ There were also reports of vandalism, looting and the seizure of property belonging to other religious and/or ethnic groups.⁷⁵¹ According to the UN, at least 137,000 people (mainly of Kurdish origin) fled to the DAANES area in the wake of a military offensive in the SIG area in the spring of 2018. After that, more Kurds left the SIG area. It is not known how many Kurds were still living in the SIG area during the reporting period.⁷⁵²

2.1.1.4 SSG territory

In the west of Idlib province, there was a Christian community numbering several hundred people. In addition, there was a Druze community of several thousand people in the north of Idlib province.⁷⁵³ According to one source, most of them were older adults. They were able to practise their faith in only a limited number of places, out of public view.⁷⁵⁴ In 2021, the leader of HTS, Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, launched a charm offensive aimed at religious minorities in the SSG area.⁷⁵⁵ In doing so, he sought to make a gesture towards the Christian population by returning some possessions.⁷⁵⁶ According to one source, the rapprochement with the Druze made hardly any headway.⁷⁵⁷ There is no evidence to suggest that Christians and Druze in the SSG area experienced serious discrimination in their daily lives during the reporting period.

2.1.2 Apostasy

In legal terms, apostasy (*ridda*) was not a criminal offence in Syria.⁷⁵⁸ The Syrian authorities nevertheless restricted the conversion of Muslims, as conversion from

⁷⁴⁸ SOHR, *Turkish occupation of Afrin six years on. Over 8,700 kidnappings and arbitrary arrests and over 4,000 other violations by Turkish forces and their proxy factions*, 17 March 2024; Kurdistan 24, *Six years after Afrin occupation, violations of human rights persist without any signs of abating*, 18 March 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁷⁴⁹ HRW, *“Everything is by the power of the weapon”. Abuses and impunity in Turkish-occupied northern Syria*, 29 February 2024; USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024; USDOS, *Syria 2023 international religious freedom report*, 26 June 2024, pp. 19–20; STJ, *Northern Syria: Replacement of Kurdish landmarks in Afrin, Turkification in Al-Bab*, 29 August 2024.

⁷⁵⁰ Rudaw, *10,000 Palestinians settled in Afrin: Kurdish politician*, 2 January 2024; STJ, *International crimes in Afrin in northern Syria: Federal public prosecutor’s office must investigate*, 18 January 2024; Ceasefire & YASA, *Escalating human rights violations in Syria’s Afrin: 2024 update*, 14 May 2024, p. 2; STJ, *In the absence of accountability: Torture as a systematic policy in northern Syria*, 26 June 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024; USDOS, *Syria 2023 international religious freedom report*, 26 June 2024, p. 19.

⁷⁵¹ HRW, *“Everything is by the power of the weapon”. Abuses and impunity in Turkish-occupied northern Syria*, 29 February 2024; USDOS, *Syria 2023 international religious freedom report*, 26 June 2024, p. 19; Syria Direct, *‘We feel the loss’: Afrin Kurds mourn Maydanki’s forest*, 14 August 2024; Rudaw, *Militants prevent Afrin’s Kurdish farmers from harvesting olives*, 2 November 2024.

⁷⁵² HRW, *Syria: Afrin residents blocked from fleeing, aid*, 8 April 2018; SOHR, *Turkish occupation of Afrin six years on. Over 8,700 kidnappings and arbitrary arrests and over 4,000 other violations by Turkish forces and their proxy factions*, 17 March 2024; Kurdistan 24, *Six years after Afrin occupation, violations of human rights persist without any signs of abating*, 18 March 2024; Rudaw, *Nearly half of Rojava’s population fled due to Syria war: Study*, 12 June 2024.

⁷⁵³ Syria Direct, *HTS looks to Idlib’s Christians and Druze to whitewash violations*, 11 December 2023; North Press Agency, *HTS confiscates lands, property of Druze community in Idlib*, 7 September 2024.

⁷⁵⁴ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁷⁵⁵ Confidential source, December 2024.

⁷⁵⁶ Syria Direct, *HTS looks to Idlib’s Christians and Druze to whitewash violations*, 11 December 2023; confidential source, October 2024.

⁷⁵⁷ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁷⁵⁸ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

Islam to another religion was prohibited under Islamic law.⁷⁵⁹ According to the USDOS, NGOs reported that conversions remained relatively rare, due to social conventions and religious prohibitions. These organisations also reported that social pressure continued to force converts to move within the country or emigrate in order to practise their new religion openly.⁷⁶⁰

In general, the government did not impose any strict religious rules within its territory. There was a relatively large number of Muslims who did not practise their faith. Nevertheless, according to various sources, apostates in Syria were generally unlikely to admit openly to having left Islam, as this was a major taboo for many in Syria, and it was not socially accepted. Apostates risked being ostracised by society.⁷⁶¹ Apostates risked being threatened, subjected to ill-treatment and, in some cases, killed by their fellow citizens.⁷⁶² According to another source, male apostates found it difficult to find marriage partners because they were no longer Muslims. Problems could also arise regarding the inheritance of estates, as apostates from Islam were not entitled to inherit from Muslims.⁷⁶³

Although ISIS did not have effective control over any territory in Syria during the reporting period, it was still present in the country.⁷⁶⁴ ISIS labelled certain groups of believers, including some Sunni and Shia groups, as apostates and polytheists. According to ISIS, apostasy was punishable by death.⁷⁶⁵ During the reporting period, there were no known cases of people having been killed by ISIS for leaving Islam.

During the reporting period, there were no known cases of apostates who encountered problems with HTS.⁷⁶⁶ According to various sources, in the SSG area, HTS and the local community reportedly do not tolerate apostasy from Islam.⁷⁶⁷

2.1.3 *Palestinians in Syria*

According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), there were approximately 438,000 Palestinians in Syria during the reporting period.⁷⁶⁸ Around 80% were residing in the Damascus area.⁷⁶⁹

In Syria, most Palestinians had not been naturalised. Like Syrian nationals, Palestinians in Syria had access to education, healthcare, property rights and the labour market.⁷⁷⁰ According to various sources, the Syrian government treated Palestinians in the same way as Syrian nationals.⁷⁷¹ In Syria, there were Palestinians who supported Assad, and there was a small Palestinian elite with close ties to the government. Some Palestinians opposed the Assad government, and

⁷⁵⁹ Humanists International, *The freedom of thought report, Syria*, 25 September 2020; USCIRF, *Annual report 2024*, 2 May 2024, p. 68; USDOS, *Syria 2023 international religious freedom report*, 26 June 2024, p. 8; MEC, *Syria*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁷⁶⁰ USDOS, *Syria 2023 international religious freedom report*, 26 June 2024, p. 4.

⁷⁶¹ Confidential source, June 2024; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁷⁶² Confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024

⁷⁶³ Confidential source, August 2024.

⁷⁶⁴ BBC, *Islamic State attack on army bus kills 33 Syrian soldiers*, 12 August 2023; BBC Monitoring, *IS claims another suicide attack in Syria 'to avenge' al-Hol women*, 6 June 2024.

⁷⁶⁵ CJA, *The Islamic State and its treatment of 'out-groups': A comparative analysis*, August 2023, p. 17; The New York Times, *Islamic State claims responsibility for deadly bombings in Iran*, 4 January 2024; The National, *ISIS attacks Iran: Is the terror group exploiting Gaza war chaos?*, 9 January 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: IS says Syria rebel offensive led by 'apostates'*, 6 December 2024.

⁷⁶⁶ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁷⁶⁷ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁷⁶⁸ UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2024. Progress report*, 5 November 2024, p. 5.

⁷⁶⁹ Confidential source, April 2024.

⁷⁷⁰ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁷⁷¹ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

others remained neutral. Whether individual Palestinians were regarded by the Syrian government as potential opponent and treated as such depended on their personal circumstances.⁷⁷²

Living conditions in Syria continued to deteriorate during the reporting period, partly due to the persistent increase in the cost of living.⁷⁷³ According to the UN, more than 90% of the Syrian population lived below the poverty line (see Section 3.1).⁷⁷⁴ Of the approximately 438,000 Palestinians in Syria, around 90% were living below the poverty line.⁷⁷⁵ Around 30% were extremely vulnerable.⁷⁷⁶ According to UNRWA, food insecurity among Palestinians had risen from 46% in September 2022 to 62% in March 2024.⁷⁷⁷ Around 25% of the Palestinian population consisted of households headed by women.⁷⁷⁸ According to UNRWA, around 40% of all Palestinians in Syria had been internally displaced for an extended period. Most of these displaced persons were from the Yarmouk camp, which had been largely destroyed during the Syrian civil war (see Sub-section 1.19.2).⁷⁷⁹ There were nine official camps and three unofficial camps for Palestinian refugees in Syria.⁷⁸⁰ Six of them – most notably Yarmouk, Daraa and Ayn al-Tal – had been largely destroyed during the Syrian civil war.⁷⁸¹ In recent years, several thousand Palestinians have returned to the Yarmouk camp because they could no longer afford their rent. In Yarmouk, they lived in and amongst the ruins. There was a lack of basic infrastructure and services. For example, there was no electricity, hardly any water, no rubbish collection, many stray dogs, and rubble from destroyed buildings everywhere.⁷⁸² A security clearance was required in order to return to the camp.⁷⁸³

During the reporting period, 420,000 Palestinians (95% of the total Palestinian population in Syria) were dependent on UNRWA for humanitarian assistance and basic necessities.⁷⁸⁴ A small number of Palestinians received support through other means. In addition, more than 60,000 households received support from UNRWA to get through the winter.⁷⁸⁵

UNRWA continued to provide support to Palestinians in Syria in various ways. For example, it provided vocational training and offered microloans to help people start businesses.⁷⁸⁶ The organisation also repaired facilities (such as schools and health centres) in the camps. It also repaired homes in these camps.⁷⁸⁷ In addition, mobile

⁷⁷² Enab Baladi, *Cuts in aid to UNRWA include Palestinians in Syria*, 5 February 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁷⁷³ UNHCR, *Syria Arab Republic operational update (June-July 2024)*, 16 September 2024.

⁷⁷⁴ UNOCHA, *Press briefing by Martin Griffiths, under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator*, 7 July 2023; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 2.

⁷⁷⁵ Confidential source, September 2024.

⁷⁷⁶ Confidential source, April 2024.

⁷⁷⁷ UNRWA, *UNRWA situation report #10 on the Syria emergency response to displacement from Lebanon*, 11 November 2024, p. 1.

⁷⁷⁸ Confidential source, April 2024.

⁷⁷⁹ Enab Baladi, *Cuts in aid to UNRWA include Palestinians in Syria*, 5 February 2024; UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2024*, 3 April 2024, p. 12; Syria Direct, *No return to Yarmouk for Syrian-Palestinians fleeing Lebanon*, 25 November 2024.

⁷⁸⁰ UNRWA, *Latakia (unofficial camp)*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁷⁸¹ UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2024*, 3 April 2024; UNRWA, *UNRWA situation report #10 on the Syria emergency response to displacement from Lebanon*, 11 November 2024, p. 4; UNRWA, *Yarmouk (unofficial camp)*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; confidential source, April 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

⁷⁸² Syria Direct, *No return to Yarmouk for Syrian-Palestinians fleeing Lebanon*, 25 November 2024; confidential source, April 2024.

⁷⁸³ Syria Direct, *No return to Yarmouk for Syrian-Palestinians fleeing Lebanon*, 25 November 2024.

⁷⁸⁴ UN, *UNRWA cash assistance crucial to mitigate Palestine refugee hardship in Syria*. *UNRWA press release*, 19 April 2024; confidential source, July 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

⁷⁸⁵ UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2024*, 3 April 2024.

⁷⁸⁶ Confidential source, July 2024.

⁷⁸⁷ Enab Baladi, *UNRWA to restore 110 damaged homes in Daraa camp*, 5 May 2023; UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2024*, 3 April 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

clinics visited several camps.⁷⁸⁸ For legal support, Palestinians could turn to UNRWA,⁷⁸⁹ which worked with volunteers in the areas of civil registration, gender-based violence and child protection.⁷⁹⁰ During the reporting period, there was an increase in gender-based violence and school dropout rates due to work or marriage.⁷⁹¹

As reported by UNRWA, during the reporting period, the assistance provided was not equally adequate across all areas, due to high inflation, rising prices and funding shortfalls.⁷⁹² For example, staff at health centres did not receive their salaries for much of 2024, while there were long queues for doctors' appointments. According to one source, doctors were allowed only two minutes per patient during consultation hours. By the end of 2024, most students were no longer receiving an education due to a lack of funds. Many other facilities were forced to close their doors in 2024.⁷⁹³ UNRWA also provided financial support.⁷⁹⁴ Due to the loss of funding, however, it was able to provide this support for only ten months in 2023,⁷⁹⁵ and for only four months in 2024.⁷⁹⁶ In addition, UNRWA provided food aid. Due to funding shortfalls, UNRWA was able to carry out only one round of food aid in 2023, rather than the three originally planned.⁷⁹⁷ Furthermore, in 2024, UNRWA had only enough supplies to last three months.⁷⁹⁸

2.1.4

Kurds

During the reporting period, thousands of schoolchildren of Kurdish origin travelled from the DAANES area to the government-controlled area to sit the national school examinations.⁷⁹⁹ Citizens of Kurdish origin also travelled through that area to receive medical treatment in Damascus.⁸⁰⁰ Furthermore, according to one source, some Kurdish bus drivers were operating bus services through the government-controlled area.⁸⁰¹ According to various sources, Kurds from the DAANES area were sometimes arrested by government forces, particularly in the city of Aleppo.⁸⁰² According to various sources, for this reason, Kurds often tried to think of reasons why they might be arrested before leaving the DAANES area (for example, because they had not completed their compulsory national service or because they had once taken part in a demonstration). Before leaving, they tried to work through intermediaries to find out whether their names appeared on any of the lists of wanted persons.⁸⁰³ According to various sources, Kurds who were members of the SDF or the de facto administration were not able to travel through the government-controlled area unless specific arrangements had been made with the government in advance. For example, some high-ranking figures were able to travel to Damascus for meetings.⁸⁰⁴

⁷⁸⁸ UNRWA, *Syria, Lebanon and Jordan emergency appeal 2024*, 3 April 2024, p. 19; Confidential source, July 2024.

⁷⁸⁹ Confidential source, July 2024.

⁷⁹⁰ UNRWA, *UNRWA situation report #10 on the Syria emergency response to displacement from Lebanon*, 11 November 2024, p. 3; Confidential source, September 2024.

⁷⁹¹ Confidential source, September 2024.

⁷⁹² UNRWA, *UNRWA Situation Report #7 on the Syria emergency response to displacement from Lebanon*, 24 October 2024.

⁷⁹³ Confidential source, April 2024.

⁷⁹⁴ UNRWA, *UNRWA situation report #10 on the Syria emergency response to displacement from Lebanon*, 11 November 2024, p. 3.

⁷⁹⁵ Confidential source, July 2024.

⁷⁹⁶ Confidential source, September 2024.

⁷⁹⁷ UNRWA, *Post distribution monitoring. Emergency multi-purpose cash and in-kind food assistance*, March 2024; confidential source, July 2024.

⁷⁹⁸ Confidential source, September 2024.

⁷⁹⁹ Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, *Education under strain in Al-Hasakeh governorate: Disjointed curricula and political antagonism impact civilians*, December 2023; UNHCR, *Syria Arab Republic operational update (June-July 2024)*, 16 September 2024, p. 2; Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁰⁰ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁰¹ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁰² DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, p. 63; Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁰³ Confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024

⁸⁰⁴ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

2.2 Military service

2.2.1 *Compulsory military service in the government-controlled area*

Under the law, compulsory military service applied to all Syrian men between the ages of 18 and 42.⁸⁰⁵ This also applied to all Palestinian men of this age group registered in Syria.⁸⁰⁶ It also applied to Syrian men living abroad.⁸⁰⁷ Under the law, compulsory national service lasted between 18 and 21 months, depending on the conscript's level of education.⁸⁰⁸ In practice, conscripts often had to serve in the reserves for several years immediately after completing their compulsory military service.⁸⁰⁹ The law did not specify a maximum duration for reserve duty.⁸¹⁰

2.2.1.1 Legislative amendments

The Compulsory Military Service Act was laid down in Decree No. 30 of 3 May 2007. During the reporting period, President Assad issued two decrees amending this law.⁸¹¹ Decree No. 37 of 1 December 2023 added Section 'w' to Article 26 of this Act. Under these provisions, reservists 40 years of age or older were able to buy out their reserve duty for 4,800 USD. Active reservists 40 years of age or older received a reduction of 200 USD from this amount for every month they had served as reservists up to that point.⁸¹² Decree No. 20 of 1 August 2024 lowered this age limit from 40 to 38. Under this decree, reservists fulfilling an administrative function (*khadamat thabiteh*)⁸¹³ due to a mild or partial disability could buy out their reserve duty for 3,000 USD. Reservists could also be eligible for exemption from reserve duty if they had served for at least ten years as professional soldiers on fixed-term contracts (see Sub-section 2.2.1.8).⁸¹⁴

2.2.1.2 Period of service for reservists

On 26 June 2024, Major General Ahmed Sleiman spoke during an interview on a Syrian television channel about the plan to phase out reserve duty over three stages between 1 July 2024 and 31 October 2025, reducing it to a maximum of two years in the third stage.⁸¹⁵ Within this context, the Ministry of Defence announced in June

⁸⁰⁵ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 54; DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 10.

⁸⁰⁶ The Syrian Observer, *Palestinian youths forced to join PLA in Syria*, 7 June 2019; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 31 May 2022, p. 52; DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 10.

⁸⁰⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 54; Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁰⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 54; Asharq Al-Awsat, *After 12 years of war, women outnumber men in Syria*, 16 December 2023.

⁸⁰⁹ ISPI, *Fight or flight: The Syrian conscription nightmare*, 5 June 2023; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 54; DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 8; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Syria's reserve military service transformations and objectives*, 21 August 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

⁸¹⁰ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 9; Enab Baladi, *Syrian regime ends retention and recall of certain military categories*, 27 April 2024.

⁸¹¹ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸¹² Enab Baladi, *Assad issues decree allowing exemption fees for reserve service*, 3 December 2023; The Syrian Observer, *Granting of Syrian passport: Reserve service completion now a condition?*, 4 December 2023; DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 18; Enab Baladi, *What's new in Syrian regime's administrative order on military service*, 11 June 2024.

⁸¹³ This refers to a 'service provided at a single fixed location'.

⁸¹⁴ SANA, *President al-Assad issues a legislative decree amending article (26) of the Military Service Law*, 1 August 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Syria lowers maximum age of conscription from 40 to 38*, 1 August 2024; Enab Baladi, *New legislative decree lowers military service age in Syria to 38*, 2 August 2024; Enab Baladi, *What does regime want from amending age of those eligible to pay military exemption fee?*, 13 August 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸¹⁵ Al Arabiya, *Syria to demobilize tens of thousands of reservists: Defense official*, 27 June 2024; Enab Baladi, *Three-phase plan to discharge soldiers in Syria*, 27 June 2024; Asharq Al-Awsat, *Damascus: Army to rely on volunteers, discharge tens of thousands of reservists*, 28 June 2024; Enab Baladi, *What does regime want from amending age of those eligible to pay military exemption fee?*, 13 August 2024; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Syria's reserve military service transformations and objectives*, 21 August 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

2024 that reservists who had completed six years or more of active reserve duty as of 1 July 2024 would be demobilised in that month. In addition, all reserve officers who had completed more than one year of active reserve duty by 30 June 2024 would be demobilised. Furthermore, all reservists who had reached the age of 40 by 30 June 2024 and who had completed two years of active reserve duty would also be demobilised.⁸¹⁶ From 31 August 2024, reservists who had completed 5.5 years of active reserve duty would be demobilised.⁸¹⁷ Furthermore, all reservists who had completed five years of active reserve duty by 31 October 2024 would be demobilised. In addition, all reserve officers who had completed more than one year of active reserve duty by that date would be demobilised.⁸¹⁸ According to various sources, reservists were demobilised in 2024.⁸¹⁹

2.2.1.3 Mobilisation of the military reserve

The military reserve included, amongst others, men under the age of 42 who had completed their compulsory military service.⁸²⁰ According to one source, this age limit of 42 did not apply to men who had completed their military service as reserve officers or reserve non-commissioned officers with certain academic and professional qualifications, including doctors, nurses and engineers. Depending on the army's needs, they could also be called up at a later age. Furthermore, according to this source, the military reserve included men who had served in the army as professional soldiers on fixed-term contracts. For them, the age limits depended on their military rank. The military reserve also included men who had completed their compulsory military service in the armed forces of another country.⁸²¹

The military reserve was divided into three groups. The first group, which would be the first to be called up in the event of a general mobilisation, comprised reservists who had been discharged no more than five years before. The second group consisted of reservists who had been discharged between five and ten years earlier. The third group comprised reservists who had left the service between ten and fifteen years earlier.⁸²² No general mobilisation of the military reserve had been declared since 2018.⁸²³

It was not clear whether any reservists who had not previously been called up were called up during the reporting period. According to one source, the authorities were still searching for reservists who had failed to respond to their summons.⁸²⁴ According to another source, reservists with various specialisations have been called up in recent years, including those with specific academic qualifications. As far as this source was aware, there had been no reports of new call-ups of reservists since mid-2022.⁸²⁵ Because there was sometimes a need for reservists with specific expertise, those from certain professions were more likely to be called up or to remain active in the reserves after completing their service.⁸²⁶ For example, this was the case during the COVID-19 pandemic, when doctors and medical specialists

⁸¹⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Syrian army to demobilise reserve soldiers, officers*, 8 June 2024; Enab Baladi, *What's new in Syrian regime's administrative order on military service*, 11 June 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Major amendments to Syria's conscription law*, 28 June 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸¹⁷ Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Syria's reserve military service transformations and objectives*, 21 August 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 43.

⁸¹⁸ BBC Monitoring, *Syrian army demobilises more reservists*, 5 October 2024; The Syrian Observer, *From war to demobilization: Do the Syrian regime's decisions carry a double message to Israel?*, 25 October 2024.

⁸¹⁹ EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 44; Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸²⁰ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 5.

⁸²¹ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸²² DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 5; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 39.

⁸²³ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 55.

⁸²⁴ The Syrian Observer, *Wanted for military service in Syria: Lebanon's hell better than regime's prisons*, 11 October 2024.

⁸²⁵ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸²⁶ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, pp. 5 and 9.

were kept on standby.⁸²⁷ According to other sources, reservists who had not previously been called up were called up during the reporting period.⁸²⁸ Most conscripts were retained as active reservists after completing their official service without being discharged (see Sub-section 2.2.1).⁸²⁹

2.2.1.4 Regional differences in the government-controlled area

The sources consulted did not agree on whether there were specific regions where men were more likely to be called up for compulsory military service or reserve duty. There was anecdotal evidence that the authorities were recruiting reservists from areas previously held by the opposition and attempting to send them to the front lines.⁸³⁰ At the same time, however, anecdotal evidence also suggested that the authorities continued to enforce conscription for compulsory military service or reserve duty in all areas where they could do so.⁸³¹ The authorities carried out several campaigns to recruit people for compulsory military service or reserve duty. This was usually done at border crossings and checkpoints, although it also involved raids on shops, restaurants and other places.⁸³² For that reason, many men wishing to avoid military service did not leave their places of residence and avoided checkpoints.⁸³³

2.2.1.5 International humanitarian law

A large proportion of the Syrian armed forces consisted of conscripts.⁸³⁴ According to various sources, there have been reports in the recent past of conscripts involved in violations of the international humanitarian law (such as looting).⁸³⁵ During the reporting period, there were numerous reports of alleged violations of the international humanitarian laws. These violations included mortar attacks on villages, airstrikes on civilian infrastructure, mosques, school buildings and workshops, as well as attacks on agricultural vehicles, aid workers and ambulances.⁸³⁶ No specific information was available to suggest that conscripts were also involved in this during the reporting period.⁸³⁷

2.2.1.6 Deferral and exemptions

The Syrian system provided various ways to defer compulsory national service for a limited period.⁸³⁸ Under the law, deferrals could be granted to full-time students in secondary and higher education. Age limits applied to each level of education. For example, students in secondary school could be granted a deferral until they turned

⁸²⁷ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸²⁸ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 5; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 40; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸²⁹ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 5.

⁸³⁰ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 55; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸³¹ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸³² DIS, *Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs*, 7 July 2023, p. 24; DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 6; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 38; Levant 24, *Assad scrambles to regroup amid recruitment crisis*, 3 December 2024; Hürriyet Daily News, *Regime ups conscription as Syrian rebels press on*, 4 December 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸³³ Syria Direct, *New residency requirements leave Syrians in Egypt in limbo*, 5 September 2024; confidential source, June 2024; confidential source, August 2024.

⁸³⁴ CIA, *The world factbook – Military service age and obligation*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁸³⁵ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸³⁶ AA, *Over 6,000 civilians displaced in a week amid attacks on Idlib by Syrian army, its allies*, 8 September 2023; SNHR, *Syrian regime forces bomb al-Haj Akid al-Aswad Mosque in N. Idlib, September 3, 2024*, 6 September 2024; OHCHR, *UN Commission warns Syrian war is intensifying amid continuing patterns of war crimes and fear of large-scale regional conflict*, 10 September 2024; AP News, *Violence spikes in Syria's opposition-held northwest, killing civilians and striking infrastructure*, 17 October 2024; SNHR, *Woman injured, mosque damaged in a ground regime attack on E. Idlib, October 19, 2024*, 22 October 2024; SNHR, *Investigation proving two Russian forces' attacks in Idlib - a massacre in which 11 civilians were killed & the destruction of a power station depriving thousands of civilians of water*, 23 October 2024; SNHR, *Syrian regime forces bomb two schools in W. Aleppo*, 9 November 2024; Levant 24, *Russia and Assad escalate brutal war crimes against Syrian civilians*, 3 December 2024; SNHR, *149 civilians killed, including 35 children and 16 women, in northern Syria since November 27, 2024, up until December 3, 2024*, 4 December 2024, p. 3; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸³⁷ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸³⁸ Confidential source, October 2024.

21, and medical students could be deferred until the age of 29.⁸³⁹ Furthermore, deferrals could be granted on the grounds of family circumstances. For example, they could be granted to men who were the sole breadwinners for their parents.⁸⁴⁰ A deferral on medical grounds could be granted if there was a medical condition with a prospect of recovery. A review was conducted every six to twelve months.⁸⁴¹ Reservists were not eligible for deferment unless they lived outside Syria.⁸⁴²

The Syrian system also provided various ways to obtain exemption from compulsory national service. Exemption was possible on medical grounds, for example, in cases of total blindness, paralysis or any other condition rendering a conscript unfit for military service.⁸⁴³ Conscripts who were unable to perform active frontline service due to a minor or partial disability could obtain exemption by paying a buy-out fee of 3,000 USD.⁸⁴⁴ Furthermore, exemption could be granted on the grounds of family circumstances. This often applied to the only son in a family, even if there were sisters.⁸⁴⁵ Exemption was also possible for a son from a family in which two sons had already been killed during their military service or in combat.⁸⁴⁶ In addition, Syrians living abroad could obtain exemption by paying a buy-out fee. The amount of this buy-out fee depended on the duration and circumstances of the stay abroad (see Sub-section 2.2.1.7).⁸⁴⁷ Conscripts who had served for at least ten years with one of the intelligence and security services were also eligible for exemption.⁸⁴⁸ Furthermore, conscripts were eligible for exemption from military service if they had served as professional soldiers on a fixed-term contract for at least five years.⁸⁴⁹ If they had served on a contractual basis for at least ten years, they would be eligible for exemption from reserve duty.⁸⁵⁰

According to one source, conscripts meeting all the legal criteria for deferment or exemption were not always granted such deferment or exemption in practice. This source stated that the law was applied in a highly arbitrary manner.⁸⁵¹ According to various sources, the authorities generally did respect the deferrals or exemptions that had been granted.⁸⁵² According to one source, there were no known cases of individuals who had bought their way out of military service during the reporting period.⁸⁵³ Nevertheless, the possibility could not be ruled out that some individuals were recruited despite having been granted a deferment or exemption (for example, because of errors in the registration process or because they did not have the proper documents to prove this when stopped for a check).⁸⁵⁴

⁸³⁹ ISPI, *Fight or flight: The Syrian conscription nightmare*, 5 June 2023; DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 18; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁴⁰ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁴¹ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁴² Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁴³ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, pp. 12-13.

⁸⁴⁴ ISPI, *Fight or flight: The Syrian conscription nightmare*, 5 June 2023; DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 14; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁴⁵ Men who were their parents' only surviving son or who were from single-parent families were eligible for deferment from compulsory national service and reserve duty. This deferral became a permanent exemption for reasons including if the man's mother reached the age of fifty, or his father reached the age of sixty, or if it was proven that either of them had become infertile.

⁸⁴⁶ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, pp. 11-12.

⁸⁴⁷ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁴⁸ Article 11 of Decree No. 30 of 2007.

⁸⁴⁹ Enab Baladi, *Assad issues decree allowing exemption fees for reserve service*, 3 December 2023.

⁸⁵⁰ The Syrian Observer, *Syria today – Plans to demobilize tens of thousands of reservists; Latest SNHR report on torture*, 28 June 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Syria lowers maximum age of conscription from 40 to 38*, 1 August 2024; Enab Baladi, *New legislative decree lowers military service age in Syria to 38*, 2 August 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Reshaping Syria's military: The strategic evolution of reserve service under the Assad regime*, 12 August 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁵¹ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁵² DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 16; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁵³ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁵⁴ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 12; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

2.2.1.7 Buying out of compulsory military service

Conscripts in Syria who were deemed fit for compulsory military service were not allowed to buy out of it.⁸⁵⁵ Conscripts who served as pilots were an exception. They could obtain exemption by paying a buy-out fee of 15,000 USD. If they had worked as pilots for at least five years, the buy-out fee was 10,000 USD.⁸⁵⁶ Another exception was for conscripts who were unable to perform active frontline duty due to a minor or partial disability. Their buy-out fee amounted to 3,000 USD.⁸⁵⁷ This buy-out fee was unaffordable for a Syrian earning an average monthly salary of 150 USD (see Chapter 3).⁸⁵⁸

A conscript who had exceeded the age limit of 42, who had not been exempted and who had not served was required to pay a compensation fee of 8,000 USD.⁸⁵⁹ A conscript was required to pay this fee within three months of reaching the age of 42. Failure to pay this compensation could result in a one-year prison sentence. In addition, a fine of 200 USD could be imposed for each year in which payment was not made, up to a maximum of 2,000 USD.⁸⁶⁰ Failure to make payments could also result in the seizure of assets.⁸⁶¹

Conscripts living abroad could buy out of compulsory military service through a Syrian embassy or consulate, or through an authorised representative in Syria.⁸⁶² The terms and conditions for this were specified in Article 13 of Decree 30 dated 2 May 2007, as amended.⁸⁶³ It followed that the buy-out fee for someone who had lived abroad for at least four years amounted to 7,000 USD. The buy-out fee for someone who had lived abroad for at least three years was 8,000 USD. The buy-out fee for someone who had lived abroad for at least two years was 9,000 USD. The buy-out fee for someone who had lived abroad for at least one year was 10,000 USD.⁸⁶⁴ The buy-out fee for someone who was born abroad and had lived there continuously until reaching conscription age was 3,000 USD. The buy-out fee for someone who was born abroad and who had lived there for at least ten years before reaching conscription age was 6,500 USD, with a deduction of 500 USD for each additional year of residence beyond those ten years, up to the maximum age of seventeen. Furthermore, the buy-out fee for someone who had obtained at least a Master's degree based on a foreign scholarship and had been living abroad since completing the degree was 6,000 USD.⁸⁶⁵

According to one source, the website of the Syrian Embassy in Sweden stated that the exemption procedure took 34 working days. Once the application had been received, the conscript was notified of the payment date. In practice, this procedure

⁸⁵⁵ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 15; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁵⁶ USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, p. 31.

⁸⁵⁷ ISPI, *Fight or flight: The Syrian conscription nightmare*, 5 June 2023; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁵⁸ Salarymonitor.org, *Average salary in Syria*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁸⁵⁹ Article 97 of the Compulsory National Service Act; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁶⁰ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 26.

⁸⁶¹ ISPI, *Fight or flight: The Syrian conscription nightmare*, 5 June 2023; DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 27; USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, p. 31.

⁸⁶² DIS, *Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs*, 7 July 2023, pp. 9–10.

⁸⁶³ Article 13 was last amended by Decree No. 31 of 2020, with the exception of Section 1(a), which was last amended by Decree No. 29 of 2022; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁶⁴ ISPI, *Fight or flight: The Syrian conscription nightmare*, 5 June 2023; DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 16; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁶⁵ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

could take longer.⁸⁶⁶ Furthermore, the embassy published a list of names of conscripts who had bought their way out of military service.⁸⁶⁷

During the reporting period, there were no reports of Syrians from abroad being recruited after their return, despite having bought out of compulsory military service.⁸⁶⁸

2.2.1.8 Buying out of reserve duty

Since December 2023, reservists living in Syria have been able to buy out of reserve duty from the age of 40 and, since August 2024, from the age of 38. Reservists with a minor or partial disability were also able to buy out of reserve duty (see Sub-section 2.2.1.1).⁸⁶⁹ Since 2020, reservists living outside Syria have been able to buy out of reserve duty. Under Decree No. 31 of 8 November 2020, Syrian men who had been living abroad for at least one year could buy out of reserve duty for 5,000 USD.⁸⁷⁰ Reservists living in the Netherlands could buy out of reserve duty through the Syrian embassy in Brussels or through an authorised representative in Syria.⁸⁷¹

⁸⁶⁶ ACCORD, *Anfragebeantwortung zu Syrien: Informationen zur Dauer des Prozederes des Freikaufs vom Wehrdienst bei der syrischen Armee nach mindestens einjährigem Aufenthalt im Ausland [a-12448]*, 30 August 2024.

⁸⁶⁷ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 55; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁶⁸ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁶⁹ ISPI, *Fight or flight: The Syrian conscription nightmare*, 5 June 2023; Enab Baladi, *Assad issues decree allowing exemption fees for reserve service*, 3 December 2023; Enab Baladi, *What does regime want from amending age of those eligible to pay military exemption fee?*, 13 August 2024; confidential source, June 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁷⁰ ISPI, *Fight or flight: The Syrian conscription nightmare*, 5 June 2023; Enab Baladi, *What does regime want from amending age of those eligible to pay military exemption fee?*, 13 August 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁷¹ Confidential source, June 2024; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

2.2.1.9 Visit to Syria

Under the law, conscripts who had their permanent residence abroad, including in the Netherlands, and who had therefore been granted a deferment of military service, were permitted to visit Syria for a maximum of ninety days per calendar year without this affecting their right to deferment. They were able to extend their stay by sixty days for a fee of 200 USD.⁸⁷²

According to one source, there were several known cases of conscripts and reservists who had bought out of military service abroad and had returned to Syria for more than three months. They had not been recruited after their return. According to this source, those who had bought out of compulsory national service abroad, completed all the necessary paperwork and received a security clearance certificate were required to remain outside Syria for at least one additional month to ensure that their names had been removed from the recruitment lists.⁸⁷³ Once the buy-out fee had been paid and the registration was in order, the person in question was permanently exempt from compulsory military service. As far as is known, this exemption was observed upon return to Syria.⁸⁷⁴

2.2.1.10 Duties of conscripts and reservists

Conscripts and reservists could be assigned various duties. The duties depended on military and security requirements. They could be assigned combat duties and deployed in military operations. They could be deployed as guards or to staff checkpoints. They could also be deployed in logistical support roles or assigned administrative duties.⁸⁷⁵ There were several reports of conscripts and reservists being sent to the front lines.⁸⁷⁶

Conscripts and reservists generally lived and worked in poor conditions in the army. They had to contend with harsh treatment from their officers, food shortages and little or no pay.⁸⁷⁷ Conscripts and reservists from areas currently or formerly held by opposition groups and economically disadvantaged regions generally received poorer treatment than those from areas considered loyal to President Assad's government or those of Alawite background.⁸⁷⁸ The former were more likely to be sent to the front lines as a punitive measure, to be deployed in anti-ISIS operations in the desert, or to be denied permission to visit their families.⁸⁷⁹

Conscripts and reservists from wealthy families were able to use bribes and their connections to secure better treatment in the army, to avoid being deployed on combat missions or to the front line, to be assigned to desk jobs, to obtain exemption, or to effectively evade active military service. In the latter case, they were able to stay at home, even though, on paper, it appeared as though they were actively serving in the army.⁸⁸⁰ The practice of conscripts paying bribes to secure

⁸⁷² DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 20; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 49; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁷³ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁷⁴ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 46; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 47; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁷⁵ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁷⁶ The New Humanitarian, *The risk of return: As Israel bombs Lebanon, Syrian deportees face detention, conscription, or worse*, 16 October 2024; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁷⁷ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 35; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 41.

⁸⁷⁸ ISPI, *Fight or flight: The Syrian conscription nightmare*, 5 June 2023; Enab Baladi, *"They turned us into killers": Young men in regime's historic stronghold refuse to join army*, 11 December 2023; DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 6-7; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 41.

⁸⁷⁹ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 7; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 41; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁸⁰ ISPI, *Fight or flight: The Syrian conscription nightmare*, 5 June 2023; DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 7 and 15; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 42; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

better treatment was less widespread in the army's elite units (such as the Syrian Republican Guard, the Fourth Division and the Special Forces) than in other army units.⁸⁸¹

Conscripts and reservists were generally unable to choose their posts.⁸⁸² The authorities tended to recruit only conscripts of unquestionable loyalty to President Assad's government for the elite units. In many cases, these conscripts were of Alawite background. Educational background also played an important role in the allocation of military posts.⁸⁸³

2.2.1.11 Evasion of compulsory national service

In peacetime, evasion of compulsory national service was punishable by a fine of up to four months' pay or an extension of service of up to six months, depending on the duration of the evasion. In cases of repeated evasion of compulsory national service, the person concerned was brought before a military court. In that case, the court could sentence the person to a maximum prison term of six months. In wartime, anyone evading compulsory national service could be sentenced to up to five years' imprisonment, additional military service and fines that could increase depending on the length of the evasion.⁸⁸⁴ Reservists could be fined up to six months' pay or sentenced to up to two years' imprisonment for evading service.⁸⁸⁵ According to one source, these legal provisions did not apply to conscripts and reservists returning from abroad if they paid the buy-out fee within one month of arriving in Syria.⁸⁸⁶ Following a prison sentence, draft evaders often served their time at the Sednaya military prison near Damascus.⁸⁸⁷ This prison was notorious for its systematic use of torture, executions and ill-treatment, resulting in the deaths of many prisoners (see Section 1.11).⁸⁸⁸ After serving their prison sentences, draft evaders were still required to complete their compulsory national service.⁸⁸⁹

In recent years, it was reportedly standard practice for draft evaders to be sent to the army to fulfil their compulsory national service following a security screening, either by reporting for duty voluntarily or by being arrested.⁸⁹⁰ For example, this was the case for some Syrians who had returned from abroad during the reporting period (see Sub-section 7.13.1).⁸⁹¹ During the reporting period, the authorities actively sought out those evading compulsory military service and reserve duty. They were apprehended primarily at border crossings, at the numerous military

⁸⁸¹ EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 42; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁸² DIS, *Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs*, 7 July 2023, pp. 19-20.

⁸⁸³ EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 42; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁸⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 58; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 51; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁸⁵ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁸⁶ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁸⁷ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 66.

⁸⁸⁸ Amnesty International, *Human Slaughterhouse: Mass hangings and extermination at Saydnaya prison, Syria*, 7 February 2017; Association of Detainees & The Missing in Sednaya Prison, *The administrative structure and organizational ties of Sednaya prison*, 2 October 2022, p. 35; USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024; SNHR, *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces' detention, fatal torture of a refugee forcibly deported from Türkiye*, 9 August 2024.

⁸⁸⁹ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 73; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 51.

⁸⁹⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 58; DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 54; The New Humanitarian, *The risk of return: As Israel bombs Lebanon, Syrian deportees face detention, conscription, or worse*, 16 October 2024.

⁸⁹¹ ACHR, *What happens after the forced deportation of refugees from Lebanon?*, 29 January 2024, p. 15; The New Humanitarian, *The risk of return: As Israel bombs Lebanon, Syrian deportees face detention, conscription, or worse*, 16 October 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 4; confidential source, December 2024.

checkpoints, during raids, or when they came into contact with the authorities to apply for a service.⁸⁹²

2.2.1.12 Additional penalty for refusal of military service

Certain groups feared additional punishment for refusal of military service. This mainly concerned conscripts from areas currently or formerly under opposition control, as these communities were regarded as less loyal to the government. They could face additional punishment, including longer periods of detention, harsher treatment in the army or deployment to the most dangerous front lines (such as in the north of Latakia province).⁸⁹³ Other personal factors that could play a role in this regard included ethnic background, religious beliefs and socio-economic status.⁸⁹⁴

2.2.1.13 Police officers

Officers were required to request discharge in order to leave the police force. Leaving their posts without permission was regarded as a form of desertion, which was a criminal offence.⁸⁹⁵ According to one source, the term 'desertion' was not limited to military personnel, but was broadly applied to all security forces. From a legal perspective, there was no distinction between desertion from the army and desertion from the police.⁸⁹⁶ The penalties for police officers who left their posts were therefore comparable to those for conscripts who deserted from the army.⁸⁹⁷ They were usually sentenced by a military court to a fine or a prison term under the provisions of the Military Penal Code.⁸⁹⁸ According to one source, there were instances in which some fugitive officers were sentenced to death, either in absentia or in person. The broad scope of the legal provisions allowed military prosecutors to bring the most serious charges against them.⁸⁹⁹

2.2.1.14 Regulations concerning the intelligence services

There were numerous regulations governing compulsory national service and work within the intelligence services. Some of these arrangements were not made public.⁹⁰⁰ The following decrees, amongst others, dealt with these matters:

- Decree No. 14 of 1969 on the Directorate of General Security.
- Decree No. 18 of 2003 on the Military Service Act.
- Decree No. 64 of 2004 on the Mobilisation Act.
- Decree No. 30 of 2007 on the Compulsory Military Service Act.
- Decree No. 104 of 2011.
- Decree No. 1 of 2012 on members of the internal security forces.⁹⁰¹

2.2.1.15 Intelligence service officers

Intelligence service officers who left their posts without authorisation could face arrest, detention, forced confessions and criminal conviction by a military court. Some have also gone missing while in custody.⁹⁰² According to another source, they were considered deserters under the law.⁹⁰³ Desertion was generally punished under

⁸⁹² Enab Baladi, "They turned us into killers": Young men in regime's historic stronghold refuse to join army, 11 December 2023; SNHR, *At least 213 arbitrary detentions recorded in October 2024*, 4 November 2024; confidential source, August 2024.

⁸⁹³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 58; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁹⁴ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁹⁵ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁹⁶ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁹⁷ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁹⁸ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁸⁹⁹ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁰⁰ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁰¹ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁰² Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁰³ Confidential source, October 2024.

Articles 100 to 104 of the Military Penal Code.⁹⁰⁴ According to various sources, the severity of punishment could be influenced by factors including rank, duties, unit, and whether the officer deserted while in possession of a weapon and wearing a uniform. Officers were usually punished more harshly than conscripts.⁹⁰⁵

2.2.1.16 Demobilisations

During the reporting period, several demobilisation decrees were issued concerning reserve officers, reserve non-commissioned officers and reservists, including on 16 August 2023, 27 August 2023 and 27 April 2024. Within this context, the relevant categories of military personnel were demobilised according to length of service (see Sub-section 2.2.1.2).⁹⁰⁶ According to the sources consulted, there were no known cases of individuals who had been called up or recruited again following their demobilisation during the reporting period.⁹⁰⁷

2.2.1.17 Amnesty schemes for draft evaders

No reports were found during the reporting period regarding amnesty schemes for those evading compulsory national service or reserve duty.⁹⁰⁸

2.2.1.18 Lists of persons wanted or called up for military service

There was no consolidated national list of wanted persons. Each of the various intelligence and security services had its own list. As far as is known, the Syrian authorities had not published any of these lists during the reporting period. Many Syrians paid intermediaries to check whether their names appeared on any of the wanted lists.⁹⁰⁹ Given the absence of a central database where all the lists from all intelligence and security services could be consulted, it was necessary to inquire at multiple agencies. This made it a costly undertaking for many Syrians.⁹¹⁰

As far as is known, the Syrian authorities did not publish any lists of people who had been called up for military service. Conscripts included on these lists were usually informed of it when they came into contact with the authorities (for example, at checkpoints or when asked to produce documents).⁹¹¹

2.2.1.19 Permission to travel abroad

Conscripts whose service had been deferred due to studies could be granted permission to travel abroad (for example, to study there).⁹¹² The law did not specify a limit on the number of times an exit permit could be granted. This implied that such permission could be granted provided the conditions were met.⁹¹³ In principle, there was no limit on how long a student could stay abroad after obtaining permission. Students whose deferrals had expired by the time they returned were at risk of being fined.⁹¹⁴ According to one source, students were required to pay a deposit before departure or to have a civil servant or professional soldier act as a

⁹⁰⁴ The Syria Report, *Travel documents denied for regime defectors*, 11 June 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁰⁵ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁰⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Syria discharges new batch of reserve officers*, 16 August 2023; Enab Baladi, *Syrian regime ends retention and recall of certain military categories*, 27 April 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Assad regime releases new batch of reserve officers from duty*, 29 April 2024; Enab Baladi, *What's new in Syrian regime's administrative order on military service*, 11 June 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁰⁷ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁰⁸ Confidential source, September 2024.

⁹⁰⁹ Confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024

⁹¹⁰ Confidential source, August 2024, confidential source, September 2024.

⁹¹¹ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹¹² Confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹¹³ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁹¹⁴ Confidential source, September 2024.

guarantor. Students could have their deposits refunded if they returned within the specified time or if they requested that the permission granted be revoked.⁹¹⁵

Upon reaching the age of eighteen, men were required to report to the local recruitment office for initial registration. They were required to do this within a year of turning eighteen. The initial medical examination took place at the recruitment agency. Conscripts also received their military service booklets.⁹¹⁶ Every 45 days, the authorities published the birthdates of conscripts required to report for duty to begin basic military training.⁹¹⁷ There was often a gap of several months between receiving the military service booklet and being called up to begin military service.⁹¹⁸ According to one source, conscripts were able to leave Syria legally in the meantime.⁹¹⁹ Once conscripts and reservists had been called up for military service, they could not leave Syria legally without an official exit permit from the recruitment office.⁹²⁰

2.2.1.20 Relatives of deserters and people refusing military service

The authorities did not usually approach the relatives of draft resisters and deserters solely because of their relatives' desertion or refusal of military service.⁹²¹

Depending on personal circumstances (such as the region of origin or profile of the draft resister or deserter), relatives of draft resisters and deserters were sometimes approached or even detained by the authorities. This could have been a way of pressuring draft resisters or deserters to fulfil their military obligations. These families may also have been subjected to various forms of intimidation and extortion.⁹²²

⁹¹⁵ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁹¹⁶ DIS, *Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs*, 7 July 2023, pp. 5 and 8.

⁹¹⁷ DIS, *Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs*, 7 July 2023, p. 5.

⁹¹⁸ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹¹⁹ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁹²⁰ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹²¹ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 29; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹²² DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 29-30; confidential source, October 2024.

2.2.2 Compulsory military service in the DAANES territory

In the DAANES area, men eighteen years of age and older were required to serve for one year. This compulsory national service was entirely separate from compulsory military service in the government-controlled area.⁹²³

2.2.2.1 Legislative amendments

On 22 February 2024, the de facto administration announced that the Compulsory Self-Defence Service Act had been amended. Article 6 of this Act amended the levels of the fines for the loss or damage of the military service booklet. A provision was also added to stipulate that students in secondary school could be granted a deferral of up to one year to sit the national examination. An article was also added stipulating that doctors, pharmacists and those working in rural services could defer their military service by one year, provided they were not older than 30. This deferral may be granted for up to two consecutive years.⁹²⁴

2.2.2.2 Rounds of recruitment

Depending on the security situation and staffing requirements, one or more rounds of recruitment for military service took place each year.⁹²⁵ In addition, the authorities issued a circular setting out the ages of the men required to serve.⁹²⁶ On 22 June 2024, the de facto administration announced that men born between 1998 and 30 June 2006 would be required to serve.⁹²⁷ On 26 June 2024, the military police launched their recruitment campaign. To this end, the military police checked the military service booklets of men seeking to pass through the checkpoints. The military police also went door to door to track down conscripts.⁹²⁸

2.2.2.3 Difference between legislation and practice

In legal terms, compulsory military service applied to residents of the DAANES area, to Ajanib Kurds,⁹²⁹ to Maktoum Kurds⁹³⁰ and to Syrians from outside the DAANES area who had resided in the DAANES area longer than three years.⁹³¹ In practice, the authorities applied the recruitment campaign less strictly in areas with a predominantly Arab population and amongst Christians.⁹³² Furthermore, under the law, compulsory national service lasted twelve months.⁹³³ One source noted that, in practice, local commanders would extend this period by up to three months if there was a need for personnel, particularly during crises.⁹³⁴ Furthermore, under the Compulsory Self-Defence Service Act, compulsory military service applied in the

⁹²³ Section 1(a) of the Self-Defence Service Act.

⁹²⁴ Enab Baladi, *AANES adopts amendments to conscription laws*, 22 February 2024; DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, p. 91; Enab Baladi, *Despite announcing its halting, SDF launches compulsory recruitment campaign in al-Hasakah*, 27 June 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

⁹²⁵ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁹²⁶ North Press Agency, *Syria's AANES determines age required for 2021 self-defense duty*, 3 May 2021; DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, p. 19; Confidential source, November 2024.

⁹²⁷ DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, p. 13; confidential source, November 2024.

⁹²⁸ Enab Baladi, *Despite announcing its halting, SDF launches compulsory recruitment campaign in al-Hasakah*, 27 June 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: North-East Syria (June 2024)*, 30 June 2024; The Syrian Observer, *SDF arrests hundreds of young men for conscription in Northern and Eastern Syria*, 2 July 2024; ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: North-East Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹²⁹ Ajanib Kurds are stateless Kurds who are listed in the official Syrian civil registry. They were present in Syria during the 1962 census, but failed to convince the authorities that they had been living in Syria before 1945. For that reason, they were registered as Ajanib (literally: alien). They have limited access to public services and have limited property rights and inheritance rights.

⁹³⁰ Maktoum Kurds are stateless Kurds who are not listed in the official Syrian civil registry. They did not take part in the 1962 census, or their births were not registered for various reasons. They have fewer rights than Ajanib Kurds. For example, Maktoum Kurds cannot legally travel to the rest of Syria without special permission from the intelligence and security services.

⁹³¹ Section 1(d) of the Self-Defence Service Act.

⁹³² DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, pp. 13-14; confidential source, November 2024.

⁹³³ Article 2 of the Self-Defence Service Act.

⁹³⁴ Confidential source, November 2024.

DAANES area to men 18 years of age and older.⁹³⁵ There was no compulsory national service for women.⁹³⁶ In practice, women and children – both boys and girls – were conscripted (see Section 1.17).⁹³⁷

2.2.2.4 Deferral

Deferral of military service in the DAANES area was possible for various reasons. One reason was for studies. This type of deferral had to be renewed each year.⁹³⁸ According to one source, deferral was generally observed in practice.⁹³⁹ Under the law, deferral was also possible on the grounds of practising certain professions, special family circumstances, or returning from abroad.⁹⁴⁰ Articles 24 and 30 of the Act listed the professions for which deferral was possible. Articles 25 and 26 provided further details on special family circumstances. Return from abroad was covered in Article 26.⁹⁴¹ According to multiple sources, deferral on medical grounds was also possible.⁹⁴² Various sources noted that the authorities generally complied with the deferral arrangements in practice.⁹⁴³

2.2.2.5 Exemption

Various categories of people were exempt from military service. One of these categories consisted of sons whose fathers had been killed in action while serving in the SDF.⁹⁴⁴ Another consisted of conscripts who were unfit for active military service due to their medical condition.⁹⁴⁵ Exemption also applied to conscripts who were the sole breadwinners for their parents.⁹⁴⁶ It also applied to conscripts whose siblings required special support.⁹⁴⁷ Another category concerned foundlings whose origins were unknown.⁹⁴⁸ According to one source, conscripts were not required to serve if they had already completed their compulsory national service in the government army.⁹⁴⁹ According to various sources, the authorities generally complied with the exemption regulations in practice.⁹⁵⁰ In some cases, people with exemptions were required to pay bribes to secure their exemptions, or they were targeted for extortion at checkpoints.⁹⁵¹

⁹³⁵ Article 1(a) of the Self-Defence Service Act; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 56; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹³⁶ Article 3 of the Self-Defence Service Act; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹³⁷ Amnesty International, *Syrian Kurdish student disappeared in Syria: Fidaa Mohammad Qassem*, 29 January 2024; SNHR, *Girl named Amani Sheikh Khalil abducted by the SDF in Aleppo governorate, June 6, 2024*, 13 June 2024; HRW, *Northeast Syria: Military recruitment of children persists*, 2 October 2024.

⁹³⁸ Articles 16 to 23 of the Compulsory Self-Defence Service Act apply to students in secondary school and higher education; Enab Baladi, *AANES adopts amendments to conscription laws*, 22 February 2024; DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, p. 15.

⁹³⁹ Confidential source, November 2024.

⁹⁴⁰ Article 16 of the Self-Defence Service Act.

⁹⁴¹ Enab Baladi, *AANES adopts amendments to conscription laws*, 22 February 2024.

⁹⁴² DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, p. 16; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁴³ DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, p. 15; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

⁹⁴⁴ Section 29(1) of the Self-Defence Service Act; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁴⁵ Article 29(2) of the Self-Defence Service Act.

⁹⁴⁶ Section 29(3) of the Self-Defence Service Act; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁴⁷ Article 29(4) of the Self-Defence Service Act.

⁹⁴⁸ Article 29(5) of the Self-Defence Service Act.

⁹⁴⁹ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁵⁰ DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, p. 15; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁵¹ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

- 2.2.2.6 **Active military service**
Following three months of basic training, recruits were assigned to one of the SDF's military units. In the case of Arabs, this could have been the Deir ez-Zor Military Council or, if there were not enough Christian recruits to fill all the ranks, the Assyrian Military Council or the Assyrian Internal Security Forces (Sutoro).⁹⁵² According to various sources, recruits were usually assigned to units in their own regions.⁹⁵³ Recruits could also be assigned to the traffic police, the internal security forces (*Asayish*), the Assyrian internal security forces or the Arab internal security forces (*Shorta*).⁹⁵⁴
- 2.2.2.7 **Administrative duty**
The law did not contain provisions for administrative duty (*khadamat thabiteh*).⁹⁵⁵ According to one source, conscripts who were unable to serve on the front line for medical reasons could be assigned to administrative posts. They could be placed in a DAANES office, in logistics, in catering, in security or in a role that did not require heavy physical labour.⁹⁵⁶
- 2.2.2.8 **Buying out**
As far as is known, it was not possible to officially buy out of compulsory national service during the reporting period.⁹⁵⁷ Syrians who held a residence permit abroad were able to visit the DAANES area for one month each year without being conscripted, provided they paid a fee of 400 USD.⁹⁵⁸ According to one source, this scheme did not apply to Syrians with a residence permit in Türkiye.⁹⁵⁹
- 2.2.2.9 **Reserve duty**
In legal terms, men who had completed their compulsory military service could be called up as reservists during crises.⁹⁶⁰ As far as is known, no reservists were called up during the reporting period.⁹⁶¹
- 2.2.2.10 **Draft evasion and desertion**
For many young people, compulsory national service in the DAANES area had been the reason for leaving the area for Türkiye and the Kurdish region in northern Iraq.⁹⁶² Draft evaders who were apprehended at a checkpoint in the DAANES area were subsequently conscripted. In addition, their term of service could be extended by one month as a disciplinary measure.⁹⁶³ The law did not provide for separate penalties for refusal of military service and desertion.⁹⁶⁴
- 2.2.2.11 **Travel abroad for draft evaders**
According to various sources, draft evaders were not able to leave the DAANES area legally, as their names were known to the checkpoints.⁹⁶⁵

⁹⁵² The *Sutoro* is a Christian local militia in Hasaka province affiliated with the *Asayish*; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁵³ Enab Baladi, *Deir Ezzor Military Council targets regime forces' positions*, 3 December 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrian army, pro-Kurdish militia clash amid IS threat*, 4 December 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁵⁴ DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, pp. 14 and 17; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

⁹⁵⁵ Confidential source, November 2024.

⁹⁵⁶ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁵⁷ DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, p. 17; confidential source, November 2024.

⁹⁵⁸ Article 27 of the Self-Defence Service Act; DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, p. 16; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁵⁹ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁶⁰ Article 31 of the Self-Defence Service Act.

⁹⁶¹ DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, p. 19; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁶² Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

⁹⁶³ Article 15 of the Self-Defence Service Act.

⁹⁶⁴ Article 1(h) of the Self-Defence Service Act; Enab Baladi, *DAANES adopts amendments to conscription laws*, 22 February 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 62; confidential source, November 2024.

⁹⁶⁵ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

2.2.2.12 Duties of conscripts

Conscripts could be assigned both combat and non-combat duties, such as guarding public buildings, border patrols, logistical tasks and staffing checkpoints.⁹⁶⁶ In some cases, they could also be deployed to the front line (for example, if they were part of a sniper unit).⁹⁶⁷ The sources consulted did not agree on whether, in the latter case, a distinction was made between ethnic and/or religious groups.⁹⁶⁸ There was, however, no evidence to suggest that conscripts were being systematically discriminated against according to their ethnic origin.⁹⁶⁹

2.3 Freedom of expression

For 2023, as well as for 2022 and 2021, Syria scored one point on the Freedom House Global Freedom Score,⁹⁷⁰ which measures the various freedoms in a country. It was thus designated as 'Not free'.⁹⁷¹ There is no clear overview of the differences in freedom of expression across the various areas of control. Various sources reported that freedom of expression was severely restricted in all areas and that the de facto authorities cracked down hard on any critical voices.⁹⁷²

2.3.1 Opponents and alleged opponents

Given the arbitrary nature of arrests and other abuses, it was not possible to establish a clear overview of when the Syrian authorities classified someone as an opponent, or what reprisals followed certain opposition activities. There were many different circumstances that could lead to people being classified as opponents by the authorities in the government-controlled area.⁹⁷³ The categories of people who were generally regarded as opponents in the government-controlled area included political activists, current or former members of armed (or other) opposition groups, former civil servants who had left their posts and gone to other areas of control or abroad, and deserters.⁹⁷⁴ There were other categories of people whom the authorities could also classify as opponents. Examples of these categories included protesters, human rights activists, critical journalists and critical students.⁹⁷⁵ People who had posted critical messages online or who had made critical comments in public could also be classified as opponents.⁹⁷⁶ This also applied to internally

⁹⁶⁶ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁶⁷ DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, p. 1; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁶⁸ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁶⁹ DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, p. 21.

⁹⁷⁰ This index was compiled by aggregating scores for various factors, such as press freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of religion. The maximum score was 100 points.

⁹⁷¹ Freedom House, *Countries and territories*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

⁹⁷² Amnesty International, *The state of the world's human rights*, 23 April 2024; Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024, Syria*, 29 February 2024.

⁹⁷³ EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 12; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁷⁴ SOHR, *Regime-controlled areas in 2023. Nearly 2,625 fatalities in acts of violence...alarming increase in crime rate...deteriorating security situation...chronic stifling crises*, 4 January 2024; Syria Direct, *Hostages and siege: Daraa frees detainees by any means necessary*, 13 June 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. May 2024*, 20 June 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, pp. 19 and 27; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁷⁵ SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023, including of 129 children and 87 women, with 232 documented in December alone*, 2 January 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 19; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁷⁶ STJ, *Syria: Protests escalate in the areas controlled by the government and the latter responds with arrests and ready-made accusations*, 27 September 2023; The New Arab, *Syrian president Assad visits coast as discontent rises over economic conditions*, 29 September 2023; SNHR, *Government employee was arrested by Syrian regime forces in Tartus governorate, November 2, 2023*, 5 November 2023; Syria Direct, *'Ambiguous relationship': Where does Latakia stand on Suwayda's movement?*, 26 January 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024; SNHR, *On the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture: SNHR has documented the death of 15,383 Syrians under torture since March 2011, with 157,287 still detained and/or forcibly disappeared*, 27 June 2024;

displaced persons who originally came from areas that, until a few years before, had been under the control of the armed opposition and who wished to return to those areas; to people who had travelled outside the government-controlled area to visit relatives; to people who were in contact with relatives outside the government-controlled area; to medical workers who had provided assistance to members of the opposition, and for NGO staff who had no ties to the government.⁹⁷⁷ People could be arrested for the slightest offence. In that respect, little had changed compared to previous years.⁹⁷⁸

There was also little scope for opposition activities in the other three areas of control. Some of the aforementioned categories of people were also at risk of being classified as opponents. This was particularly true of political activists, members of the opposition, human rights activists, demonstrators and critical journalists.⁹⁷⁹ For example, there were reports of arrests of members of the Kurdish National Council and the Kurdish Democratic Unity Party in the DAANES area.⁹⁸⁰ There were also reports of protesters being arrested in the SSG area.⁹⁸¹ There were also reports of journalists being arrested in the SIG area.⁹⁸²

2.3.2 Criticism of the parties/groups in power

There was little or no scope in Syria for criticising the authorities or for expressing opinions other than those of the authorities.⁹⁸³ Openly criticising the authorities in one of the areas of control could result in arrest, detention and the seizure of property.⁹⁸⁴ In general, therefore, criticism tended to be confined to a few decisions taken by the authorities or to issues affecting the local community.⁹⁸⁵ According to

UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024; Trouw, 'Je kunt absoluut niet stellen dat asielzoekers veilig terug kunnen', 31 August 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁷⁷ UN HRC, "No end in sight": *Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023 (A/HRC/53/CRP.5)*, 10 July 2023; SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023, including of 129 children and 87 women, with 232 documented in December alone*, 2 January 2024; SOHR, *Regime-controlled areas in 2023. Nearly 2,625 fatalities in acts of violence...alarming increase in crime rate...deteriorating security situation...chronic stifling crises*, 4 January 2024; ACHR, *What happens after the forced deportation of refugees from Lebanon?*, 29 January 2024; The Syria Report, *IDPs return to regime-controlled areas in Idlib and Hama*, 18 June 2024; SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024; FP, *Syrians in Lebanon are stuck in limbo*, 9 July 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Assad's forces detain civilians in Damascus for visiting relatives in Northern Syria*, 6 September 2024; Enab Baladi, *Around 200 civilians detained near Damascus after crossing three control zones*, 7 September 2024; The New Arab, *200 Syrians missing after arrest by regime forces near Damascus*, 8 September 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Coming from the north: what fate for 200 Syrians arrested by regime?*, 9 September 2024; MEMO, *Assad regime arrests, disappears 200 Syria civilians returning from opposition areas*, 10 September 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; HRW, *Syrians fleeing Lebanon risk repression upon return*, 30 October 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁷⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 46; SNHR, *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces' detention of lawyer Thamer al-Talla and his subsequent death in a regime detention center due to medical negligence*, 10 May 2024.

⁹⁷⁹ HRW, *"Everything is by the power of the weapon". Abuses and impunity in Turkish-occupied northern Syria*, 29 February 2024; Syria Direct, *'Today Heba, tomorrow us': Feminist activist's hanging casts long shadow*, 2 March 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: HTS reportedly freed two key critics it detained last July*, 12 June 2024; SOHR, *Aleppo. Turkish-backed factions impose royalties and threaten Kurdish landowners who cling to them and refuse to migrate from Afrin*, 13 August 2024; Syria Direct, *'Liberated Saydnaya': Enforced disappearance and extortion in Syrian National Army prisons*, 19 September 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁸⁰ The Syrian Observer, *SDF kidnaps Kurdish National Council leader in Qamishli*, 26 January 2024; SNHR, *SDF arrests a female media worker with the Kurdish National Council and a Yekiti Party member in Hasaka*, June 10, 2024, 11 June 2024; The Syrian Observer, *SDF arrests members affiliated with Kurdish National Council in Hassakeh*, 13 June 2024.

⁹⁸¹ BBC Monitoring, *HTS orders arrests after violent protests in Syria's Idlib*, 24 May 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Dozens arrested after violent clashes: Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham security forces suppress Idlib protest*, 12 September 2024.

⁹⁸² STJ, *Northwest Syria: Local authorities attack journalists, suffocate freedom of expression*, 29 March 2024; Levant 24, *Journalist Bakr al-Qasim detained by Turkish-backed forces in northern Syria*, 27 August 2024.

⁹⁸³ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁸⁴ SNHR, *SNHR condemns the Syrian regime's detention of three activists, including two Alawites, in Latakia governorate over voicing criticism of the regime*, 17 September 2024; The Syria Report, *Government seizes dissidents' properties in Suweida*, 8 October 2024.

⁹⁸⁵ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

one source, during the reporting period, there were dozens of known cases in each of the areas of control concerning people who had been arrested and detained for criticising living conditions and the political situation in the relevant area of control.⁹⁸⁶

In the government-controlled area, it was virtually impossible to criticise the authorities or express dissenting views.⁹⁸⁷ It was not always clear what the standard was. This seemed to depend, at least in part, on where a person was. For example, the bar seemed to be set much higher in Suweida – where demonstrations had been taking place since August 2023 – than in Latakia or Tartous, where people were arrested under the Cybercrime Law of April 2022 for expressing support online for the protests in Suweida.⁹⁸⁸ It also seemed to depend on the reach (online or offline) of the person voicing the criticism. For example, on social media, there were sarcastic comments, satire, humorous street interviews and internet memes about the ration cards (smart cards) and the economic situation. The threshold at which this could lead to reprisals seemed to be lower for those who were more famous or those with a wider reach.⁹⁸⁹ Even if criticism was not voiced directly or in public, reprisals could follow if an informant had reported it to one of the intelligence services. According to one source, it was common for people to report on others.⁹⁹⁰

2.3.3 *Relatives of political activists and opponents*

Multiple sources pointed to instances in which relatives of well-known political activists or of individuals regarded by the Syrian authorities as opponents faced difficulties from the authorities solely because of their family ties. They could face harassment, ill-treatment, summonses to appear before an intelligence agency, arrest, detention, torture or the seizure of their property. Many Syrian refugees who still had family in Syria were reluctant to speak out against the Assad government, as they did not want to put their family in Syria in danger.⁹⁹¹ It is not known how often relatives of political activists and opponents encountered such problems.⁹⁹²

2.3.4 *Syrians living abroad*

There were several factors that could lead the Syrian authorities to view Syrians living abroad as opponents. One factor was the timing of their departure from Syria. The authorities viewed Syrians who had left the country in the early years of the conflict and applied for asylum with suspicion, as they assumed they were seeking asylum for political reasons.⁹⁹³ Another factor was the expression of criticism or views directed against the government. If Syrians living abroad were very outspoken and strongly criticised the Syrian government (for example, on the internet or through social media), they could be classified as opponents by the Syrian authorities.⁹⁹⁴ Another factor was participation in opposition activities. If Syrians living abroad took part in demonstrations, organised demonstrations or supported opposition groups, they could also be regarded as members of the opposition. Another factor was contact with opposition groups. If Syrians living abroad maintained contact with opposition groups (for example, by reporting human rights violations to these groups), they could also be classified as opponents. In

⁹⁸⁶ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁸⁷ Confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024

⁹⁸⁸ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁸⁹ Enab Baladi, *Regime pursues "immoral" content creators*, 30 September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁹⁰ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁹¹ HRW, *Syria: Mass unlawful asset freezes*, 18 July 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 21; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁹² Confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁹³ ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁹⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 47; confidential source, October 2024.

addition, family ties or friendships with well-known opponents may also have played a role.⁹⁹⁵

2.3.5 *Clarity regarding the risks upon return*

Many Syrians living abroad who wished to visit Syria would, prior to their departure, pay an intermediary to check with various security and intelligence agencies to determine whether their names appeared on any of the lists of wanted persons.⁹⁹⁶ Given the absence of a central database where all the lists from all intelligence and security services could be consulted, it was necessary to inquire at multiple agencies. This made it a costly undertaking for many Syrians.⁹⁹⁷ Moreover, this was done on the basis of trust, and it was never clear whether inquiries had been made, or to which authorities. Consequently, this operation never provided any guarantee that, upon their return, they would not still be arrested at a checkpoint staffed by one of the many armed groups.⁹⁹⁸ There were a few known cases of Syrians who returned from abroad after being told that they were not wanted by any intelligence or security service, but who were nevertheless arrested at a checkpoint after entering Syria. Some of them subsequently died in custody.⁹⁹⁹

2.3.6 *Detention, torture and enforced disappearance upon return*

Syrians could also face the risk of detention, torture and disappearance upon return for reasons other than opposition (actual or alleged). For example, this could happen because they had evaded their compulsory military service or reserve duty (see Sub-section 2.2.1.11).¹⁰⁰⁰ It was also possible that someone from the person's immediate circle had reported allegations concerning them to the intelligence services.¹⁰⁰¹ Another reason could be that the Syrian security apparatus wanted to generate revenue and therefore detained someone for ransom.¹⁰⁰²

2.3.7 *Opinions or utterances that the Assad government could regard as criticism*

The authorities interpreted many opinions and utterances as criticism of the government. Examples included views and comments regarding the presidential family, the intelligence and security services, Alawites, electoral fraud, human rights violations, corruption, drug trafficking, government failure, democracy, the opposition and poor living conditions.¹⁰⁰³ This could lead to arrest, torture, detention and the bringing of false charges. According to one source, it could also lead to an enforced disappearance, particularly in cases where the person concerned was viewed by the authorities as a threat. The relatives of the person concerned could also encounter problems with the authorities in retaliation for their relatives' views.¹⁰⁰⁴

2.3.8 *Past opposition activities*

⁹⁹⁵ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁹⁶ Confidential source, October 2024.

⁹⁹⁷ Confidential source, August 2024, confidential source, September 2024.

⁹⁹⁸ Confidential source, September 2024.

⁹⁹⁹ SOHR, *Despite settling his status. Deportee from Turkey die under torture in regime detention centre in Aleppo*, 11 September 2024; Levant 24, *Syrian refugee dies in Assad regime custody after deportation from Turkey*, 12 September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁰⁰ SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: Widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024.

¹⁰⁰¹ DIS, *Syria. Military service*, 25 January 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 33; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁰² UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/55/64)*, 9 February 2024; The Syria Report, *IDPs return to regime-controlled areas in Idlib and Hama*, 18 June 2024.

¹⁰⁰³ SNHR, *Civilian arrested in Latakia governorate by Syrian regime forces over criticizing economic situation*, August 20, 2023, 21 August 2023; Syria Direct, *'Ambiguous relationship': Where does Latakia stand on Suwayda's movement?*, 26 January 2024; USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, p. 58; SOHR, *Having showed up fraud in People's Assembly elections. Regime security services arrest journalist in Homs*, 19 September 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 18; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Confidential source, October 2024.

According to various sources, the authorities were slow to forgive and forget.¹⁰⁰⁵ In many cases, the authorities punished people for their critical activities, regardless of when they had taken place, even if it had been many years earlier.¹⁰⁰⁶

2.3.9 *Position of journalists*

According to Reporters without Borders (*Reporters sans frontières*, RSF), an international NGO dedicated to press freedom, Syria remained one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists during the reporting period.¹⁰⁰⁷ Syria was ranked 179th in RSF's 2024 Press Freedom Index. In all, this ranking included 180 countries. In the 2023 Press Freedom Index, Syria was ranked 175th.¹⁰⁰⁸

In the government-controlled area, the media were severely restricted. All media outlets required authorisation from the authorities in order to operate.¹⁰⁰⁹ On 23 April 2024, the government introduced Act No. 19, establishing a new Ministry of Information. This ministry was granted far-reaching powers to control the Syrian media, including television productions, digital media and social media.¹⁰¹⁰

Independent journalists or those critical of the government faced the risk of censorship, intimidation, arrest, detention (in solitary confinement), torture, abduction, enforced disappearance, killing and travel bans.¹⁰¹¹

During the reporting period, there were reports of intimidation, arrest, detention and abduction of journalists in the DAANES area.¹⁰¹² In addition, there were reports of journalists being arrested in the SSG area.¹⁰¹³ There were also reports of journalists being subjected to intimidation, ill-treatment, arrest and torture in the SIG area.¹⁰¹⁴

2.3.10 *Wives and children of men who were missing*

According to one source, the authorities sometimes regarded the wives and children of men who had gone missing while in detention as actual or potential opponents. This view could lead to certain negative consequences, including social exclusion upon return to Syria. They could also be arrested or questioned by the authorities, particularly if there was a perception that these relatives either were opponents or supported opponents. Furthermore, they could have been exposed to threats or reprisals for the actions of their relatives. They could also face difficulties accessing

¹⁰⁰⁵ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 47; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁰⁶ EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 12; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁰⁷ RSF, *Syrian journalists threatened by neighbouring states, as Syria remains second most dangerous country in the world for reporters*, RSF and SCM warn, 14 June 2024.

¹⁰⁰⁸ RSF, *2024 World Press Freedom Index*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024, Syria*, 29 February 2024; STJ, *Syria: Ministry of Information stifles digital platforms citing "indecent content," "offending national constants"*, 19 September 2024.

¹⁰¹⁰ SANA, *President al-Assad issues law on establishing information ministry to replace the one issued in 1961*, 23 April 2024; Enab Baladi, *Al-Assad issues decree on establishing alternative information ministry*, 23 April 2024; SNHR, *The Syrian regime's law no. 19 of 2024 on establishing a media ministry blatantly violates freedom of media, opinion, and expression*, 13 June 2024.

¹⁰¹¹ USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024; CPJ, *Syrian journalist Mahmoud Ibrahim arrested after post on anti-Assad protests*, 17 May 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰¹² SNHR, *SDF arrests a media worker in Hasaka governorate, August 15, 2023*, 17 August 2023; USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, pp. 42 and 60; Syria Direct, *Restrictions on local journalists in northeastern Syria multiply*, 4 July 2024.

¹⁰¹³ USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, pp. 43 and 59; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰¹⁴ The Syrian Observer, *Journalists arrested in demonstration against Abdel Rahman Mustafa government in al-Rai*, 19 December 2023; RSF, *Police attack reporters covering protest in northwestern Syria*, 22 December 2023; USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, pp. 59-60; AP News, *A Syrian journalist who reports for international agencies is arrested by Turkish-backed authorities*, 27 August 2024; SNHR, *SNHR condemns SNA's detention of media worker Bakr Qasim in Aleppo governorate on August 26, 2024*, 28 August 2024; IFJ, *Syria: Journalist Bakr al-Kassem released one week after his arrest by Türkiye-backed authorities*, 3 September 2024.

basic services (such as education and healthcare) due to the stigma.¹⁰¹⁵ In addition, the fact that a Syrian had been living abroad could be sufficient grounds to attract the attention of the intelligence services.¹⁰¹⁶ Furthermore, relatives of missing persons could be financially exploited by the intelligence services by providing information about the missing persons in exchange for large sums of money.¹⁰¹⁷

2.3.11 *Increased focus on Syrians returning from specific countries*

According to one source, the main requirement upon return was that there were no outstanding issues regarding compulsory military service or reserve duty, and that the individual's name did not appear on any of the lists of wanted persons.¹⁰¹⁸

According to another source, the actions of the Syrian authorities were characterised by a high degree of arbitrariness and unpredictability.¹⁰¹⁹

There were dozens of reports of Syrians returning from Türkiye and Lebanon being subjected to extortion, arbitrary arrest, incommunicado detention, torture and killing, as well as seizure of their property. This was the case for people who had returned voluntarily – including those who had 'sorted out their status' – as well as for those who had been forced to return and those who had fled Lebanon to escape Israeli bombing.¹⁰²⁰

According to one source, various factors played a role in this regard, including gender, age, place of origin, the time at which the person had left Syria, the manner of departure (legal or illegal, see Sub-section 2.3.12), family relationships, occupation and any anti-government stance (actual or alleged).¹⁰²¹

Furthermore, Syrians returning from places such as Europe and the Gulf States were always at risk of arrest and detention in connection with extortion, as it was assumed that they had financial resources and that ransom could be demanded in their case.¹⁰²² This form of extortion was also prevalent amongst the Syrian

¹⁰¹⁵ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰¹⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 46; confidential source.

¹⁰¹⁷ UN HRC, "No end in sight": torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023 (A/HRC/53/CRP.5), 10 July 2023, pp. 19-20; BBC, *Back from the dead: Desperately searching for Syria's missing prisoners*, 14 September 2023; USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, p. 83; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024.

¹⁰¹⁸ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰¹⁹ Confidential source, November 2024.

¹⁰²⁰ OHCHR, *Syrian returnees subjected to "gross human rights violations and abuses"*, UN report details, 13 February 2024; Enab Baladi, *Voluntary or by force, stories of Syrians who returned to their homeland*, 5 March 2024; SNHR, *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces for detention, fatal torture of a refugee forcibly deported from Lebanon*, 28 June 2024; The New Arab, *Syrian regime detains dozens of refugees who returned from Lebanon in July*, 8 August 2024; SOHR, *Despite settling his status. Deportee from Turkey die under torture in regime detention centre in Aleppo*, 11 September 2024; Levant 24, *Syrian refugee dies in Assad regime custody after deportation from Turkey*, 12 September 2024; SOHR, *Amid dire living conditions. Regime forces impose levies on returnees from Lebanon and arrest 35 others*, 2 October 2024; Enab Baladi, *Regime arrests nine Syrians returning from Lebanon*, 2 October 2024; North Press Agency, *Government forces arrest Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 2 October 2024; Levant 24, *UN warns of dire conditions for Syrians returning from Lebanon*, 5 October 2024; MEE, *Syrian refugees flee Lebanon for Kurdish and Turkish-controlled parts of northern Syria*, 6 October 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Syrians returning from Lebanon arrested by regime*, 10 October 2024; SNHR, *Three men arrested by Syrian regime forces after returning from Lebanon*, October 9, 2024, 11 October 2024; North Press Agency, *SNA releases Syrian returnees from Lebanon for \$100 each*, 14 October 2024; The New Humanitarian, *The risk of return: As Israel bombs Lebanon, Syrian deportees face detention, conscription, or worse*, 16 October 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: Widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024; TIMEP, *Caught between two wars: The risky return of Syrian refugees from Lebanon*, 13 November 2024; HRW, *Syrians fleeing Lebanon risk repression upon return*, 30 October 2024; Enab Baladi, *Regime arrested 26 Syrian returnees from Lebanon*, 30 October 2024; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

¹⁰²¹ Confidential source, November 2024.

¹⁰²² SOHR, *SOHR exclusive. Regime security services arrest and blackmail Syrians returning voluntarily to the "safe homeland"*, 12 June 2022; UN HRC, "No end in sight": torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023 (A/HRC/53/CRP.5), 10 July 2023; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 33; confidential source, November 2024.

population. As a result, some families were forced to sell their homes to raise the money.¹⁰²³

2.3.12 *Illegal exit*

Within the government-controlled area, leaving the country illegally could have consequences, as this was a criminal offence under Act No. 18 of 2014. It could result in a fine or a prison sentence.¹⁰²⁴

2.3.13 *Social media monitoring*

During the reporting period, criminal proceedings were brought against citizens under the Cybercrime Act in connection with their activities on social media. They could be arrested and sentenced to time in prison. Other penalties could also have been imposed, such as a travel ban or placement under supervision.¹⁰²⁵ According to one source, criminal cases were heard by a military court (for example, if one of the participants in a WhatsApp group turned out to be a member of the armed forces).¹⁰²⁶

According to various sources, the Syrian authorities monitored the social media accounts of Syrians both at home and abroad.¹⁰²⁷ Another source reported that this took place systematically.¹⁰²⁸ According to the US Department of State, the Syrian authorities used advanced technologies and hundreds of IT specialists to monitor various matters, including the emails and social media accounts of prisoners, activists and other people.¹⁰²⁹ Sources indicated that the Syrian authorities relied heavily on human informants in Syria, in addition to technical monitoring. A large amount of information on alleged criticisms still came from people reporting others to the authorities. The scale at which this occurred is not known.¹⁰³⁰

Sources reported that authorities in other areas of control were also monitoring critical comments on social media. They were nevertheless unable to say to what extent or how effectively this was being done.¹⁰³¹ During the reporting period, there were reports of human rights activists being arrested by HTS because of their social media activities.¹⁰³²

2.3.14 *Mobile phone traffic monitoring in the various areas of control*

According to various sources, mobile phone traffic in the government-controlled area was being monitored.¹⁰³³ According to one source, the other areas of control lacked the necessary technology, and that mobile phones were therefore sometimes

¹⁰²³ YouTube, *TIMEP, Syria and Syrian refugees: From EU migration policies to Israel's war on Lebanon*, 25 November 2024, [URL](#), [27:41-30:02]; confidential source, September 2024.

¹⁰²⁴ ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 30 October 2024.

¹⁰²⁵ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 5; BBC Monitoring, *Syria police arrest YouTube comedians over public decency violations*, 6 September 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰²⁶ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰²⁷ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2024, Syria*, 29 February 2024; USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, p. 62; 1 SNHR, *The Syrian regime's law no. 19 of 2024 on establishing a media ministry blatantly violates freedom of media, opinion, and expression*, 13 June 2024, p. 6; BBC Monitoring, *Syrian government to 'monitor' platforms that publish 'vulgar' content*, 17 August 2024; RSF, *Syria*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰²⁸ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰²⁹ USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, p. 62.

¹⁰³⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 48; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰³¹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 48; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰³² Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰³³ The Syrian Observer, *Assad's forces detain civilians in Damascus for visiting relatives in Northern Syria*, 6 September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

checked by hand.¹⁰³⁴ Another source reported having no knowledge of this form of monitoring in the north-west.¹⁰³⁵

2.3.15 *Anonymous SIM cards*

According to various sources, it was not possible to obtain SIM cards in Syria through legal channels that were not registered to a specific name.¹⁰³⁶ To obtain a SIM card, a buyer had to show an ID card,¹⁰³⁷ and the seller would make a copy. The seller also completed a form, after which the payment was made.¹⁰³⁸ In the government-controlled area, however, counterfeit SIM cards or those imported from abroad could be found on the black market.¹⁰³⁹

2.3.16 *Passwords for social media accounts*

According to various sources, the authorities did not routinely ask for social media account passwords when people were legally entering or leaving Syria.¹⁰⁴⁰ This usually happened when someone was being arrested. In addition, people were sometimes asked to hand over their phones at checkpoints.¹⁰⁴¹

2.4 **LGBTIQ+**

2.4.1 *Position of LGBTIQ+ people*

Little information was available on the situation of the LGBTIQ+ community during the reporting period. According to various sources, the situation of LGBTIQ+ people in Syria remained as dire as ever.¹⁰⁴² For many people in Syria, LGBTIQ+ issues were a major taboo and a sensitive subject to discuss.¹⁰⁴³ As far as is known, there were no LGBTIQ+ people in Syria who were open about their sexual orientation, gender identity or transgender background.¹⁰⁴⁴

In general, LGBTIQ+ people were neither accepted nor tolerated in Syrian society.¹⁰⁴⁵ LGBTIQ+ people were likely to face discrimination and violence (see Sub-section 2.5.4). According to one source, there was little public awareness of the issue.¹⁰⁴⁶

2.4.2 *Criminalisation of sexual acts*

Under Section 520 of the Criminal Code, engaging in sexual acts between persons of the same sex was punishable by imprisonment of up to three years.¹⁰⁴⁷ Additional information is provided in Sub-section 7.4.1 of the General COI Report on Syria dated August 2023.

¹⁰³⁴ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰³⁵ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰³⁶ Confidential source, June 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰³⁷ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰³⁸ Confidential source, July 2024.

¹⁰³⁹ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Confidential source, June 2024; confidential source, July 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁴¹ SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

¹⁰⁴² Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁴³ GEM, *The Syrian LGBTQIA+ people in conflict and displacement: Peace and accountability efforts*, 15 June 2024, p. 21; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁴⁴ GEM, *The Guardians of Equality Movement to help LGBTQ+ people in Syria*, 23 August 2023; USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, p. 113; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Atlantic Council, *This organization is helping Syria's LGBTQI community. Here's how*, 21 June 2022; HRW, *World Report 2024, Syria*, 9 January 2024; USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, p. 103; Human Dignity Trust, *Syria*, 12 September 2024; The Equality Pathway, *Turkey deports Syrian LGBT+ refugees back to danger*, 30 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

2.4.3 *Criminal prosecution of LGBTIQ+ people*

The Syrian authorities invoked Article 520 of the Penal Code, as well as Article 517 of the Penal Code, which relates to 'offences against public decency', primarily against the LGBTIQ+ community.¹⁰⁴⁸ In 2023, an official from the Syrian Ministry of the Interior stated, on condition of anonymity, that around 200 Syrians were currently in prison for engaging in sexual acts with a person of the same sex.¹⁰⁴⁹

There were a few reports of forced deportations of LGBTIQ+ people to Syria from Türkiye, Lebanon and Iraq.¹⁰⁵⁰ According to one source, some of them went into hiding after their deportation. The same source noted that there were also reports that some LGBTIQ+ people had been arrested following their deportation.¹⁰⁵¹

In the SSG area, anyone identifying as LGBTIQ+ could face flogging or the death penalty under Sharia law.¹⁰⁵² According to one source, it was common for LGBTIQ+ people to be tortured after their arrest and forced to pay money for their release.¹⁰⁵³ In January 2024, Syrian media reported that the SSG was drafting a bill relating to public morality. It could also have implications for the position of the LGBTIQ+ community. Following widespread criticism of this bill, the SSG suspended it.¹⁰⁵⁴

The United Arab Emirates Act of 1965 applied in the SIG area. This legislation leaves the conviction of LGBTIQ+ people to the judge.¹⁰⁵⁵ According to one source, there had been instances in which armed groups killed LGBTIQ+ people.¹⁰⁵⁶

No information was available on this point regarding the situation in the DAANES area.¹⁰⁵⁷

2.4.4 *Discrimination and violence against LGBTIQ+ people*

In Syria, LGBTIQ+ people faced discrimination.¹⁰⁵⁸ This could be accompanied by bullying, humiliation, intimidation, extortion and violence (including sexual violence) from relatives, colleagues at work or the authorities (for example, during an arrest).¹⁰⁵⁹ In addition, it was difficult for LGBTIQ+ people to find jobs or housing.¹⁰⁶⁰ This could not be quantified further due to a lack of statistics.

The Syrian civil war had rendered Syrian society more conservative and violent. Compared to heterosexual and cisgender people, LGBTIQ+ people were at much greater risk of reprisals from relatives (for example, because the latter viewed their

¹⁰⁴⁸ GEM, *The Syrian LGBTQIA+ people in conflict and displacement: Peace and accountability efforts*, 15 June 2024, p. 14; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Human Dignity Trust, *Syria*, 12 September 2024; Openly, *Gay Syrian refugees see intolerance rise in once-liberal Lebanon*, 9 November 2023.

¹⁰⁵⁰ ACHR, *Lebanon's violation of human rights through the forced deportation of refugees*, 19 May 2023, p. 7; GEM, *Deportation of Syrian LGBTQIA+ refugees from Turkey: "Go to Syria and die there"*, 11 June 2024; The Equality Pathway, *Turkey deports Syrian LGBT+ refugees back to danger*, 30 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁵¹ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁵² GEM, *The Syrian LGBTQIA+ people in conflict and displacement: Peace and accountability efforts*, 15 June 2024, p. 16; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁵³ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Enab Baladi, *Enab Baladi publishes details from Idlib's 'Public Morality' draft law*, 4 January 2024; Levant 24, *SSG proposes new legislation and law enforcement branch*, 8 January 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Julani freezes morality police in Idlib amid extremist tensions*, 19 April 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁵⁵ GEM, *The Syrian LGBTQIA+ people in conflict and displacement: Peace and accountability efforts*, 15 June 2024, p. 15.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁵⁸ GEM, *The Guardians of Equality Movement to help LGBTQ+ people in Syria*, 23 August 2023; LQIOO, *Everything you need to know about LGBTQ rights in Syria*, 2 September 2023.

¹⁰⁵⁹ USDOS, *2024 trafficking in persons report: Syria*, 25 June 2024; Human Dignity Trust, *Syria*, 12 September 2024; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁶⁰ GEM, *The Syrian LGBTQIA+ people in conflict and displacement: Peace and accountability efforts*, 15 June 2024, p. 22.

existence as a stain on the family's honour). Such reprisals could involve social exclusion, as well as ill-treatment or honour-based violence.¹⁰⁶¹ As far as is known, there were no reports of LGBTIQ+ people who had been victims of honour-based violence during the reporting period.¹⁰⁶²

According to one source, some LGBTIQ+ people had reportedly been killed following their deportation.¹⁰⁶³ For example, in July 2024, Turkish organisations reported that a trans woman from Idlib, who had been deported by the Turkish authorities through the Bab al-Hawa border crossing, had been killed in Syria. It was nevertheless unclear from the reports whether her relatives or HTS were responsible for her death.¹⁰⁶⁴ Other sources were also unable to confirm her death.¹⁰⁶⁵

2.4.5 Protection options

It was not possible for LGBTIQ+ people to obtain protection from the authorities.¹⁰⁶⁶ As far as is known, there were no civil society organisations in Syria advocating for the rights of LGBTIQ+ people.¹⁰⁶⁷

2.5 Women

According to various sources, gender-based violence and poverty among female-headed households increased during the reporting period, due to the deteriorating living conditions in the country (see Chapter 3).¹⁰⁶⁸ Child marriages have reportedly increased as well in response to rising poverty across Syria.¹⁰⁶⁹

Additional information on gender-based violence and female-headed households, is presented in section 5.4 of the General COI Report on Syria dated August 2023. This information was still up to date during the reporting period.

2.6 Blood feuds

According to several sources, incidents related to blood feuds¹⁰⁷⁰ regularly took place in eastern regions inhabited by Arab tribal groups, particularly those living in villages in the provinces of Deir ez-Zor and Hasaka, as well as in the Badia

¹⁰⁶¹ Atlantic Council, *This organization is helping Syria's LGBTQI community. Here's how*, 21 June 2022; Syria Direct, *Community in the collapse: Syrian LGBTQ+ refugees carve out their own havens in Beirut*, 31 January 2023; Openly, *Gay Syrian refugees see intolerance rise in once-liberal Lebanon*, 9 November 2023; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁶² Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁶³ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Haberler.com, *The report about a Syrian transgender individual born in 1997 caused a stir in Adana*, 9 July 2024; Duvar, *Refugee trans woman deported by Turkey over HIV status killed in Syria*, 27 July 2024; Minority Azerbaijan, *Refugee trans woman deported from Turkey murdered*, 28 July 2024; Kaos GL, *Deported refugee trans woman murdered*, 29 July 2024; Kaos GL, *Those who posted on social media, the Removal Center and Adana Governorate are responsible*, 12 August 2024.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 71; USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, p. 104; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Asharq Al-Awsat, *After 12 years of war, women outnumber men in Syria*, 16 December 2023; HRW, *World Report 2024, Syria*, 9 January 2024; Syria Untold, *Exploitation of widows and child recruitment in widow homes*, 25 April 2024; UNOCHA, *Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Martin Griffiths. Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria*, 30 May 2024, 30 May 2024; UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2024*, 10 November 2024, p. 10; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁶⁹ UNFPA, *13 years on, the Syria crisis is pushing women and girls to the brink*, 15 March 2024; UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2024*, 10 November 2024, p. 11.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Blood feuds are a form of honour-based violence. Blood feuds arise from a dispute between two parties in which a person has been killed or seriously injured.

Desert.¹⁰⁷¹ Blood feuds also occurred outside these areas, but generally only in tribal regions.¹⁰⁷² According to one source, blood feuds also occurred in cities (such as Damascus) as a result of demographic changes, as many people had migrated from the tribal areas of Deir ez-Zor to the cities.¹⁰⁷³ The extent to which blood feuds took place in the various areas of control during the reporting period is not known.

Women were not usually the targets of blood feuds, but there were a few known cases in which women had fallen victim to blood feuds.¹⁰⁷⁴

2.7 Minors (including unaccompanied minors)

2.7.1 Care of minors

As a rule, children who had lost their parents, or at least had no parents able to care for them, were taken in by close relatives. If this was not possible, children could go to a shelter.¹⁰⁷⁵

2.7.2 Types of shelter

Various types of shelters were available for minors in the government-controlled area. These included orphanages, youth care centres and shelters for children with disabilities.¹⁰⁷⁶ Although no statistics were available, it is believed that, as a result of the conflict and the deteriorating economic situation, there were not enough shelter places. Children's homes generally had limited financial resources, which meant they were not always able to meet the children's basic needs. In addition, there was little oversight of the shelters by the Syrian Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour.¹⁰⁷⁷ In the children's homes, boys and girls were usually housed separately.¹⁰⁷⁸ The temporary shelters operated by UNICEF and Save the Children in the camps for displaced persons constituted an exception to this.¹⁰⁷⁹

2.7.3 Family-based shelter in the government-controlled area

There were no official adoption arrangements for Muslim families in Syria. In addition to children's homes and foster care with relatives, there were two other forms of alternative care: *kafala* and *al-haq*. *Kafala* was a form of guardianship in which an unrelated family cared for a child if the child's parents were unable to do so. The child could not claim the family name or an inheritance from the family providing childcare. The foster family could formalise the child's inclusion in the family before a sharia court. *Al-haq* was reserved for abandoned children whose parents were entirely absent. Under this form of care, a foster family signed a one-off contract for a period of one year. In practice, the child remained connected to the family until the age of eighteen.¹⁰⁸⁰ In practice, care for children without parents was usually organised informally within the communities (including in camps).¹⁰⁸¹

¹⁰⁷¹ Enab Baladi, *Organizations launch project to resolve tribal conflicts in Deir Ezzor*, 31 May 2024; SOHR, *Tribal infighting. Young man killed in southern Al-Hasakah*, 12 July 2024; confidential source, August 2024.

¹⁰⁷² Syria Direct, *Daraa residents turn to clan reconciliation over the court system*, 4 April 2024; confidential source, June 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁷³ Confidential source, August 2024.

¹⁰⁷⁴ SOHR, *Tribal clashes. Woman killed and five injured in Deir Ezzor countryside*, 6 August 2024; SOHR, *Appeals to end clashes. Civilians injured in tribal infightings in eastern Deir Ezzor countryside*, 15 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁷⁵ UN, *Syria: From orphans to earthquake survivors*, 6 February 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Syria*, 31 May 2022, p. 64; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Syria*, 31 May 2022, p. 65; The National, *Care centre in Syria's Idlib gives hope to lost children of war*, 14 July 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁸¹ STJ, *Adoption in Syria*, 2 March 2022; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

2.7.4 *Care in the other areas of control*

In the DAANES area, temporary shelters operated by UNICEF and Save the Children were set up in camps for displaced people.¹⁰⁸² In terms of care for minors in refugee camps, the camp management played a supervisory role. The camp management also approved the placement of children from the temporary shelters with host families.¹⁰⁸³ Save the Children provided children with housing and facilities in its temporary shelters, including those in the al-Hol and al-Roj camps. Children were also staying at the Houri Rehabilitation Centre and the Orkesh Rehabilitation Centre without their parents. These youth facilities bore some resemblance to detention centres (see Section 1.18).¹⁰⁸⁴ There were also a few orphanages in the north-east.¹⁰⁸⁵

Several orphanages and temporary shelters were located in the SIG and SSG areas. These facilities were operated by charities and humanitarian organisations that were largely dependent on private donations and funding from abroad.¹⁰⁸⁶ There was little oversight of these shelters by the local authorities.¹⁰⁸⁷

The overall deterioration in the humanitarian situation during the reporting period had an impact on the situation of unaccompanied minors. For some families, the situation was so desperate that they left their children by the side of the road, in hospitals, at mosques or in a park.¹⁰⁸⁸ In Syria, many children did not go to school. Many children were working.¹⁰⁸⁹ During the day, many children could be seen on the streets, begging or selling goods to motorists.¹⁰⁹⁰ The number of street children was not known, however, nor was the extent to which these children were on their own or whether a parent or carer was involved in the background.¹⁰⁹¹

2.7.5 *Temporary guardianship*

Matters relating to guardianship were laid down in the Staff Regulations Act (WPS). The father – or, in his absence, his father (the grandfather) – had legal guardianship of the children of the marriage, as well as of their property.¹⁰⁹² In legal terms, legal guardianship ended when a child reached the age of eighteen.¹⁰⁹³ There were two types of guardianship: legal guardianship (*wilaya*) and temporary guardianship by appointment (*wisaya*).¹⁰⁹⁴

The legal guardian's (*wali*) authority could be revoked if the guardian was missing, under guardianship or in detention. In such a situation, a judge decided who would be granted temporary guardianship.¹⁰⁹⁵ The wali could also appoint a temporary

¹⁰⁸² Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁸³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General COI Report on Syria*, 31 May 2022, p. 65; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁸⁴ UN HRC, *Punishing the innocent: Ending violations against children in the north-east of the Syrian Arab Republic*, 19 March 2024, p. 8; Amnesty International, *Aftermath. Injustice, torture, and death in detention in North-East Syria*, 17 April 2024, p. 47; CNN, *'In prison because of our parents': Children of ISIS fighters coming of age in detention ask what they're being punished for*, 11 June 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁸⁶ IPS, *Abandoned children growing problem in northern Syria*, 27 March 2024; Al Jazeera, *'My soul and beating heart': Orphaned Syrian children find new family*, 20 November 2023; The National, *Care centre in Syria's Idlib gives hope to lost children of war*, 14 July 2024; Child Houses, *About us*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁸⁸ STJ, *Syria: Over 100 cases of child abandonment between 2021 and 2022*, 2 March 2023; IPS, *Abandoned children growing problem in northern Syria*, 27 March 2024; The National, *Care centre in Syria's Idlib gives hope to lost children of war*, 14 July 2024.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁹¹ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁹² Confidential source, August 2024, confidential source, September 2024.

¹⁰⁹³ Confidential source, August 2024.

¹⁰⁹⁴ NRC, *Guide to children's rights in Syria*, July 2023, p. 21.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Article 174 WPS; NRC, *Guide to children's rights in Syria*, July 2023, p. 22; confidential source, September 2024.

guardian (for example, if he was living abroad).¹⁰⁹⁶ Such an allocation had to be confirmed by a court.¹⁰⁹⁷

An applicant could submit an application for temporary guardianship (*wisaya sharia*) directly to a court without an appointment. This usually involved a Sharia court.¹⁰⁹⁸ Although applicants were entitled assistance by a solicitor, in principle, no one else was required to be present.¹⁰⁹⁹ Before ruling on the application, the judge first spoke with the applicant to assess whether the applicant was capable of handling the responsibility.¹¹⁰⁰ In this assessment, the judge also considered what would be in the child's best interests. If there were any doubts about the applicant, the judge could appoint someone else or call on other individuals.¹¹⁰¹

The WPS did not specify the duration of temporary guardianship. When granting temporary guardianship, the judge determined the powers to be vested in the temporary guardian. One source cited the example of temporary guardianship to arrange a trip abroad for the child. In this example, the temporary guardianship was valid for three months. According to this source, the judge issued the decision to the applicant, together with the relevant case number.¹¹⁰² The judge's decision (*karar*) was then archived at the court.¹¹⁰³

Once temporary guardianship had been granted, the father or his father generally played no part in the temporary guardian's powers, unless the situation changed and the father or his father regained custody following legal proceedings.¹¹⁰⁴

2.7.6 *Upbringing by relatives*

According to one source, children who were raised by relatives of their parents were not entered in the family registers (*daftar ayli*) of those relatives. The child was entered into the civil registry under the names of the biological father and mother and entered in their family register.¹¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁹⁶ Article 175 WPS; NRC, *Guide to children's rights in Syria*, July 2023, p. 22.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Article 176(3) of the WPS.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Confidential source, August 2024, confidential source, September 2024.

¹¹⁰⁰ Confidential source, August 2024.

¹¹⁰¹ Confidential source, September 2024.

¹¹⁰² Confidential source, August 2024.

¹¹⁰³ Confidential source, September 2024, confidential source, October 2024.

¹¹⁰⁴ Confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, September 2024

¹¹⁰⁵ Confidential source, September 2024.

3 Living conditions

3.1 General

According to WHO figures, Syria had a population of approximately 23.6 million in 2023.¹¹⁰⁶ According to the IDMC, there were approximately 7.2 million internally displaced persons at the end of 2023.¹¹⁰⁷ In addition, according to the UNHCR, there were 5.1 million refugees and asylum seekers from Syria in 2023.¹¹⁰⁸

During the reporting period, living conditions in Syria continued to deteriorate compared to the previous reporting period, due in part to the ongoing rise in the cost of living.¹¹⁰⁹ According to the UN, more than 90% of the Syrian population was living below the poverty line.¹¹¹⁰

According to a World Bank report published in May 2024, around 5.7 million Syrians were living in extreme poverty in 2022. They had to make do on less than 2.15 USD per person per day. An additional 14.5 million others were living in poverty, having to make do on less than 3.65 USD per person per day.¹¹¹¹

According to UNOCHA, at the start of 2024, 16.7 million people (almost 70% of the population) needed humanitarian aid to survive.¹¹¹² This was the highest number of people in need since the conflict began in 2011. This was an increase of 9% relative to 2023, when 15.3 million people needed humanitarian aid to survive.¹¹¹³ From the end of September 2024, several hundred thousand more people who had left Lebanon were added to that number (see Section 7.1).¹¹¹⁴

According to UNOCHA, 15.4 million Syrians were facing food insecurity.¹¹¹⁵ More than 650,000 children experienced stunted growth.¹¹¹⁶ According to information from the OHCHR, 58% of all households had to borrow money to buy food.¹¹¹⁷

3.2 The economy

The Syrian economy has displayed a downward trend in recent years. The gross domestic product (GDP) fell by 3.5% in 2022 and by 1.2% in 2023.¹¹¹⁸

The national currency, the Syrian pound (SYP),¹¹¹⁹ has lost much of its value in recent years. On the international market, the official exchange rate for one US

¹¹⁰⁶ WHO, *Syrian Arab Republic*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹¹⁰⁷ IDMC, *Global report on internal displacement 2024*, 14 May 2024, p. 124.

¹¹⁰⁸ UNHCR, *Refugee Data Finder*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹¹⁰⁹ UNHCR, *Syria Arab Republic operational update (June-July 2024)*, 16 September 2024.

¹¹¹⁰ UNOCHA, *Press briefing by Martin Griffiths, under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator*, 7 July 2023; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 2.

¹¹¹¹ World Bank, *Syria economic monitor: Conflict, crises, and the collapse of household welfare*, 24 May 2024, p. 32.

¹¹¹² UNOCHA, *Humanitarian update. Syrian Arab Republic. Issue 24. May 2024*, 15 July 2024; Security Council Report, *June 2024 monthly forecast*, 1 June 2024.

¹¹¹³ UNHCR, *Syria Arab Republic operational update (June-July 2024)*, 16 September 2024.

¹¹¹⁴ Confidential source, December 2024.

¹¹¹⁵ Security Council Report, *June 2024 monthly forecast*, 1 June 2024.

¹¹¹⁶ OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 27 September 2023; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 2.

¹¹¹⁷ YouTube, *UN Human Rights Middle East and North Africa*, 26 June 2024, [URL](#).

¹¹¹⁸ World Bank, *Syria economic monitor: Conflict, crises, and the collapse of household welfare*, 24 May 2024, p. 27.

¹¹¹⁹ In Syrian vernacular, the SYP is also known as the Syrian lira.

dollar (USD) was approximately 2,500 SYP at the beginning of March 2023 and approximately 13,000 SYP at the end of October 2024.¹¹²⁰ At that time, the exchange rate for one US dollar on the black markets in Damascus and Aleppo was 14,650 SYP. In Idlib, it was 15,170 SYP.¹¹²¹ On 1 December 2024, the exchange rate for one US dollar on the black market was 14,800 SYP in Damascus, 15,500 SYP in Aleppo and 16,100 SYP in Idlib.¹¹²²

As a result of the conflict, the economy had largely collapsed. Based on satellite imagery of Syria's light intensity, the World Bank estimated in 2023 that the Syrian economy had shrunk by 80% between 2010 and 2022.¹¹²³ What remained of the economy was largely divided between the Syrian elite and the security apparatus. Various sources have described the Syrian economy as predatory.¹¹²⁴ Due to the economic crisis, more women and children started looking for work.¹¹²⁵ Although no exact figures were available, child labour was widespread.¹¹²⁶

3.3 Basic services

In March 2024, UNOCHA noted that humanitarian needs in Syria continued to rise.¹¹²⁷ Since then, more than 500,000 people (including both Syrians and Lebanese), many of whom needed assistance, have fled from Lebanon to Syria to escape the Israeli bombardments in Lebanon. This put an even greater strain on the already severely overburdened services and civil infrastructure. This influx also led to further price increases.¹¹²⁸ For most people, the cost of basic services had already become disproportionately high, given their income.¹¹²⁹ For example, buying meat or eating out had become unaffordable for someone on a teacher's salary.¹¹³⁰ Bread was the staple food in Syria. In government-controlled areas, people on low incomes could use ration cards to buy certain basic goods (such as bread) at reduced prices.¹¹³¹ The bread was usually made with poor-quality flour.¹¹³² Access to and availability of basic services (such as water, fuel, electricity and healthcare) were limited throughout Syria. Most jobs and services were available in the cities. This made them more accessible to city dwellers than to those in rural areas.¹¹³³

¹¹²⁰ Syria Direct, 'Worst since the beginning of the 20th century': What does 2024 hold for Syria's economy in freefall?, 28 December 2023; XE, US dollar to Syrian pound exchange rate chart, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹¹²¹ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹¹²² Confidential source, December 2024.

¹¹²³ World Bank, *Syria economic monitor: Syria's economy in ruins after a decade-long war*, 17 March 2023, p. ix; The Economist, *Is Syria's drug-dealing dictator coming in from the cold?*, 11 September 2024.

¹¹²⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 19; VOA, *More than a decade on, no end in sight for Syria's war*, 14 March 2024; OHCHR, *UN Commission warns Syrian war is intensifying amid continuing patterns of war crimes and fear of large-scale regional conflict*, 10 September 2024.

¹¹²⁵ World Bank, *The welfare of Syrian households after a decade of conflict*, 24 May 2024, p. 19.

¹¹²⁶ Enab Baladi, *Child labor in Syria: A phenomenon leaving physical and psychological scars*, 21 March 2024; Syria Direct, *A generation left behind: Poverty puts northwestern Syria's children to work*, 9 April 2024; World Bank, *Syria economic monitor: Conflict, crises, and the collapse of household welfare*, 24 May 2024, p. 25; IPS, *Conflict deprives children of education in northern Syrian IDP camps*, 18 June 2024.

¹¹²⁷ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024.

¹¹²⁸ OHCHR, *Statement by Paulo Pinheiro, chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic at the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly Third Committee*, 1 November 2024; The Washington Post, *While Syrian refugees don't want to return, officials in Lebanon and Syria see exodus as opportunity*, 9 November 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

¹¹²⁹ SACD, *Fading vision of safe Syria*, 29 May 2024, p. 5.

¹¹³⁰ Enab Baladi, *Economic malfunction: People's need is 55 times minimum salary in Syria*, 25 September 2023; Syria Direct, *'A government job is a burden': Syrian regime institutions bleed staff*, 21 May 2024; Syria Direct, *Daraa communities' foot the bill for public education*, 10 June 2024; confidential source, August 2024.

¹¹³¹ SOHR, *Government plant to restore "smart card" subsidization in Syria*, 25 June 2024; Enab Baladi, *Bread queues in Deir Ezzor due to smart card distribution system*, 11 August 2024.

¹¹³² Confidential source, August 2024.

¹¹³³ Confidential source, October 2024.

There were many problems with the drinking water supply.¹¹³⁴ Drinking water was in short supply in many places. According to one source, water was available for only an hour a day in some places. Moreover, it was never entirely clear what time of day that was.¹¹³⁵ There were also periods when the drinking water supply was completely cut off.¹¹³⁶ In some places, drinking water had to be brought in by tankers and in bottles.¹¹³⁷ In the north-east, there were problems with the water supply because power stations had been damaged by shelling, leading to temporary shutdowns of water pumping stations.¹¹³⁸

As many people could no longer afford gas bottles, they used wood, old clothes, old shoes and other materials for cooking and heating. Some people used petrol for cooking. This led to an increase in explosions. The victims were usually women.¹¹³⁹

Electricity was in short supply in many parts of Syria.¹¹⁴⁰ The electricity grid suffered from numerous prolonged power cuts.¹¹⁴¹ In some neighbourhoods within the government-controlled area, electricity was available for only half an hour a day.¹¹⁴² In other neighbourhoods, it was one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening. There were also urban neighbourhoods where the power would come on for three hours and then go off for three hours. In affluent urban neighbourhoods, electricity was said to be generally available without interruption.¹¹⁴³ During the reporting period, the price per kilowatt-hour increased sharply.¹¹⁴⁴ In the north-east and north-west, there were occasional problems with the power supply, as the electricity networks had been damaged in air raids.¹¹⁴⁵

Many Syrians said they could no longer afford the cost of travel to school or work.¹¹⁴⁶ People sometimes had to queue for hours at the petrol station.¹¹⁴⁷ Petrol and diesel were not always available.¹¹⁴⁸ Fuel was increasingly becoming too expensive for people, due to rapidly rising prices. As a result, car travel in Syria became increasingly rare.¹¹⁴⁹

¹¹³⁴ SNHR, *Distress call to end the suffering of about 2,000 IDP families in al-Shahba area in rural Aleppo who have been struggling for weeks with no access to drinking water*, 4 March 2024; Het Parool, *Tienduizenden Syriërs vluchten naar hun thuisland, maar zijn ze daar wel veiliger?*, 1 October 2024.

¹¹³⁵ Confidential source, August 2024.

¹¹³⁶ Syria Direct, *'Exacerbating the crisis, not managing it': Basic services scarce in Moadamiyat al-Sham*, 2 September 2024; Enab Baladi, *Lifting support for pump stations creates water crisis in Deir Ezzor*, 11 September 2024; Enab Baladi, *Water crisis in Idlib: Water tanker trucks fail to meet demand*, 29 October 2024.

¹¹³⁷ Enab Baladi, *Water crisis in Idlib: Water tanker trucks fail to meet demand*, 29 October 2024.

¹¹³⁸ Syria Direct, *Hasakah residents ration as 'water war' persists*, 24 October 2023; SANA, *Alouk water station is out of service for the 4th month due to the Turkish occupation attacks in Hasaka*, 11 February 2024;

UNOCHA, *Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Martin Griffiths. Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria*, 30 May 2024, 30 May 2024.

¹¹³⁹ OHCHR, *"We did not fear death but the life there". The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024, p. 11; Syria Direct, *Unable to afford cooking gas, Hasakah residents turn to a 'deadly' alternative*, 27 August 2024; confidential source, August 2024.

¹¹⁴⁰ OHCHR, *"We did not fear death but the life there". The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024, p. 12.

¹¹⁴¹ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024.

¹¹⁴² Trouw, *'Voor een kleinigheid kun je in Syrië je geld, je familie en je leven verliezen'*, 30 August 2024.

¹¹⁴³ Confidential source, August 2024.

¹¹⁴⁴ MEMO, *Syria raises electricity prices by up to 500%*, 21 February 2024.

¹¹⁴⁵ STJ, *Northwest Syria: Syrian-Russian attacks killing civilians and hammering critical infrastructure*, 26 January 2024; SNHR, *Russian forces bomb power station in W. Idlib, injures two workers, October 15, 2024*, 15 October 2024; The Syrian Observer, *What reasons for Russian escalation in Northern Syria?*, 17 October 2024; UNOCHA, *North-West Syria. Situation Report*, 18 October 2024; NES NGO Forum, *NES Forum statement: Escalations of hostilities in Northeast Syria*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024

¹¹⁴⁶ Enab Baladi, *Economic malfunction: People's need is 55 times minimum salary in Syria*, 25 September 2023; The Economist, *Is Syria's drug-dealing dictator coming in from the cold?*, 11 September 2024.

¹¹⁴⁷ Confidential source, August 2024.

¹¹⁴⁸ SOHR, *Due to fuel shortages. Bus drivers' strike in Al-Qamishli hits transport*, 14 September 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Almost complete halt of transportation in Damascus*, 17 September 2024; confidential source, August 2024.

¹¹⁴⁹ Het Parool, *Tienduizenden Syriërs vluchten naar hun thuisland, maar zijn ze daar wel veiliger?*, 1 October 2024; MEI, *Assad's economic fragility exposed by Israel's war on Lebanon*, 30 October 2024.

According to UNOCHA, most Syrians had insufficient access to hospitals or other medical care.¹¹⁵⁰ The quality of healthcare continued to decline. In hospitals, items such as painkillers and antibiotics were not always available, so people had to buy them themselves from pharmacies.¹¹⁵¹ The healthcare system suffered from a lack of funding.¹¹⁵² In March 2024, the WHO reported that, at that time, 65% of hospitals and 62% of health centres had been forced to suspend their activities either partially or entirely.¹¹⁵³

Many school-age children were not attending school.¹¹⁵⁴ In March 2024, UNOCHA reported that more than 2.45 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 were not attending school.¹¹⁵⁵ As a result of the conflict, many school buildings were damaged or were used as temporary accommodation for displaced people.¹¹⁵⁶

During the reporting period, rents had risen so sharply that an increasing number of people could no longer afford their housing costs.¹¹⁵⁷

3.4 Differences between the areas of control

The deteriorating humanitarian situation affected the entire country of Syria. Access to medical facilities, water supplies and food markets had deteriorated, particularly in the SSG area in the north-west. This was the area most severely affected by the earthquakes in 2023, and 800,000 people were living there in tents. The number of people facing food insecurity there had increased.¹¹⁵⁸ As a result of the conflict, many people in the north-west had been temporarily displaced.¹¹⁵⁹ In contrast, the situation in some parts of the government-controlled territory was less dire than in the rest of Syria, particularly in areas considered loyal to President Assad's government.¹¹⁶⁰ According to various sources, the government provided hardly any basic services to the other areas of control to areas that had been under opposition control until a few years ago. Most facilities went to areas loyal to President Assad's government.¹¹⁶¹ In some cases, the government also blocked humanitarian aid, such as that destined for the Rukban refugee camp, which was located near the border with Jordan and Iraq.¹¹⁶² The Syrian-Kurdish enclaves in the province and city of Aleppo also faced blockades on humanitarian aid during the reporting period.¹¹⁶³ In the DAANES area, the situation was slightly less dire than in the rest of Syria, as oil was extracted and grain was produced there. As a result, prices in

¹¹⁵⁰ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024.

¹¹⁵¹ Confidential source, August 2024.

¹¹⁵² The New Arab, *Hospitals in northwest Syria face major funding shortfalls, risking closure*, 5 September 2024; Enab Baladi, *Bab al-Hawa hospital threatened with closure due to lack of funding*, 6 September 2024.

¹¹⁵³ WHO, *WHO marks 13 years of the Syrian crisis with renewed commitment and support*, 14 March 2024.

¹¹⁵⁴ UNICEF, *After 13 years of conflict in Syria, more children than ever in need of humanitarian assistance and a chance*, 14 March 2024; UNOCHA, *OCHA warns Security Council of Syria's 'generational crisis' as children endure conflict and deprivation*, 20 September 2024.

¹¹⁵⁵ UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024, p. 73; UNICEF, *The situation of children in Syria*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹¹⁵⁶ ETANA, *Syria. Situation update: North-West Syria (July 2024)*, 31 July 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹¹⁵⁷ Enab Baladi, *Rent prices double in Qamishli, payable exclusively in dollars*, 1 July 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Rent in Damascus up by 60 percent*, 14 October 2024.

¹¹⁵⁸ World Bank, *Syria economic monitor: Conflict, crises, and the collapse of household welfare*, 24 May 2024, p. 24; confidential source, October 2024.

¹¹⁵⁹ UNOCHA, *North-West Syria. Situation Report*, 18 October 2024; SOHR, *Amid displacement of civilians from west Aleppo countryside. Regime forces bombard Al-Atareb city*, 31 October 2024; The New Arab, *Massive displacement in Syria's Idlib amid Assad regime attacks*, 31 October 2024.

¹¹⁶⁰ This referred in particular to the provinces of Tartous and Latakia, as well as to the city of Damascus.

¹¹⁶¹ Confidential source, July 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹¹⁶² The New Arab, *Rukban IDP camp 'starving' as Syrian regime cuts off food, medicine for a month*, 10 May 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 2.

¹¹⁶³ North Press Agency, *Government forces tighten siege on Kurdish areas in Aleppo*, 20 November 2023; North Press Agency, *Government reinforces checkpoints around Kurdish areas in Aleppo*, 17 January 2024; STJ, *Aleppo: Syrian government forces block essential supplies to Kurdish neighbourhoods*, 5 April 2024.

the DAANES area were generally lower than they were in the government-controlled area.¹¹⁶⁴

¹¹⁶⁴ World Bank, *Syria economic monitor: Conflict, crises, and the collapse of household welfare*, 24 May 2024, p. 19.

4 Freedom of movement

The Syrian Constitution of 2012 guaranteed freedom of movement. The de facto authorities restricted freedom of movement within the borders by setting up checkpoints throughout the country. Many checkpoints were spread across the various areas of control. Furthermore, it was not always clear to passengers who was staffing the checkpoints.¹¹⁶⁵ Additional information on checkpoints is provided in Sub-section 1.14.2.

4.1 Travel options between the areas of control

Various travel options between the areas of control were available to civilians. For example, it was possible to travel by scheduled flight operated by Cham Wings from Qamishli in the DAANES area to Damascus in the government-controlled area, and vice versa.¹¹⁶⁶ It was also possible to travel from Qamishli to Damascus and back by public bus. Luggage was checked at the bus station on departure. At the checkpoints along the way, officials would usually only check national identity cards and demand bribes. According to one source, the bus was considered the safest way to travel in Syria.¹¹⁶⁷ It was also possible to travel by land from Qamishli to the city of Aleppo.¹¹⁶⁸ According to one source, before departing for the government-controlled area, travellers in Qamishli were able to work through intermediaries in the government-controlled enclave within the city to check whether their names appeared on any of the wanted lists.¹¹⁶⁹

Civilians were able to travel between the SIG area and the DAANES area through the Awn al-Dadat crossing in the north-west.¹¹⁷⁰ According to one source, there was little foot traffic through this crossing.¹¹⁷¹ According to another source, it was difficult and risky for civilians to travel from the north-east to the north-west, as every armed group in the SIG area had its own checkpoints.¹¹⁷² Civilians were able to travel between the SIG area and the SSG area without excessive difficulty.¹¹⁷³

During the reporting period, it was not possible for people to move across the front lines between the SSG area and the government-controlled area. All roads leading in that direction were closed. Civilians were also not able to travel directly from the SIG area to government-controlled area through the Abu al-Zandeen crossing.¹¹⁷⁴ To reach the government-controlled area from these areas, civilians first had to travel to the DAANES area and from there to the government-controlled area. This journey involved high costs and significant security risks, as it was necessary to pass through several checkpoints, and it was often necessary to pay bribes.¹¹⁷⁵

¹¹⁶⁵ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹¹⁶⁶ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹¹⁶⁷ Confidential source, August 2024.

¹¹⁶⁸ SOHR, *Returning from pilgrimage. Fourth Division "rob" people at Al-Tabaka crossing*, 25 June 2024; Syria Direct, *Regime and AANES conscription traps Syrians in Lebanon as thousands flee*, 8 October 2024.

¹¹⁶⁹ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹¹⁷⁰ The Syria Report, *IDPs return to regime-controlled areas in Idlib and Hama*, 18 June 2024; Enab Baladi, *2,700 displaced persons from Lebanon arrive in northern Syria*, 11 October 2024.

¹¹⁷¹ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹¹⁷² Confidential source, October 2024.

¹¹⁷³ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹¹⁷⁴ The Syria Report, *IDPs return to regime-controlled areas in Idlib and Hama*, 18 June 2024; Enab Baladi, *Economic lifeline for Turkey, Syrian opposition, and regime Abu al-Zandeen crossing charts future of northern Syria*, 30 August 2024.

¹¹⁷⁵ The Syria Report, *Many Idlib residents unable to preserve their property rights in Damascus*, 9 July 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

All authorities required civilians wishing to enter their areas of control to have a local sponsor or – in the government-controlled area – a security clearance.¹¹⁷⁶ A security clearance meant that a person was not on any of the lists of individuals sought by the Syrian security apparatus (see Section 7.10). Travel between the various areas of control was difficult and involved risks (see Sub-section 1.14.2). Civilians often had to find informal routes to avoid checkpoints, and thus to avoid extortion and other problems.¹¹⁷⁷

4.2 Official exit options

To travel abroad, civilians were required to carry all their identity documents with them, including a valid passport. People under the age of eighteen had to have permission from their parents or guardians in order to travel. Civil servants or professional soldiers required a security clearance and an exit permit. Furthermore, mothers wishing to travel abroad with their children without the father first had to obtain temporary guardianship from a court (see Sub-section 2.7.5). Conscripts who had not yet completed their compulsory military service were required to apply to the local recruitment office for deferrals and exit permits (see Sub-section 2.2.1.19).¹¹⁷⁸ Security checks were carried out on departure. These could lead to arrest. It is not possible to specify the situations in which this occurred.¹¹⁷⁹ A travel ban was also a possibility.¹¹⁸⁰

In addition to Damascus International Airport (see Section 4.4), international flights departed from Aleppo Airport. During the reporting period, it was possible to fly from this airport to Erbil in Iraq and to Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates.¹¹⁸¹

4.3 Illegal exit

The neighbouring countries maintained strict border controls, thereby making it difficult to cross a large section of the external borders illegally.¹¹⁸² For example, Türkiye had built border walls along sections of its approximately 911-kilometre-long border with Syria.¹¹⁸³ There were multiple reports of Turkish border guards firing on Syrians attempting to cross the border.¹¹⁸⁴ During the reporting period, Iraq constructed a border wall and trenches along its approximately 599-kilometre-long border with Syria. This was because drug smugglers and ISIS fighters were

¹¹⁷⁶ USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, p. 69; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. July 2024*, 8 August 2024; Enab Baladi, *Displaced people from Lebanon prevented from entering northern Syria*, 3 October 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 11; Enab Baladi, *Syria disowns its children. Lebanon displaced set adrift in Syria*, 21 November 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

¹¹⁷⁷ SOHR, *Returning from pilgrimage. Fourth Division "rob" people at Al-Tabaka crossing*, 25 June 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹¹⁷⁸ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹¹⁷⁹ SOHR, *Accused of expressing his political opinion. Regime security services arbitrarily arrest civilian at Damascus international airport*, 27 January 2023.

¹¹⁸⁰ SOHR, *After security measures against her brother and her husband; Sources suggest that Luna Al-Shibl may have been subjected to assassination attempt*, 3 July 2024.

¹¹⁸¹ Flightradar24, *Flight history for Cham Wings Airlines flight SAW762*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

¹¹⁸² State Documentation of the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, *Syria: The border situation between Turkey Syria and Iraq*, 10 October 2023, p. 12.

¹¹⁸³ State Documentation of the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, *Syria: The border situation between Turkey Syria and Iraq*, 10 October 2023, p. 2; Enab Baladi, *Russia and Turkey resume joint patrols in northern Syria*, 24 August 2024.

¹¹⁸⁴ HRW, *Turkish border guards torture, kill Syrians*, 27 April 2023; North Press Agency, *Turkish border guards kill, wound Syrians in Idlib*, 6 May 2024; Rudaw, *Child shot dead in Kobane while trying to cross Turkish border: Monitor*, 17 August 2024.

active in the south-eastern border regions of Syria.¹¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, the border with Jordan was heavily guarded.¹¹⁸⁶ Crossing the border into Lebanon could also be dangerous. For example, in September 2023, two Syrians were injured and one Syrian was killed by a landmine whilst attempting to cross the border with Lebanon illegally.¹¹⁸⁷

According to various sources, leaving the country or a region illegally was generally not possible without the help of human traffickers. That required connections and a large amount of money.¹¹⁸⁸

4.4 Damascus Airport

Damascus International Airport closed on several occasions during the reporting period. For example, the airport was closed on 12 October 2023 after a runway was damaged in an air raid.¹¹⁸⁹ On 22 October 2023, further airstrikes took place, damaging the runway.¹¹⁹⁰ A few hours after the airport had opened, there were further missile attacks, leading to the closure of the airport.¹¹⁹¹ The airport resumed operations in late November 2023.¹¹⁹²

Upon arrival at the airport, the passengers' travel documents were checked, and security checks were carried out. As part of this process, checks were carried out to see whether the passengers appeared on any of the lists of wanted persons.¹¹⁹³ There were several reports of internally displaced persons and Syrians returning from abroad being arrested at the airport (see Sub-section 1.10.2).¹¹⁹⁴ According to one source, travellers were often required to report to a branch of an intelligence service or a recruitment agency. Once all the necessary procedures had been completed, travellers were permitted to travel to all parts of the area.¹¹⁹⁵

Domestic flights operated by Syrian Airlines and the private airline Cham Wings departed from Damascus Airport to destinations including Qamishli Airport. From there, it was possible to travel to the DAANES area.¹¹⁹⁶ Buses also left Damascus for the DAANES area.¹¹⁹⁷

¹¹⁸⁵ State Documentation of the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, *Syria: The border situation between Turkey Syria and Iraq*, 10 October 2023, pp. 9 and 12; The New Arab, *Iraq constructs security wall along border with Syria to thwart ISIS infiltration*, 28 February 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Iraq installs cameras to secure borders, control smuggling*, 2 July 2024.

¹¹⁸⁶ AA, *Jordanian soldiers injured in border clashes with militants near Syria*, 18 December 2023.

¹¹⁸⁷ L'Orient Today, *Syrian teen killed, two others injured by landmines crossing into Lebanon*, 13 September 2023.

¹¹⁸⁸ ACHR, *What happens after the deportation of refugees from Lebanon?*, 29 January 2024, p. 15; BBC Monitoring, *Outlet reports new influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon*, 8 July 2024; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹¹⁸⁹ Arab News, *Syria's two main airports out of service after Israel strikes: state media*, 12 October 2023; Asharq Al-Awsat, *Israel targets Aleppo, Damascus airports 10 times in over a year to 'fight Iran'*, 16 October 2023.

¹¹⁹⁰ Rudaw, *Israeli strikes put Damascus, Aleppo airports out of service: State media*, 22 October 2023.

¹¹⁹¹ Rudaw, *Damascus airport in service after month-long hiatus: Monitor*, 26 November 2023; VOA, *Israeli airstrikes put Damascus airport out of service again*, 26 November 2023; Reuters, *Syria says Israel strike puts Damascus airport out of service*, 26 November 2023; AP News, *Syria says an Israeli airstrike hit the Damascus airport and put it out of service*, 26 November 2023.

¹¹⁹² SOHR, *Damascus airport in service after month-long hiatus*, 26 November 2023; Enab Baladi, *Damascus International Airport resumes activity without official announcement*, 29 December 2023.

¹¹⁹³ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹¹⁹⁴ MEMO, *Missing Syrian activist arrested in Damascus*, 25 February 2020; SNHR, *Syrian regime arrested a civilian at Damascus International Airport in Damascus city on October 1*, 3 October 2022; North Press Agency, *Four Syrians arrested in Damascus upon deportation from Iraq*, 2 August 2023; SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023, including of 129 children and 87 women, with 232 documented in December alone*, 2 January 2024, p. 4; SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 12.

¹¹⁹⁵ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹¹⁹⁶ Enab Baladi, *Transport fees doubled between al-Hasakah and Damascus*, 16 November 2023; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria's Cham Wings announces flights from Aleppo to Istanbul*, 7 November 2024; Cham Wings, *Flights to Qamishli*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹¹⁹⁷ Enab Baladi, *Transport fees doubled between al-Hasakah and Damascus*, 16 November 2023.

5 Legal protection

5.1 Operation of the judiciary in the various areas of control

5.1.1 *The judiciary in the government-controlled area*

According to the constitution, the judiciary was independent, but in practice it was not.¹¹⁹⁸ For example, Assad appointed the president of the Supreme Constitutional Court.¹¹⁹⁹ Judges and public prosecutors were required to be members of the Ba'ath Party.¹²⁰⁰ Furthermore, the judiciary was under the influence of the intelligence services.¹²⁰¹ By no means were all criminal cases conducted in accordance with the law.¹²⁰² The judiciary in the government-controlled area often lacked transparency, and fair trials were frequently not guaranteed.¹²⁰³

In early September 2023, President Assad issued Decree No. 32, which called for the disbandment of the military field courts.¹²⁰⁴ Pending cases were to be transferred to the military courts.¹²⁰⁵ According to various sources, it remained unclear what would happen to the archives of the military field courts, as the decree made no provision in this regard.¹²⁰⁶ Furthermore, the transfer of ongoing cases to the military and counter-terrorism courts reportedly had little effect on trial outcomes. The practice of military and counter-terrorism courts sentencing political opponents to death continued.¹²⁰⁷

5.1.2 The judiciary in the DAANES area

The legal system in the DAANES area consisted of courts, legal committees and investigative bodies. There was no extensive court system in the DAANES area.¹²⁰⁸ According to various sources, the judiciary in the DAANES area often lacked transparency. There were no standards for a fair trial. Impunity was said to be high as well.¹²⁰⁹

5.1.3 *The judiciary in the SIG area*

Each local SNA faction exercised control over a specific area and its civilian infrastructure. In these areas, they were often the ones who controlled the judiciary.

¹¹⁹⁸ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 5.

¹¹⁹⁹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Country Report. Syria*, 19 March 2024, p. 12.

¹²⁰⁰ Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024, Syria*, 29 February 2024.

¹²⁰¹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Country Report. Syria*, 19 March 2024, p. 13.

¹²⁰² UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/54/58)*, 14 August 2023; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 5; Confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁰³ Freedom House, *Freedom in the world 2024, Syria*, 29 February 2024; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 5; Confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁰⁴ MEMO, *Assad disbands notorious military field courts in Syria that have killed thousands*, 4 September 2023; Arab News, *Syria's Assad scraps notorious military field courts*, 4 September 2023.

¹²⁰⁵ EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 17.

¹²⁰⁶ HRW, *World Report 2024, Syria*, 9 January 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁰⁷ STJ, *Syria: Death penalty as a tool of political repression and elimination of opponents*, 10 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁰⁸ USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, pp. 24-25.

¹²⁰⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 73; Amnesty International, *Aftermath. Injustice, torture, and death in detention in North-East Syria*, 17 April 2024, p. 100; Just Security, *Assessing amnesties and re-assimilation in Northeast Syria*, 7 November 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

There was said to be a high degree of impunity there, as the local rulers also made up the judiciary.¹²¹⁰

- 5.1.4 The judiciary in the SSG area
The legal system in the SSG area was based on Sharia law.¹²¹¹ In Idlib, local courts operated outside the purview of the SSG.¹²¹² As in the DAANES area, the judiciary in the SIG area often lacked transparency. Often, there was no fair trial. Impunity was said to be high as well.¹²¹³

5.2 Legal protection

According to one source, it was possible to report incidents to the police in the government-controlled area. In most cases, however, a bribe was necessary to ensure that the report was acted upon. According to the same source, incidents could also be reported directly to the court.¹²¹⁴

Civilians often did not go to the police to report crimes, as the police had a reputation for trying to extort money from civilians under threat of violence, rather than ensuring their protection and upholding the rule of law. Lawlessness was becoming increasingly prevalent in the government-controlled area, particularly in the south of the country.¹²¹⁵

In the government-controlled area, the authorities did not always state exact reasons for arrests and detentions. In some cases, therefore, it was unclear to civilians exactly why they had been arrested and detained. Arrests were often carried out directly by the Syrian security apparatus without an arrest warrant issued by the judiciary.¹²¹⁶ Civilians were often arrested and interrogated by the Syrian security apparatus without any legal basis. They were not allowed to appoint a lawyer, contact their relatives or defend themselves.¹²¹⁷ It was not uncommon for the authorities to torture a detainee in order to extract a confession.¹²¹⁸

Given the inadequate functioning of the rule of law in all areas of control, the de facto authorities generally afforded no legal protection within their areas of control.¹²¹⁹

5.3 Prison conditions

¹²¹⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 73; HRW, *Syria: Abuses, impunity in Turkish-occupied territories*, 29 February 2024; STJ, *Northwest Syria: Fighters flog a man for "insulting God"*, 1 March 2024.

¹²¹¹ USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, p. 25.

¹²¹² Confidential source, December 2024.

¹²¹³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 72; MEI, *Crossroads in Idlib: HTS navigating internal divisions amid popular discontent*, 13 May 2024.

¹²¹⁴ Confidential source, September 2024.

¹²¹⁵ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 2.

¹²¹⁶ SNHR, *Civilian arrested in Latakia governorate by Syrian regime forces over criticizing economic situation*, August 20, 2023, 21 August 2023; SNHR, *Syrian regime arrests 10 women in Aleppo city*, November 5, 2023, 16 November 2023; SNHR, *Man named Fahd al-Aqra arrested by Syrian regime forces in Hama city*, August 4, 2024, 7 August 2024; SNHR, *SNHR condemns the Syrian regime's detention of three activists, including two Alawites, in Latakia governorate over voicing criticism of the regime*, 17 September 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 8.

¹²¹⁷ SNHR, *In Assad's Syria, arbitrary detention is a codeword for torture*, 18 June 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²¹⁸ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/54/58)*, 14 August 2023.

¹²¹⁹ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 74; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 12.

The humanitarian situation in Syria also affected the conditions in detention centres and prisons. According to various sources, conditions in detention centres and prisons in Syria were poor and, in many cases, even life-threatening. This was the result of torture and sexual violence, a lack of food and drinking water, overcrowding, poor sanitary conditions, a lack of medical care and prolonged solitary confinement.¹²²⁰ In Syria, there were many clandestine and secret detention centres operated by armed groups and subject to absolutely no oversight.¹²²¹

5.4 Corruption and bribery

According to various sources, bribes and connections played a significant role in the judiciary.¹²²² One source noted that nothing could be arranged without payment. The same source reported that judges almost always impose the minimum sentence in the absence of aggravating circumstances. If the claimant had paid a bribe, however, the judge might choose to impose the maximum sentence on the defendant or to impose a sentence for another criminal offence.¹²²³ According to another source, it was also possible to pay bribes after a conviction, thereby temporarily delaying the recording of the conviction. This could sometimes give a convicted person time to leave the country.¹²²⁴ It was also possible to secure the release of a convicted person by paying a bribe if a final decision had not yet been made.¹²²⁵ Lawyers and other intermediaries often demanded large sums of money to secure a prisoner's transfer, early release, visiting rights while in detention, or inclusion in an amnesty scheme.¹²²⁶ According to one source, there was a difference between civil and criminal cases, with far more arbitrariness and corruption in the criminal justice system.¹²²⁷

¹²²⁰ UN HRC, "No end in sight": torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023 (A/HRC/53/CRP.5), 10 July 2023, p. 13-15; UN HRC, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/54/58), 14 August 2023; Amnesty International, *Aftermath. Injustice, torture and death in detention in North-East Syria*, 17 April 2024; UN HRC, *Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of the Syrian Arab Republic (CCPR/C/SYR/CO/4)*, 25 July 2024.

¹²²¹ The Syrian Observer, *Daraa secret prisons: To whom do they belong, what fate of inmates?*, 22 November 2023; Ceasefire & YASA, *Escalating human rights violations in Syria's Afrin: 2024 update*, 14 May 2024, p. 3; Syria Direct, *'Liberated Saydnaya': Enforced disappearance and extortion in Syrian National Army prisons*, 19 September 2024; STJ, *Syria/Afrin: Illegal transfer of Syrian detainees to Türkiye and subjecting them to sham trials*, 31 October 2024.

¹²²² USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024; Levant 24, *Abduction epidemic escalates in Assad's areas amid security breakdown*, 5 September 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

¹²²³ Confidential source, September 2024.

¹²²⁴ Confidential source, August 2024.

¹²²⁵ HRW, *Syrians fleeing Lebanon risk repression upon return*, 30 October 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

¹²²⁶ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 5; Syria Direct, *'Liberated Saydnaya': Enforced disappearance and extortion in Syrian National Army prisons*, 19 September 2024.

¹²²⁷ Confidential source, September 2024.

6 Displaced persons

6.1 Situation of internally displaced persons

As a result of the conflict, there were approximately 7.2 million displaced persons in Syria by the end of July 2023.¹²²⁸ According to UN figures, there were 174,000 additional displaced persons in 2023. In general, displaced people faced extremely difficult living conditions, partly as a result of declining aid and funding for humanitarian organisations, combined with the particularly dire economic situation.¹²²⁹ The ongoing violence and military operations along the front lines resulted in the displacement (or re-displacement) of people, either temporarily or permanently. For example, in October 2024, more than 10,000 people in the north-west were displaced by an increase in fighting along the front lines, particularly around the town of Saraqeb.¹²³⁰

Of the approximately 5.06 million people in north-western Syria (the entire SSG area and the SIG area in the north of Aleppo province), 3.54 million were displaced in September 2024. Of these displaced persons, around 2.0 million were living in 1,534 official and informal camps at that time. Women and children accounted for 79% of these displaced persons.¹²³¹ In the north-west, most of the camps were disorganised. The residents were living in tents without access to essential services.¹²³² Most of the camps were not equipped for a harsh winter, and there was a shortage of basic necessities.¹²³³ In the first half of 2024, hundreds of tents belonging to displaced persons were damaged by the weather.¹²³⁴ Some areas experienced flooding during the reporting period.¹²³⁵ Many displaced persons were unable to replace their tents. Most of them depended on food aid from international aid organisations to survive. The living conditions of displaced people deteriorated in response to shortfalls in funding for aid programmes. The lack of funding forced UN agencies to cut off the drinking water supply to hundreds of camps in north-western Syria during the reporting period, forcing camp residents to obtain water from expensive external sources (such as water trucks and bottled water).¹²³⁶

In the DAANES area, the de facto authorities restricted the freedom of movement of displaced persons who were not originally from the north-east or who had no first-degree or second-degree relatives living in the north-east. They were required to stay in closed camps.¹²³⁷

6.2 Return to former place of residence

¹²²⁸ UNHCR, *Syrian Arab Republic*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹²²⁹ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹²³⁰ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹²³¹ UNOCHA, *Northwest Syria Factsheet (As of 23 September 2024)*, 23 September 2024.

¹²³² Confidential source, October 2024.

¹²³³ Enab Baladi, *Displaced people unprepared for winter in northern Syria*, 5 November 2024; MSF, *As winter approaches in Syria, people in camps burn shoes for warmth*, 7 November 2023.

¹²³⁴ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹²³⁵ Al Jazeera, *Flooding submerges refugee camp in northwestern Syria*, 17 January 2024; Enab Baladi, *United Nations warns of flood risk for displaced persons in northwest Syria*, 19 January 2024; Levant 24, *Flooding ravages IDP camps in northern Syria*, 21 March 2024; The Syrian Observer, *UN: 12,000 people affected by floods in northwest Syria*, 10 May 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²³⁶ Al-Monitor, *Water shortages worsen as funding dries up for northwest Syria displaced*, 10 July 2024; UNOCHA, *North-West Syria. Situation report*, 29 July 2024, p. 1; UNOCHA, *North-West Syria. Escalation of hostilities (as of 28 November 2024)*, 28 November 2024, p. 2; Confidential source, October 2024.

¹²³⁷ Confidential source, October 2024.

During the reporting period, displaced persons continued to return to their former homes in Syria.¹²³⁸ Very little information was available on this point. According to information from the UNHCR, 155,325 displaced persons returned between January 2023 and July 2023.¹²³⁹

Upon returning to the government-controlled area, displaced persons could face interrogation, threats, arrest, torture, detention and extortion by the authorities, particularly if they were originally from areas that had previously been under the control of the armed opposition.¹²⁴⁰

In many cases, the Syrian authorities required a security clearance and individual reconciliation if a displaced person wished to return to the government-controlled area from another area of control.¹²⁴¹ Those with cases outstanding with the Syrian authorities first had to resolve their status (also known as individual reconciliation) before being able to return to the government-controlled area (see Section 7.10).¹²⁴² According to the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC), obtaining a security clearance generally required a combination of connections, bribery and proof that no family members were affiliated with opposition groups or involved in opposition activities.¹²⁴³ According to another source, Syrians returning home were often subjected to extortion at checkpoints (see Sections 1.16 and 7.13).¹²⁴⁴

6.3 Wives and children of missing persons

Relatives of opponents (including missing persons) who returned to their original areas of residence in the government-controlled area were at increased risk of arrest as a form of retaliation and pressure on their relatives to surrender. This was particularly true for relatives of activists and prominent dissidents.¹²⁴⁵ According to various sources, the wives and children of missing persons were also at risk of becoming victims of sexual violence (see Sub-section 2.3.10).¹²⁴⁶ For women, there was the added complication that properties were often registered in their husbands' names, making it difficult for them to claim these properties if their husbands went missing.¹²⁴⁷

¹²³⁸ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹²³⁹ UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria: Syria Factsheet (June 2024)*, 30 June 2024.

¹²⁴⁰ Memo, *Syria: regime 'tortured to death' returning displaced person in Aleppo*, 8 August 2023; The Syria Report, *Bribes, security services, major obstacle to return in Al-Tadhamon*, 14 November 2023; OHCHR, *"We did not fear death but the life there". The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024; The Syria Report, *IDPs return to regime-controlled areas in Idlib and Hama*, 18 June 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 24.

¹²⁴¹ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁴² The Syria Report, *IDPs return to regime-controlled areas in Idlib and Hama*, 18 June 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 24.

¹²⁴³ SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. April 2024*, 20 May 2024.

¹²⁴⁴ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁴⁵ USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, p. 34; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, pp. 13 and 21; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁴⁶ SNHR, *SNHR's 12th annual report on violations against females in Syria*, 25 November 2023; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁴⁷ NRC, *Facing an impossible choice: Refugee women's housing, land and property rights in Syria*, 1 August 2024, p. 8.

7 Return

7.1 Numbers

In 2022, the UNHCR monitored the return of 50,966 Syrian refugees from Türkiye, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. In 2023, there were 38,257 people. Between January and the end of August 2024, there were 34,061. Given that these figures were based solely on data verified by the UNHCR, the actual number of Syrians who had returned may have been higher.¹²⁴⁸

According to a survey conducted by the UNHCR in April and May 2024 amongst Syrian refugees in several neighbouring countries, 1.7% of respondents intended to return to Syria within twelve months.¹²⁴⁹

Hundreds of thousands of Syrians returned to Syria after 23 September 2024. From that date onwards, there was a sharp increase in the number of Syrians and Lebanese fleeing the Israeli bombardments from Lebanon into Syria.¹²⁵⁰ The UNHCR monitored arrivals at various border crossings on the Syrian side. On 25 November 2024, the UNHCR reported that, since 24 September 2024, an estimated 562,000 Syrians, Lebanese and people of other nationalities had entered Syria through the border crossings where it was monitoring arrivals, due to the military escalation in Lebanon. An estimated 63% of these people were Syrians, with the remaining 37% consisting of Lebanese and people of other nationalities.¹²⁵¹ The number of men of conscription age (18 to 42) who returned was limited.¹²⁵² Many men remained in Lebanon without their families for fear of being arrested in Syria for evading compulsory national service or reserve duty, or because their names appeared on one of the wanted lists.¹²⁵³

Most Syrians who fled from Lebanon to Syria from 23 September 2024 travelled through the Masnaa border crossing.¹²⁵⁴ The number of people travelling through this border crossing fell sharply after 4 October 2024.¹²⁵⁵ On 4 October 2024, a bomb exploded on the main road in the no-man's-land between the checkpoint just outside the town of Masnaa in Lebanon and the border crossing at Jdeidat Yabous in Syria. The bomb crater rendered it almost impossible for vehicles to pass.¹²⁵⁶

¹²⁴⁸ UNHCR, *Operational Data Portal*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹²⁴⁹ UNHCR, *Ninth regional survey on Syrian refugees' perceptions & intentions on return to Syria*, 30 June 2024, p. 5.

¹²⁵⁰ Enab Baladi, *Hundreds cross from Lebanon to Syria following Israeli escalation*, 24 September 2024; Trouw, *Einde aanvallen in Libanon nog niet in zicht*, 25 September 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: 'Tens of thousands' of displaced cross from Lebanon to Syria*, 25 September 2024.

¹²⁵¹ UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria. Emergency response brief*, 25 November 2024, p. 1; confidential source, December 2024.

¹²⁵² UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria Flash Update #4. Response to displacement from Lebanon to Syria*, 30 September 2024; UNHCR, *UNHCR: As crisis deepens in Lebanon, more flee to Syria and beyond to escape bombs*, 4 October 2024; UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria. Emergency response brief*, 13 November 2024, 14 November 2024, p. 3; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

¹²⁵³ Rudaw, *Kurdish woman pleads for help after fleeing Lebanon*, 7 October 2024; UNRWA, *UNRWA Syria response to the influx from Lebanon. UNRWA situation report 3*, 10 October 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Wanted for military service in Syria: Lebanon's hell better than regime's prisons*, 11 October 2024; Raseef22, *'Lost and facing the unknown': Syrians returning to the "homeland" from the hell of the Israeli war on Lebanon*, 31 October 2024; Enab Baladi, *Syria disowns its children. Lebanon displaced set adrift in Syria*, 21 November 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁵⁴ The Syrian Observer, *Arrivals from Lebanon reach more than 370 thousand*, 14 October 2024; UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria Flash Update #18. Response to displacement from Lebanon to Syria*, 25 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁵⁵ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁵⁶ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Israeli strike severs key road between Lebanon and Syria*, 4 October 2024; NRC, *Israël bombardeert grensovergang tussen Syrië en Libanon waarover honderdduizenden mensen vluchten*, 4 October 2024; UNHCR, *UNHCR: As crisis deepens in Lebanon, more flee to Syria and beyond to escape bombs*, 4 October 2024; UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria Flash Update #12. Response to displacement from Lebanon to Syria*, 12 October 2024.

Further airstrikes on 22 and 25 October 2024 caused even more damage to this road.¹²⁵⁷ Other official and unofficial border crossings were also hit by airstrikes starting in late September 2024.¹²⁵⁸ This made it difficult for people, including Syrians wishing to return to their homeland, to flee to Syria as they sought to escape the violence in southern Lebanon.¹²⁵⁹ Syrians from southern Lebanon diverged to border crossings further north with the provinces of Homs and Tartous.¹²⁶⁰ According to a few sources, some Syrians learned at the border that they had been accused of crimes in Syria, and what these charges were. They were reportedly given the choice of whether or not to enter Syria. The extent to which this was a systematic practice was nevertheless unclear.¹²⁶¹

The figures for people who had travelled into Syria as of 23 September 2024 were likely under-reported.¹²⁶² Some Syrians paid large sums of money to human traffickers to enter the country undetected. These were presumably mainly men of conscription age, individuals who appeared on one of the wanted lists and wished to avoid being arrested, and Syrians who wanted to keep open the option of returning to their host country and thereby avoid losing their status there.¹²⁶³

7.2 Temporary return

It was not known exactly how many Syrians travelled to Syria for family (or other) visits during the reporting period.¹²⁶⁴ Some estimates put the number of people who visited Syria through one of its neighbouring countries at between a few thousand and a few tens of thousands. Some of them were Syrians from Europe.¹²⁶⁵ According to various sources, most of those visiting Syria were either women or men who had been exempted from military service.¹²⁶⁶ One source noted that these were often people with money and good connections.¹²⁶⁷ Based on sources cited by the EUAA, Syrians living in Europe who returned from a visit to Syria without encountering any problems were those who had left the country for economic reasons and who did not pose any security risks. They were often pro-government or had good connections with the authorities.¹²⁶⁸ They were able to use these

¹²⁵⁷ Asharq Al-Awsat, *Another Israeli strike hits Lebanon-Syria border crossing*, 22 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Israeli strikes reported at Syria-Lebanon border crossing, near Golan Heights*, 22 October 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Al-Masnaa crossing targeted again amid continued exodus to Syria*, 23 October 2024; UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria Flash Update #18. Response to displacement from Lebanon to Syria*, 25 October 2024.

¹²⁵⁸ Levant 24, *Israel attacks border crossings while thousands flee Lebanon to Syria*, 26 September 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Israeli air strike hits Syria-Lebanon border crossing, injuring several*, 26 September 2024; Enab Baladi, *Israel targets crossings between Syria and Lebanon*, 25 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Israeli strike on Syria-Lebanon border post kills three soldiers*, 25 October 2024; UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria Flash Update #18. Response to displacement from Lebanon to Syria*, 25 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syria-Lebanon crossing closed after Israeli strikes*, 2 November 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Israel strikes 'illegal' Lebanon-Syria border crossing – monitor*, 10 November 2024; UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria. Emergency response brief*, 13 November 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Israel strikes Lebanon-Syria crossing, 'significant damage' reported*, 24 November 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Israel attacks Syria-Lebanon border crossings, reportedly kills six*, 27 November 2024.

¹²⁵⁹ AP News, *Destruction of Lebanon-Syria border crossings in Israeli airstrikes creates difficulties*, 27 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁶⁰ Raseef22, *"Lost and facing the unknown": Syrians returning to the "homeland" from the hell of the Israeli war on Lebanon*, 31 October 2024.

¹²⁶¹ Confidential source, September 2024, confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁶² UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria: Fact sheet (July 2024)*, 6 August 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁶³ Enab Baladi, *Thousands gather at Syrian border coming from Lebanon*, 25 September 2024; ETANA, *Brief: Displacement & refugee returns from Lebanon*, 10 October 2024; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; Raseef22, *"Lost and facing the unknown": Syrians returning to the "homeland" from the hell of the Israeli war on Lebanon*, 31 October 2024; OHCHR, *Syria being pulled into the catastrophic conflict engulfing the region, UN Commission warns*, 1 November 2024; The Washington Post, *While Syrian refugees don't want to return, officials in Lebanon and Syria see exodus as opportunity*, 9 November 2024; Enab Baladi, *Syria disowns its children. Lebanon displaced set adrift in Syria*, 21 November 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁶⁴ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁶⁵ EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 32; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁶⁶ Confidential source, August 2024, confidential source, September 2024.

¹²⁶⁷ Confidential source, August 2024.

¹²⁶⁸ EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, pp. 32-33.

connections to check before their journey whether their names appeared on any of the lists of wanted persons.¹²⁶⁹

Until the military escalation in Lebanon in September 2024, Syrians wishing to visit the government-controlled area from Europe usually travelled through Beirut, from which they would take a taxi to Syria.¹²⁷⁰ These taxis were often arranged in advance and were driven by drivers who were known to the people at the checkpoints. According to several sources, they paid bribes along the way, thereby avoiding thorough checks.¹²⁷¹ Because the journey was longer and required bribes at every checkpoint, a trip to Aleppo was more expensive than one to Damascus.¹²⁷² According to one source, people who did not use this option were often subjected to stricter baggage checks, during which their money and belongings were confiscated.¹²⁷³

A smaller number of Syrians travelled through Jordan or Saudi Arabia for short visits to Syria. From there, they took a plane, a taxi or a bus to Syria.¹²⁷⁴ According to one source, they paid several thousand dollars to intermediaries to be able to travel into or out of Syria. Following the military escalation in Lebanon in September 2024, hardly any Syrians travelled from Jordan to visit their families in Syria.¹²⁷⁵

Syrians wishing to visit the DAANES area usually travelled through the Iraqi Kurdish city of Erbil and took a taxi from there to Hasaka.¹²⁷⁶

Visits to Syria through Türkiye were less common. One reason was that Syrians who had previously left Türkiye illegally after staying there (for example, by boat to the Greek islands) were generally not allowed to re-enter Türkiye.¹²⁷⁷

7.3 Return from Türkiye

According to the Turkish Presidency of Migration Management (PMM), 2,935,252 Syrians with temporary protection status in Türkiye on 21 November 2024, including 511,393 in the province of Istanbul and 412,153 in the province of Gaziantep.¹²⁷⁸ Hostility towards Syrians in Türkiye increased further, partly as a result of the escalation of anti-Syrian violence in the Turkish city of Kayseri in late June 2024, during which Syrians were targeted in attacks by Turkish citizens (see Section 1.6.3).¹²⁷⁹

On 20 November 2024, the Turkish Minister of the Interior, Ali Yerlikaya, stated that approximately 729,761 Syrians had returned to Syria voluntarily between 2016 and 2024.¹²⁸⁰ In June 2024, he stated that around 103,045 Syrians had returned voluntarily in 2023.¹²⁸¹ On 20 November 2024, he further noted that approximately

¹²⁶⁹ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁷⁰ Confidential source, July 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁷¹ Confidential source, August 2024, confidential source, September 2024.

¹²⁷² Confidential source, August 2024, confidential source, September 2024.

¹²⁷³ Confidential source, August 2024.

¹²⁷⁴ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁷⁵ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁷⁶ Syria Direct, *Syrians at a loss after Erbil stops issuing visas*, 22 April 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

¹²⁷⁷ Confidential source, August 2024.

¹²⁷⁸ PMM, *Temporary protection*, [URL](#), accessed 27 November 2024.

¹²⁷⁹ Syria Direct, *Anti-Syrian riots serve Ankara's goal of refugee returns*, 5 July 2024; Le Monde, *Syrian refugees attacked in Turkey: 'The crisis makes us perfect scapegoats'*, 20 July 2024; Enab Baladi, *Syrians pack their bags in Turkey*, 25 July 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁸⁰ Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, *Tutanak dergisi Plan ve Bütçe Komisyonu* (Minutes of the Planning and Budget Committee), 20 November 2024, p. 24, [URL](#).

¹²⁸¹ BBC Monitoring, *Turkish interior minister says more than 100,000 Syrians returned in a year*, 13 June 2024; Enab Baladi, *Turkey reveals number of refugees returning to Syria in 2023*, 13 June 2024.

114,083 Syrians had returned voluntarily in 2024.¹²⁸² The return took place through the border crossings at Cilvegözü-Bab al-Hawa (Idlib province), Akçakale-Tel Abyad (Raqqqa province), Öncüpınar-Bab al-Salameh, Karkamış-Jarablus and Zeytindalı-a-Hamam (Aleppo province).¹²⁸³

There were several reports of the withdrawal of temporary protection status from Syrians under the Temporary Protection Regulation, partly on grounds of public order and/or national security (for example, because they were in a province other than the one in which they were registered or because they did not have the correct documents with them), and possibly due to coercion when signing the forms for 'voluntary' return.¹²⁸⁴ Returning Syrians usually ended up in the SIG area, although many were not originally from there (see Section 7.11).¹²⁸⁵ After being deported, some Syrians tried to return to Türkiye with the help of human traffickers. They usually went into hiding upon their return to Türkiye.¹²⁸⁶

7.4 Return from Lebanon

By the end of the reporting period, the number of Syrians in Lebanon was estimated to be at least 1.5 million, out of a total population of approximately 4.5 million Lebanese.¹²⁸⁷ Even before the conflict in Syria, several hundred thousand Syrians were living in Lebanon, mainly as migrant workers in the construction, agricultural and domestic sectors. Lebanon did not regard around half of the Syrians as either displaced persons or refugees,¹²⁸⁸ and it was not a party to the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.¹²⁸⁹

Even before the military escalation of September 2024, pressure was mounting in Lebanon on Syrians to return to Syria.¹²⁹⁰ On 7 April 2024, a Syrian criminal gang reportedly abducted and killed a Lebanese politician.¹²⁹¹ Following this incident, hostility towards Syrians increased further.¹²⁹² In the north of the country, local

¹²⁸² Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, *Tutanak dergisi, Plan ve Bütçe Komisyonu* (Minutes of the Planning and Budget Committee), 20 November 2024, p. 26, [URL](#); The Levant, *Decline in temporary protected Syrians in Turkey*, 21 November 2024.

¹²⁸³ HRW, *Syrians face dire conditions in Turkish-occupied 'safe zone'*, 28 March 2024; Enab Baladi, *Deportation of Syrians from Turkey: From election card to state approach*, 7 May 2024; Enab Baladi, *Deportees stranded in Tal Abyad*, 17 September 2024.

¹²⁸⁴ Enab Baladi, *Syrians' deportation from Turkey "voluntarily" on paper; "Forcibly" on ground*, 18 August 2023; HRW, *World Report 2024, Syria*, 9 January 2024; Syria Direct, *Deported Syrians struggle to wrap up loose ends in Turkey*, 10 January 2024; SOHR, *Contrary to Ankara's statements about voluntarily return of 625,000 Syrian refugees: Turkish authorities continue forcible deportation of Syrians*, 16 February 2024; HRW, *Syrians face dire conditions in Turkish-occupied 'safe zone'*, 28 March 2024; Enab Baladi, *Deportation of Syrians from Turkey: From election card to state approach*, 7 May 2024; GEM, *Deportation of Syrian LGBTQIA+ refugees from Turkey: "Go to Syria and die there"*, 11 June 2024; North Press Agency, *Turkey departs 16,500 Syrian refugees in June*, 30 June 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Turkish report claims 150 families facing deportation after anti-Syrian riots*, 19 July 2024; NRC, *Mishandeld in een Turks uitzetcentrum. 'Dit project is gefinancierd door de EU'*, 11 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁸⁵ The New Arab, *600,000 Syrian refugees return home from Turkey as part of repatriation plan*, 3 August 2023.

¹²⁸⁶ Levant 24, *Syrian refugee dies in Assad regime custody after deportation from Turkey*, 12 September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹²⁸⁷ FP, *Syrians in Lebanon are stuck in limbo*, 9 July 2024; TIMEP, *Syrian refugees in Lebanon face a crisis within a crisis*, 10 October 2024; UNHCR, *Flash appeal Lebanon. Covering the period October-December*, October 2024, p. 7; confidential source, December 2024.

¹²⁸⁸ UNHCR, *UNHCR Lebanon: Fact sheet (April 2024)*, April 2024, p. 1; Pax, *Lebanon: Hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees at imminent risk of deportation*, 16 May 2024.

¹²⁸⁹ Enab Baladi, *Syrian prisoners in Lebanon face deportation risk*, 9 May 2024.

¹²⁹⁰ OHCHR, *Statement by Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. 56th Session of the UN Human Rights Council*, 3 July 2024.

¹²⁹¹ L'Orient Today, *Pascal Sleiman killed, body taken to Syria, says Lebanese army*, 8 April 2024; Ahram Online, *Lebanon shaken as army says Syrian gang kills local official*, 8 April 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Coordinated by Lebanese-Syrian: Syrians responsible for the abduction and killing of Pascal Suleiman arrested*, 10 April 2024.

¹²⁹² HRW, *Lebanon: Stepped-up repression of Syrians*, 25 April 2024; The Guardian, *If they see a Syrian, they beat them up: the refugees living in fear in Lebanon*, 8 May 2024; AP News, *Hundreds of Syrian refugees head home as anti-refugee sentiment surges in Lebanon*, 14 May 2024; Enab Baladi, *Extortion card and punching bag for inter-community and regional conflicts. Lebanon officially demonizes Syrian refugees*, 17 May 2024; BBC, *Lebanon's shift from safe haven to hostile country for Syrian refugees*, 27 May 2024; Reuters, *Syrians in Lebanon fear unprecedented restrictions, deportations*, 29 May 2024.

authorities introduced administrative measures that made it more difficult for unregistered Syrians to rent a home or attend school.¹²⁹³ In the north, evictions and shop closures took place, and curfews were imposed.¹²⁹⁴ The Lebanese authorities closed some informal refugee camps.¹²⁹⁵ Employers were encouraged to stop hiring Syrians.¹²⁹⁶ Some Syrians had their residence permits revoked. The cost of renewing the annual residence permit also increased.¹²⁹⁷ Many Syrians could barely afford it. According to the UNHCR, around 90% of Syrians in Lebanon needed humanitarian aid to survive.¹²⁹⁸

During the reporting period, Lebanon was not able to organise the voluntary return of Syrian refugees to Syria except on a limited scale, as the Syrian government accepted only a small number from Lebanon.¹²⁹⁹ The Syrian authorities were reportedly unwilling to take any steps to facilitate the return of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers.¹³⁰⁰ There were also reports of forced returns from Lebanon.¹³⁰¹ According to various sources, forced deportation took place under the guise of voluntary return. For example, Syrians who had forgotten their UNHCR registration cards were arrested at Lebanese army checkpoints and deported.¹³⁰² There were indications that some Syrians returned to Lebanon within hours or days of being deported from there, with the help of human traffickers.¹³⁰³ During the reporting period, the Lebanese authorities organised a number of return convoys, enabling several hundred Syrians to return to Syria. For these convoys, the Syrian authorities granted entry permits to only a limited number of Syrians wishing to return, often no more than 20% of those originally on the Lebanese list.¹³⁰⁴

7.5 Checks at the border crossings with Lebanon

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- ¹²⁹³ BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Lebanon tightens measures against Syrian refugees in northern areas*, 8 June 2024.
- ¹²⁹⁴ AP News, *Hundreds of Syrian refugees head home as anti-refugee sentiment surges in Lebanon*, 14 May 2024; Amnesty International, *World leaders must commit to protecting Syrian refugees as Lebanon steps up crackdown ahead of Brussels conference*, 27 May 2024; SNHR, *On World Refugee Day. At least 4,714 returning refugees & IDPs have been arbitrarily arrested by Syrian regime forces*, 20 June 2024, p. 4; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Lebanese authorities expel Syrian migrants from northern towns*, 28 August 2024.
- ¹²⁹⁵ Enab Baladi, *Lebanon: Syrians homeless after demolition of al-Waha camp*, 24 May 2024.
- ¹²⁹⁶ The Arab Weekly, *Syrians in Lebanon fear unprecedented restrictions as pressure mounts for their deportation*, 29 May 2024.
- ¹²⁹⁷ The Syrian Observer, *Syrians in Lebanon confirm cancellation of temporary residency under "sponsorship" system*, 7 May 2024; confidential source, September 2024.
- ¹²⁹⁸ UNHCR, *Twelve years on, Syrian refugees face deepening debt and hunger*, 15 March 2023; confidential source, October 2024.
- ¹²⁹⁹ BBC Monitoring, *Syrian state media showcase return of displaced Syrians from Lebanon*, 11 July 2024; Enab Baladi, *Return of a group of Syrian refugees from Lebanon: Is Syria safe?*, 11 July 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, September 2024.
- ¹³⁰⁰ Levant 24, *Syrian refugee dies in Assad regime custody after deportation from Turkey*, 12 September 2024; confidential source, August 2024.
- ¹³⁰¹ HRW, *World Report 2024, Syria*, 9 January 2024; ACHR, *What happens after the forced deportation of refugees from Lebanon?*, 29 January 2024; HRW, *Lebanon: Stepped-up repression of Syrians*, 25 April 2024; Pax, *Lebanon: Hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees at imminent risk of deportation*, 16 May 2024; Reuters, *Syrians in Lebanon fear unprecedented restrictions, deportations*, 29 May 2024; Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, *EU-Lebanon deal: Turning a blind eye to reality*, 16 July 2024; De Morgen, *Libanon werkt samen met Cyprus om vluchtelingen naar Syrië te deporteren, stelt mensenrechtenorganisatie*, 4 September 2024; The New Humanitarian, *The risk of return: As Israel bombs Lebanon, Syrian deportees face detention, conscription, or worse*, 16 October 2024; confidential source, July 2024; confidential source, September 2024.
- ¹³⁰² ACHR, *What happens after the deportation of refugees from Lebanon?*, 29 January 2024, p. 12; Enab Baladi, *Lebanon's plans for Syrian refugee returns criticized for legal violations*, 22 May 2024; The National, *Weaponising residency: Lebanon's crackdown on Syrian refugees*, 2 June 2024.
- ¹³⁰³ ACHR, *What happens after the forced deportation of refugees from Lebanon?*, 29 January 2024, p. 19; SNHR, *Man named Mahmoud Hasana dies on May 9, 2024, of wounds sustained on May 1 from a regime gunshot near the Syrian-Lebanese borders*, 13 May 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.
- ¹³⁰⁴ The New Humanitarian, *300 Syrians return from Lebanon*, 16 May 2024; UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria: Fact sheet (July 2024)*, 6 August 2024; The New Humanitarian, *The risk of return: As Israel bombs Lebanon, Syrian deportees face detention, conscription, or worse*, 16 October 2024.

Syrians wishing to return to Syria from Lebanon first arrived at a Syrian checkpoint after crossing the Lebanese side of the border. They usually had to pay a small bribe there.¹³⁰⁵

Since July 2020, Syrians older than eighteen years of age have been required to exchange 100 USD at border crossings at the official exchange rate set by the Central Bank of Syria. Without the exchange receipt, the Syrians were not given an entry stamp and were not allowed to enter Syria.¹³⁰⁶ On 29 September 2024, the Council of Ministers decided to suspend this measure for one week for Syrians fleeing Lebanon.¹³⁰⁷ This suspension was subsequently extended on several occasions, most recently until 30 November 2024.¹³⁰⁸

At the Immigration and Passports Department, Syrians were required to present a valid Syrian passport or a Syrian identity card in order to receive an entry stamp. This was usually accompanied by a small bribe.¹³⁰⁹ Extensive security checks were carried out at passport control. As part of this process, the authorities checked, amongst other things, whether the name appeared on any of the lists of wanted persons.¹³¹⁰ Any individuals identified as wanted were removed from the queue and placed in a police van, which took them away at the end of the day.¹³¹¹ Men of conscription age who were wanted for compulsory military service were usually issued a summons at the passport office to report to a local recruitment office within fifteen days of entering Syria (see Sub-section 2.2.1.11). Those evading compulsory military service or reserve duty often had to pay a higher bribe at the passport office as well.¹³¹²

Passport control was followed by baggage screening.¹³¹³ According to one source, such screenings could vary from one border crossing to another. Whereas some border crossings followed a basic protocol, others conducted more thorough screenings (for example, searching not only the luggage but also the entire car).¹³¹⁴

After passing through baggage screening, Syrians who had arrived from Lebanon since the end of September 2024 could go to the tents set up by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) if they required medical assistance. There, they could also board private buses to travel further inland.¹³¹⁵

7.6 Return from Jordan

¹³⁰⁵ Etana, *Brief: Displacement & refugee returns from Lebanon*, 10 October 2024; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024.

¹³⁰⁶ Enab Baladi, *New mechanism to exchange \$100 upon entering Syria*, 29 August 2024; Enab Baladi, *Regime extorts Syrians with decisions to pay money to enter their country*, 12 September 2024; Enab Baladi, *No exemption for Syrians from exchanging \$100 at border*, 26 September 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Briefing: Syrians fleeing Lebanon still required to exchange \$100 at border*, 27 September 2024; ETANA, *Brief: Displacements & refugee returns from Lebanon*, 10 October 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 9; STJ, *Syria: Decision imposing the exchange of \$100 on Syrians: Disguised legalization and extortion of those entering their country*, 29 November 2024; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁰⁷ UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria Flash Update #4. Response to displacement from Lebanon to Syria*, 30 September 2024, p. 2.

¹³⁰⁸ Enab Baladi, *Extension of suspension of \$100 exchange requirement at Syrian borders*, 5 October 2024; Enab Baladi, *Regime extends suspension of \$100 exchange requirement at Syrian borders*, 15 October 2024; UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria. Emergency response brief*, 17 November 2024, p. 3; confidential source, December 2024.

¹³⁰⁹ Etana, *Brief: Displacement & refugee returns from Lebanon*, 10 October 2024; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³¹⁰ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹³¹¹ Etana, *Brief: Displacement & refugee returns from Lebanon*, 10 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³¹² Etana, *Brief: Displacement & refugee returns from Lebanon*, 10 October 2024; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; *Syria: Decision imposing the exchange of \$100 on Syrians: Disguised legalization and extortion of those entering their country*, 29 November 2024.

¹³¹³ ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³¹⁴ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹³¹⁵ ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024.

According to various sources, approximately 1.2 million Syrians were in Jordan, around half of whom were registered as refugees with the UNHCR.¹³¹⁶ According to UNHCR figures from 31 October 2024, there were 621,182 registered Syrian refugees in Jordan, out of a population of more than 11 million.¹³¹⁷ About 18% of all registered Syrian refugees were staying in the Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps.¹³¹⁸ According to one source, 4,060 Syrians had voluntarily returned from Jordan in the first seven months of 2024.¹³¹⁹ According to another source, most of the Syrians returning from Jordan were from the southern provinces of Daraa and Suweida.¹³²⁰ No reports of deportations to Syria were found.

7.7 Return from Iraq

According to information from the UNHCR dated 31 October 2024, there were 295,546 registered Syrian refugees in Iraq.¹³²¹ Most were of Kurdish origin and were staying in camps in the Kurdish autonomous region of Iraq.¹³²² During the reporting period, the Iraqi authorities also forcibly deported some Syrians to Damascus and the DAANES area.¹³²³

7.8 Return from countries in Europe and the US

As far as is known, there were no forced deportations of Syrians to Syria from the countries of the European Union, Norway, Switzerland or the United States during the reporting period. Furthermore, there were hardly any voluntary returns from these countries. It was not possible to provide exact figures on the number of Syrians who have returned permanently from Europe and the US.¹³²⁴ On rare occasions, Syrians have voluntarily returned permanently from the Netherlands.¹³²⁵ Where return assistance was used (see Section 7.17), the return took place through the Jordanian capital, Amman. They travelled by bus from Amman to Damascus.¹³²⁶ According to various sources, Syrians from Europe did not usually return to north-western Syria.¹³²⁷ One source claimed that more Syrians were returning from Europe – often temporarily – to north-eastern Syria than to north-western Syria.¹³²⁸

According to one source, no distinction was made during the reporting period, and Syrians received no special treatment based on the country from which they were

¹³¹⁶ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Syrian refugees in Jordan: A crisis of dwindling humanitarian aid*, 9 January 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³¹⁷ UNHCR, *Operational data portal. Syria Regional Refugee Response*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; AlleCijfers.nl, *Jordanië in cijfers en grafieken*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹³¹⁸ UNHCR, *Twelve years on, Syrian refugees face deepening debt and hunger*, 15 March 2023; UNHCR, *Jordan. Refugee camps*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹³¹⁹ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹³²⁰ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹³²¹ UNHCR, *Operational data portal. Syria Regional Refugee Response*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹³²² UNHCR, *Twelve years on, Syrian refugees face deepening debt and hunger*, 15 March 2023; UNHCR, *Operational Data Portal. Iraq operation*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹³²³ North Press Agency, *Iraq departs Syrian refugees to Northeast Syria*, 17 April 2024; HRW, *Iraq: Unlawful deportations of Syrians*, 27 June 2024; VOA, *Human rights group calls on Iraq to halt deportations of Syrian refugees*, 27 June 2024; The New Arab, *Iraq's broken promise: How Syrian refugees are at risk of unlawful deportation despite legal protections*, 3 September 2024; Global Detention Project, *Iraq summarily deporting refugees*, 11 September 2024; Rudaw, *Iraq deported 68 foreign nationals since July*, 21 September 2024.

¹³²⁴ Deutscher Bundestag, *Sachstand zu Abschiebungen nach Afghanistan und Syrien aus Deutschland und ausgewählten EU-Mitgliedstaaten*, 8 April 2024, p. 10; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, pp. 31-32; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³²⁵ Reformatorisch Dagblad, *"Risico's groot bij vertrek naar Syrië"*, 30 August 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

¹³²⁶ Reuters, *Cyprus suspends Syrian asylum applications as it struggles with arrivals spike*, 14 April 2024; confidential source, August 2024.

¹³²⁷ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³²⁸ Confidential source, October 2024.

returning.¹³²⁹ According to other sources, Syrians returning from Europe and elsewhere were often assumed to have financial resources. They were therefore at risk of arrest, detention and abduction (see Section 1.10). In their case, a ransom could be demanded.¹³³⁰ According to a source consulted by the EUAA, there were several known cases of Syrians who held the nationality of one of the EU Member States and who, while visiting Syria, were questioned by the intelligence services and required to pay large sums of money before being allowed to leave the country.¹³³¹

7.9 Areas of control to which people returned

During the reporting period, people returned from abroad to all the areas of control.¹³³² Syrians returning from abroad generally returned to their original places of residence.¹³³³ In practice, access and return to a person's original places of residence often depended on the consent of local security forces (see Section 7.11).¹³³⁴

Most Syrians who had returned from Lebanon since September 2024 remained in the government-controlled area, mainly in the provinces of Damascus and Homs.¹³³⁵ Beginning in September 2024, tens of thousands of people travelled on to the north-east.¹³³⁶ On 25 October 2024, the UNHCR reported that 50,779 people had entered the DAANES area from Lebanon since 24 September 2024. Most had travelled by land to the province of Raqqa.¹³³⁷ They entered the DAANES area from the government-controlled area mainly through the Tabqa crossing in Raqqa province and the al-Tayha crossing in Aleppo province.¹³³⁸ People also arrived through the Sabka crossing in Raqqa province and Qamishli airport.¹³³⁹ Some people used human traffickers to enter the north-east.¹³⁴⁰ Around 95% were able to stay with friends or family. The rest went to closed displacement camps (4%), such as the Serakaniye camp near the city of Hasaka and the town of al-Adnaniyah in Raqqa province, or to informal settlements and temporary shelters (1%).¹³⁴¹ Most of those who returned to the DAANES area were either originally from that area or had come from the city of Afrin and had relatives living in the DAANES area.¹³⁴²

¹³²⁹ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹³³⁰ SOHR, *SOHR exclusive. Regime security services arrest and blackmail Syrians returning voluntarily to the "safe homeland"*, 12 June 2022; UN HRC, *"No end in sight": torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023 (A/HRC/53/CRP.5)*, 10 July 2023; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 33; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

¹³³¹ EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, pp. 32-33.

¹³³² AP News, *Some Syrian refugees risk returning to opposition-held areas as hostility in host Lebanon grows*, 12 June 2024.

¹³³³ SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 11; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³³⁴ The Syria Report, *Some displaced residents allowed to return to new neighbourhoods in Al-Hajar Al-Aswad*, 6 June 2023; The Syria Report, *Property fraud and poor services in the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp*, 9 July 2024; ISPI, *The illusion of safe zones in Syria*, 8 August 2024; MEI, *Inside Damascus's reconstruction lab: Navigating the framework of return and recovery*, 31 October 2024, pp. 4.

¹³³⁵ UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria Flash Update #12. Response to displacement from Lebanon to Syria*, 12 October 2024; UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria. Emergency response brief, 13 November 2024*, 14 November 2024, p. 2; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, December 2024.

¹³³⁶ North Press Agency, *Dozens of Syrian families arrive in NE Syria from Lebanon*, 30 September 2024.

¹³³⁷ UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria Flash Update #18. Response to displacement from Lebanon to Syria*, 25 October 2024.

¹³³⁸ SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 11.

¹³³⁹ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁴⁰ North Press Agency, *Displaced persons from Lebanon find shelter in camps in NE Syria*, 6 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁴¹ North Press Agency, *Displaced persons from Lebanon find shelter in camps in NE Syria*, 6 October 2024; Rudaw, *Kurdish woman pleads for help after fleeing Lebanon*, 7 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁴² Confidential source, October 2024.

Beginning in September 2024, several thousand people travelled from the DAANES area to the SIG area.¹³⁴³ To do so, they often used human traffickers who charged hundreds of dollars for the service.¹³⁴⁴ In early October 2024, most people were stranded for several days at the Awn al-Dadat crossing.¹³⁴⁵ There, they were initially stopped by local SNA factions.¹³⁴⁶ There were long waiting times, partly due to the security checks that were carried out.¹³⁴⁷ On 16 October 2024, the UNHCR stated that more than 4,000 people had arrived in the north-west from Lebanon since 23 September 2024, mostly through the Awn al-Dadat crossing.¹³⁴⁸ Most of those who returned to the SIG area were either originally from there or had relatives living there.¹³⁴⁹

7.10 Conditions for returning to the government-controlled area

According to various sources, Syrians wishing to return from abroad to the government-controlled area – like displaced persons wishing to return from other areas of control – had to undergo screening before being allowed to return. Two procedures played a key role in enabling the return: the security clearance and the individual reconciliation process. Those with cases outstanding with the Syrian authorities first had to resolve their status (also known as individual reconciliation) before being able to return to the government-controlled area. Both the security clearance and the individual reconciliation were handled by the Syrian intelligence services.¹³⁵⁰ According to one source, anyone suspected of having ties to the opposition would never be granted a security clearance.¹³⁵¹ It was not possible to provide a clear overview of the duration of these procedures, the number of contacts with the authorities, the documents involved in these procedures, or the bodies concerned.¹³⁵²

Syrians wishing to return to the government-controlled area needed, at the very least, a valid Syrian passport or Syrian identity card.¹³⁵³ In addition, they were required to hold a security clearance issued by the Syrian authorities.¹³⁵⁴ A security clearance certificate meant that a person was not on any of the lists of individuals wanted by the Syrian security apparatus. They could apply for this certificate at a Syrian embassy abroad.¹³⁵⁵ The security clearance was also required in order to

¹³⁴³ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁴⁴ Confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁴⁵ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁴⁶ North Press Agency, *Turkey-backed armed groups block Syrians fleeing Lebanon from returning*, 3 October 2024; SOHR, *Following its closure and activity of smuggling networks. Awn Al-Dadat crossing opens its doors to returnees from Lebanon*, 9 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁴⁷ Etana, *Brief: Displacement & refugee returns from Lebanon*, 10 October 2024.

¹³⁴⁸ UNHCR, *Northwest Syria Flash Update #4. Response to displacement from Lebanon to Syria*, 17 October 2024.

¹³⁴⁹ ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁵⁰ OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees, 13 February 2024; The Syria Report, *IDPs return to regime-controlled areas in Idlib and Hama*, 18 June 2024; ISPI, *The illusion of safe zones in Syria*, 8 August 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 28; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 4; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁵¹ Confidential source, December 2024.

¹³⁵² OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees, 13 February 2024; UN HRC, *Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of the Syrian Arab Republic (CCPR/C/SYR/CO/4)*, 25 July 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 28; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁵³ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 82; The Syrian Observer, *New decisions deny passport to category of Syrians*, 16 May 2024.

¹³⁵⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 82; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Country Report. Syria*, 19 March 2024, pp. 23-24; Syria Direct, *No return to Yarmouk for Syrian-Palestinians fleeing Lebanon*, 25 November 2024.

¹³⁵⁵ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 82.

carry out certain procedures in Syria, such as reclaiming property – including a house or a plot of land – or obtaining official documents.¹³⁵⁶

Individual reconciliation was necessary for return if the Syrian wishing to return was wanted by the Syrian authorities or if there was a security file on that person (see Section 6.2). This procedure was designed to 'reintegrate' defeated opposition groups into the state (for example, to allow them to regain access to civil documents). In many cases, this involved evasion of compulsory national service or reserve duty (see Sub-section 2.2.1.11), but it could also relate to past political (or other) activities. This procedure could be initiated through a Syrian embassy abroad, at official border crossings or through intermediaries.¹³⁵⁷ When applications for individual reconciliation were approved by the authorities and the names of the individuals concerned were removed from the lists of wanted persons, they were issued a document enabling them to return to Syria. In July 2024, the UN Human Rights Council expressed concerns about the lack of clarity surrounding the reconciliation process and its selective application.¹³⁵⁸ In some cases, applications for reconciliation were rejected without further explanation.¹³⁵⁹

Completing the reconciliation process and thereby obtaining approval from the intelligence services did not guarantee that the individuals concerned would not be re-arrested, detained or subjected to enforced disappearance.¹³⁶⁰ This followed from several reports concerning the arrest, detention and enforced disappearance of individuals who had gone through the reconciliation process.¹³⁶¹

7.11 Conditions for returning to other areas of control

According to one source, the areas not under government control were the least risky for Syrians wishing to return to Syria from abroad, provided they had no other issues with the local authorities and were not regarded as a threat.¹³⁶² Travel to the other areas of control was often difficult and could be dangerous. Syrians often had to seek out informal routes to avoid checkpoints in the government-controlled area.¹³⁶³

In addition to requiring valid identification, all the authorities demanded that Syrians wishing to enter their area of control from abroad had a local sponsor and/or a security clearance certificate.¹³⁶⁴ For example, the de facto administration of the

¹³⁵⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 83; Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Country Report. Syria*, 19 March 2024, pp. 23-24.

¹³⁵⁷ OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". *The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁵⁸ UN HRC, *Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of the Syrian Arab Republic (CCPR/C/SYR/CO/4)*, 25 July 2024.

¹³⁵⁹ OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". *The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024.

¹³⁶⁰ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁶¹ SNHR, *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023, including of 129 children and 87 women, with 232 documented in December alone*, 2 January 2024; SOHR, *Regime-controlled areas in 2023. Nearly 2,625 fatalities in acts of violence...alarming increase in crime rate...deteriorating security situation...chronic stifling crises*, 4 January 2024; OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". *The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024; SNHR, *Man named Abdul Latif Tou'ma arrested by regime personnel in Damascus city, March 9, 2024*, 19 March 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Assad's forces detain civilians in Damascus for visiting relatives in Northern Syria*, 6 September 2024; SOHR, *Despite settling his status. Deportee from Turkey die under torture in regime detention centre in Aleppo*, 11 September 2024; Levant 24, *Syrian refugee dies in Assad regime custody after deportation from Turkey*, 12 September 2024; The Syrian Observer, *After being returned from Turkey: Syrian engineer dies in Aleppo Military Security branch*, 13 September 2024; HRW, *Syrians fleeing Lebanon risk repression upon return*, 30 October 2024.

¹³⁶² Confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁶³ Confidential source, September 2024, confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁶⁴ The Syria Report, *IDPs return to regime-controlled areas in Idlib and Hama*, 18 June 2024; ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. July 2024*, 8 August 2024; Memo, *Syrians must produce regime issued passports to*

DAANES area required them to have a local sponsor and to undergo a security check.¹³⁶⁵ Syrians of conscription age who held a residence permit abroad and wished to visit the DAANES area were able to do so upon payment of 400 USD (see Sub-section 2.2.2).¹³⁶⁶ Returning to the SIG area required a valid identity document issued by the local authorities in the SIG area.¹³⁶⁷ Furthermore, the SNA factions did not grant return permission to men between the ages of 18 and 30.¹³⁶⁸

7.12 Problems after arriving in Damascus

Some Syrians returning from abroad encountered problems upon their arrival in Damascus. Some were summoned by an intelligence agency. Others were subjected to extortion at a checkpoint. Some people had their possessions seized. Others were arrested (see Sub-section 1.10.2). There were also reports of Syrians returning from Lebanon who were arrested in Damascus at their hotel or at a bus station while travelling through to their hometowns (see Sub-section 1.19.1). Furthermore, there were several reports of internally displaced persons and Syrians returning from abroad being arrested at the airport (see Section 4.4). Returning Syrians also faced problems arising from the alarming economic situation and the lack of services (see Chapter 3).¹³⁶⁹

7.13 Treatment in the various areas of control

Syrians returning from abroad could face discrimination in all areas of control, as they had left the country during the conflict. They could be accused of being traitors, spies, members of the opposition and/or terrorists because they had not remained in Syria.¹³⁷⁰ They were subject to security checks in all areas of control.¹³⁷¹ Furthermore, Syrians returning from abroad were at risk of serious human rights violations in all areas of control, such as arbitrary detention, torture, ill-treatment, enforced disappearance and extortion (see below).¹³⁷²

According to the OHCHR, Syrian refugees who have returned are even more vulnerable to human rights violations than those who never left Syria, as they are systematically questioned and vetted upon their return. This vulnerability also stemmed from the perception that they posed a potential threat to the authorities,

travel through border with Turkiye, 12 September 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

¹³⁶⁵ ETANA, *Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria. July 2024*, 8 August 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

¹³⁶⁶ Article 27 of the Self-Defence Service Act; DIS, *Syria. Military recruitment in North and East Syria*, 2 July 2024, p. 16; confidential source, September 2024, confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁶⁷ The Syria Report, *IDPs return to regime-controlled areas in Idlib and Hama*, 18 June 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

¹³⁶⁸ The Syria Report, *IDPs return to regime-controlled areas in Idlib and Hama*, 18 June 2024.

¹³⁶⁹ MEMO, *Missing Syrian activist arrested in Damascus*, 25 February 2020; SNHR, *Syrian regime arrested a civilian at Damascus International Airport in Damascus city on October 1*, 3 October 2022; North Press Agency, *Four Syrians arrested in Damascus upon deportation from Iraq*, 2 August 2023; SNHR, *At least 223 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in August 2023, including 14 children and 17 women*, 2 September 2023, p. 4; SNHR, *No fewer than 182 cases of arbitrary arrest documented in January 2024, including of eight children and four women*, 2 February 2024, p. 8; X.com, *Al-Jumhuriya*, 7 October 2024, [URL](#); SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: Widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 8; ETANA, *Survey: Recent Returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁷⁰ Pax, *Syrië veilig? Misleidend en een cynisch voorwendsel*, 10 September 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 3; Syria Direct, *No return to Yarmouk for Syrian-Palestinians fleeing Lebanon*, 25 November 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁷¹ Confidential source, September 2024, confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁷² OHCHR, *Syria being pulled into the catastrophic conflict engulfing the region, UN Commission warns*, 1 November 2024; confidential source, December 2024.

as they had left Syria and were therefore suspected of involvement in terrorist activities.¹³⁷³

The OHCHR investigated the challenges faced by Syrians returning to Syria from abroad. To this end, between October 2022 and June 2023, they interviewed dozens of Syrians who had returned home, amongst others. They found that many of them had faced human rights violations and abuse upon their return to Syria, including arbitrary arrests, detention, torture and serious ill-treatment, after which they decided to leave Syria again.¹³⁷⁴

7.13.1 Government-controlled area

Syrians returning to the government-controlled area (see Sub-section 1.6.1) could face a wide range of human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearances, extortion and ill-treatment by the Syrian authorities. As there was no systematic monitoring of Syrians who had returned and no overview of all those who had returned, it was not possible to provide exact figures for the various human rights violations in the government-controlled area.¹³⁷⁵

During the reporting period, there were several reports of returning Syrians being mistreated at checkpoints.¹³⁷⁶ There were also reports of Syrians who had returned being tortured.¹³⁷⁷ For example, in July 2023, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that Syrians had been tortured by the military intelligence service following their deportation from Lebanon and had subsequently been conscripted into the army as reservists.¹³⁷⁸ Furthermore, in February 2024, the OHCHR reported about a man who had been tortured following his return to the government-controlled area.¹³⁷⁹

There were also reports of returning Syrians facing extortion at checkpoints, with those who refused to pay being arrested.¹³⁸⁰ There were also reports that Syrians

¹³⁷³ OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". *The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024, p. 27.

¹³⁷⁴ OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". *The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024, pp. 6 and 25-26.

¹³⁷⁵ EIP, *Refugee return in Syria: Dangers, security risks and information scarcity*, July 2019; HRW, *Lebanon: Armed forces summarily deporting Syrians*, 5 July 2023; OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". *The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024; AP News, *Some Syrian refugees risk returning to opposition-held areas as hostility in host Lebanon grows*, 12 June 2024; SNHR, *On World Refugee Day. At least 4,714 returning refugees & IDPs have been arbitrarily arrested by Syrian regime forces*, 20 June 2024; Enab Baladi, *Syrian regime denies arrest of returning refugees despite documentation of thousands of cases*, 28 August 2024; SOHR, *Amid dire living conditions. Regime forces impose levies on returnees from Lebanon and arrest 35 others*, 2 October 2024; Enab Baladi, *Regime arrests nine Syrians returning from Lebanon*, 2 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Syrians returning from Lebanon reportedly detained by authorities*, 8 October 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Syrians returning from Lebanon arrested by regime*, 10 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Further arrests reported as Syrians return from Lebanon*, 10 October 2024; SOHR, *Upon returning from Lebanon. Military intelligence arrests civilian near border crossing in Homs*, 10 October 2024; ETANA, *Brief: Displacement & refugee returns from Lebanon*, 10 October 2024; SOHR, *After having returned back from Lebanon. Members of military intelligence branch arrest three civilians in Rif Dimashq*, 12 October 2024; The New Humanitarian, *The risk of return: As Israel bombs Lebanon, Syrian deportees face detention, conscription, or worse*, 16 October 2024; The Guardian, *'Nowhere to go': Syrians fleeing Israeli strikes in Lebanon face perilous return*, 23 October 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 4; HRW, *Syrians fleeing Lebanon risk repression upon return*, 30 October 2024; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, December 2024.

¹³⁷⁶ *Syria: Decision imposing the exchange of \$100 on Syrians: Disguised legalization and extortion of those entering their country*, 29 November 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

¹³⁷⁷ AP News, *Some Syrian refugees risk returning to opposition-held areas as hostility in host Lebanon grows*, 12 June 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

¹³⁷⁸ HRW, *Lebanon: Armed forces summarily deporting Syrians*, 5 July 2023.

¹³⁷⁹ OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". *The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024, p. 25.

¹³⁸⁰ The Syria Report, *IDPs return to regime-controlled areas in Idlib and Hama*, 18 June 2024; SOHR, *Amid dire living conditions. Regime forces impose levies on returnees from Lebanon and arrest 35 others*, 2 October 2024; ETANA, *Brief: Displacement & refugee returns from Lebanon*, 10 October 2024; The Guardian, *'Nowhere to go': Syrians fleeing Israeli strikes in Lebanon face perilous return*, 23 October 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 3; STJ,

returning home were required to report to an intelligence agency within a few days of their arrival, after which they would be interrogated. This could sometimes lead to arrest and enforced disappearance.¹³⁸¹

There were numerous reports of Syrians returning home being arrested at border crossings and checkpoints.¹³⁸² In some cases, this was linked to evading compulsory military service and reserve duty.¹³⁸³ For example, on 2 October 2024, the SOHR reported that government forces had arrested nearly 35 people as they were travelling from Lebanon through the government-controlled area towards the DAANES area. Their arrest is said to have been linked to evading compulsory military service and reserve duty.¹³⁸⁴ There were also reports that men of conscription age were told, after crossing the border, that they had to report to the army within a period of fifteen days to three months to fulfil their compulsory military service or reserve duty.¹³⁸⁵

There were multiple reports of Syrians dying in detention in the government-controlled area following their deportation from Türkiye or Lebanon.¹³⁸⁶

Syria: Decision imposing the exchange of \$100 on Syrians: Disguised legalization and extortion of those entering their country, 29 November 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

¹³⁸¹ OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". *The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 6; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁸² OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". *The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024; AP News, *Some Syrian refugees risk returning to opposition-held areas as hostility in host Lebanon grows*, 12 June 2024; The Syria Report, *IDPs return to regime-controlled areas in Idlib and Hama*, 18 June 2024; SNHR, *On World Refugee Day. At least 4,714 returning refugees & IDPs have been arbitrarily arrested by Syrian regime forces*, 20 June 2024, p. 3; Enab Baladi, *Syrian regime denies arrest of returning refugees despite documentation of thousands of cases*, 28 August 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Further arrests reported as Syrians return from Lebanon*, 10 October 2024; SOHR, *Upon returning from Lebanon. Military intelligence arrests civilian near border crossing in Homs*, 10 October 2024; ETANA, *Brief: Displacement & refugee returns from Lebanon*, 10 October 2024; SOHR, *After having returned back from Lebanon. Members of military intelligence branch arrest three civilians in Rif Dimashq*, 12 October 2024; The New Humanitarian, *The risk of return: As Israel bombs Lebanon, Syrian deportees face detention, conscription, or worse*, 16 October 2024; The Guardian, *'Nowhere to go': Syrians fleeing Israeli strikes in Lebanon face perilous return*, 23 October 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024; HRW, *Syrians fleeing Lebanon risk repression upon return*, 30 October 2024; STJ, *Syria: Decision imposing the exchange of \$100 on Syrians: Disguised legalization and extortion of those entering their country*, 29 November 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

¹³⁸³ Enab Baladi, *Regime arrests nine Syrians returning from Lebanon*, 2 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Syrians returning from Lebanon reportedly detained by authorities*, 8 October 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Syrians returning from Lebanon arrested by regime*, 10 October 2024; BBC Monitoring, *Further arrests reported as Syrians return from Lebanon*, 10 October 2024; The New Humanitarian, *The risk of return: As Israel bombs Lebanon, Syrian deportees face detention, conscription, or worse*, 16 October 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 4; HRW, *Syrians fleeing Lebanon risk repression upon return*, 30 October 2024; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁸⁴ SOHR, *Amid dire living conditions. Regime forces impose levies on returnees from Lebanon and arrest 35 others*, 2 October 2024.

¹³⁸⁵ The New Arab, *Syrian regime detains dozens of refugees who returned from Lebanon in July*, 8 August 2024; The New Humanitarian, *The risk of return: As Israel bombs Lebanon, Syrian deportees face detention, conscription, or worse*, 16 October 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 4; Raseef22, *"Lost and facing the unknown": Syrians returning to the "homeland" from the hell of the Israeli war on Lebanon*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

¹³⁸⁶ SNHR, *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces for detention, fatal torture of a refugee forcibly deported from Lebanon*, 28 June 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Young Syrian man returns from Lebanon to be killed in Assad's prison*, 1 July 2024; SNHR, *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces for detention, fatal torture of a refugee forcibly deported from Lebanon who died in a Damascus hospital*, 9 July 2024; North Press Agency, *Government forces execute Daraa detainee in Saydnaya Prison*, 5 August 2024; SNHR, *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces' detention, fatal torture of a refugee forcibly deported from Türkiye*, 9 August 2024; SOHR, *Despite settling his status. Deportee from Turkey die under torture in regime detention centre in Aleppo*, 11 September 2024; Levant 24, *Syrian refugee dies in Assad regime custody after deportation from Turkey*, 12 September 2024; The Syrian Observer, *After being returned from Turkey: Syrian engineer dies in Aleppo Military Security branch*, 13 September 2024; The New Humanitarian, *The risk of return: As Israel bombs Lebanon, Syrian deportees face detention, conscription, or worse*, 16 October 2024; SOHR, *Having returned from Lebanon. Young man dies under torture in regime prison*, 23 October 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 4; HRW, *Syrians fleeing Lebanon risk repression upon return*, 30 October 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

Some Syrians who returned were arrested because they were on a wanted list due to past political activities or desertion (whether actual or alleged).¹³⁸⁷ There were also multiple reports of Syrians being arrested upon their return because they were mistaken for an opposition figure with the same name.¹³⁸⁸

In May 2024, the SNHR documented 23 cases of arbitrary arrests and detentions of people who had returned from Lebanon and Jordan.¹³⁸⁹ In early July 2024, the SNHR reported that it had documented at least 126 cases of arbitrary arrest/detention of individuals deported from Lebanon during the first six months of 2024.¹³⁹⁰ In July 2024, the SNHR documented 17 cases of arbitrary arrests/detentions of people who had been deported from Lebanon through the al-Masnaa border crossing.¹³⁹¹ In August 2024, the SNHR documented 19 cases of arbitrary arrests/detentions of people who had been deported from Lebanon; in September 2024, 9 cases of arbitrary arrests/detentions of people who had returned from Lebanon; and in October 2024, there were 17 cases of arbitrary arrests/detentions of people who had returned from Lebanon.¹³⁹² Apart from the fact that women and children were amongst those arrested or detained, the SNHR did not provide any further details on the profiles of those arrested or detained.

At the end of October 2024, ETANA estimated that at least 130 people had been arrested at border crossings and checkpoints since 23 September 2024. According to ETANA, there were indications that the authorities were directing their attention to returning Syrians upon arriving at their destination. The organisation argued that, from a visual perspective, this was a better option for the authorities, as arrests at official border crossings could be documented by UNHCR representatives who were present there.¹³⁹³ According to the *Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy* (TIMEP), they had also heard that the authorities sometimes waited months before arresting a person. Consequently, shortly after their return, it might seem that the Syrians had returned safely and were no longer in danger, whereas they were actually still at risk.¹³⁹⁴ According to another source, some returning Syrians did not encounter problems until six months after their arrival.¹³⁹⁵ Furthermore, SJAC noted that, in October 2024, rapporteurs stated that people living in the government-controlled area were generally reluctant to talk about their experiences. It would probably take some time before the rapporteurs could identify people living in the government-controlled area who were willing to be interviewed at length.¹³⁹⁶

7.13.2 DAANES area

Little information was available on the situation of returning Syrians in the DAANES area during the reporting period. The available information suggests that Syrians who returned to the DAANES area (see Sub-section 1.6.2) may have faced a wide range of human rights violations at the hands of the SDF (see Sections 1.8 to 1.11).

¹³⁸⁷ HRW, *Lebanon: Stepped-up repression of Syrians*, 25 April 2024; HRW, *Syrians fleeing Lebanon risk repression upon return*, 30 October 2024; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024.

¹³⁸⁸ SNHR, *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces for detention, fatal torture of a refugee forcibly deported from Lebanon*, 28 June 2024; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹³⁸⁹ SNHR, *At least 228 cases of arbitrary detention cases recorded in May 2024, including of 13 children and four women*, 3 June 2024, p. 9.

¹³⁹⁰ SNHR, *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 recorded in June*, 3 July 2024, p. 11.

¹³⁹¹ SNHR, *At least 209 arbitrary detentions recorded in July 2024, including of 14 children and three women*, 2 August 2024, p. 9.

¹³⁹² SNHR, *At least 214 arbitrary detentions recorded in August 2024, including of 13 children and seven women*, 2 September 2024, p. 9; SNHR, *At least 206 arbitrary detentions recorded in September 2024*, 2 October 2024, p. 9; SNHR, *At least 213 arbitrary detentions recorded in October 2024*, 4 November 2024, p. 9.

¹³⁹³ ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024.

¹³⁹⁴ YouTube, *TIMEP, Syria and Syrian refugees: From EU migration policies to Israel's war on Lebanon*, 25 November 2024, [URL](#), [09:42-10:41].

¹³⁹⁵ Confidential source, December 2024.

¹³⁹⁶ SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. October 2024*, 19 November 2024.

It was not possible to provide exact figures for the various human rights violations in the DAANES area.¹³⁹⁷

According to UNCOI, the unrest in the eastern part of Deir ez-Zor province and the hostilities between Türkiye and the SDF continued to have a negative impact on civilians in the DAANES area. Illegal detentions and the recruitment of underage fighters also continued.¹³⁹⁸

7.13.3 SIG area

Little information was available regarding the situation of returning Syrians in the SIG area during the reporting period. The available information suggests that Syrians who returned to the SIG area (see Sub-section 1.6.3) may have faced a wide range of human rights violations at the hands of SNA factions (see Sections 1.8 to 1.11). It was not possible to provide exact figures for the various human rights violations in the SIG area affecting returning Syrians.¹³⁹⁹ According to one source, returnees from Syria in the SIG area were typically detained for a few hours or days in order to verify their identity and determine their destination.¹⁴⁰⁰

According to UNCOI, arrests, violence and extortion by SNA factions continued in the SIG area during the reporting period. Kurdish and Arab women and men arriving from the government-controlled area or the DAANES area were routinely summoned by the military police and detained until they were acquitted or tried in military courts run by SNA factions for alleged terrorist offences or for links to the SDF.¹⁴⁰¹

7.13.4 SSG territory

Little information was available regarding the situation of returning Syrians in the SSG area during the reporting period. The available information suggests that Syrians who returned to the SSG area (see Sub-section 1.6.4) may have faced a wide range of human rights violations at the hands of HTS (see Sections 1.8 to 1.11). It was not possible to provide exact figures for the various human rights violations in the SSG area affecting returning Syrians.¹⁴⁰²

According to UNCOI, protests on an unprecedented scale spread across the SSG area starting in February 2024. Protesters called for the release of political and security detainees, for administrative and socio-economic reforms, and for the removal of HTS leader Abu Mohammad al-Jolani. The demonstrations were sparked by reports of torture and ill-treatment of prisoners by the HTS General Security Service, following months of arrest campaigns by HTS targeting its own members, as well as members of other armed groups and political parties (such as *Hizb al-Tahrir*).¹⁴⁰³

¹³⁹⁷ EIP, *Refugee return in Syria: Dangers, security risks and information scarcity*, July 2019; OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". *The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

¹³⁹⁸ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 16.

¹³⁹⁹ SOHR, *Demanding ransoms in return for their release. Turkish-backed factions detain refugees deported forcibly from Turkey*, 11 July 2024; The Syria Report, *IDPs return to regime-controlled areas in Idlib and Hama*, 18 June 2024; ETANA, *Brief: Displacement & refugee returns from Lebanon*, 10 October 2024; North Press Agency, *Syrian families displaced, devastated by Turkey's "Peace Spring"*, 10 October 2024; North Press Agency, *SNA releases Syrian returnees from Lebanon for \$100 each*, 14 October 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 12; confidential source, September 2024, confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴⁰¹ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 13.

¹⁴⁰² State Documentation of the Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, *Syria: The border situation between Turkey Syria and Iraq*, 10 October 2023, pp. 8-9; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴⁰³ UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/57/86)*, 12 August 2024, p. 11.

7.14 Type of document upon return

At the border crossing into the government-controlled area, Syrians were required to present a valid Syrian passport or a Syrian identity card in order to receive an entry stamp.¹⁴⁰⁴ Abroad, the fees for a Syrian passport ranged from 265 to 1,000 euros. In addition, the validity of the passport had been reduced to two years for men who had been granted deferment from military service. Consular fees were a major source of income for the Syrian government.¹⁴⁰⁵

In the SIG area, only documents issued by the authorities in the SIG area were recognised.¹⁴⁰⁶

7.15 Groups at increased risk of detention, torture and/or disappearance

Large sections of the population were at increased risk of classification as suspect groups and/or arrest and detention. The Syrian authorities labelled civilians as opponents or threats for the slightest reason (for example, because of posts on social media or the internet).¹⁴⁰⁷ The sources consulted identified various groups who were at increased risk of detention, torture and/or disappearance upon return to Syria. This applied to:

- People belonging to the armed (or other) opposition (see Section 1.6).¹⁴⁰⁸
- People who were on one of the lists of wanted persons or whose names were similar to that of someone on such a list (see Sub-section 1.14.2).¹⁴⁰⁹
- Human rights activists (see Section 1.15).¹⁴¹⁰
- Men of conscription age (see Section 2.2).¹⁴¹¹
- Deserters (see Sub-section 2.2.1.13).¹⁴¹²
- Journalists and others who had voiced criticism, for example, on social media (see Section 2.3).¹⁴¹³
- People belonging to the political opposition (see Sub-section 2.3.1).¹⁴¹⁴
- Relatives of political activists and opponents (see Sub-section 2.3.3).¹⁴¹⁵
- LGBTIQ+ people (see Section 2.4).¹⁴¹⁶

¹⁴⁰⁴ Etana, *Brief: Displacement & refugee returns from Lebanon*, 10 October 2024; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 31 October 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴⁰⁵ North Press Agency, *Syrians race to get passports despite skyrocketing costs*, 28 November 2023; Enab Baladi, *Three ways for Syrians abroad to obtain a passport*, 25 January 2024; SNHR, *The Syrian regime perpetrates multiple types of violations against citizens obtaining passports in and outside Syria*, 28 February 2024, p. 1; DW, *Syrian passports: How German money funds war crimes in Syria*, 28 March 2024.

¹⁴⁰⁶ SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 12; confidential source, September 2024.

¹⁴⁰⁷ SNHR, *Law No. 20 of 2022 promulgated by the Syrian regime further perpetuates the oppression of freedom of opinion and expression, and has been used as grounds for dozens of cases of arbitrary arrest and torture*, 18 August 2023; SNHR, *Civilian arrested in Latakia governorate by Syrian regime forces over criticizing economic situation, August 20, 2023*, 21 August 2023; SNHR, *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces' detention of lawyer Thamer al-Talla and his subsequent death in a regime detention center due to medical negligence*, 10 May 2024.

¹⁴⁰⁸ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 85; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 26.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Confidential source, September 2024, confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴¹⁰ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴¹¹ SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 7; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴¹² The Syrian Observer, *New decisions deny passport to category of Syrians*, 16 May 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴¹³ Confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

¹⁴¹⁴ EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 17; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴¹⁵ AP News, *Some Syrian refugees risk returning to opposition-held areas as hostility in host Lebanon grows*, 12 June 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 18; confidential source, September 2024.

¹⁴¹⁶ Confidential source, October 2024.

- People who had worked for the government and had left the country without permission (see Section 4.2).¹⁴¹⁷
- Relatives of political activists and/or missing persons (see Section 6.3).¹⁴¹⁸
- People who were thought to be wealthy (see Section 7.8).¹⁴¹⁹
- People who had left Syria illegally (see Section 7.16).¹⁴²⁰
- People from areas that were (or had previously been) under the control of the armed opposition (see Section 7.19).¹⁴²¹

7.16 Previous unauthorised departure

If Syrians returning to the government-controlled area had previously left the country illegally – which was the case for a large proportion of Syrian refugees abroad – they had to initiate an individual reconciliation procedure at the border.¹⁴²² Additional information on individual reconciliation is provided in Sections 6.2.1 and 7.10.

Within a few days of their arrival, returning Syrians were required to report to the police or an intelligence agency to explain the reason for their previous illegal departure and how it had taken place.¹⁴²³ Such interrogation could sometimes lead to arrest and enforced disappearance.¹⁴²⁴ According to one source, the interrogation usually lasted no more than a day. The person concerned was then brought before a judge. According to this source, the person concerned could avoid punishment provided there were no other issues (such as those relating to military service or any of the wanted lists) and a bribe had been paid.¹⁴²⁵

According to one source, there were no consequences in the DAANES area, the SIG area or the SSG area if a Syrian had previously left the country illegally.¹⁴²⁶ According to another source, this depended on the individual's profile within the SSG area.¹⁴²⁷

7.17 Organisations providing support to returning Syrians

Various organisations, including the UNHCR, stated that conditions in Syria during the reporting period did not allow for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers.¹⁴²⁸ For this reason, Syrians wishing to return

¹⁴¹⁷ The Syrian Observer, *New decisions deny passport to category of Syrians*, 16 May 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴¹⁸ Confidential source, September 2024, confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴¹⁹ Confidential source, September 2024.

¹⁴²⁰ OHCHR, *"We did not fear death but the life there". The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴²¹ SNHR, *Syrian regime arrests 10 women in Aleppo city, November 5, 2023*, 16 November 2023; DIS, *Syria: Military service*, 25 January 2024, p. 52; AP News, *Some Syrian refugees risk returning to opposition-held areas as hostility in host Lebanon grows*, 12 June 2024; SNHR, *Man named Fahd al-Aqra arrested by Syrian regime forces in Hama city, August 4, 2024*, 7 August 2024; EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 22; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 5; confidential source, September 2024, confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴²² Confidential source, September 2024, confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴²³ EUAA, *Syria. Country Focus*, 22 October 2024, p. 33; ETANA, *Survey: Recent returns from Lebanon to Syria*, 13 October 2024.

¹⁴²⁴ OHCHR, *"We did not fear death but the life there". The dire human rights situation facing Syrian returnees*, 13 February 2024; confidential source, August 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴²⁵ Confidential source, September 2024.

¹⁴²⁶ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴²⁷ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴²⁸ OSES, *United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen briefing to the Security Council*, 21 December 2023; UN HRC, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*

to Syria voluntarily received no systematic monitoring or support from UN agencies and their affiliated organisations, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM).¹⁴²⁹ Upon arriving in Syria, Syrians could receive some support from the SARC.¹⁴³⁰ Furthermore, as far as is known, no organisations were operating in Syria that provided systematic monitoring and support to Syrians who had returned home.¹⁴³¹

In the Netherlands, there were three organisations to which Syrians could turn for reintegration support: Solid Road, the Goedwerk Foundation and the ROS Foundation.¹⁴³²

7.18 Neighbouring countries' arrangements for temporary return

Since 2014, Syrians residing in Türkiye have been granted temporary protection status there. They could prove this by presenting a temporary protection identity card. They would lose this temporary status if they returned to Syria voluntarily.¹⁴³³ Although it was possible to apply to have this temporary status reinstated after leaving Türkiye, most such applications were rejected. Only in a few rare cases were people allowed back into Türkiye.¹⁴³⁴

In addition, Türkiye had adopted several arrangements to allow some Syrians residing there to return to Syria temporarily and then be readmitted to Türkiye. This made it easy for lorry drivers to travel back and forth between Syria and Türkiye.¹⁴³⁵ It was also possible to apply for permission to return temporarily for medical, humanitarian or business reasons (for example, if a relative was seriously ill). This permission had to be requested from the governor of the Turkish province where the Syrian was registered, and administrative fees had to be paid.¹⁴³⁶ Since April 2022, the Turkish authorities have no longer been granting permission for visits to relatives in connection with Islamic (or other) holidays.¹⁴³⁷

Following the February 2023 earthquake, Türkiye had adopted arrangements for Syrian refugees staying in the ten affected Turkish provinces.¹⁴³⁸ They were able to apply at the border for permission to return to Syria temporarily for up to six

(A/HRC/55/64), 9 February 2024, p. 4; UNOCHA, *Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 humanitarian needs overview (February 2024)*, 3 March 2024, p. 29; Reuters, *With few signs of Syria solution, EU pledges more support to refugees*, 27 May 2024; UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria: Fact sheet (July 2024)*, 6 August 2024; Enab Baladi, *UNHCR: We do not encourage wide-scale voluntary return of Syrians*, 7 August 2024; SJAC, *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024; UN, *Highlighting "alarming" effects of Israel's regional incursions on Syria, Security Council underscores need to protect thousands of refugees pouring into country*, 23 October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, December 2024.

¹⁴²⁹ IOM, *IOM becomes a related organization to the UN*, 25 July 2016; IOM Nederland, *Terugkeer naar Jemen, Libië of Syrië*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹⁴³⁰ UNOCHA, *Humanitarian update. Syrian Arab Republic. Issue 24. May 2024*, 15 July 2024.

¹⁴³¹ Confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

¹⁴³² Solid Road, *About Solid Road*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; Goedwerk Foundation, *Veelgestelde vragen aan Goedwerk Foundation*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; Stichting ROS, *Over Stichting ROS*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹⁴³³ UNHCR, *Türkiye. Information for Syrians. Rights and obligations*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹⁴³⁴ Confidential source, November 2024.

¹⁴³⁵ Confidential source, June 2024.

¹⁴³⁶ Enab Baladi, *Syrians' hopes for "Eid visit" clash with costly alternatives*, 5 April 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴³⁷ Enab Baladi, *Syrian refugees in Turkey allowed to head home for Eid: a right or a pretext for deportation*, 29 July 2021; Syria Direct, *Cancellation of Eid visits to Syria a 'turning point' in Turkey's refugee policy*, 27 April 2022; Enab Baladi, *Syrians' hopes for "Eid visit" clash with costly alternatives*, 5 April 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

¹⁴³⁸ The following ten provinces were involved: Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Gaziantep, Malatya, Kilis, Osmaniye, Diyarbakır, Adana, Adıyaman en Şanlıurfa; Al Jazeera, *Syrian refugees return home from Turkey after quake devastation*, 16 February 2023.

months.¹⁴³⁹ Under these arrangements, the deadline for their return to Türkiye was initially set at 15 September 2023.¹⁴⁴⁰ In August 2023, the Turkish Department of Migration Management (PMM) announced that this deadline had been extended by three months.¹⁴⁴¹ According to various sources, between 65,000 and 70,000 people had taken advantage of this scheme. Most had subsequently returned to Türkiye.¹⁴⁴²

Lebanon had no arrangements allowing Syrian refugees and asylum seekers residing in the country to return to Syria temporarily. If they returned to Syria temporarily, they were not allowed to return to Lebanon. They could be barred from entering the country unless they met the standard Lebanese entry and visa requirements.¹⁴⁴³ Syrians living in Lebanon with a residence permit were able to return to Syria for visits.¹⁴⁴⁴

Jordan also had no arrangements allowing Syrian refugees and asylum seekers residing in the country to return to Syria temporarily. If they returned to Syria temporarily, they would not be allowed to return to Jordan unless they met the standard Jordanian entry and visa requirements.¹⁴⁴⁵ Syrians residing in Jordan with a residence permit were able to return to Syria for visits. To do so, they needed permission from the Jordanian Ministry of the Interior.¹⁴⁴⁶

In federal Iraq, this would result in Syrian refugees and asylum seekers registered with the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior having their status revoked if they were to return to Syria, even for a short visit. Syrians who held a residence permit and who were not asylum seekers or refugees were permitted to return to Syria under Act No. 76 of 2017. In Iraqi Kurdistan, asylum seekers with an identity card could apply for an exit visa to travel for short or long periods, including a return to Syria. Requirements for this application included approval from the internal security forces (*Asayish*). Depending on the outcome, the identity card could be kept by the Iraqi authorities until their return. Syrians with other types of residence permits in Iraqi Kurdistan were also able to apply for a short-term exit permit.¹⁴⁴⁷

7.19 Return from opposition-held territory to the government-controlled area

Syrians returning from abroad to the government-controlled area, from areas that belonged (or had previously belonged) to the armed opposition, were required to initiate an individual reconciliation process upon their return. According to one source, they were usually summoned by an intelligence service for interrogation a few days after their return.¹⁴⁴⁸ One source reported that people from the provinces of Idlib and Suweida – which had been the scene of unrest during the reporting period – were regarded as actual or potential opponents.¹⁴⁴⁹ Another source cited the provinces of Hama, Daraa and Quneitra, as well as several districts of the city of Aleppo, as examples of areas not under government control (see Section 7.15).¹⁴⁵⁰

¹⁴³⁹ MEE, *Turkey earthquake: Syrians in hard-hit areas head home after devastation*, 16 February 2023.

¹⁴⁴⁰ DIS, *Türkiye. Syrians in Türkiye. The Temporary Protection Regulation and its implementation*, 8 October 2023, p. 40.

¹⁴⁴¹ UNHCR, *Türkiye. Announcements*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024.

¹⁴⁴² DIS, *Türkiye. Syrians in Türkiye. The Temporary Protection Regulation and its implementation*, 8 October 2023, p. 40; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

¹⁴⁴³ UNHCR, *Lebanon. Detention and deportation*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; UNHCR, *Lebanon. Legal residency*, [URL](#), accessed 13 December 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 90.

¹⁴⁴⁵ Confidential source, November 2024.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 89; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴⁵⁰ Confidential source, September 2024.

According to multiple sources, Syrian authorities viewed returning Kurds and Arabs from the DAANES region primarily through the lens of suspected opposition involvement rather than ethnic identity. Upon return, what mattered more was whether an individual was on one of the lists of wanted persons and any ties they might have to the Syrian government.¹⁴⁵¹ Additional information on individual reconciliation is provided in Sections 6.2.1 and 7.10.

7.20 Return to the original places of residence

Many Syrians who returned home faced economic difficulties.¹⁴⁵² For example, they struggled to find work due to discrimination and a lack of job opportunities.¹⁴⁵³ They did not always have the right connections or financial resources. Many also discovered upon their return that their homes and farms had been destroyed and that they no longer had any means of support.¹⁴⁵⁴ Houses, flats and other property belonging to Syrians who had left the country were often destroyed, looted or appropriated by armed groups, particularly in areas formerly held by the opposition.¹⁴⁵⁵ In some cases, neighbours or internally displaced persons had moved into the properties and/or the properties had been sold at auction for low prices.¹⁴⁵⁶

There were no clear government procedures or offices to facilitate property claims. Since 2012, the Syrian authorities have enacted legislation that has made it difficult for Syrians to reclaim their homes following a prolonged absence. For example, in 2018, the Syrian authorities passed legislation designating specific areas for reconstruction. If homeowners in the designated areas were unable to provide proof of ownership within a year, the land or property would be transferred to the local authorities. Even when documents had been provided, the local authorities proceeded with the expropriation in some cases.¹⁴⁵⁷ Many Syrians who had returned no longer had intact property deeds or identity documents.¹⁴⁵⁸ In many cases, they

¹⁴⁵¹ Confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024; confidential source, October 2024

¹⁴⁵² WHO, *Fleeing conflict twice, a family returns to northwest Syria in search of safety*, 25 November 2024.

¹⁴⁵³ Pax, *Syrië veilig? Misleidend en een cynisch voorwendsel*, 10 September 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 3; Syria Direct, *No return to Yarmouk for Syrian-Palestinians fleeing Lebanon*, 25 November 2024; Enab Baladi, *Syria disowns its children. Lebanon displaced set adrift in Syria*, 21 November 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, October 2024.

¹⁴⁵⁴ OHCHR, *Statement by Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. 56th Session of the UN Human Rights Council*, 3 July 2024; confidential source, December 2024.

¹⁴⁵⁵ The Syria Report, *Some displaced residents allowed to return to new neighbourhoods in Al-Hajar Al-Aswad*, 6 June 2023; MEI, *Amid calls for refugee returns, Assad's property grab continues*, 20 June 2023; The Syria Report, *Bribes, security services, major obstacle to return in Al-Tadhamon*, 14 November 2023; The Day After, *Violating the HLP rights post the trilogy (siege – destruction – displacement)*, 31 January 2024; HRW, *"Everything is by the power of the weapon". Abuses and impunity in Turkish-occupied northern Syria*, 29 February 2024; The New Arab, *Mass Syria regime looting of homes revealed in explosive new report*, 23 May 2024; HRW, *Türkiye's troubling embrace of Syrian groups accused of grave crimes*, 30 July 2024; ISPI, *The illusion of safe zones in Syria*, 8 August 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Protests in al-Bukamal for removal IRGC's 47th regiment HQ*, 19 September 2024; STJ, *"My entire life savings vanished overnight". Housing, land, and property rights violations in "Peace Spring" strip*, October 2024; Enab Baladi, *Syria disowns its children. Lebanon displaced set adrift in Syria*, 21 November 2024; confidential source, July 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

¹⁴⁵⁶ The Syria Report, *Regime tallies IDP properties in Idlib and Hama for auction*, 22 June 2021; The Syria Report, *In a first, Idlib governate offers absentee-owned olive, almond and fig orchards for public auction*, 6 September 2023; USDOS, *Syria 2023 Human Rights Report*, 23 April 2024, p. 31; SOHR, *Idlib. Regime's government announces public auctions for investment in farmlands and properties belonging to displaced people*, 8 September 2024; confidential source, September 2024.

¹⁴⁵⁷ The Guardian, *Millions of Syrian refugees face fight to reclaim homes, says human rights group*, 25 May 2023; L'Orient Today, *What risks do Syrians returning home face?*, 17 May 2024; SNHR, *The Syrian regime is using provisional seizure of assets as an instrument of collective punishment*, 16 July 2024; HRW, *Syria: Mass unlawful asset freezes*, 18 July 2024; Syria Direct, *Displaced Syrian women grapple with loss of real estate ownership*, 14 November 2024.

¹⁴⁵⁸ The Syria Report, *Some displaced residents allowed to return to new neighbourhoods in Al-Hajar Al-Aswad*, 6 June 2023; Syria Direct, *Displaced Syrian women grapple with loss of real estate ownership*, 14 November 2024; confidential source, September 2024; confidential source, November 2024.

were also unable to obtain supporting documents, as land registers had been damaged or were missing, and/or the staff responsible for them had fled.¹⁴⁵⁹

The Assad government generally provided little or no shelter, assistance with home repairs or other support (financial or otherwise). Returning Syrians could also not expect any assistance from the authorities if their homes had been seized by another party.¹⁴⁶⁰ Returnees from Syria who were looking for a place to live were faced with high rents, forcing them to seek accommodation with relatives, with friends or in displacement camps.¹⁴⁶¹

In terms of education and healthcare, returning Syrians faced overcrowded classrooms and a shortage of affordable medicines.¹⁴⁶²

¹⁴⁵⁹ Syria Direct, *Seized properties sold 'dirt cheap' in Afrin*, 25 July 2023; confidential source, November 2024.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria*, 7 August 2023, p. 84; The Syria Report, *Syria shelters Lebanese refugees, leaving Syrian returnees on their own*, 22 October 2024; SNHR, *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon*, 29 October 2024, p. 9; Enab Baladi, *Syria disowns its children. Lebanon displaced set adrift in Syria*, 21 November 2024.

¹⁴⁶¹ The Syria Report, *High demand for rentals in opposition-controlled Northwest Syria*, 3 July 2024; Enab Baladi, *House rents rise by 70% in Idlib in one year*, 25 September 2024; The Syrian Observer, *Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon flock to areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration*, 4 October 2024; Enab Baladi, *Syria disowns its children. Lebanon displaced set adrift in Syria*, 21 November 2024; confidential source, December 2024.

¹⁴⁶² UNHCR, *UNHCR Syria. Emergency response brief*, 17 November 2024, p. 3; Enab Baladi, *Syria disowns its children. Lebanon displaced set adrift in Syria*, 21 November 2024.

8 Appendices

8.1 List of abbreviations used

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
ALF	Afrin Liberation Forces
GNP	Gross National Product
COI	Country of Origin Information
DAANES	Democratic Autonomous Administration of Northeast Syria
DMC	Deir ez-Zor Military Council
EU	European Union
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
FPV	First-person view
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HTS	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (Organisation for the Liberation of the Levant)
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IDF	Israel Defense Forces
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IED	Improvised Explosive Devices
IEP	Institute for Economics & Peace
INSO	International NGO Safety Organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham
KNC	Kurdish National Council
LDF	Local Defense Forces
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other diverse identities
NDF	National Defense Forces
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSES	Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces
PMM	Presidency of Migration Management
PYD	Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (Democratic Union Party)
RSF	Reporters sans frontières (Reporters without Borders)
SAA	Syrian Arab Army
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SDC	Syrian Democratic Council
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SIG	Syrian Interim Government
SJAC	Syria Justice and Accountability Centre
SNA	Syrian National Army
SNHR	Syrian Network for Human Rights
SOHR	Syrian Observatory for Human Rights
SSG	Syrian Salvation Government
SYP	Syrian Pound
Timep	Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNCOI	Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

UNDOF	United Nations Disengagement Observer Force
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
USD	US dollars
UN	United Nations
UNSC	UN Security Council
US	United States
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
PSL	Personal Status Law
YPG	Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Protection Units)
YPJ	Yekîneyên Parastina Jinê (Women's Protection Units)

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- *Syria raises electricity prices by up to 500%*, 21 February 2024.
- *New Syria intelligence appointments benefit Russia at expense of Iran*, 11 May 2024.
- *Kurdish militia in Syria forcibly recruited over 200 children in 2023, UN report reveals*, 13 June 2024.
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- *In Suwayda, 'organized gangs' serve as an arm of Damascus and violence threatens to ignite interfamilial conflicts*, 15 June 2022.
- *Community in the collapse: Syrian LGBTQ+ refugees carve out their own havens in Beirut*, 31 January 2023.
- *'Strangers in our own homes': A waning Assyrian community holds on in northeastern Syria*, 21 March 2023.
- *Yazidis' long struggle against landlessness and discrimination in rural Hasakah*, 4 April 2023.
- *Darayya's al-Khalij neighborhood 'unoccupied, destroyed houses' as hopes of return fade seven years into regime control*, 2 June 2023.
- *Seized properties sold 'dirt cheap' in Afrin*, 25 July 2023.
- *Hasakah residents ration as 'water war' persists*, 24 October 2023.
- *Women returning from al-Hol face an uphill battle in Raqqa*, 13 November 2023.
- *HTS looks to Idlib's Christians and Druze to whitewash violations*, 11 December 2023.
- *'Worst since the beginning of the 20th century': What does 2024 hold for Syria's economy in freefall?*, 28 December 2023.
- *Deported Syrians struggle to wrap up loose ends in Turkey*, 10 January 2024.
- *'Ambiguous relationship': Where does Latakia stand on Suwayda's movement?*, 26 January 2024.
- *'Today Heba, tomorrow us': Feminist activist's hanging casts long shadow*, 2 March 2024.
- *Syrian students' futures hostage to brokers and state employee bribes*, 25 March 2024.
- *How Suwayda became a drug-smuggling hub*, 26 March 2024.
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- *Daraa residents turn to clan reconciliation over the court system*, 4 April 2024.
- *A generation left behind: Poverty puts northwestern Syria's children to work*, 9 April 2024.
- *Syrians at a loss after Erbil stops issuing visas*, 22 April 2024.
- *'A government job is a burden': Syrian regime institutions bleed staff*, 21 May 2024.
- *Wheat price 'disaster' in northeastern Syria spells trouble for next season*, 6 June 2024.
- *Daraa communities' foot the bill for public education*, 10 June 2024.
- *The war over AANES municipal elections in northeastern Syria*, 11 June 2024.
- *Hostages and siege: Daraa frees detainees by any means necessary*, 13 June 2024.
- *Suwayda sidesteps a 'spiral of violence' following clashes*, 26 June 2024.

- *Restrictions on local journalists in northeastern Syria multiply*, 4 July 2024.
- *Anti-Syrian riots serve Ankara's goal of refugee returns*, 5 July 2024.
- *The short arm of the law: Daraa police absent or constrained*, 11 July 2024.
- *As Ankara and Damascus inch closer, northeastern Syria stands to lose*, 16 July 2024.
- *Murhij al-Jarmani assassinated: A 'turning point' for Suwayda's uprising?*, 19 July 2024.
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- *'We feel the loss': Afrin Kurds mourn Maydanki's forest*, 14 August 2024.
- *Unable to afford cooking gas, Hasakah residents turn to a 'deadly' alternative*, 27 August 2024.
- *'Exacerbating the crisis, not managing it': Basic services scarce in Moadamiyat al-Sham*, 2 September 2024.
- *New residency requirements leave Syrians in Egypt in limbo*, 5 September 2024.
- *'Liberated Saydnaya': Enforced disappearance and extortion in Syrian National Army prisons*, 19 September 2024.
- *Will Iran's proxies in Syria mobilize in support of Hezbollah?*, 3 October 2024.
- *Regime and AANES conscription traps Syrians in Lebanon as thousands flee*, 8 October 2024.
- *As Israel strikes Iran-linked figures in Damascus, civilians pay the price*, 10 October 2024.
- *Displaced Syrian women grapple with loss of real estate ownership*, 14 November 2024.
- *No return to Yarmouk for Syrian-Palestinians fleeing Lebanon*, 25 November 2024.

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- *Human rights violations in Syria. April 2024*, 20 May 2024.
- *Human Rights violations in Syria. May 2024*, 20 June 2024.
- *Human rights violations in Syria. August 2024*, 10 October 2024.
- *Human rights violations in Syria. September 2024*, 21 October 2024.

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- *Syria: October 29-November 5, 2024*, 5 November 2024.

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- *Fading vision of safe Syria*, 29 May 2024.

Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)

- *Syrian regime arrested a civilian at Damascus International Airport in Damascus city on October 1*, 3 October 2022.
- *Breaking down the amnesty decrees issued by the Syrian regime between March 2011 and October 2022*, 16 November 2022.
- *1,057 civilians, including 251 children, 94 women, and 133 victims who died due to torture, were documented killed in Syria, in 2022*, 1 January 2023;

- *At least 2,221 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in Syria in 2022, 3 January 2023.*
- *SDF arrests a media worker in Hasaka governorate, August 15, 2023, 17 August 2023.*
- *The Syrian regime is responding to the August 2023 protests with the same savage mindset with which it reacted to the protests of March 2011, 26 August 2023.*
- *161 civilians, including 34 children, 44 women, and two individuals who died due to torture documented killed in Syria in October 2023, 1 November 2023.*
- *No fewer than 73 attacks on vital civilian facilities by Syrian-Russian alliance forces in northwestern Syria since October 5, 2023, 14 November 2023.*
- *Amnesty decree no. 36 of 2023 excludes political prisoners, 21 November 2023.*
- *SNHR's 12th annual report on violations against females in Syria, 25 November 2023.*
- *Boy named Hanan Hassan abducted by SDF in Aleppo, November 22, 2024, 25 November 2024.*
- *SNHR, Syrian regime forces bombard Shuhada Afis School in E. Idlib, injuring a teacher and three children, 2 December 2023.*
- *1,032 civilian deaths, including 181 children and 150 women, as well as 57 deaths due to torture, documented in 2023, 1 January 2024.*
- *At least 2,317 arbitrary arrests/detentions documented in 2023, including of 129 children and 87 women, with 232 documented in December alone, 2 January 2024.*
- *Three civilians killed, incl. a woman and a boy, in an HTS bombardment on W. Aleppo, January 1, 2024, 3 January 2024.*
- *SNHR's 13th annual report: most notable human rights violations in Syria in 2023, 23 January 2024.*
- *Two children named Walid al-Sfouq and Mohammad al-Dleim killed by war remnants of unidentified source in E. Rural Damascus, January 25, 2024, 28 January 2024.*
- *Girl named Maya Shaker abducted by the SDF in Hasaka, January 20, 2024, 29 January 2024.*
- *Girl named Samira Ali abducted by the SDF in Aleppo, January 30, 2024, 31 January 2024.*
- *Three months after the ICJ's ruling, the Syrian regime has blatantly breached it, killing more Syrian citizens under torture, 22 February 2024.*
- *SNHR condemns the assassination of activist Heba Suhaib Haj Aref in eastern rural Aleppo governorate, 28 February 2024.*
- *No fewer than 194 cases of arbitrary arrest documented in February 2024, including of seven children and five women, 2 March 2024.*
- *Distress call to end the suffering of about 2,000 IDP families in al-Shahba area in rural Aleppo who have been struggling for weeks with no access to drinking water, 4 March 2024.*
- *Most notable human rights violations in Syria in March 2024: Violations recorded across all areas of control are further evidence that Syria in its entirety is unsafe for the return of refugees, 8 April 2024.*
- *68 civilian deaths, including 13 children and three women as well as nine deaths due to torture, documented in Syria in April 2024, 1 May 2024.*
- *No fewer than 212 cases of arbitrary detention cases recorded in April 2024, including of 12 children and seven women, 2 May 2024.*

- *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces' detention of lawyer Thamer al-Talla and his subsequent death in a regime detention center due to medical negligence, 10 May 2024.*
- *Man named Mahmoud Hasana dies on May 9, 2024, of wounds sustained on May 1 from a regime gunshot near the Syrian-Lebanese borders, 13 May 2024.*
- *Man named Ayman Abdul Kafi shot dead by SDF personnel in E. Aleppo, May 21, 2024, 24 May 2024.*
- *At least 228 cases of arbitrary detention cases recorded in May 2024, including of 13 children and four women, 3 June 2024.*
- *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces' arrest of two women and two boys in Damascus City on June 2, 2024, 5 June 2024.*
- *SNHR, SDF arrests a female media worker with the Kurdish National Council and a Yekiti Party member in Hasaka, June 10, 2024, 11 June 2024.*
- *Girl named Amani Sheikh Khalil abducted by the SDF in Aleppo governorate, June 6, 2024, 13 June 2024.*
- *The Syrian regime's law no. 19 of 2024 on establishing a media ministry blatantly violates freedom of media, opinion, and expression, 13 June 2024.*
- *In Assad's Syria, arbitrary detention is a codeword for torture, 18 June 2024.*
- *On World Refugee Day. At least 4,714 returning refugees & IDPs have been arbitrarily arrested by Syrian regime forces, 20 June 2024.*
- *On the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture: SNHR has documented the death of 15,383 Syrians under torture since March 2011, with 157,287 still detained and/or forcibly disappeared, 27 June 2024.*
- *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces for detention, fatal torture of a refugee forcibly deported from Lebanon, 28 June 2024.*
- *429 civilian deaths, including 65 children and 38 women, as well as 53 deaths due to torture, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, 1 July 2024.*
- *At least 1,236 arbitrary detentions including of 56 children and 30 women, documented in Syria in the first half of 2024, with 217 Recorded in June, 3 July 2024.*
- *Three civilians, including a child, killed in a ground regime attack in W. Rural Damascus, July 2, 2024, 3 July 2024.*
- *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces for detention, fatal torture of a refugee forcibly deported from Lebanon who died in a Damascus hospital, 9 July 2024.*
- *The Syrian regime is using provisional seizure of assets as an instrument of collective punishment, 16 July 2024.*
- *The Syrian regime's 2024 parliamentary elections are illegitimate and predetermined by the regime's security apparatus, 24 July 2024.*
- *At least 209 arbitrary detentions recorded in July 2024, including of 14 children and three women, 2 August 2024.*
- *Girl named Mariam Ibou abducted by the SDF in Aleppo governate, August 2, 2024, 5 August 2024.*
- *SDF arrests multiple civilians in E. Aleppo, August 6, 2024, 7 August 2024.*
- *SNHR condemns Syrian regime forces' detention, fatal torture of a refugee forcibly deported from Türkiye, 9 August 2024.*
- *Man killed, two others injured by a landmine of unidentified source in E. Rural Damascus, August 11, 2024, 14 August 2024.*
- *In the nine months since the ICJ issued its order, the Syrian regime has killed at least 43 individuals due to torture, and arrested at least 756 civilians, including nine children and 24 women, 15 August 2024.*

- *SNHR condemns SNA's detention of media worker Bakr Qasim in Aleppo governorate on August 26, 2024, 28 August 2024.*
- *SNHR's 13th annual report on enforced disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Disappeared: No end in sight for the crime of enforced disappearance in Syria, 30 August 2024.*
- *Boy named Akid Muslim abducted by the SDF in E. Aleppo, August 28, 2024, 30 August 2024.*
- *57 civilian deaths, including 13 children and six women, as well as six deaths due to torture, documented in Syria in August 2024, 1 September 2024.*
- *At least 214 arbitrary detentions recorded in August 2024, including of 13 children and seven women, 2 September 2024.*
- *Three children injured by a landmine of unidentified source in N. Aleppo, August 31, 2024, 2 September 2024.*
- *Syrian regime forces bomb al-Haj Akid al-Aswad Mosque in N. Idlib, September 3, 2024, 6 September 2024.*
- *SNHR condemns the Syrian regime's detention of three activists, including two Alawites, in Latakia governorate over voicing criticism of the regime, 17 September 2024.*
- *At least 206 arbitrary detentions recorded in September 2024, 2 October 2024.*
- *Man named Abdul Aziz al-Dahik dies due to torture in regime detention centers, September 30, 2024, 3 October 2024.*
- *Three men arrested by Syrian regime forces after returning from Lebanon, October 9, 2024, 11 October 2024.*
- *SNHR Condemns Israeli Occupation of Syrian Lands in Quneitra in Syrian Golan Since September 15, 2024, 15 October 2024.*
- *Woman injured, mosque damaged in a ground regime attack on E. Idlib, October 19, 2024, 22 October 2024.*
- *Investigation proving two Russian forces' attacks in Idlib. A massacre in which 11 civilians were killed & the destruction of a power station depriving thousands of civilians of water, 23 October 2024.*
- *A dreadful homecoming: widespread human rights violations against Syrian refugees returning from Lebanon, 29 October 2024.*
- *89 civilian deaths, recorded in Syria in October 2024, including of 25 children and 12 women, with four, including a child, dying due to torture, 1 November 2024.*
- *At least 213 arbitrary detentions recorded in October 2024, 4 November 2024.*
- *Syrian regime forces bomb two schools in W. Aleppo, 9 November 2024.*
- *In the one year since the ICJ issued its order, the Syrian regime has killed at least 84 individuals through torture, and arrested at least 1,161 civilians, including 18 children and 43 women, 15 November 2024.*
- *71 civilian deaths, documented in Syria in November 2024, including of 20 children and six women, with three dying due to torture, 1 December 2024.*
- *At least 196 arbitrary detentions recorded in November 2024, 3 December 2024.*

Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR)

- *SOHR exclusive. Regime security services arrest and blackmail Syrians returning voluntarily to the "safe homeland", 12 June 2022.*
- *Lowest annual death toll ever. 3,825 people killed across Syria in 2022, 31 December 2022.*

- *Accused of expressing his political opinion. Regime security services arbitrarily arrest civilian at Damascus international airport, 27 January 2023.*
- *Amid removing checkpoints in different provinces. Regime forces remove the largest checkpoint in Damascus, 29 September 2023.*
- *Security chaos. Civilian killed in regime-held areas in centre of Al-Suwaydaa City, 22 October 2023.*
- *Ongoing security chaos. Members of gang affiliated with "Shuja'a Al-Ali" kidnap young man near Syria-Lebanon border, 8 November 2023.*
- *Damascus airport in service after month-long hiatus, 26 November 2023.*
- *Highest annual death toll in three years. 4,361 people killed across Syria in 2023, 31 December 2023.*
- *Regime-controlled areas in 2023. Nearly 2,625 fatalities in acts of violence...alarming increase in crime rate...deteriorating security situation...chronic stifling crises, 4 January 2024.*
- *Monthly death toll. 143 civilians among 359 people killed in January 2024, 1 February 2024.*
- *Contrary to Ankara's statements about voluntarily return of 625,000 Syrian refugees: Turkish authorities continue forcible deportation of Syrians, 16 February 2024.*
- *Monthly death toll. 142 civilians among 405 people killed in February 2024, 1 March 2024.*
- *For "refusing to pay zakat". ISIS cells threaten a civilian with a grenade in Deir Ezzor countryside, 7 March 2024.*
- *Ongoing security chaos. Member of criminal security service shot dead in the capital Damascus, 16 March 2024.*
- *Turkish occupation of Afrin six years on. Over 8,700 kidnappings and arbitrary arrests and over 4,000 other violations by Turkish forces and their proxy factions, 17 March 2024.*
- *Monthly death toll. 204 civilians among 514 people killed in March 2024, 1 April 2024.*
- *Under pressure from Turkey. "Al-Shahba'a Gathering" faction announces its dissolution and the integration of its military formations into "Al-Jabha Al-Shamiyyah", 5 April 2024.*
- *SOHR booklet, comprising 13 reports with infographics, summarises all key developments in Syria in March 2024, 8 April 2024.*
- *New assassination. Unidentified gunmen shoot officer and member of state security branch dead in Douma city, 17 April 2024.*
- *Amid growing public panic. Regime forces besiege Talbiseh city and start military fortifications in and around the city, 24 April 2024.*
- *After detention of officers. Regime forces bring military reinforcements to Al-Suwaydaa, 25 April 2024.*
- *In response to kidnapping of retired policeman. Passenger bus kidnapped on Homs-Talbisah road, 29 April 2024.*
- *Monthly death toll. 149 civilians among 376 people killed in April 2024, 1 May 2024.*
- *Military escalation. HTS attacks the 46th Regiment frontline and regime kamikaze drone attacks tractor in western Aleppo, 21 May 2024.*
- *Military escalation. Turkish ground forces shell two villages in Kurdish areas in Aleppo countryside, 26 May 2024.*
- *Monthly death toll. 100 civilians among 254 people killed in May 2024, 1 June 2024.*
- *Al-Suwaydaa. Armed gang kidnaps child and another gang attempts to kidnap another child, 10 June 2024.*

- *In two separate incidents in less than 24 hours. Six children killed in explosion of war remnants in regime-held areas, 19 June 2024.*
- *Since early 2024. SOHR documents 113 kidnappings with Homs topping the list, 19 June 2024.*
- *Despite its continuation for about 20 days with complete absence of Iranian militias: Combing campaign in Syrian desert fails to kill any "ISIS" member, 23 June 2024.*
- *After attacks on security headquarters. Regime forces bring military reinforcements to Al-Suwaydaa, 25 June 2024.*
- *Under public pressure. Kidnapping gang releases young man and hands him over to dignitaries of Talbisah city, 25 June 2024.*
- *Government plant to restore "smart card" subsidization in Syria, 25 June 2024.*
- *After having returned from Lebanon. Young man dies under torture in notorious "Palestine branch" prison in Damascus, 26 June 2024.*
- *To pressure regime forces: Local people siege security building in Inkhil and military checkpoint near Jassem in Daraa, 30 June 2024.*
- *Monthly death toll. 138 civilians among 332 people killed in June 2024, 1 July 2024.*
- *SOHR booklet, comprising 13 reports with infographics, summarises all key developments in Syria in June 2024, July 2024.*
- *After security measures against her brother and her husband; Sources suggest that Luna Al-Shibl may have been subjected to assassination attempt, 3 July 2024.*
- *Amid concerns about storming Kanaker town. Regime forces send military reinforcement to checkpoints in Rif Dimashq, 4 July 2024.*
- *June 2024. SOHR documents 375 arrests and kidnappings across Syria, 6 July 2024.*
- *Third targeting since beginning of year. Israeli airstrikes target two buildings near Baniyas city, 9 July 2024.*
- *Demanding ransoms in return for their release. Turkish-backed factions detain refugees deported forcibly from Turkey, 11 July 2024.*
- *Accused of "practicing witchcraft". Woman hanged to death in her house in Daraa countryside, 12 July 2024.*
- *Tribal infighting. Young man killed in southern Al-Hasakah, 12 July 2024.*
- *Amid regime forces' failure to control security situation. 13 people killed in 14 incidents of security disorder in Daraa since early July, 12 July 2024.*
- *Al-Quneitra. Israeli forces cross border with occupied Syrian Golan and arrest civilian in southern countryside, 19 July 2024.*
- *Following infiltration operation by "Afrin Liberation Forces". Three members of Turkish-backed faction killed in northern countryside of Aleppo, 21 July 2024.*
- *In two security operations. "SDF" arrests seven people accused of belonging to "ISIS" in eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor, 31 July 2024.*
- *Monthly death toll. 153 civilians among 257 people killed in July 2024, 1 August 2024.*
- *Guided missile. Regime forces kill and injure five civilians in Sahl Al-Ghab, 6 August 2024.*
- *Tribal clashes. Woman killed and five injured in Deir Ezzor countryside, 6 August 2024.*
- *Major mobilization. Regime forces demand the release of 20 prisoners including officers, 11 August 2024.*
- *Tartous. Girl kidnapped and gang demands 500,000,000 Syrian liras for her release, 11 August 2024.*

- *Aleppo. Turkish-backed factions impose royalties and threaten Kurdish landowners who clung to them and refuse to migrate from Afrin, 13 August 2024.*
- *After four years of detention. Young man dies under torture in regime's prisons, 14 August 2024.*
- *War remnants. Man killed and two women injured in explosion of landmine in eastern countryside of Hama, 19 August 2024.*
- *Demanding huge amounts of money. Military intelligence blackmail people returning to Syria, 20 August 2024.*
- *Leaving three dead and wounded. HTS-backed General Security Service carries out security operation targeting ISIS cell in Idlib countryside, 25 August 2024.*
- *Monthly death toll. 154 civilians among 298 people killed in August 2024, 1 September 2024.*
- *August 2024. SOHR documents 280 arrests and kidnappings across Syria, 6 September 2024.*
- *After being ambushed by "ISIS" cells. Two persons executed by slaughtering on charged of cooperating with "SDF" intelligence in Al-Raqqah desert, 8 September 2024.*
- *Idlib Regime's government announces public auctions for investment in farmlands and properties belonging to displaced people, 8 September 2024.*
- *New assassination. Regime lieutenant shot dead in Tartous countryside, 10 September 2024.*
- *24 hours after having been kidnapped. Body of young man found dumped near bread bakery in western Daraa countryside, 10 September 2024.*
- *For refusing to stop. Members of "Eighth Brigade" open fire on two people in Daraa countryside, 10 September 2024.*
- *Despite settling his status. Deportee from Turkey die under torture in regime detention centre in Aleppo, 11 September 2024.*
- *Due to fuel shortages. Bus drivers' strike in Al-Qamishli hits transport, 14 September 2024.*
- *Participated in recruiting females and children. Female leader in IRGC assassinated in Deir Ezzor, 15 September 2024.*
- *New crime. Civilian killed by a member of "SDF" in Deir Ezzor countryside, 16 September 2024.*
- *Having showed up fraud in People's Assembly elections. Regime security services arrest journalist in Homs, 19 September 2024.*
- *After attacking house with RPG shell | Eighth Brigade attacks group of "regime" in Daraa countryside, 25 September 2024.*
- *Monthly death toll. 138 civilians among 342 people killed in September 2024, 1 October 2024.*
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8.6 Map of Syria with provinces and capitals



Source: Atlas Mapmakers

The boundaries and names on this map and the designations used should not be construed as an endorsement or acceptance thereof by the Kingdom of the Netherlands.