



COI QUERY

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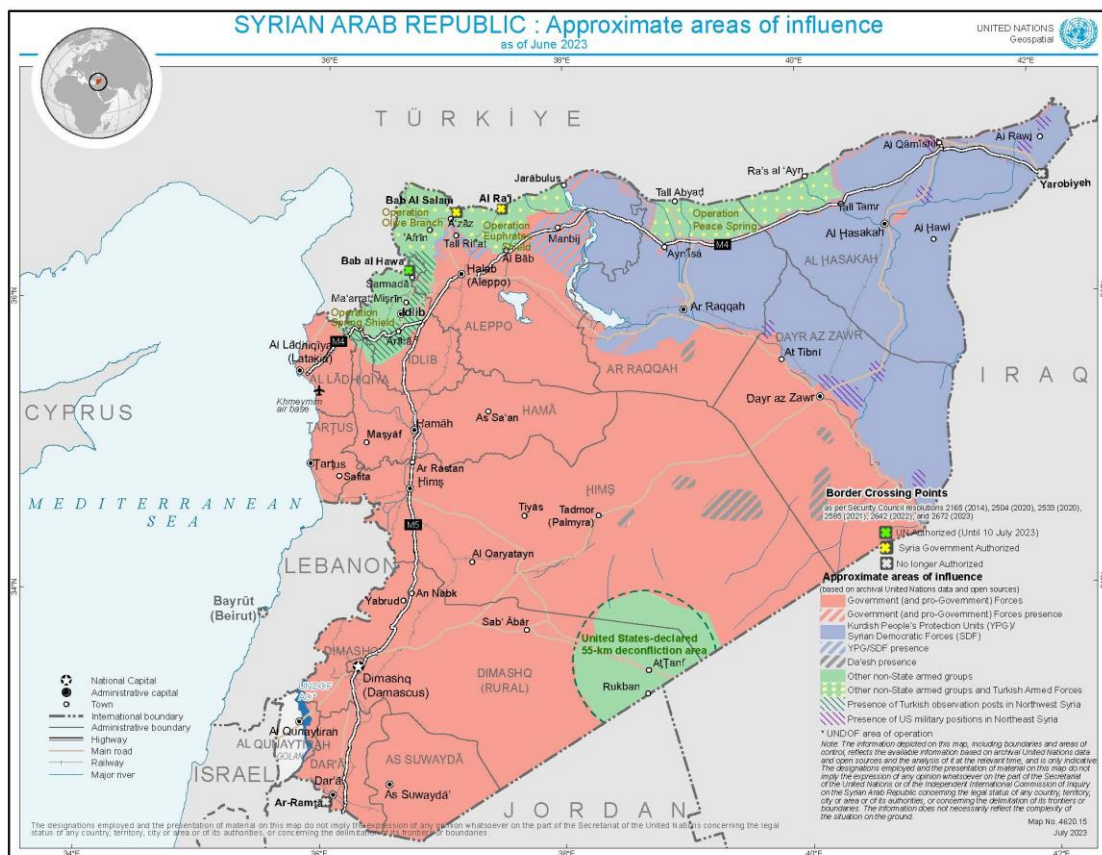
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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Syria

Major human rights, security, and socio-economic developments

1. Territorial control



Map 1: Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2023, © UN Geospatial¹

No significant changes to territorial control were reported during the reference period. A UN map depicting approximative areas of influence in Syria as of June 2023 (see Map 1) provides the same assessment regarding territorial control in Syria as it did in December 2022.²

¹ UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of June 2023, 1 July 2023, [url](#)

² UN Geospatial, Syrian Arab Republic: Approximate areas of influence as of December 2022, January 2023, [url](#)



For a detailed description of territorial control in Syria see section 1.1 of the [EUAA COI report: Syria - Security situation report \(October 2023\)](#).

2. Security situation

North-west Syria

In August and September clashes between Ha'yat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and Government of Syria (GoS) forces were concentrated in southern Idlib governorate, Latakia and western Aleppo governorates,³ as well as Hama countryside.⁴ Tens of combatants and several civilians were among the casualties reported.⁵

On 5 October, a drone strike on the Military College in Homs governorate killed at least 89 people and wounded 277 others, according to authorities. While the attack was not claimed by any group, the GoS blamed it on 'armed terrorist organizations backed by known international parties',⁶ HTS being the main group it suspected.⁷ In the immediate aftermath of the Homs attack, GoS and Russian forces stepped up attacks on the HTS-controlled areas in Idlib and western Aleppo governorates.⁸ GoS and Russian forces used intense ground shelling and airstrikes on opposition-held areas in Idlib and western Aleppo governorates, while HTS and allied groups responded with artillery and suspected drone strikes on targets in Latakia, Aleppo and Hama governorates.⁹ Human Rights Watch documented the use of cluster munitions by the GoS forces in an attack on a town in Idlib governorate which led to civilian casualties.¹⁰ The confrontations in October marked the most significant escalation of hostilities in four years, according to the Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (UNCOI).¹¹ By the end of October, more than 70 people were killed and 349 injured as a result of the hostilities in northwest Syria. The hostilities also led to the displacement of around 120 000 people and damage to infrastructure and services, over

³ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – August 2023, n.d., [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – September 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁴ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – September 2023, 9 October 2023, [url](#)

⁵ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – August 2023, n.d., [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – September 2023, n.d., [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-West Syria – September 2023, 9 October 2023, [url](#)

⁶ Enab Baladi, An Iranian play directed by Damascus. Homs military college attack: Assad's chance to re-manage own crises, 12 October 2023, [url](#); France24, Syria buries dead after military academy drone attack, 6 October 2023, [url](#)

⁷ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – October 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Statement by Paulo Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 24 October 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – October 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – October 2023, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁰ HRW, Northwest Syria: Government Uses Cluster Munitions, 5 November 2023, [url](#)

¹¹ UN Human Rights Council, Statement by Paulo Pinheiro, Chair of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 24 October 2023, [url](#)

40 health facilities, 27 schools and 20 water systems being affected.¹² The hostilities in north-west Syria continued through November, albeit at a lower intensity.¹³

North-east Syria

In September, drone strikes attributed to Türkiye killed members of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Hasaka governorate and Manbij (Aleppo governorate). The same month, SDF attacks against Turkish-backed fighters in Aleppo governorate led to at least 13 fighters killed.¹⁴

Between 19-23 September, infighting between GoS forces and the National Defence Forces (NDF) took place in neighbourhoods of Hasaka city,¹⁵ leading to several civilian casualties who were caught in the crossfire, damage to infrastructure and temporary displacement.¹⁶

Following a PKK attack in Ankara (Türkiye) on 1 October 2023,¹⁷ Türkiye declared all YPG and PKK infrastructure in Syria as valid military targets¹⁸ and began a campaign of drone strikes which hit more than 150 locations in Hasaka, Raqqa and Aleppo governorates between 5-10 October.¹⁹ Most attacks were concentrated on the border areas in northern Hasaka governorate²⁰ as well as on Hasaka city, Qamishli and Tal Tamer.²¹ The strikes reportedly killed more than 50 people, although the number of civilians was not specified.²² The attacks also targeted water and energy infrastructure,²³ as well as oil installations in Hasaka governorate, rendering at least 18 water pumping stations and 11 power stations non-operational and affecting an estimated 4.3 million civilians.²⁴ In November, intermittent strikes by Türkiye on SDF and PKK targets continued at a lower intensity.²⁵

¹² UNOCHA, North-West Syria. Situation Report, updated on 2 November 2023, [url](#)

¹³ UNOCHA, Ms. Edem Wosornu, OCHA Director of Operations and Advocacy, on Behalf of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Martin Griffiths - Briefing to the Security Council on the Situation in Syria, 28 November 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – September 2023, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁵ NPA, Clashes between government forces, NDF erupt in Syria's Hasakah, 20 September 2023, [url](#); Rudaw, One dead in infighting between regime elements in Hasaka: Monitor, 20 September 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update Syrian Arab Republic - Issue 16 / September 2023, 9 November 2023, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁷ Reuters, Turkey says bombers came from Syria, eyes cross-border targets, 4 October 2023, [url](#)

¹⁸ HRW, Northeast Syria: Turkish Strikes Disrupt Water, Electricity, 26 October 2023, [url](#); Reuters, Turkey says bombers came from Syria, eyes cross-border targets, 4 October 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – October 2023, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁹ HRW, Northeast Syria: Turkish Strikes Disrupt Water, Electricity, 26 October 2023, [url](#)

²⁰ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – October 2023, 5 November, [url](#)

²¹ UNOCHA, Ms. Edem Wosornu, OCHA Director of Operations and Advocacy, on behalf of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Martin Griffiths, 30 October 2023, [url](#)

²² International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – October 2023, n.d., [url](#)

²³ UNOCHA, Ms. Edem Wosornu, OCHA Director of Operations and Advocacy, on behalf of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Martin Griffiths, 30 October 2023, [url](#)

²⁴ HRW, Northeast Syria: Turkish Strikes Disrupt Water, Electricity, 26 October 2023, [url](#)

²⁵ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – November 2023, n.d., [url](#)



Since August 2023, clashes between the SDF and Arab tribal fighters – members of the Deir Ez-Zor Military Council, broke out in Deir Ez-Zor governorate after SDF detained the commander and some members of the Military Council.²⁶ Despite mediation from U.S. officials, clashes continued in September in eastern Deir Ez-Zor as tribal forces attacked SDF positions.²⁷ Between end of August and mid-September, the fighting led to the displacement of about 6 500 families and a total of 96 persons dead and 106 injured, according to local sources.²⁸ The number of civilian casualties was not specified. On 27 September, in a briefing to the UN Security Council, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) Director of Operations and Advocacy stated that 23 civilians were reportedly killed and many more injured in late August in the fighting in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, while tens of thousands were displaced as a result.²⁹ On 25 September, the Mehkan water station was damaged as a result of the hostilities, leaving at least 17 000 people without access to safe drinking water.³⁰ Although SDF reestablished control over its territory in Deir Ez-Zor, attacks by Arab tribal groups on its positions were reported to continue in October, leading to casualties among combatants and civilians.³¹ Sporadic attacks by tribal groups against SDF were also reported in November.³² The tribal insurgency against SDF is reportedly receiving support from the GoS and Iran.³³

ISIL activity

Although the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) capabilities in Syria were assessed by the U.S. Department of Defense (USDOD) to remain degraded during the reporting period,³⁴ the group launched attacks against security forces mainly in Deir Ez-Zor, Raqqa and the central desert region in Homs governorate.³⁵ ISIL attacks led at times to civilian casualties³⁶

²⁶ Al Jazeera, Several killed in fighting between SDF and tribesmen in eastern Syria, 30 August 2023, [url](#); Lister, C., A dangerous escalation in Syria's Deir ez-Zor, 30 August 2023, MEI, [url](#)

²⁷ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – September 2023, n.d., [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – September 2023, 6 October 2023, [url](#)

²⁸ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: Deir-ez-Zor Situation Report No. 1 (As of 14 September 2023), 17 September 2023, [url](#)

²⁹ UNOCHA, Ms. Edem Wosornu, OCHA Director of Operations and Advocacy, on behalf of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Martin Griffiths, Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria, 27 September 2023, [url](#)

³⁰ UNOCHA, Ms. Edem Wosornu, OCHA Director of Operations and Advocacy, on behalf of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Martin Griffiths, Briefing to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria, 27 September 2023, [url](#)

³¹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – October 2023, 5 November 2023, [url](#)

³² Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: North-East Syria – November 2023, 4 December 2023, [url](#)

³³ Van Wilgenburg, W., The SDF's Insurgency Challenge in Deir ez-Zor, TWI, 14 November 2023, [url](#); ISW, The Syrian Democratic Forces' Arab Coalition Is Crumbling, Creating Opportunities for ISIS, Iran and Turkey, 15 September 2023, [url](#)

³⁴ USDOD, Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve I Quarterly Report to the United States Congress I July 1, 2023 – September 30, 2023, 9 November 2023, [url](#), p. 11

³⁵ UN Security Council, As Regional Violence Spills over to Syria, Special Envoy, Briefing Security Council, Urges De-escalation, Refocus on Country's Political Process, 30 October 2023, [url](#)

³⁶ Waters, G., ISIS Redux: The Central Syria Insurgency in September 2023, 2 October 2023, [url](#)



and the temporary capture of some GoS positions.³⁷ In November 2023, an ISIL-attributed attack killed at least 34 GoS soldiers and members of the NDF in the desert area of al-Rasafah located between Raqqa, Homs and Deir Ez-Zor governorates.³⁸

Southern Syria

During the reporting period, the number of improvised explosive device (IED) attacks and car bombs targeting GoS forces grew, particularly in Dar'a and Quneitra governorates.³⁹ Targeted killings against civilians, GoS soldiers, intelligence officers and civil representatives, former opposition fighters and drug traffickers were reported across south-west Syria, claiming the lives of over 47 persons between August and October 2023, according to Etana Syria.⁴⁰ Kidnappings for ransom by smuggling gangs, armed groups and GoS forces were reportedly common in southern Syria, at times demanding sums of up to USD 75 000 for the release of those held captive.⁴¹

Impact of Israel-Hamas conflict

Following the eruption of the Israel-Hamas conflict in October 2023, Iran-backed armed groups have attacked U.S. forces in Syria, prompting U.S. response strikes.⁴² U.S. bases in Syria were attacked at least 22 times by drone strikes, improvised missiles and mortar shells. Most attacks were in the countryside of Deir Ez-Zor and Hasaka governorates, as well as on the al-Tanf base near the border with Iraq and Jordan. The attacks led to a contractor dying of a heart attack and 56 U.S. servicemen being injured.⁴³ U.S. forces have carried out retaliatory airstrikes on sites belonging to Iranian-backed armed groups in Deir Ez-Zor governorate.⁴⁴

In October, Iranian-backed groups, including the Lebanese Hezbollah reportedly deployed forces to Quneitra and Dar'a governorates from where they launched rocket attacks at the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.⁴⁵ Israel launched retaliatory missile and airstrikes against GoS

³⁷ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – August 2023, n.d., [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – October 2023, n.d., [url](#)

³⁸ Al Monitor, At least 34 Syrian soldiers killed in suspected ISIS attack as threat surges, 8 November 2023, [url](#)

³⁹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – October 2023, 14 November 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – September 2023, 6 October 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – October 2023, 14 November 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – September 2023, 6 October 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – August 2023, 11 September 2023, [url](#)

⁴¹ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – August 2023, 11 September 2023, [url](#)

⁴² Al-Ahmed, S., Iranian-backed militia attacks on coalition forces threaten to ignite eastern Syria, MEI, 13 November 2023, [url](#); Al Monitor, Four attacks against US troops in Syria hours after strikes on IRGC facilities, 13 November 2023, [url](#)

⁴³ Al-Ahmed, S., Iranian-backed militia attacks on coalition forces threaten to ignite eastern Syria, MEI, 13 November 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁴ Al-Ahmed, S., Iranian-backed militia attacks on coalition forces threaten to ignite eastern Syria, MEI, 13 November 2023, [url](#); Van Wilgenburg, W., The SDF's Insurgency Challenge in Deir ez-Zor, TWI, 14 November 2023, [url](#); Al Monitor, Four attacks against US troops in Syria hours after strikes on IRGC facilities, 13 November 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁵ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – October 2023, 14 November 2023, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – October 2023, n.d., [url](#)



and Iranian-linked targets in Quneitra,⁴⁶ Dar'a,⁴⁷ Damascus⁴⁸ and Aleppo governorates,⁴⁹ which led to reported casualties among soldiers⁵⁰ and civilians.⁵¹ In mid-October, reported airstrikes by Israel on Damascus and Aleppo international airports, repeatedly put them temporarily out of service.⁵² On 26 November, GoS authorities claimed that another Israeli strike put Damascus airport out of service, forcing incoming flights to be directed to airports in Latakia and Aleppo.⁵³

Conflict data

According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) dataset,⁵⁴ between 1 August 2023 and 30 November 2023 there were 4 381 security incidents recorded in Syria: 1 099 were coded as battles, 2 576 as explosions/remote violence, and 706 as violence against civilians.⁵⁵

⁴⁶ Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – October 2023, 14 November 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷ ACLED, Middle East Regional Overview: The Regional Implications of the Israel-Gaza Conflict, 8 November 2023, [url](#); France24, Israel strikes kill 8 Syria troops, hit Aleppo airport: defence ministry, 25 October 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Israel air raids kill eight soldiers in southern Syria: State media, 25 October 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁸ Al Monitor, Suspected Israeli strikes in Syria target Hezbollah, Iran-backed groups, 17 November 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁹ France24, Israel strikes kill 8 Syria troops, hit Aleppo airport: defence ministry, 25 October 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Israel air raids kill eight soldiers in southern Syria: State media, 25 October 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁰ France24, Israel strikes kill 8 Syria troops, hit Aleppo airport: defence ministry, 25 October 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Israel air raids kill eight soldiers in southern Syria: State media, 25 October 2023, [url](#); Al Monitor, Suspected Israeli strikes in Syria target Hezbollah, Iran-backed groups, 17 November 2023, [url](#)

⁵¹ Al Jazeera, Syria says Israel hit Damascus, Aleppo airports again amid Gaza bombing, 22 October 2023, [url](#)

⁵² France24, Israel strikes kill 8 Syria troops, hit Aleppo airport: defence ministry, 25 October 2023, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Syria says Israel hit Damascus, Aleppo airports again amid Gaza bombing, 22 October 2023, [url](#)

⁵³ Reuters, Syria says Israel strike puts Damascus airport out of service, 26 November 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁴ EUAA used only the following type of ACLED coded security events in the analysis: battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians. For more information on ACLED data and how it is used by the EUAA, see [EUAA COI Report Syria – Security situation \(October 2023\)](#).

⁵⁵ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (1 December 2023), [url](#)

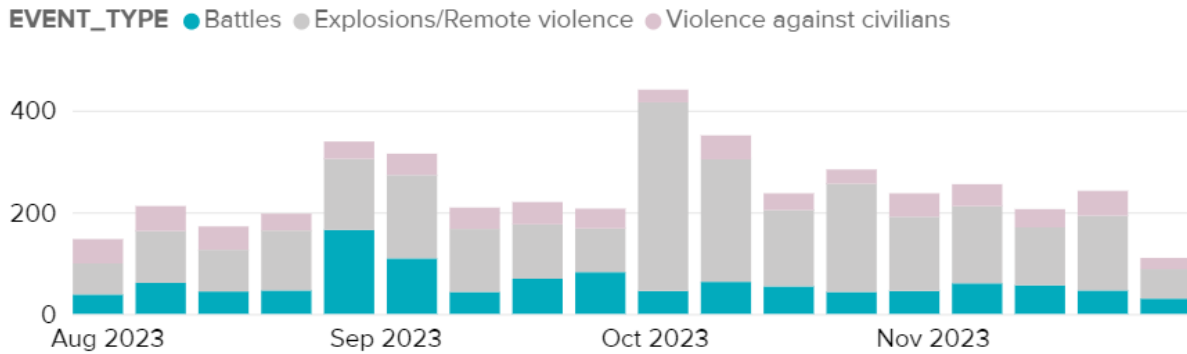


Figure 1. Evolution of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians between 1 August and 30 November 2023, based on ACLED data⁵⁶

Most security incidents were recorded by ACLED in Aleppo (1 077), Idlib (1 030) and Deir Ez-Zor (742) governorates. The lowest security incidents figures were recorded in Tartous (5), Damascus (10) and Quneitra (16) governorates (see Figure 2).

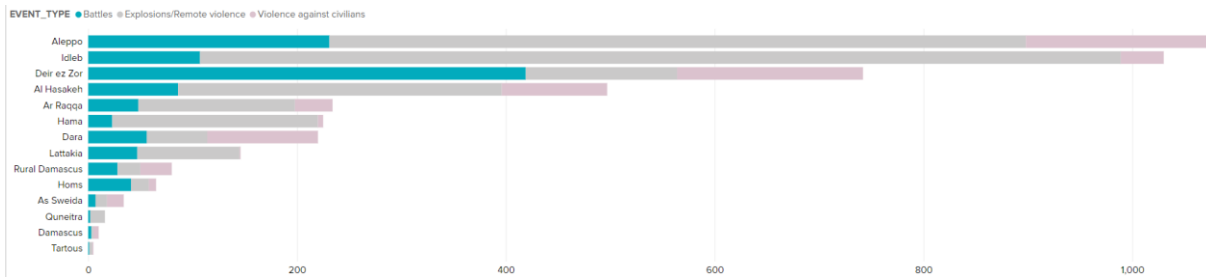


Figure 2. Number of security events coded battles, explosions/remote violence and violence against civilians between 1 August and 30 November 2023. Breakdown by governorate based on ACLED data⁵⁷

According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), for the period 1 August to 30 November 2023, there were 385 civilian fatalities recorded in Syria. Most civilian fatalities recorded by SNHR during this period occurred in Idlib governorate (84), followed by Deir Ez-Zor (70), Dar’a (70), and Homs governorates (60) (see Figure 3). It is worth noting that for the month of August 2023, the SNHR included within its total number of civilian fatalities the death of 15 civilians who drowned while on migration routes to Europe. These deaths were recorded under their governorates of origin: Dar’a, Sweida, Quneitra and Rural Damascus.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (1 December 2023), [url](#)

⁵⁷ EUAA analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Data Export Tool, Middle East (1 December 2023), [url](#)

⁵⁸ SNHR, 97 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Three Women, and 10 Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in August 2023 in Syria, 1 September 2023, [url](#), p. 6



Civilian fatalities by governorate	August 2023 ⁵⁹	September 2023 ⁶⁰	October 2023 ⁶¹	November 2023 ⁶²
Damascus	-	-	2	2
Rural Damascus	7	-	-	3
Idlib	12	6	50	16
Deir Ez-Zor	20	18	14	18
Aleppo	17	12	13	12
Dar'a	23	17	16	14
Hama	5	-	9	-
Homs	3	-	56	1
Hasaka	3	1	-	-
Raqqa	-	1	-	-

⁵⁹ SNHR, 97 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Three Women, and 10 Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in August 2023 in Syria, 1 September 2023, [url](#), p. 9

⁶⁰ SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 12 Children, 10 Women, and Two Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in Syria in September 2023, 1 October 2023, [url](#), p. 9

⁶¹ 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, [url](#), p. 11

⁶² SNHR, 72 Civilians, Including 14 Children and Seven Women, Killed in Syria in November 2023: Nine of Them, Including One Woman, Died Due to Torture, 1 December 2023, [url](#), p. 9



Civilian fatalities by governorate	August 2023 ⁵⁹	September 2023 ⁶⁰	October 2023 ⁶¹	November 2023 ⁶²
Quneitra	5	-	-	-
Sweida	1	-	1	4
Latakia	1	-	-	2
Tartous	-	-	-	-
Total	97	55	161	72

Figure 3. Civilian fatalities August-November 2023. Monthly breakdown based on SNHR data⁶³

3. Human rights developments in areas under Government of Syria control

Protests criticising the economic situation and the Assad regime began in August 2023 in GoS-controlled areas, particularly in Sweida and Dar'a governorates, but also in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo and the coastal regions of Latakia and Tartous.⁶⁴ Protests grew and continued in September in Sweida governorate⁶⁵ while decreased in other parts of the country.⁶⁶ On 13 September, three protesters who were attempting to storm a Ba'ath party building in Sweida city were injured by bullets allegedly fired by pro-GoS forces.⁶⁷ This

⁶³ SNHR, 97 Civilians, Including 22 Children, Three Women, and 10 Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in August 2023 in Syria, 1 September 2023, [url](#), p. 9; SNHR, 55 Civilians, Including 12 Children, 10 Women, and Two Individuals Who Died due to Torture Documented Killed in Syria in September 2023, 1 October 2023, [url](#), p. 9; 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, [url](#), p. 11; SNHR, 72 Civilians, Including 14 Children and Seven Women, Killed in Syria in November 2023: Nine of Them, Including One Woman, Died Due to Torture, 1 December 2023, [url](#), p. 9

⁶⁴ 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, [url](#), pp. 1-3; New Your Times (The), Rare protests in Syria summon echoes of Arab Spring, 31 August 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁵ ISW, Syria Protest Update, September 12 – September 18, 20 September 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁶ ISW, Syria Protest Update, August 29 – September 4, 6 September 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁷ Reuters, Three wounded as gunshots disperse anti-government protest in Syria's Sweida, 13 September 2023, [url](#); ISW, Syria Protest Update, September 12 – September 18, 20 September 2023, [url](#)



incident was the first documented use of violence by GoS on protesters in Sweida since the demonstrations began in August 2023.⁶⁸ The GoS response was mainly focused on negotiating with Druze leaders⁶⁹ in the governorate and organising counterdemonstrations.⁷⁰ The protests continued in Sweida in September and October, albeit on a smaller scale.⁷¹

The UNCOI documented in the first half of 2023 cases of arbitrary arrests and detention by GoS forces of persons who made critical statements against the GoS on social media, activists and community leaders, and persons who had ‘reconciled’ with the GoS.⁷² The same source also reported on GoS authorities continuing the practice of using forced confessions in court, as well as on cases of denial of access to legal counsel while in detention, incommunicado detention, and torture and ill-treatment while in detention.⁷³

Reporting on the period from 1 January to 30 June 2023, the UNCOI described cases of returnees from abroad to GoS areas who were either extorted, arrested, detained, conscripted, tortured, or forcibly disappeared. The source further detailed a case where one returnee was arrested and tortured to obtain a confession because of a security report accusing him of crimes committed while he was abroad. In other cases, Syrian returnees from Lebanon had to pay bribes of several hundred dollars to the Fourth Division of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) or to smugglers not to be handed over to security agencies or to prison. Those who paid the bribes were released while others were detained, conscripted to military service, or forcibly disappeared.⁷⁴

On 16 November 2023, the GoS promulgated Legislative Decree No. 36 of 2023,⁷⁵ providing a general amnesty for crimes committed before the date of the decree. The amnesty covered those who committed misdemeanors, those with incurable diseases and those over the age of 70. It also prescribed that those sentenced to death would serve life in prison instead, while those sentenced to life in prison will have their sentence reduced to 20 years. The amnesty excluded convicts of crimes resulting in death of a person, weapon smugglers and those wanted who did not turn themselves in within the coming months.⁷⁶ The SNHR stated that the amnesty does not cover prisoners of conscience and detainees arrested in the context of the conflict, and ‘excludes all offenses used as grounds to charge detainees and forcibly

⁶⁸ ISW, Syria Protest Update, September 12 – September 18, 20 September 2023, [url](#); Reuters, Three wounded as gunshots disperse anti-government protest in Syria’s Sweida, 13 September 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁹ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – September 2023, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁰ ISW, Syria Protest Update, September 12 – September 18, 20 September 2023, [url](#)

⁷¹ Etana Syria, MEMO: Anti-Regime Protests Hold Momentum in Suwayda, 16 October 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – October 2023, 14 November 2023, [url](#)

⁷² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 September 2023, [url](#), paras 34, 36, 39

⁷³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 September 2023, [url](#), paras 37-39

⁷⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 September 2023, [url](#), paras 41-41

⁷⁵ SNHR, Amnesty Decree No. 36 of 2023 Excludes Political Prisoners, 21 November 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁶ AP News, Syria’s president grants amnesty, reduced sentences on anniversary of coup that put father in power, 16 November 2023, [url](#)



disappeared persons'.⁷⁷ Regarding military personnel, the decree provides amnesty for the crimes of internal and external desertion but does not cover crimes punishable by death as per the Military Penal code: fleeing to the enemy (Article 102), leading a conspiracy and deserting to the enemy (Article 103), taking up arms against Syria (Article 154) treason and dealing with the enemy in peacetime (Article 155), cooperation with the enemy during wartime (Article 156), failure to report known crimes (Article 157), spying for the enemy (Articles 158-159), recruiting for the enemy (Article 160).⁷⁸ Information on the implementation in practice of the amnesty could not be found.

During the reference period, there were limited reports of GoS forces arresting men for the purpose of serving compulsory and reserve military service. According to GoS sources cited by the Syrian news outlet North-Press Agency (NPA), in November the Military Police arrested 850 persons wanted for military and reserve service in Aleppo governorate,⁷⁹ while unspecified number of draft evaders were also arrested in Homs and Hama governorates. The same source noted that from its controlled areas in Hasaka and Qamishli cities, the GoS was also trying to recruit conscripts from areas outside its control.⁸⁰

In September, Syrian president Assad issued Legislative Decree No. 32 of 2023 which abolished the military field courts.⁸¹ The military field courts have been reportedly used by the GoS to issue death sentences without due process against civilians and military personnel.⁸² Sources stated that thousands of people have been executed following sentences issued by military field courts throughout the conflict.⁸³ According to a SNHR report, 7 872 persons were sentenced to death by military field courts and executed between March 2011 and August 2023. Of these, 63 executions were carried out between 2022-2023 (62 in 2022 and one in 2023). Of the total number of persons executed, the majority were civilians (74 %) while the rest were military personnel (either military deserters or defectors).⁸⁴ Following the abolishment of the military field courts, all cases will fall under the military judiciary and be prosecuted according to the Military Penal code and Military procedure.⁸⁵ The move to abolish the military field courts was viewed by critics as an attempt by the GoS to evade accountability

⁷⁷ SNHR, Amnesty Decree No. 36 of 2023 Excludes Political Prisoners, 21 November 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁸ SNHR, Amnesty Decree No. 36 of 2023 Excludes Political Prisoners, 21 November 2023, [url](#), p. 10; Free Syrian Lawyers Association, Analytical Legal Study on Legislative Decree No. 36 of 2023, 23 November 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁹ NPA, Government arrests 850 people in Syria's Aleppo to serve military service, 14 November 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁰ NPA, Syrian government recruiting campaign coincides with US-Iranian tension, 22 November 2023, [url](#)

⁸¹ Jusoor for Studies, Why the Syrian Regime Decided to Abolish Military Field Courts?, 25 September 2023, [url](#)

⁸² Al Monitor, Syria's Assad abolishes notorious military field courts, 4 September 2023, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Syria Today – Assad Abolishes Military Field Courts, Deir-ez-Zor Clashes Intensify, 4 September 2023, [url](#)

⁸³ Al Monitor, Syria's Assad abolishes notorious military field courts, 4 September 2023, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Syria Today – Assad Abolishes Military Field Courts, Deir-ez-Zor Clashes Intensify, 4 September 2023, [url](#); SNHR, An Instrument of Death and Disappearance: How the Syrian Regime Uses Military Field Courts Against Activists and Dissidents, 12 September 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁴ SNHR, An Instrument of Death and Disappearance: How the Syrian Regime Uses Military Field Courts Against Activists and Dissidents, 12 September 2023, [url](#), pp. 19-20, 27

⁸⁵ El Fakir, M. and Al Mustafa, M., Military Field Court: Nullification and a No Change Approach, Omran, 10 October 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Why the Syrian Regime Decided to Abolish Military Field Courts?, 25 September 2023, [url](#)



for the forcibly disappeared persons,⁸⁶ to rehabilitate its reputation and appease demands of the Arab countries.⁸⁷ Sources noted that referring cases to the military judiciary rather than to the military field courts represents only a minor change, since the military judiciary has significant leverage in classifying and handling cases.⁸⁸

4. Socio-economic situation

According to the World Food Programme (WFP), the cost of living in Syria almost doubled in the first nine months of 2023.⁸⁹ Devaluation of the Syrian pound (SYP),⁹⁰ cuts in fuel subsidies⁹¹ and increase of public sector wages and pensions further accelerated inflation.⁹² The cost of living for a family of five was estimated at SYP 6 000 000 at the end of August. Meanwhile the minimum monthly wage was of SYP 185 000.⁹³ As of August, the average salary was reported to be approximately SYP 250 000 (USD 18 at the informal market exchange rate).⁹⁴

In August, the GoS doubled the minimum wage for public sector workers to around SYP 186 000, the first increase of its kind since December 2021.⁹⁵ Pensions were also doubled.⁹⁶ At the same time, the GoS cut subsidies for fuel⁹⁷ and bread as part of new austerity measures.⁹⁸ Despite the increase, the new minimum wage could cover only 13 % of the July 2023 minimum expenditure basket (MEB) - a monetary threshold for what a family of five needs in a month to cover its essential needs, including goods, services, utilities, and resources.⁹⁹ By September 2023, the MEB cost was of SYP 2 198 000, recording an increase for the fourteenth consecutive month.¹⁰⁰

⁸⁶ SNHR, An Instrument of Death and Disappearance: How the Syrian Regime Uses Military Field Courts Against Activists and Dissidents, 12 September 2023, [url](#), p. 10; STJ, Military Field Courts in Syria: 55 Years of Arbitrary Decisions, 13 October 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁷ Jusoor for Studies, Why the Syrian Regime Decided to Abolish Military Field Courts?, 25 September 2023, [url](#); STJ, Military Field Courts in Syria: 55 Years of Arbitrary Decisions, 13 October 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁸ El Fakir, M. and Al Mustafa, M., Military Field Court: Nullification and a No Change Approach, Omran, 10 October 2023, [url](#); Jusoor for Studies, Why the Syrian Regime Decided to Abolish Military Field Courts?, 25 September 2023, [url](#); SNHR, An Instrument of Death and Disappearance: How the Syrian Regime Uses Military Field Courts Against Activists and Dissidents, 12 September 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁸⁹ WFP, Syria – Market Price Watch Bulletin, September 2023, 1 November 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁹⁰ As of October 2023, the official exchange rate was SYP 11 557/USD while the average informal (parallel) market exchange rate stood at 13 875/USD. WFP, Syria – Market Price Watch Bulletin, September 2023, 1 November 2023, [url](#), p. 4

⁹¹ WFP, Syria – Market Price Watch Bulletin, September 2023, 1 November 2023, [url](#), p. 1; Daher, J., Bad governance is proving to be an economic liability as protests sweep Syria, 2 September 2023, [url](#)

⁹² Al Jazeera, Why are Syrians protesting in Sweida?, 29 August 2023, [url](#)

⁹³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update Syrian Arab Republic - Issue 16 / September 2023, 9 November 2023, [url](#), p. 10

⁹⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update Syrian Arab Republic - Issue 15 / August 2023, 2 October 2023, [url](#), p. 2

⁹⁵ WFP, Syria – Market Price Watch Bulletin, July 2023, 29 August 2023, [url](#), p. 1

⁹⁶ Al Jazeera, Why are Syrians protesting in Sweida?, 29 August 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁷ BBC News, Syria doubles public-sector pay and cuts subsidies as economy sinks, 16 August 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁸ Daher, J., Bad governance is proving to be an economic liability as protests sweep Syria, Al Majalla, 2 September 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁹ WFP, Syria – Market Price Watch Bulletin, July 2023, 29 August 2023, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁰⁰ WFP, Syria – Market Price Watch Bulletin, September 2023, 1 November 2023, [url](#), p. 1



As of September 2023, the cost of the standard reference food basket¹⁰¹ price reached SYP 938 000 (USD 81 at the official exchange rate of SYP 11 557), doubling since the start of 2023.¹⁰² The WFP food assistance provided to Syrians was reduced by 40 % from July onwards following a cut in funding. In August 2023, WFP provided food assistance to 3.5 million Syrians, but would require additional funding to continue its assistance until March 2024.¹⁰³

House rent prices in Damascus increased by 300 % in recent years, reaching rates between SYP 500 000 per month in the suburbs and SYP 5 000 000 in central areas, according to UNOCHA. A six-month rental deposit is required to be paid in advance according to regulations. As a result of the high prices, around 600 000 IDPs were renting houses in slum areas.¹⁰⁴

An increase in oil prices since August 2023 has resulted in doubling of prices for public transportation.¹⁰⁵ Water shortage was reported to affect most of southern governorates in Syria leading many to have to purchase water at prices of up to SYP 350 000 monthly.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ According to WFP, the standard food basket is a group of essential food commodities providing 2 060 kcal a day for a family of five during a month. The basket includes bread, rice, lentils, sugar, and vegetable oil. WFP, Syria – Market Price Watch Bulletin, September 2023, 1 November 2023, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁰² WFP, Syria – Market Price Watch Bulletin, September 2023, 1 November 2023, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁰³ WFP, WFP Syria Situation Report #8, August 2023, 4 October 2023, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁰⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update Syrian Arab Republic - Issue 16 / September 2023, 9 November 2023, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update Syrian Arab Republic - Issue 16 / September 2023, 9 November 2023, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁰⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update Syrian Arab Republic - Issue 16 / September 2023, 9 November 2023, [url](#), p. 10



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