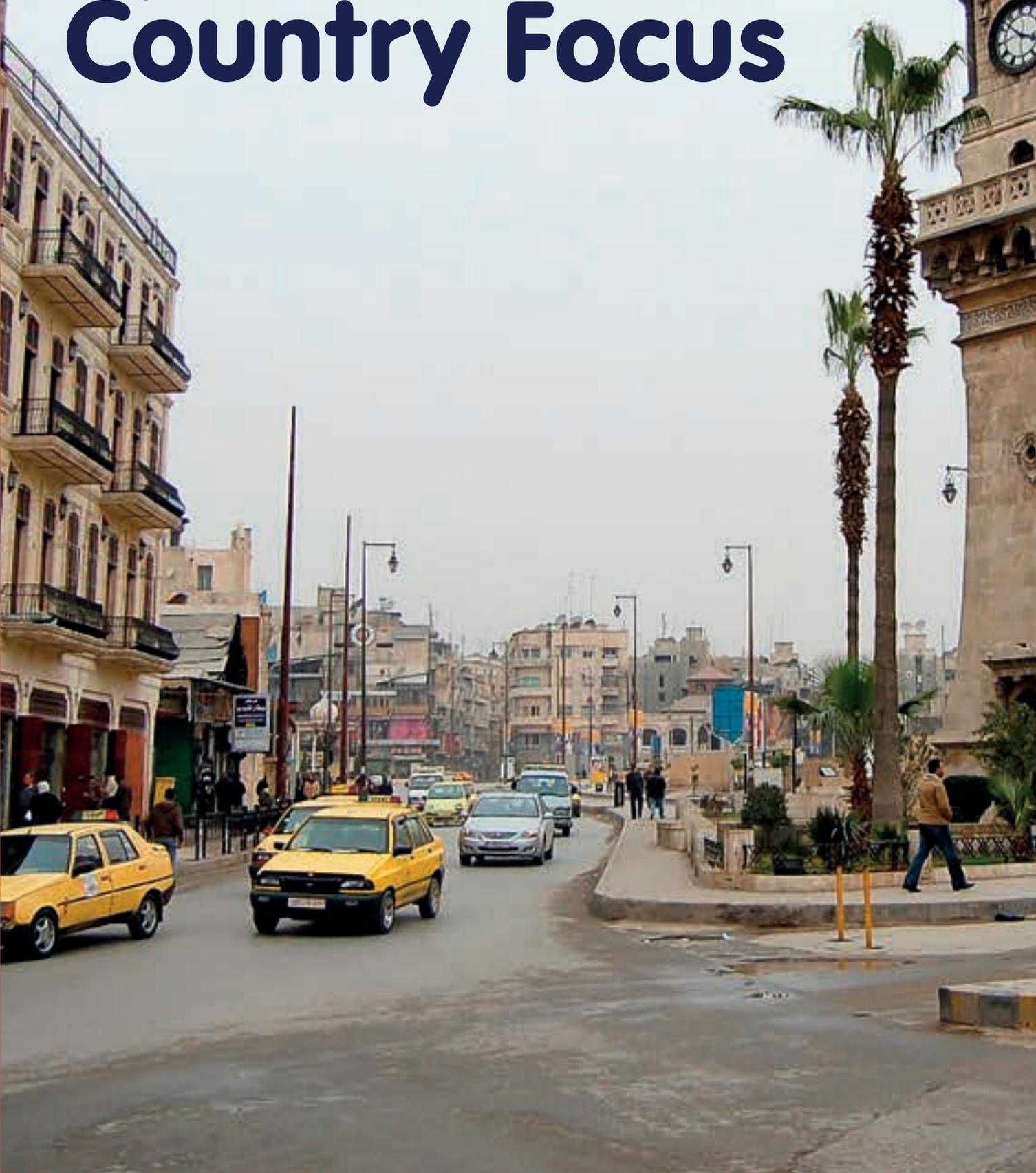


Syria - Country Focus



Syria – Country focus report

Country of Origin Information Report

October 2024



Manuscript completed in October 2024

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024

PDF ISBN 978-92-9410-400-7 doi: 10.2847/3595713 BZ-01-24-018-EN-N

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Cite as: EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report - Syria -Security Situation, October 2024, [url](#)



Acknowledgements

This report was jointly drafted by the EUAA COI Sector together with:

- Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD).

The following departments and organisations have reviewed parts of this report:

- Czech Republic, Department for Asylum and Migration Policy
- Denmark, Danish Immigration Service
- France, Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA), Information, Documentation and Research Division
- Sweden, Swedish Migration Agency, Country of Origin Information, Section for Information Analysis.

All parts of this report have been reviewed by at least one reviewer.

The review carried out by the mentioned departments, experts or organisations contributes to the overall quality of the report, but does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of the EUAA.





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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the [EUAA COI Report Methodology \(2023\)](#). The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

'Refugee', 'risk' and similar terminology are used as generic terminology and not in the legal sense as applied in the EU Asylum Acquis, the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.

Neither the EUAA, nor any person acting on its behalf, may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this report.

On 19 January 2022, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) became the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA). All references to EASO, EASO products and bodies should be understood as references to the EUAA.

The drafting of this report was finalised on 30 September 2024. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the [Methodology](#) section of the [Introduction](#).





Glossary and abbreviations

Term	Definition
DAANES	Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
GoS	Government of Syria
HTS	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; also known as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State (IS), or Daesh
MEB	Minimum Expenditure Basket
<i>mukhtar</i>	Mayor or chief of a village/neighbourhood
NDF	National Defence Forces
NPA	North Press Agency
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights
PYD	Democratic Union Party (Kurdish)
RYM	Revolutionary Youth Movement
SAA	Syrian Arab Army
SDF	Syrian Democratic Forces
SJAC	Syria Justice and Accountability Centre





Term	Definition
SNA	Syrian National Army
SNHR	Syrian Network for Human Rights
SOHR	Syrian Observatory of Human Rights
STJ	Syrians for Truth & Justice
UNCOI	Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
WFP	World Food Programme
YPG	Kurdish People's Protection Units





Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide relevant information for the assessment of applications for international protection, including refugee status and subsidiary protection, and in particular for use in updating EUAA’s country guidance document on Syria.

The report covers the period of September 2023 – August 2024, and provides a limited update of selected sections previously addressed in the EUAA COI reports: [Syria – Country Focus \(October 2023\)](#), [Syria - Targeting of individuals \(September 2022\)](#) as well as an update of the EUAA COI report: [Syria - Socio-economic situation in Damascus city \(September 2022\)](#).

This report should be read in conjunction with the [EUAA COI report: Syria – Security situation \(October 2024\)](#).

Methodology

This report was jointly drafted by EUAA and ACCORD and reviewed by EUAA and national COI departments in EU+ countries, as mentioned in the [Acknowledgements](#) section.

This report is produced in line with the EUAA COI Report Methodology (2023)¹ and the EUAA COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2023).²

Defining the terms of reference

The terms of reference (ToR) of this report were defined by EUAA based on discussions held and input received from COI experts in the EUAA COI specialist network on Syria and from policy experts in EU+ countries within the framework of a Country Guidance development on Syria. The ToR also build on previous EUAA COI reports on Syria covering the same topics. The Terms of Reference for this report can be found in [Annex II](#).

Collecting information

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based and electronic sources until 30 August 2024. Some limited additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 30 September 2024.

¹ EUAA, EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, February 2023, [url](#)

² EUAA, Writing and Referencing Guide for EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, February 2023, [url](#)





Quality control

To ensure that the authors respected the EUAA COI Report Methodology and that the Terms of Reference were comprehensively addressed, a review was carried out by COI specialists from the countries and organisations listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section. All comments made by the reviewers were taken into consideration and most of them were implemented in the final draft of this report, which was finalised on 30 September 2024. EUAA also performed the final quality review and editing of the text.

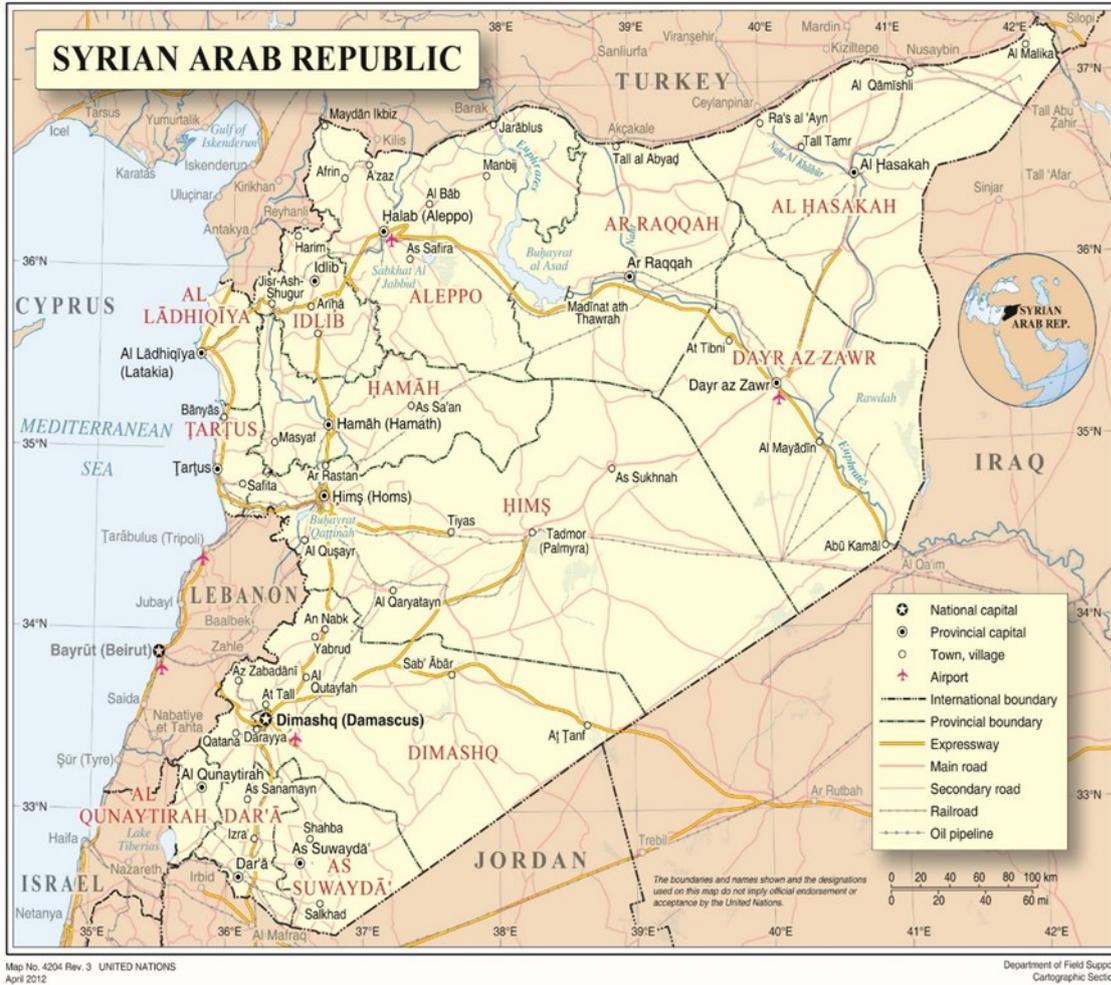
Sources

In accordance with EUAA COI methodology, a range of different published documentary sources have been consulted on relevant topics for this report. These include COI reports by governments; information from civil society, advocacy groups, humanitarian organisations and NGOs; international and NGO human rights reports; reports produced by various bodies of the United Nations; Syrian and regionally-based media and social media; academic publications and think tank reports and specialised sources covering Syria. All information from these sources was consulted within time constraints and within the research constraints posed by Syria's challenging information-gathering environment.

In addition to using publicly available documentary sources, several oral sources were contacted for this report. Sources were assessed for their background, publication history, reputability and current ground-level knowledge. All oral sources are described in the [Bibliography](#).



Maps



Map 1: Syrian Arab Republic, © United Nations³

³ Syria, Map No. 4204 Rev. 3, April 2012, United Nations, [url](#)

1. Profiles

1.1. Persons perceived to be opposing the Government of Syria (GoS)

Participation in activities regarded as opposition is the primary factor influencing how the Government of Syria (GoS) treats those it perceives as opponents.⁴ Factors such as the area of origin and the religious or ethnic background of an individual can exacerbate the treatment received from the GoS.⁵ For instance, persons originating from areas previously controlled by the opposition are more likely to be viewed as disloyal or involved in opposition activities and be subjected to increased scrutiny or punitive actions.⁶ For more information see section [1.1.2\(c\)](#). The GoS' suspicion of certain ethno-religious groups, including Sunnis and Kurds, is rooted in historical tensions and the association of these communities with various opposition movements.⁷ Perceived GoS opponents who are also Sunni or Kurdish would receive more scrutiny and pressure from the GoS authorities.⁸

Some sources assessed that persons who are on wanted lists⁹ since 2011 because of their involvement in peaceful demonstrations against the GoS and opposition activities¹⁰ would be likely to be viewed as opposition by the GoS. Cases of persons on wanted lists who were arrested, detained and forcibly disappeared by the GoS authorities have been documented in previous years.¹¹ For more information on the treatment of persons wanted by the GoS for offences related to military service see section [1.3](#).

According to sources interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2023, past activities such as taking part in a protest in the early years of the conflict could still cause problems for a person, particularly if neighbours report them to authorities as revenge or for personal gain.¹² Having left the country is another reason for which persons are reported to the GoS.¹³ According to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (UNCOI) 'denunciations based on unsubstantiated and unrelated interpersonal

⁴ Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence with EUAA, 19 & 28 August 2024; SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024; EUAA, Syria: Targeting of individuals, September 2022, [url](#), p. 16

⁵ Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence with EUAA, 19 & 28 August 2024; SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024

⁶ Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence with EUAA, 19 & 28 August 2024; SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024

⁷ Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence with EUAA, 19 & 28 August 2024

⁸ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024

⁹ Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence with EUAA, 19 & 28 August 2024; SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024

¹⁰ Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence with EUAA, 19 & 28 August 2024

¹¹ EUAA, Syria: Targeting of individuals, September 2022, [url](#), pp. 21-22; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 27

¹² Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 44

¹³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 59 [source: Ammar Hamou]



grievances commonly lead to arrest and detention'.¹⁴ According to Ali Aljasem¹⁵, there are cases where neighbours denounced the person who underwent 'reconciliation/status settlement' to the intelligence services for previous activities. This situation would create additional security issues for the person which would have to be dealt with by interacting with the intelligence services.¹⁶

Some sources assessed that Syrians who left the country during the conflict and those who requested asylum abroad are viewed with distrust or as potentially disloyal¹⁷ or opposing the GoS.¹⁸ According to the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR)'s assessment, the majority of Syrians who fled the country before 2016 are likely to be perceived by the GoS as having sought asylum for political reasons, namely opposition to its rule.¹⁹ Other sources have however indicated that the mere fact of having applied for asylum abroad does not make an individual subject to mistreatment²⁰ and that the GoS is aware that many Syrians applied for asylum as a requirement to get residence in their host country.²¹ For information on the treatment of returnees from abroad see section [1.2.3](#).

1.1.1. Treatment of persons perceived to be opposing the Government of Syria

During the reference period, the GoS security forces were reported to target, with arbitrary arrest and detention, a wide range of categories of individuals including protesters; online activists; journalists;²² university students and others expressing views critical of local conditions and the authorities' conduct in GoS-held areas;²³ persons originating from former opposition-held areas who underwent so-called 'reconciliation/status settlement';²⁴ individuals who travelled between areas outside GoS control and GoS-held areas or contacted relatives in opposition-held areas;²⁵ individuals with family members who were dissidents; activists;²⁶

¹⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/54/58], 12 September 2023, [url](#), para. 35

¹⁵ Ali Aljasem is a PhD student at the Center for Conflict Studies - History of International Relations at Utrecht University and focuses on paramilitarism in Syria.

¹⁶ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 34

¹⁷ Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence with EUAA, 19 & 28 August 2024

¹⁸ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024

¹⁹ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024

²⁰ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 86; EUAA, Syria: Targeting of individuals, September 2022, [url](#), p. 33; EUAA, Syria: Situation of returnees from abroad, [url](#), p. 18

²¹ EUAA, Syria: Targeting of individuals, September 2022, [url](#), p. 33

²² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 11 March 2024, [url](#), para. 54

²³ 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, [url](#), p. 12

²⁴ 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, [url](#), p. 4. For further information on the so-called 'reconciliation/status settlement' process see section 1.2.1.

²⁵ New Arab (The), 200 Syrians missing after arrest by regime forces near Damascus, 8 September 2024, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Around 200 civilians detained near Damascus after crossing three control zones, 7 September 2024, [url](#)

²⁶ 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, [url](#), p. 4



draft evaders and reserve service deserters;²⁷ army defectors;²⁸ former members of opposition armed groups;²⁹ internally displaced persons (IDPs) seeking to return to their area of residence in GoS-held areas;³⁰ as well as returnees from abroad.³¹ Some detentions by the GoS increasingly appeared to be motivated solely by financial gain³² with security forces demanding huge sums of money for the release of those arrested.³³

The GoS has targeted specific individuals with torture due to their association with anti-GoS persons or groups, using it as a form of collective punishment.³⁴ Those subjected to torture and ill-treatment included persons opposing or perceived to be opposing the GoS,³⁵ such as protesters, former members of anti-GoS armed groups, army defectors, members of NGOs,³⁶ and returnees from abroad.³⁷

Despite the GoS adopting Law 16/2022 which criminalised torture,³⁸ sources have continued to report torture being practiced by GoS security forces. In its July 2024 concluding observations to the periodic report on Syria, the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concerns about ‘reports of widespread torture or ill-treatment, at times leading to death’.³⁹ The UNCOI reports, covering the period between July 2023 – June 2024, stated that the GoS ‘continued’ to commit acts of torture and ill-treatment against persons in its custody, as well as practices leading to deaths in detention and enforced disappearance⁴⁰, including in Sednaya

²⁷ Access Center for Human Rights, What Happens After The Forced Deportation Of Refugees From Lebanon?, 29 January 2024, [url](#), p. 18

²⁸ 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, [url](#), p. 4; FP, Syrians in Lebanon Are Stuck in Limbo, 9, July 2024, [url](#)

²⁹ Syria Direct, Hostages and siege: Daraa frees detainees by any means necessary, 13 June 2024, [url](#)

³⁰ 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, [url](#), p. 12

³¹ OHCHR, “We did not fear death but the life there”. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), paras. 85

³² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 11 March 2024, [url](#), paras. 61-62; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 55; 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, [url](#), p. 5; UN Human Rights Council, 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, [url](#)

³³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 11 March 2024, [url](#), paras. 61-62; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), paras. 53-54

³⁴ 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, [url](#), p. 6

³⁵ UNCOI, “No End in Sight”: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), paras. 15-16

³⁶ UNCOI, “No End in Sight”: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), paras. 19, 23, 26, 30, 36

³⁷ UNCOI, “No End in Sight”: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), paras. 74-77

³⁸ EUAA, Syria: Targeting of individuals, September 2022, [url](#), p. 21

³⁹ UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of the Syrian Arab Republic [CCPR/C/SYR/CO/4], 25 July 2024, [url](#), para. 28

⁴⁰ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 11 March 2024, [url](#), paras. 56-57; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/57/86], 10 September 2024, [url](#), paras. 17, 20, 22, 28



military prison (Rural Damascus governorate). In some instances, Syrian authorities issued administrative death notifications for detainees without providing details about the circumstances of death, leaving families unable to retrieve the bodies.⁴¹ In 2023, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) recorded the deaths of 48 civilians who were tortured in GoS prisons and security centres. Amongst the victims were persons who ‘settled their status’, an army defector and former members of the opposition groups.⁴² Between mid-November 2023 and mid-August 2024, SNHR documented the death of 43 persons due to torture in GoS detention centres.⁴³

Conditions in prisons run by the GoS and affiliated armed groups were harsh,⁴⁴ at times resulting in the death of inmates.⁴⁵ The UNCOI reported on GoS authorities continuing the practice of using forced confessions in court, as well as denial of access to legal counsel while in detention, incommunicado detention, and torture and ill-treatment while in detention.⁴⁶ The widespread use of torture and ill-treatment of persons held in detention facilities run by GoS has been documented throughout the conflict.⁴⁷ Torture was most notably reported to take place at detention facilities of the Military Intelligence Directorate (also known as Military Security),⁴⁸ the Air Force Intelligence Directorate,⁴⁹ and the Political Security Directorate,⁵⁰ all of which had branches across the country, as well as in facilities of the General Intelligence Directorate (based in the Damascus area), the Criminal Security Department of the police, and in military prisons overseen by the Military Police (including Sednaya military prison).⁵¹

A study based on interviews with 69 former detainees in GoS prisons⁵² found that both men and women faced severe overcrowding and lack of basic services in detention and were subjected to sexual violence, including rape, and torture.⁵³ The same study found that most

⁴¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 11 March 2024, [url](#), paras. 56-57

⁴² 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, [url](#)

⁴³ 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, [url](#), pp. 3-4

⁴⁴ UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of the Syrian Arab Republic [CCPR/C/SYR/CO/4], 25 July 2024, [url](#), para. 30; USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section 1, Respect for the Integrity of the Person. Prison and Detention Center Conditions

⁴⁵ UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of the Syrian Arab Republic, [CCPR/C/SYR/CO/4] 25 July 2024, [url](#), para. 30

⁴⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 12 September 2023, [url](#), paras. 37-39

⁴⁷ UNCOI, “No End in Sight”: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), paras. 2, 4, 5

⁴⁸ UNCOI, “No End in Sight”: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), para. 17-18

⁴⁹ UNCOI, “No End in Sight”: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), para. 22-23

⁵⁰ UNCOI, “No End in Sight”: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), para. 27

⁵¹ UNCOI, “No End in Sight”: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), paras. 31-33

⁵² The source carried out interviews with 69 former detainees (33 males and 36 females) between March 2021 and January 2024. Most males were detained between 2011 and 2014, whereas most females were detained between 2013 and 2016. Legal Action Worldwide, Syrian Centre for Legal Studies and Research, “It is a Forever Stigma: The Role of Gender Discrimination in the Syrian Government’s Detention and Torture System”, 26 June 2024, [url](#), p. 10

⁵³ Legal Action Worldwide, Syrian Centre for Legal Studies and Research, “It is a Forever Stigma: The Role of Gender Discrimination in the Syrian Government’s Detention and Torture System”, 26 June 2024, [url](#), pp. 5-6



males were arrested due to their perceived role as anti-GoS opposition members. Some participated in protests or were involved in anti-GoS activities while others were journalists, or soldiers in the Syrian Arab Army (SAA). Women who were detained were more likely to have actively participated in the anti-GoS opposition or had relatives associated with the armed opposition to GoS.⁵⁴

In September 2023, Syrian president Assad issued Legislative Decree No. 32 of 2023 which abolished the military field courts.⁵⁵ The military field courts had reportedly been used by the GoS to issue death sentences without due process against civilians and military personnel.⁵⁶ Sources stated that thousands of people had been executed following sentences issued by military field courts throughout the conflict.⁵⁷ Following the abolishment of the military field courts, all cases will fall under the military judiciary⁵⁸ and be prosecuted according to the Military Penal code and Military procedure.⁵⁹ The move to abolish the military field courts was viewed by critics as an attempt by the GoS to evade accountability for the forcibly disappeared persons,⁶⁰ to rehabilitate its reputation and appease demands of the Arab countries.⁶¹ According to the human rights organisation Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC), since the issuance of Decree No. 32, all trials in the military field courts have been halted and access to the cases archive has been restricted in view of its planned transfer to regular military courts. However, some military field courts judges were reportedly transferred to hold trials at the Sednaya prison and Mezzeh military airport.⁶² The UN Human Rights Committee noted that the transfer of cases from military field courts to the military judiciary lacks transparency and that the GoS exerts significant influence in the latter's activity and composition.⁶³

On 16 November 2023, the GoS promulgated Legislative Decree No. 36 of 2023,⁶⁴ providing a general amnesty for crimes committed before the decree's enactment. The amnesty covered those who committed misdemeanors, those with incurable diseases and those over the age of 70. Furthermore, the decree commuted death sentences to life imprisonment, and life sentences were reduced to 20 years in prison. The amnesty excluded convicts of crimes

⁵⁴ Legal Action Worldwide, Syrian Centre for Legal Studies and Research, "It is a Forever Stigma: The Role of Gender Discrimination in the Syrian Government's Detention and Torture System", 26 June 2024, [url](#), p. 10

⁵⁵ Jusoor for Studies, Why the Syrian Regime Decided to Abolish Military Field Courts?, 25 September 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁶ 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](#)

⁵⁷ 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](#)

⁵⁸ Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence, 19 & 28 August 2024; SNHR, email correspondence, 9 & 26 August 2024

⁵⁹ 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](#)

⁶⁰ 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](#)

⁶¹ 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](#)

⁶² SJAC, email correspondence, 9 September 2024

⁶³ UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of the Syrian Arab Republic [CCPR/C/SYR/CO/4], 25 July 2024, [url](#), para. 36

⁶⁴ SNHR, Amnesty Decree No. 36 of 2023 Excludes Political Prisoners, 21 November 2023, [url](#)



resulting in death of a person, weapon smugglers and those wanted who did not turn themselves in within the coming months.⁶⁵ Sources stated that the amnesty does not cover prisoners of conscience and detainees arrested in the context of the conflict⁶⁶, and ‘excludes all offenses used as grounds to charge detainees and forcibly disappeared persons’.⁶⁷

1.1.2. Specific profiles perceived by the government as opposition

(a) Members of political opposition parties

The GoS has been reported to ban ‘genuine’ political opposition. While the law allows new political parties to register, there are significant obstacles preventing their approval.⁶⁸ In practice, all legally recognised political entities and independent politicians are either affiliated with, cooperate with, or are approved by the GoS.⁶⁹ The political system is designed to favour the ruling Ba’ath party which is assigned the majority of parliamentary seats by the GoS and also supervises the selection of other candidates for election.⁷⁰ Candidates not endorsed by the Ba’ath Party have very little chance of being elected.⁷¹

Elections in Syria have been described as being ‘rigged’.⁷² Elections are said to be used by the GoS to reward loyalists and replace those who fell out of favour.⁷³ The allocation of numbers of Parliament members per governorate lacks fixed criteria, being decided at the President’s discretion rather than population size.⁷⁴ For instance, the GoS stronghold Latakia has seven more seats than opposition-linked Dar’a, despite having similar population sizes.⁷⁵ At the 2024 parliamentary elections, the GoS assigned 183 of 250 parliamentary seats to the Ba’ath Party and regime-aligned parties, while granting only 67 seats to independent candidates whose candidacies are still subject to approval by regime-associated committees.⁷⁶ At the elections, the Ba’ath sponsored National Unity coalition won 185 seats and independent politicians won 65 seats.⁷⁷

⁶⁵ AP News, Syria’s president grants amnesty, reduced sentences on anniversary of coup that put father in power, 16 November 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁶ SNHR, Amnesty Decree No. 36 of 2023 Excludes Political Prisoners, 21 November 2023, [url](#); UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of the Syrian Arab Republic, 25 July 2024, [url](#), para. 24

⁶⁷ SNHR, Amnesty Decree No. 36 of 2023 Excludes Political Prisoners, 21 November 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁸ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024 - Syria, 29 February 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁹ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024 - Syria, 29 February 2024, [url](#); Etana Syria, Activists call for boycott of People’s Assembly elections, 14 July 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁰ Etana Syria, Activists call for boycott of People’s Assembly elections, 14 July 2024, [url](#)

⁷¹ Pran, V. and Sfeir, M., Syrian elections are decided before election day, Atlantic Council, 25 July 2024, [url](#)

⁷² Haid, H., Behind the façade: understanding Syria’s parliamentary election, Al Majalla, 24 July 2024, [url](#); Pran, V. and Sfeir, M., The Syrian parliamentary elections are coming up. Should anyone care?, Atlantic Council, 25 April 2024, [url](#)

⁷³ Haid, H., Behind the façade: understanding Syria’s parliamentary election, Al Majalla, 24 July 2024, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung: BTI 2024 Country Report Syria, 19 March 2024, [url](#), p. 9

⁷⁴ International IDEA, Explainer: Syria’s 2024 legislative elections. 8 July 2024, [url](#); Haid, H., Behind the façade: understanding Syria’s parliamentary election, Al Majalla, 24 July 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁵ Haid, H., Behind the façade: understanding Syria’s parliamentary election, Al Majalla, 24 July 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁶ Etana Syria, Activists call for boycott of People’s Assembly elections, 14 July 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁷ SNHR, The Syrian Regime’s 2024 Parliamentary Elections Are Illegitimate and Predetermined by the Regime’s Security Apparatus, 24 July 2024, [url](#), p. 2



According to some sources interviewed by the EUAA for this report, the GoS is currently likely to view as opposition members of political opposition parties⁷⁸ and politicians and activists opposing the GoS.⁷⁹ According to SJAC, the GoS views as oppositional individuals with ties to and members of political opposition parties including the Coalition of the Syrian Opposition, the High Negotiation Committee, the Constitutional Committee, as well as members of Damascus Declaration group and members of opposition political parties that existed in Syria (illegally) before 2011, including all Kurdish political parties.⁸⁰ During the reference period, there were some reports of GoS authorities arresting members of parties allied with the regime such as the Syrian National Party for being critical of its policies on social media.⁸¹ Some were subsequently released after spending months in detention.⁸²

(b) Political activists and protesters

Political activists (including journalists, media activists and critics of the GoS on social media)

According to some sources interviewed by the EUAA for this report, activists opposing the GoS,⁸³ critics of the GoS and its policies⁸⁴ and journalists and media workers who report on GoS abuses⁸⁵ are likely to be viewed as opposition by the GoS. According to SJAC, the GoS' tolerance for political activism is almost non-existent and most of the independent political activists have been forced into exile. The GoS allows some level of criticism towards its performance, usually carried out by entertainment figures (including actors, singers, and TV stars), as long as it is not directed at Assad's family, their inner circle, the security agencies, the prevalence of corruption and the general situation of the post-war Syria.⁸⁶ SNHR assessed that, while the minimum forms of criticism are repressed, the GoS would more severely punish those who criticise senior officials such as the President and heads of intelligence services, or who advocate for changing the political system.⁸⁷ According to SJAC, the GoS' 'red lines' are arbitrary and at times, even pro-GoS personalities and journalists have been arrested for overstepping the level of criticism tolerated by the GoS.⁸⁸

Freedom House noted that the GoS extensively monitors private and online discussions and imposes severe penalties for dissent within its controlled areas. It has applied these surveillance measures inconsistently in recent years, facing increasing criticism from segments of the population that were traditionally loyal.⁸⁹ Returnees to GoS-controlled areas who were

⁷⁸ SJAC, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 September 2024

⁷⁹ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024; SJAC, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 September 2024

⁸⁰ SJAC, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 September 2024

⁸¹ STJ, Syria: Protests Escalate in the Areas Controlled by the Government and the Latter Responds with Arrests and Ready-Made Accusations, 27 September 2023, [url](#)

⁸² BBC Monitoring, Insight, 1 February 2024, [url](#)

⁸³ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024; SJAC, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 September 2024

⁸⁴ Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence with EUAA, 19 & 28 August 2024; SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024

⁸⁵ Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence with EUAA, 19 & 28 August 2024; SJAC, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 September 2024

⁸⁶ SJAC, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 September 2024

⁸⁷ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA 9 & 26 August 2024

⁸⁸ SJAC, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 September 2024

⁸⁹ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024 - Syria, 29 February 2024, [url](#)



interviewed for an Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) report stated that they received minimal information from family members, friends, or contacts within the country about life in Syria. This is reportedly due to the pervasive fear prompted by the repressive policies and surveillance employed by GoS forces' security agencies on telecommunications and internet traffic. Many interviewees informed OHCHR that residents in GoS-controlled areas were hesitant to express criticism of the country's situation over the phone, WhatsApp, social media, or similar platforms. Even the economic crisis, once considered a relatively safe topic for discussion, was deemed delicate by many.⁹⁰

Each of the four main intelligence services of the GoS has special divisions that monitor local and international media, including social media activities.⁹¹ In applying the Cybercrime Law No. 20 of 2022⁹² SNHR noted three standard practices utilised by the GoS intelligence services: 1) the Counter-Cybercrime division of the Criminal Security Directorate investigates suspected cybercrimes once a formal complaint or request has been lodged with the public prosecutor's office; 2) the Counter-Cybercrime division proactively investigates any behaviour it perceives to contravene the law by actively monitoring social media, websites and other published content; the alleged offenders are subsequently detained; 3) intelligence services summon those who express criticism against the GoS for interrogation, where they can be subjected to torture, enforced disappearance, forced to delete social media activity and referred to extraordinary courts such as the Counterterrorism Court for trial.⁹³ According to Jusoor for Studies,⁹⁴ the agencies tasked with investigating cybercrimes interpret the actions of those charged in a highly subjective manner, leading to charges under various pretexts such as undermining the Constitution by criticising its provisions, damaging the state's prestige, or inciting racial and sectarian strife. The same source stated that the treatment of those charged under the Cybercrime law is selective, based on the GoS' assessment of the threat and impact on its security environment posed by the individual's actions under the legal definition of the crime. For instance, the GoS tolerated criticism coming from certain activists as long as they did not incite political dissent while repressing others who criticised the GoS' behaviour and the living conditions.⁹⁵ UNCOI noted that the provisions of the Cybercrime Law 'are so vaguely defined that they induce substantial risk of arbitrary detention and conviction'.⁹⁶

During the second half of 2023, the GoS reportedly detained numerous individuals for advocating protests online,⁹⁷ even in areas typically supportive of the GoS, such as Latakia

⁹⁰ OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), para. 80

⁹¹ 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, [url](#), p. 6

⁹² For more information about the provisions of the law see EUAA, COI Report: Syria - Targeting of individuals, September 2022, [url](#), pp. 75-76; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), pp. 15-16

⁹³ 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, [url](#)

⁹⁴ Jusoor for Studies Center is an independent institution based in Türkiye specializing in information management and conducting studies and research related to the Syrian political and social affairs in particular and the Middle East region in general. For more information see [url](#)

⁹⁵ Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence with EUAA, 28 August 2024

⁹⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/57/86], 10 September 2024, [url](#), para. 27

⁹⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 11 March 2024, [url](#), paras. 54-55



and Tartous governorates.⁹⁸ Whereas the protests against the GoS were concentrated in Sweida governorate, a smaller movement of dissent named 10th of August Movement started in the coastal areas of Latakia and Tartous. Those associated with the movement were mainly active on social media. Between August and December 2023, at least 30 persons were reportedly arrested by the GoS in these areas in connection with the protest movement.⁹⁹ Among those arrested for criticising the GoS on social media were pro-GoS journalists,¹⁰⁰ activists,¹⁰¹ university students and government employees.¹⁰² According to sources, those arrested for criticising the GoS on social media were charged with offenses under the Cybercrime Law.¹⁰³

Social media users originating from the coastal areas and Hama governorate were arrested after criticising the GoS or for communicating with opposition activists abroad. Despite the removal of the social media posts critical of the GoS, some detainees were still not released according to UNCOI reporting on the second half of 2023.¹⁰⁴

Between April 2022 and May 2024, SNHR documented the arrest of 176 persons on the grounds of violating the Cybercrime Law¹⁰⁵, out of which 114 were arrested in 2023.¹⁰⁶ The arrests targeted journalists, citizen journalists and media workers.¹⁰⁷ According to the human rights NGO Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), most accusations against persons arrested for criticising the GoS on social media or during demonstrations were based on Articles 285, 286 and 287 of the Syrian Penal Code¹⁰⁸ which prescribe imprisonment of up to five years for anyone who during wartime or in anticipation of war, publishes rhetoric intended to ‘weaken national sentiment’ or disseminates exaggerated news within Syria that could ‘weaken the psyche of the nation’. Additionally, these articles impose the same penalty on individuals responsible for acts of aggression aimed at unlawfully altering the state constitution.

⁹⁸ Syria Direct, ‘Ambiguous relationship’: Where does Latakia stand on Suwayda’s movement?, 26 January 2024, [url](#); 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, [url](#), p. 12

⁹⁹ Syria Direct, ‘Ambiguous relationship’: Where does Latakia stand on Suwayda’s movement?, 26 January 2024, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰ New Arab (The), Syrian president Assad visits coast as discontent rises over economic conditions, 29 September 2023, [url](#); STJ, Syria: Protests Escalate in the Areas Controlled by the Government and the Latter Responds with Arrests and Ready-Made Accusations, 27 September 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ Syria Direct, ‘Ambiguous relationship’: Where does Latakia stand on Suwayda’s movement?, 26 January 2024, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Arrests campaign tracks Latakia activists; Anticipation and caution prevail on coastal region, 22 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰² 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, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁰³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/57/86], 10 September 2024, [url](#), para. 16; 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, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁰⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 11 March 2024, [url](#), paras. 54-55

¹⁰⁵ 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, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁰⁶ 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, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁰⁷ 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, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁰⁸ STJ, Syria: Protests Escalate in the Areas Controlled by the Government and the Latter Responds with Arrests and Ready-Made Accusations, 27 September 2023, [url](#)



Furthermore, a minimum six-month prison sentence is prescribed for anyone who transmits exaggerated news abroad that could damage the ‘image of the state or its financial stature’.¹⁰⁹ According to STJ, most of the arrested were released between 24-48 hours and were forced to delete content critical of GoS.¹¹⁰ According to SNHR data, out of 146 persons arrested on the grounds of the Cybercrime Law between May 2022 and August 2023, 59 were released, one person died as a result of torture and 86 were still being held in arrest/detention.¹¹¹

Some sources assessed that family members of prominent anti-GoS activists would also encounter problems with the authorities.¹¹² They would often be stigmatised and regarded as opposition, even if they themselves had not engaged in activities against the state.¹¹³ According to an international organisation working on Syria interviewed for this report, family members of known opponents take mitigation measures such as avoiding leaving their homes, communicating with their relatives abroad or in opposition areas, exposing themselves to checkpoints, or speaking on sensitive issues.¹¹⁴ SNHR assessed that family members of prominent anti-GoS activists or of women activists would be more likely to encounter harassment at checkpoints, repeated summons to security services for investigation, and arrest, as a way to achieve pressure or as punishment.¹¹⁵

Protesters

The 2012 Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic guarantees peaceful assembly (Article 44)¹¹⁶ but in practice the GoS has restricted and suppressed it.¹¹⁷ According to SJAC, the GoS is currently more likely to view protesters as opposition.¹¹⁸ During the reference period, there were some reports of arbitrary arrest and detention of protesters.¹¹⁹

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.¹²⁰ Protests grew and

¹⁰⁹ 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, [url](#), p. 6

¹¹⁰ STJ, Syria: Protests Escalate in the Areas Controlled by the Government and the Latter Responds with Arrests and Ready-Made Accusations, 27 September 2023, [url](#)

¹¹¹ 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, [url](#), p. 11

¹¹² SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024; Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence with EUAA, 19 & 28 August 2024; International organisation working on Syria, online interview with EUAA, 13 September 2024

¹¹³ Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence with EUAA, 19 & 28 August 2024

¹¹⁴ International organisation working on Syria, online interview with EUAA, 13 September 2024

¹¹⁵ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024

¹¹⁶ Syria, Constitution, Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic, 26 February 2012, [url](#), Article 44

¹¹⁷ USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section 2, Respect for Civilian Liberties, B. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024 - Syria, 29 February 2024, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 11 March 2024, [url](#), para. 55; UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of the Syrian Arab Republic [CCPR/C/SYR/CO/4], 25 July 2024, [url](#), para. 42

¹¹⁸ SJAC, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 September 2024

¹¹⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 11 March 2024, [url](#), paras. 54, 65

¹²⁰ 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 York Times (The), Rare protests in Syria summon echoes of Arab Spring, 31 August 2023, [url](#)





continued in September in Sweida governorate¹²¹ while decreasing in other parts of the country.¹²² Anti-GoS protests persisted in Sweida during the reference period.¹²³

The GoS response towards the protests in Sweida has been mainly focused on negotiating with Druze leaders¹²⁴ in the governorate, organising counterdemonstrations¹²⁵ and increasing its military presence in the area.¹²⁶ There were, however, several instances where GoS forces reportedly used violence against the protesters. On 13 September 2023, 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.¹²⁷ This incident was the first documented use of violence by GoS on protesters in Sweida since the demonstrations began in August 2023.¹²⁸ In February 2024, security forces opened fire when a group of protesters tried to storm a government building in Sweida city, killing one protester.¹²⁹ In April 2024, an arrest of a university student who participated in the protests in Sweida triggered local armed groups to detain several officers of the GoS forces to secure his release.¹³⁰ In July 2024, the leader of a local armed faction in Sweida governorate who was regarded as a key figure in the anti-GoS protests in the governorate, was assassinated by unknown assailants.¹³¹ Protesters have attributed his death to the GoS security forces.¹³²

(c) Civilians originating from, or residing in, areas perceived to be opposing the government/reconquered areas

According to International Crisis Group, ‘the mere fact of having lived outside regime-controlled areas exposes returnees to suspicion of sympathising with, aiding or actively participating in rebel activities’. Such suspicions could be a pretext for detention and/or financial exploitation.¹³³ Persons originating from areas known for anti-GoS activities such as Dar’a, Homs, Eastern Ghouta (Rural Damascus) can be subject to questioning, detention, or

¹²¹ ISW, Syria Protest Update, September 12 – September 18, 20 September 2023, [url](#)

¹²² ISW, Syria Protest Update, August 29 – September 4, 6 September 2023, [url](#)

¹²³ 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](#); Security Council Report, July 2024 Monthly Forecast, 30 June 2024, [url](#); Al Shami, I., Suwayda Protests Continue Despite Growing Pressure, TWA, 7 June 2024, [url](#); UN Office of the Special Envoy for Syria, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen, Briefing to the Security Council, 22 July 2024, [url](#), p. 1

¹²⁴ International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch – September 2023, n.d., [url](#)

¹²⁵ ISW, Syria Protest Update, September 12 – September 18, 20 September 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁶ New Arab (The), Syrian regime sends military reinforcements to Suweida, sparking fears of crackdown, 30 April 2024, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Syrian regime deploys additional military reinforcements to As-Suwayda, 26 April 2024, [url](#)

¹²⁷ 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](#)

¹²⁸ 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](#)

¹²⁹ Etana Syria, Memo: Protest Killing & Unrest in Suwayda, 5 March 2024, [url](#); Al Jazeera, One person killed at anti-government protest in Syria's Sweida province, 28 February 2024, [url](#)

¹³⁰ New Arab (The), Syrian regime sends military reinforcements to Suweida, sparking fears of crackdown, 30 April 2024, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Syrian regime deploys additional military reinforcements to As-Suwayda, 26 April 2024, [url](#); International Crisis Group, CrisisWatch: Syria, April 2024, [url](#)

¹³¹ Asharq Al-Awsat, Syria: Sweida Tensions Rise After Assassination of Armed Faction Leader, 18 July 2024, [url](#); Syria Direct, Murhij al-Jarmani assassinated: A ‘turning point’ for Suwayda’s uprising?, 19 July 2024, [url](#); UN Office of the Special Envoy for Syria, United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Geir O. Pedersen, Briefing to the Security Council, 22 July 2024, [url](#), p. 1

¹³² Asharq Al-Awsat, Syria: Sweida Tensions Rise After Assassination of Armed Faction Leader, 18 July 2024, [url](#); Syria Direct, Murhij al-Jarmani assassinated: A ‘turning point’ for Suwayda’s uprising?, 19 July 2024, [url](#)

¹³³ International Crisis Group, Syria: Ruling over Aleppo’s Ruins, 9 May 2022, [url](#), p. 19





harassment at checkpoints, as the GoS assumes these individuals are more likely to be disloyal or involved in opposition activities.¹³⁴ According to an international organisation working on Syria, persons originating from former opposition-held areas (e.g. areas in Rural Damascus, Dar'a, parts of Homs governorate) are more likely to be at risk of human rights violations such as arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, torture, than persons originating from other areas under GoS control. There is a stigma against communities from these areas due to their perceived association with the opposition. For instance, there are cases of families who are not able to access their properties or their assets or had their assets frozen/confiscated upon administrative or judiciary decision because they are labelled as being linked to the opposition.¹³⁵

Several sources assessed that residents of opposition-held or former opposition-held areas are likely to be viewed as opposition by the GoS.¹³⁶ Human Rights Watch senior researcher Hiba Zayadin assessed that persons originating from or residing in recaptured areas that have undergone settlement and 'reconciliation' agreements with the GoS are still viewed with suspicion and such agreements do not protect individuals from surveillance, questioning or punitive actions.¹³⁷ SNHR stated that IDPs and refugees living in areas outside GoS-control, especially those who left as part of collective displacement agreements are likely to be viewed as opposition by the GoS.¹³⁸

Persons wishing to enter or exit GoS-held areas,¹³⁹ including IDPs wanting to return to their area of origin¹⁴⁰ or visit their property,¹⁴¹ are required to obtain a security clearance from the GoS security forces.¹⁴² SJAC stated that granting a security clearance generally requires a mix of government connections, bribery payments, and proving that no family members have been affiliated with opposition groups or activism.¹⁴³ Sources reported that the GoS denied security clearance to perceived opponents and their relatives, former members of the opposition,¹⁴⁴ and former residents of areas considered opposition strongholds.¹⁴⁵ IDPs wishing to return to their homes in former opposition-held areas in Damascus, Hama and Idlib governorates experienced harassment, threats and extortion, when interacting with the security branches

¹³⁴ Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence with EUAA, 19 & 28 August 2024

¹³⁵ International organisation working on Syria, online interview, with EUAA, 13 September 2024

¹³⁶ Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence with EUAA, 19 & 28 August 2024; SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024; SJAC, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 September 2024

¹³⁷ Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence with EUAA, 19 & 28 August 2024

¹³⁸ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024

¹³⁹ USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section D. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

¹⁴⁰ Syria Report (The), IDPs Return to Regime-Controlled Areas in Idlib and Hama, 18 June 2024, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ SJAC, Human Rights Violations in Syria - April 2024, 20 May 2024, [url](#)

¹⁴² Syria Report (The), IDPs Return to Regime-Controlled Areas in Idlib and Hama, 18 June 2024, [url](#); SJAC, Human Rights Violations in Syria - April 2024, 20 May 2024, [url](#); USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section D. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

¹⁴³ SJAC, Human Rights Violations in Syria - April 2024, 20 May 2024, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴ USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section D. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country; TDA, Violating the HLP Rights Post the Trilogy (Siege, Destruction, Displacement), January 2024, [url](#), pp. 21, 56

¹⁴⁵ Syria Report (The), Bribes, Security Services, Major Obstacle to Return in Al-Tadhamon, 14 November 2023, [url](#); USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section D. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country



for the purpose of obtaining a security clearance.¹⁴⁶ Some were denied access to their properties¹⁴⁷ despite having a security clearance¹⁴⁸ or had to pay bribes to authorities to gain access.¹⁴⁹ Particularly, returnees with financial means were arrested and huge bribes were demanded for their release.¹⁵⁰

In 2023, SNHR documented the arbitrary arrest and detention by GoS security forces of 386 persons who underwent ‘reconciliation/status settlement’ in former opposition-held areas, including of civilians who had links to opposition armed groups, army defectors and former humanitarian and medical activists. Most of the arrests were documented in the governorates of Rural Damascus, Dar’a, Deir Ez-Zor and Raqqa. The same source did not record any releases from detention of persons who underwent ‘reconciliation’ in former opposition-held areas of Idlib, Dar’a, Aleppo, and Rural Damascus governorates.¹⁵¹ According to OHCHR, returnees to former opposition-held areas such as Dar’a governorate or areas perceived to be opposing the GoS such as Hama city and governorate, ‘are reportedly more exposed to the risk of violations and abuses at checkpoints, including being subjected to intrusive strip searches, interrogation, arrest or extortion’.¹⁵²

In September 2024, sources reported that around 200 Syrians who travelled to opposition-held areas to visit relatives were arrested by GoS authorities on their return in the proximity of Damascus.¹⁵³ Most of detainees were reportedly originating from Damascus and areas in Rural Damascus such as Eastern Ghouta.¹⁵⁴ According to testimonies, they were released following investigation.¹⁵⁵

In former opposition-held areas, GoS forces have engaged in looting of houses of displaced residents, at times demolishing residential buildings to extract resources like iron, pipes, and wiring.¹⁵⁶ A The Day After (TDA) study investigating housing, land and property (HLP) violations in former opposition controlled areas¹⁵⁷ in Damascus, Homs, Dar’a and Aleppo governorates

¹⁴⁶ Syria Report (The), IDPs Return to Regime-Controlled Areas in Idlib and Hama, 18 June 2024, [url](#); Syria Report (The), Bribes, Security Services, Major Obstacle to Return in Al-Tadhamon, 14 November 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 69

¹⁴⁸ Syria Report (The), Bribes, Security Services, Major Obstacle to Return in Al-Tadhamon, 14 November 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 69; Syria Report (The), Bribes, Security Services, Major Obstacle to Return in Al-Tadhamon, 14 November 2023, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ Syria Report (The), IDPs Return to Regime-Controlled Areas in Idlib and Hama, 18 June 2024, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ 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, [url](#), pp. 4, 8

¹⁵² OHCHR, “We did not fear death but the life there”. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), para. 50

¹⁵³ New Arab (The), 200 Syrians missing after arrest by regime forces near Damascus, 8 September 2024, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Around 200 civilians detained near Damascus after crossing three control zones, 7 September 2024, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴ Enab Baladi, Around 200 civilians detained near Damascus after crossing three control zones, 7 September 2024, [url](#)

¹⁵⁵ Syrian Observer (The), Coming From the North: What Fate for 200 Syrians Arrested by Regime?, 9 September 2024, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶ Daoudi, S., The Public Health Effects of Normalization With Syria, New Lines Institute, 10 October 2023, [url](#), p. 9; TDA, Violating the HLP Rights Post the Trilogy (Siege, Destruction, Displacement), January 2024, [url](#), pp. 10, 12-13

¹⁵⁷ The report studied the cases of Jobar, Al-Tadamon, and Darayya in Damascus and its rural area, Al-Qusayr and Baba Amr in Homs governorate, as well as the camp neighborhood in Daraa city, and Jabal Badro neighborhood in Aleppo governorate. TDA, Violating the HLP Rights Post the Trilogy (Siege, Destruction, Displacement), January 2024, [url](#), p. 5



found that GoS forces engaged in looting of buildings and construction materials and the removal of roofs and iron from houses of displaced residents.¹⁵⁸ Public services in former opposition-held areas are reported to be worse than in other GoS-controlled regions, largely due to infrastructure damage from the conflict and ongoing marginalisation and neglect by the government.¹⁵⁹

The GoS has enacted multiple laws to target opposition areas for seizure, demolition, redevelopment, and redistribution to its allies. In 2023, authorities used Law No. 3 of 2018, which regulates the removal of rubble from damaged or demolition-designated buildings, to demolish structures in war-damaged, formerly opposition-held areas. This included areas in Yarmouk Camp in Damascus governorate and al-Hajar al-Aswad in Rural Damascus governorate. Displaced owners had 30 days to appeal the decision but, in the cases mentioned, they were not given notice of the demolitions and were unable to appeal the decision.¹⁶⁰ Properties of displaced residents from former opposition-held areas have been seized by pro-GoS militias¹⁶¹ and security actors,¹⁶² including by the National Defence Forces (NDF) in Al-Tadamon (Rural Damascus governorate)¹⁶³ and by Hezbollah in Al-Qusayr (Homs governorate).¹⁶⁴ Displaced residents from former opposition-held areas have also found their properties occupied by neighbours¹⁶⁵ or have been pressured by GoS forces and affiliated armed groups, including the NDF and Hezbollah, to sell their properties in Jobar, Darayya, Tadamon, and al-Qusayr at low prices.¹⁶⁶

In recaptured areas of Idlib governorate the GoS authorities have seized agricultural land owned by locals who were displaced from the area and offered these properties for investment through public auctions.¹⁶⁷ Systematic looting and destroying of civilian buildings by GoS forces (including 25th Division/Tiger Forces) have been documented in areas recaptured by the GoS in southern Idlib governorate (Kafruma, Khan Sheikhoun, Maarat al-Numan, Morek and Kafr Nubl).¹⁶⁸ The 25th Division has been involved in looting and demolition of properties in northern Hama governorate and southern and eastern Idlib since 2019.¹⁶⁹

¹⁵⁸ TDA, Violating the HLP Rights Post the Trilogy (Siege, Destruction, Displacement), January 2024, [url](#), pp. 10-13

¹⁵⁹ SJAC, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 September 2024; Syria Direct, East Aleppo: Years of ‘deliberate’ neglect and poor services, 31 July 2024, [url](#); TDA, Violating the HLP Rights Post the Trilogy (Siege, Destruction, Displacement), January 2024, [url](#), pp. 159-160

¹⁶⁰ SJAC, October 2023: State of Justice in Syria 2024, March 2024, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁶¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 69; TDA, Violating the HLP Rights Post the Trilogy (Siege, Destruction, Displacement), January 2024, [url](#), p. 12-13; Syria Report (The), Bribes, Security Services, Major Obstacle to Return in Al-Tadhamon, 14 November 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶² TDA, Violating the HLP Rights Post the Trilogy (Siege, Destruction, Displacement), January 2024, [url](#), p. 15; Syria Report (The), Bribes, Security Services, Major Obstacle to Return in Al-Tadhamon, 14 November 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶³ TDA, Violating the HLP Rights Post the Trilogy (Siege, Destruction, Displacement), January 2024, [url](#), p. 12-13;

Syria Report (The), Bribes, Security Services, Major Obstacle to Return in Al-Tadhamon, 14 November 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ TDA, Violating the HLP Rights Post the Trilogy (Siege, Destruction, Displacement), January 2024, [url](#), p. 21

¹⁶⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 69

¹⁶⁶ TDA, Violating the HLP Rights Post the Trilogy (Siege, Destruction, Displacement), January 2024, [url](#), p. 27

¹⁶⁷ Syria Report (The), In a First, Idlib Governorate Offers Absentee-Owned Olive, Almond and Fig Orchards for Public Auction, 6 September 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶⁸ Syria Direct, ‘Locusts’: Organized looting, destruction of displaced Syrians’ homes by ‘demolition forces’ and regime-affiliated groups, 26 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units, April 2023 [source: SNHR], [url](#), p. 25





Sources reported that in 2024 the GoS used Legislative Decree 63 of 2012 to provisionally freeze assets of hundreds of families originating from the former opposition-held area of Zakia, Rural Damascus governorate¹⁷⁰ including of individuals who underwent ‘reconciliation’ following GoS’ recapture of the town, and of forcibly disappeared and missing persons.¹⁷¹ For more information on the provisions of the decree see section [\(d\)](#) below.

(d) (Former) members of anti-government armed groups

SJAC assessed that the GoS views members of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Hay’at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) and of the Syrian National Army (SNA) as opposition. Regarding members of SDF, the source noted that particularly members who are not occupying leadership positions in the group would be at risk of detention and human rights violations at the hands of GoS authorities, whereas those in leadership positions would be less exposed to such violations because of their status and the lines of communication that SDF has with Russia.¹⁷²

According to Human Rights Watch senior researcher Hiba Zayadin, members of armed groups who fought against the GoS and who surrendered or ‘reconciled’ under government amnesty programs following recapture of territories are still viewed with suspicion by the GoS and may be targeted.¹⁷³ SJAC assessed that individuals formerly involved in opposition leadership in a civilian or military capacity, even those who have undergone ‘reconciliation’ would still be at risk of arrest, arbitrary detention, and assassination by GoS forces and affiliated local armed groups.¹⁷⁴ The source documented cases of arrest and detention of such individuals in Damascus, Rural Damascus and other governorates in southern Syria.¹⁷⁵

During the reference period, there were reports of arrests of former members of armed opposition groups, some of whom had undergone ‘reconciliation’/settlement with the GoS.¹⁷⁶ In Dar’a governorate, local armed groups increasingly resorted to taking members of GoS security forces as hostages, attacking their headquarters, and negotiating with local authorities to secure the release of detained residents.¹⁷⁷ Among those detained by the GoS in Dar’a were leaders of local armed groups and ‘reconciled’ army defectors, usually arrested at checkpoints on the Damascus-Dar’a highway.¹⁷⁸ However, these practices are not widespread

¹⁷⁰ HRW, Syria: Mass Unlawful Asset Freezes, 18 July 2024, [url](#); SNHR, The Syrian Regime is Using Provisional Seizure of Assets as An Instrument of Collective Punishment, 16 July 2024, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ SNHR, The Syrian Regime is Using Provisional Seizure of Assets as An Instrument of Collective Punishment, 16 July 2024, [url](#), p. 7

¹⁷² SJAC, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 September 2024

¹⁷³ Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence with EUAA, 19 & 28 August 2024

¹⁷⁴ SJAC, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 September 2024

¹⁷⁵ SJAC, Human Rights Violations in Syria - May 2024, 20 June 2024, [url](#)

¹⁷⁶ Syria Direct, Hostages and siege: Daraa frees detainees by any means necessary, 13 June 2024, [url](#); SJAC, Human Rights Violations in Syria - May 2024, 20 June 2024, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/57/86], 10 September 2024, [url](#), para. 23

¹⁷⁷ Syria Direct, Hostages and siege: Daraa frees detainees by any means necessary, 13 June 2024, [url](#); Haid, H., Syrians’ pursuit of freeing loved ones from al-Assad’s prisons at any cost, AlArabiya News, 26 June 2024, [url](#)

¹⁷⁸ Syria Direct, Hostages and siege: Daraa frees detainees by any means necessary, 13 June 2024, [url](#)





in all GoS controlled areas but rather more prevalent in regions with fragile power dynamics between the GoS and local communities, such as Sweida and Dar'a.¹⁷⁹

Sources reported that, in 2024, the GoS provisionally froze assets of hundreds of families originating from the former opposition-held area of Zakia, Rural Damascus governorate,¹⁸⁰ including former opposition fighters.¹⁸¹ The measure is based on the Legislative Decree 63 of 2012 which permits the 'precautionary seizure' of assets of those investigated of 'crimes against the internal or external security of the state' and of offenses under the Counterterrorism law. If the individuals are subsequently tried and convicted, their properties are automatically confiscated and transferred to the government.¹⁸²

In southern Syria, particularly in Dar'a governorate, there was a continuing 'pattern' of targeted assassinations of former members of opposition groups by unidentified gunmen.¹⁸³ In 2023, SOHR documented the killing of 56 former opposition fighters who had undergone 'reconciliation' with the GoS and had either joined a SAA military unit or a pro-GoS militia in Dar'a governorate. The perpetrators were unknown.¹⁸⁴

The US Department of State (USDOS) reported that the outcomes of court trials of defendants accused of membership in the armed opposition 'appeared predetermined', although some defendants were able to bribe prosecutors and court officials.¹⁸⁵ The same source cited media and NGO reports stating that sentences of persons accused of anti-GoS activity (including violence against the GoS) were generally harsh.¹⁸⁶

Human Rights Watch researcher Hiba Zayadin assessed that relatives of individuals who have fought against the GoS are often stigmatised and regarded as opposition, even if they themselves have not engaged in activities against the state.¹⁸⁷

¹⁷⁹ Haid, H., Syrians turn to street justice to free relatives from Assad's prisons, MEI, 8 May 2024, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰ HRW, Syria: Mass Unlawful Asset Freezes, 18 July 2024, [url](#); SNHR, The Syrian Regime is Using Provisional Seizure of Assets as An Instrument of Collective Punishment, 16 July 2024, [url](#)

¹⁸¹ HRW, Syria: Mass Unlawful Asset Freezes, 18 June 2024, [url](#)

¹⁸² HRW, Syria: Mass Unlawful Asset Freezes, 18 June 2024, [url](#)

¹⁸³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 11 March 2024, [url](#), paras. 10, 48; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, From Settlement to Captagon: The Security Dynamics in Syria's Daraa, 28 December 2023, [url](#); Etana Syria, Syria Military Brief: South Syria – June 2024, 15 July 2024, [url](#); NPA, Gunmen kill former opposition member in Syria's Daraa, 30 July 2024, [url](#); NPA, Syria's Daraa remains in complex state 5 years after government control, 3 June 2024, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴ 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, [url](#)

¹⁸⁵ USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section 1, Respect for the Integrity of the Person, E. Denial for Fair Public Trial

¹⁸⁶ USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section 1, Respect for the Integrity of the Person, E. Denial for Fair Public Trial

¹⁸⁷ Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence, 19 & 28 August 2024



1.2. Returnees from abroad

1.2.1. Current return procedures

Individuals returning to Syria must undergo one or both of two return procedures: security clearance and ‘reconciliation / status settlement’.¹⁸⁸ Both procedures are run by Syrian intelligence.¹⁸⁹ However, the distinction between applying for security clearance and settling one’s status was not always clear-cut.¹⁹⁰ Although the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) defined the security clearance (*muwafaka amniya*) as ‘a process through which the Syrian authorities crosscheck whether a person is on a wanted list and is to be considered a security threat’,¹⁹¹ this process can take various forms in practice. Thus, more broadly speaking, obtaining security clearance can be understood as a background check¹⁹² on whether an individual has an ‘unsettled’ security issue such as participation in protests, criticising the government or taking up arms against the GoS.¹⁹³ According to International Crisis Group, the process of ‘settlement of security status (*taswiyat al-wadaa al-amni*)’ involved obtaining formal security clearance from all four main security agencies as well as verification of whether the applicant has satisfied the requirements regarding the mandatory military service.¹⁹⁴ A February 2024 OHCHR report based on interviews with returnees and former returnees¹⁹⁵ noted that many returnees had to go through the so-called ‘reconciliation’ process or ‘settlement of security status (*taswiyat al-wadaa al-amni*)’ before returning to GoS-controlled areas.¹⁹⁶

Returnees from abroad, IDPs and persons wanted by intelligence services, require a security clearance for entry to and exit from GoS-controlled areas, and to access property and housing rights.¹⁹⁷ According to sources, the GoS has refused security clearances to former residents of areas considered opposition strongholds,¹⁹⁸ former opposition members or persons perceived as critical to the GoS.¹⁹⁹ In some cases, individuals without security clearances had their assets

¹⁸⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria; Treatment upon return, May 2022, [url](#), p. 8; Denmark, DIS, Syria: Issues regarding return, October 2021, [url](#), p. 8; Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence, 19 August 2024.

¹⁸⁹ Syria Direct, ‘Syria is safe, refugees should return’: The dangers of the growing narrative, 29 June 2021, [url](#); Al Jumhuriya, متاهة الموافقة الأمنية [Maze of security approval], 14 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰ EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Situation of returnees from abroad, June 2021, [url](#), p. 20; HRW, ‘Our Lives Are Like Death’: Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan, 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 47

¹⁹¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria: Issues regarding return, October 2021, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁹² HRW, ‘Our Lives Are Like Death’: Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan, 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 48

¹⁹³ Denmark, DIS, Syria: Issues regarding return, October 2021, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁹⁴ International Crisis Group, Syria: Ruling over Aleppo’s Ruins, 9 May 2022, [url](#), p. 20

¹⁹⁵ OHCHR conducted 44 interviews with primary and secondary sources between October 2022 and June 2023, including with 22 returnees and former returnees. Former returnees were interviewed in-person in Türkiye and Lebanon, while interviews with returnees inside Syria were done remotely. Those interviewed had returned to Damascus, Rural Damascus, Idlib, Aleppo, Hama, Homs and Raqqa governorate between 2014 and 2023. OHCHR, ‘We did not fear death but the life there’. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), paras. 11-12

¹⁹⁶ OHCHR, ‘We did not fear death but the life there’. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), para. 37

¹⁹⁷ Bertelsmann Stiftung: BTI 2024 Country Report Syria, 19 March 2024, [url](#), pp. 23-24

¹⁹⁸ USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section D. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

¹⁹⁹ Bertelsmann Stiftung: BTI 2024 Country Report Syria, 19 March 2024, [url](#), pp. 23-24



seized under National Decree No. 66 of 2012 (aimed at ‘redesigning unauthorized or illegal housing areas’) under the guise of counter-terrorism measures.²⁰⁰

According to OHCHR, since 2016, the GoS has used the ‘reconciliation’ process to evaluate the prior status and records of individuals seeking to return to areas under its control, either from abroad or from other regions within Syria. Initially, the ‘reconciliation’ process targeted draft evaders, military defectors and those accused of ‘terrorism’-related offenses, but it appears to have expanded over the years to include people who previously fled GoS-controlled areas and wish to return. This vetting system is supervised by the GoS General Intelligence services and carried out through the establishment of ‘reconciliation’ centres or committees across various governorates. For Syrians living abroad, the process is facilitated by the Syrian embassies. In the ‘reconciliation’ process, security agencies scrutinise an individual's background, opinions, and past activities, with a focus on examining any prior stance or involvement in activities deemed as opposition to the GoS.²⁰¹

The ‘reconciliation’ process, which involves clearing one's name before returning to GoS-controlled areas, is a common approach for individuals seeking to minimize risks such as arrest, detention, abduction, or enforced disappearance. Although primarily affecting men, an increasing number of women have also started undergoing this process in recent times. Many people returning to GoS areas from abroad first inquire whether they are on a GoS ‘wanted list’ alleging their involvement in offenses. This query is often carried out by a family member or relative within Syria, who contacts an individual connected to or acting as an intermediary for the government, typically for a fee. However, even after completing the ‘reconciliation’ process or not appearing on the ‘wanted list’, individuals may still face additional screening measures. OHCHR noted cases where persons who completed the ‘reconciliation’ process were nonetheless arrested, detained and subjected to enforced disappearance upon their return.²⁰²

The UN Human Rights Committee expressed concerns about ‘the ambiguous and arbitrary nature of the government’s ‘reconciliation’ process’.²⁰³ The UNCOI found that on-the-ground procedures regarding return varied considerably and often depended on where persons were returning from, where they intended to go,²⁰⁴ their individual profile,²⁰⁵ and the intelligence services’ local capacities. While all returnees were required to visit security agencies,²⁰⁶ in some areas they had to ‘navigate multiple and overlapping clearance processes involving a range of authorities’.²⁰⁷ Some returnees were required to settle their status in ‘status settlement’ centres

²⁰⁰ Bertelsmann Stiftung: BTI 2024 Country Report Syria, 19 March 2024, [url](#), pp. 23-24

²⁰¹ OHCHR, “We did not fear death but the life there”. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), para. 38

²⁰² OHCHR, “We did not fear death but the life there”. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), para. 39; Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence, 19 August 2024.

²⁰³ UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of the Syrian Arab Republic [CCPR/C/SYR/CO/4], 25 July 2024, [url](#), para. 34

²⁰⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 63-64

²⁰⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 63-64; TIMEP, The Selective Return of Syrian Refugees, 23 January 2023, [url](#)

²⁰⁶ TIMEP, The Selective Return of Syrian Refugees, 23 January 2023, [url](#)

²⁰⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 64



in GoS-held areas before embarking on their return, thus having to rely on family members or friends in Syria acting on their behalf. Others lodged a request for ‘status settlement’ at a border crossing or accessed such centres in person after re-entering Syria through clandestine routes.²⁰⁸

Returnees interviewed by OHCHR claimed that there were no clear official guidelines to follow in order to undergo the ‘reconciliation’ process nor any security guarantees after the process is completed. OHCHR data showed that decisions regarding individuals’ eligibility to return following the ‘reconciliation’ process, when facilitated from Lebanon, were typically communicated through unofficial channels such as WhatsApp groups or via phone calls from Syrian security agencies. Within Syria, ‘settlement cards’ are issued upon successful completion of the process, yet interviewees reported by OHCHR stated they did not receive any official documentation confirming their situation had been resolved with the government before their return.²⁰⁹

Some Syrians who wished to return were denied the ‘reconciliation’ application without being provided with any documentation explaining the reasons for the denial or being informed about potential avenues or the possibility to appeal the decision. This was particularly reported for Syrians living in Lebanon who underwent ‘reconciliation’.²¹⁰

1.2.2. Return patterns

UN agencies, including OHCHR, do not have physical and unhindered access inside GoS-controlled areas.²¹¹ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has limited presence at several border crossings from where it provides ‘health and protection referral services’ to returnees.²¹² As a result of GoS-imposed restrictions, no systematic collection of data and monitoring of returnees has been carried out and obtaining comprehensive information about the treatment of returnees by the GoS is not possible.²¹³ Studies documenting the treatment of returnees have relied mainly on interviews carried out remotely with Syrians inside the country or in neighbouring countries.²¹⁴

Since 2016, UNHCR has verified or monitored the return of over 411 922 Syrians from neighbouring countries to Syria as of 30 June 2024, the majority from Türkiye (186 400), Lebanon (91 498), and Jordan (72 360). There were 38 257 refugee returns to Syria in 2023

²⁰⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 64

²⁰⁹ OHCHR, “We did not fear death but the life there”. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), para. 40

²¹⁰ OHCHR, “We did not fear death but the life there”. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), paras. 40-41; Syria Direct, At risk in Lebanon, Syrians gamble on smuggling routes to Idlib, 8 July 2024, [url](#)

²¹¹ OHCHR, “We did not fear death but the life there”. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), paras. 10, 13

²¹² UNHCR, Syria Fact Sheet (July 2024) – Return of Syrian Refugees, 6 August 2024, [url](#), p. 3

²¹³ EIP, Refugees Return in Syria: Dangers, Security Risks and Information Scarcity, July 2019, [url](#), pp. 4-5

²¹⁴ OHCHR, “We did not fear death but the life there”. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), paras. 10-13; UNHCR, Ninth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees’ Perceptions & Intentions on Return to Syria, June 2024, [url](#), p. 17



and 19 729 in 2024.²¹⁵ There were 5 078 refugee returns from Lebanon in 2024 according to UNHCR data, as of June 2024, and an additional 103 returnees as part of General Security of Lebanon (GSO)-facilitated returns.²¹⁶

During the reference period, sources reported Syrians returning from Lebanon to GoS-controlled areas in Idlib,²¹⁷ Deir Ez-Zor,²¹⁸ Rural Damascus, and Homs governorates.²¹⁹ In some cases, returnees were provided with assistance by national NGOs and the Syrian Arab Crescent (SARC) upon arrival.²²⁰ Some returnees have claimed that they did not receive any assistance from the GoS to rebuild their houses or for alternative accommodation.²²¹

Hundreds of Syrians were deported from Lebanon in 2023 and 2024 to GoS-controlled areas.²²² Deportations of Syrians from Türkiye to areas outside GoS control in northern Syria were reported to take place during the reference period.²²³ There were also reports of smaller number of Syrians being deported from Iraq to Damascus and to areas controlled by the SDF.²²⁴

In the context of escalating hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon in September 2024, around 100 000 persons were estimated to have crossed from Lebanon into Syria, mainly through the al-Masnaa (Jdeidet Yabous) border.²²⁵ The majority were Syrians (60 % according to UNHCR data) while the rest were Lebanese citizens.²²⁶ Around 60 000 of the total number of persons who crossed into Syria were children.²²⁷ Many of the people who fled into Syria are reported to have travelled to the governorates of Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Damascus, Rural Damascus, and Tartous where they were hosted primarily by relatives and communities.²²⁸

(a) Returns from Europe

Comprehensive information on the number of Syrian returnees from Europe is not available. Statistical data from the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Tourism

²¹⁵ UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response: Durable Solutions, [url](#), updated as of 30 June 2024

²¹⁶ UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response: Durable Solutions, [url](#), updated as of 30 June 2024

²¹⁷ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update Syrian Arab Republic – Issue 25/June 2024, 1 August 2024, [url](#), p. 7

²¹⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update Syrian Arab Republic - Issue 24/May 2024, 15 July 2024, [url](#), p. 8

²¹⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update Syrian Arab Republic - Issue 24/May 2024, 15 July 2024, [url](#), p. 8; UNHCR, Syria Fact Sheet (July 2024) – Return of Syrian Refugees, 6 August 2024, [url](#), p. 1; Enab Baladi, Return of a group of Syrian refugees from Lebanon: Is Syria safe?, 11 July 2024, [url](#)

²²⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update Syrian Arab Republic - Issue 24/May 2024, 15 July 2024, [url](#), p. 8

²²¹ OHCHR, “We did not fear death but the life there”. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), para. 60

²²² Access Center for Human Rights, What Happens After The Forced Deportation Of Refugees From Lebanon?, 29 January 2024, [url](#), p. 8; Syria Direct, At risk in Lebanon, Syrians gamble on smuggling routes to Idlib, 8 July 2024, [url](#); SJAC, Intensified deportation campaigns by Lebanon and Türkiye amid EU funding pledges, 27 June 2024, [url](#)

²²³ Syria Direct, Deported Syrians struggle to wrap up loose ends in Turkey, 10 January 2024, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), After Being Returned from Turkey: Syrian Engineer Dies in Aleppo Military Security Branch, 13 September 2024, [url](#); HRW, Syrians Face Dire Conditions in Turkish-Occupied ‘Safe Zone’, 28 March 2024, [url](#)

²²⁴ HRW, Iraq: Unlawful Deportations of Syrians, 27 June 2024, [url](#)

²²⁵ UNHCR, Syria Flash Update #4 Response to Displacement from Lebanon to Syria, 30 September 2024, [url](#), p. 2

²²⁶ UNHCR, Syria Flash Update #4 Response to Displacement from Lebanon to Syria, 30 September 2024, [url](#), p. 1

²²⁷ Save the Children, About 60,000 children crossed into Syria from Lebanon in less than a week, 30 September 2024, [url](#)

²²⁸ UNHCR, Syria Flash Update #4 Response to Displacement from Lebanon to Syria, 30 September 2024, [url](#), p. 2; UNHCR, Syria Flash Update. Response to Displacement from Lebanon to Syria, 25 September 2024, [url](#), p. 2





indicated that thousands of Syrians who obtained citizenship abroad had been visiting Syria. In 2022, significant numbers arrived from countries like Germany (13 226), Sweden (19 194), and the Netherlands (9 296).²²⁹ SNHR estimated that around 10 000 Syrians living in Europe visited Syria during the summer of 2024. However, SNHR did not specify if any and how many of these were beneficiaries of international protection and included in the figure Syrians who had acquired European citizenship. The source has not encountered cases of Syrians from Europe returning to settle in Syria.²³⁰

Confidential sources interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs between March and May 2023 stated that some Syrians have been returning temporarily from Europe to GoS-controlled areas and to the north-west of Syria as they did not anticipate the issues they would encounter with authorities. These returns have often been temporary, for the purpose of family reasons (death of a relative) or checking their property.²³¹

1.2.3. Treatment of returnees by GoS and affiliated armed groups

Several confidential sources interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs between March and May 2023 concurred that the treatment of a Syrian returnee hinges on their relationship with local authorities and the authorities' perception of them. A Syrian who left the country legally, had no issues with the Syrian authorities, and was viewed as pro-government or at least not involved in opposition activities, would generally face few, if any, problems. Confidential sources indicated that a person can typically return to areas outside the control of the GoS without issues if they have no outstanding problems with those authorities and are not considered a threat.²³²

According to Jusoor for Studies, Syrians living in Europe who left the country for economic reasons, do not have security issues (such as charges related to opposition or political criticism of the GoS, and issues related to the military service) and carry official documents to prove their citizenship and residency abroad, were not facing harassment or interrogation while visiting Syria. This is reportedly due to the economic benefits the GoS gains from their return and the positive image it seeks to project, suggesting that its behaviour has changed.²³³ SNHR assessed that Syrians who fled due to economic circumstances and were not involved in opposition to the GoS would in general not encounter problems apart from being exposed to financial extortion at checkpoints.²³⁴ SJAC assessed that Syrians living in Europe who are able to return without encountering problems are those who left the country for economic reasons and are often pro-GoS or have contacts within the GoS.²³⁵

SJAC documented cases of Syrians with European citizenship who were interrogated by the intelligence services during their visit to Syria and had to pay large sums of money to leave

²²⁹ Syrian Observer (The), Influx of Syrians with Foreign Passports to Syria, 30 August 2024, [url](#)

²³⁰ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024

²³¹ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 77

²³² Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 81

²³³ Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence with EUAA, 28 August 2024

²³⁴ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024

²³⁵ SJAC, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 September 2024





the country. The same source stated that it has observed cases of Syrians who requested international protection in Europe and encountered difficulties in being allowed to return and visit their area of origin.²³⁶

According to OHCHR information, Syrians who were involved in anti-GoS protests and activism do not usually consider returning to GoS controlled areas out of fear of retaliation. Those with such backgrounds who wish to return often choose areas outside of GoS control but encounter verbal threats, harassment, and arbitrary arrests and detentions by the actors in control including from SDF, HTS and SNA.²³⁷ SNHR did not observe any cases of anti-GoS activists or politicians returning to Syria.²³⁸

An international organisation working on Syria assessed that financial extortion has become central in GoS detention and people who have spent time abroad in countries deemed to have financial possibilities such as the Gulf countries and potentially Europe, may be targeted and detained solely because they are perceived as a source of revenue. The source has documented cases of Syrians based in the Gulf countries who visited Syria recently and were detained by GoS forces for prospective monetary gain and were in some cases subject to torture and died in detention.²³⁹

Persons who left Syria illegally, those who originate from former opposition-held areas, and those with issues related to military service were generally interrogated upon return and there were cases when some of them were arrested.²⁴⁰ Sources reported cases of persons who completed the ‘reconciliation’ process but were nonetheless arrested,²⁴¹ detained and subjected to enforced disappearance upon their return.²⁴² Returnees have reported being called for interrogation by security forces upon their return. Those without civil documentation are more vulnerable to screening and arrest, according to OHCHR. Individuals with actual or perceived histories of political activism and involvement in anti-government activities, as well as men of conscription age, were assessed to be particularly vulnerable to questioning, screening, and subsequent arrest and detention.²⁴³

Security services can revisit a person’s file even years after they have returned. Informants can report persons and get security services to reopen their file, sometimes just as revenge²⁴⁴ to solve personal disputes or for financial gain.²⁴⁵ There were documented cases where returnees from abroad who did not have any outstanding issues with the GoS, had security reports filed against them which led to detention and extortion of the family for securing their

²³⁶ SJAC, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 September 2024

²³⁷ OHCHR, “We did not fear death but the life there”. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), para. 79

²³⁸ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024

²³⁹ International organisation working on Syria, online interview with EUAA, 13 September 2024

²⁴⁰ Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence with EUAA, 28 August 2024

²⁴¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 59 [source: Ammar Hamou]; OHCHR, “We did not fear death but the life there”. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), para. 39; SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024

²⁴² OHCHR, “We did not fear death but the life there”. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), para. 39

²⁴³ OHCHR, “We did not fear death but the life there”. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), para. 83-84

²⁴⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 59 [source: Ammar Hamou]

²⁴⁵ International organisation working on Syria, online interview with EUAA, 13 September 2024



release.²⁴⁶ According to STJ, returnees originating from former opposition-held areas may be arrested at checkpoints for blackmail or as revenge.²⁴⁷

The UN Human Rights Committee stated that it received reports of serious human rights violations committed against IDPs and returnees.²⁴⁸ During the reference period, there were reports of Syrians deported from Lebanon who were arrested, detained,²⁴⁹ tortured²⁵⁰ and died in GoS detention centres.²⁵¹ Between April 2023 and June 2024, SNHR documented the arrest and detention of 168 returnees²⁵² (126 between January and July 2024)²⁵³ who were deported from Lebanon. Most were detained by the Military Security Intelligence in al-Masnaa border area.²⁵⁴ Returnees were arrested by the Fourth Division of the SAA²⁵⁵ and by the GoS intelligence agencies, including the Military Security Intelligence Directorate,²⁵⁶ and were detained at the Palestine Branch (Branch 235),²⁵⁷ Qaboun²⁵⁸ and Sednaya prisons.²⁵⁹

According to a report published by the Lebanese NGO Access Center for Human Rights in 2024 (ACHR),²⁶⁰ Syrians deported from Lebanon went through a 'security settlement' and 'reconciliation' process upon arrival during which their background and previous activities

²⁴⁶ International organisation working on Syria, online interview with EUAA, 13 September 2024

²⁴⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 52 [source: STJ]

²⁴⁸ UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of the Syrian Arab Republic [CCPR/C/SYR/CO/4], 25 July 2024, [url](#), para. 34

²⁴⁹ Access Center for Human Rights, What Happens After The Forced Deportation Of Refugees From Lebanon?, 29 January 2024, [url](#), p. 12; SJAC, Intensified deportation campaigns by Lebanon and Türkiye amid EU funding pledges, 27 June 2024, [url](#); SJAC, Human Rights Violations in Syria - July 2024, 3 September 2024, [url](#)

²⁵⁰ Access Center for Human Rights, What Happens After The Forced Deportation Of Refugees From Lebanon?, 29 January 2024, [url](#), p. 12; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 11 March 2024, [url](#), paras. 61-62; AP, Some Syrian refugees risk returning to opposition-held areas as hostility in host Lebanon grows, 12 June 2024, [url](#); SJAC, Human Rights Violations in Syria - July 2024, 3 September 2024, [url](#)

²⁵¹ 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, [url](#); SNHR, SNHR Condemns Syrian Regime Forces for Detention, Fatal Torture of A Refugee Forcibly Deported from Lebanon, 28 June 2024, [url](#)

²⁵² SNHR, At least 4,714 Returning Refugees & IDPs Have been Arbitrarily Arrested by Syrian Regime Forces, 20 June 2024, [url](#), p. 4

²⁵³ SNHR, SNHR Condemns Syrian Regime Forces for Detention, Fatal Torture of A Refugee Forcibly Deported from Lebanon, 28 June 2024, [url](#)

²⁵⁴ SNHR, SNHR Condemns Syrian Regime Forces for Detention, Fatal Torture of A Refugee Forcibly Deported from Lebanon, 28 June 2024, [url](#); SNHR, At least 4,714 Returning Refugees & IDPs Have been Arbitrarily Arrested by Syrian Regime Forces, 20 June 2024, [url](#), p. 4

²⁵⁵ 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, [url](#), p. 11

²⁵⁶ SNHR, SNHR Condemns Syrian Regime Forces for Detention, Fatal Torture of A Refugee Forcibly Deported from Lebanon, 28 June 2024, [url](#); Access Center for Human Rights, What Happens After The Forced Deportation Of Refugees From Lebanon?, 29 January 2024, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, At least 4,714 Returning Refugees & IDPs Have been Arbitrarily Arrested by Syrian Regime Forces, 20 June 2024, [url](#), p. 4; SJAC, Intensified deportation campaigns by Lebanon and Türkiye amid EU funding pledges, 27 June 2024, [url](#)

²⁵⁷ Access Center for Human Rights, What Happens After The Forced Deportation Of Refugees From Lebanon?, 29 January 2024, [url](#), p. 12; SNHR, SNHR Condemns Syrian Regime Forces for Detention, Fatal Torture of A Refugee Forcibly Deported from Lebanon, 28 June 2024, [url](#)

²⁵⁸ Access Center for Human Rights, What Happens After The Forced Deportation Of Refugees From Lebanon?, 29 January 2024, [url](#), p. 12

²⁵⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 11 March 2024, [url](#), paras. 61-62

²⁶⁰ The report is based on 229 interviews (227 individuals in group cases, 72 individual interviews) and in-depth testimonies from 13 Syrian refugees subjected to deportation from Lebanon during 2023. Access Center for Human Rights, What Happens After The Forced Deportation Of Refugees From Lebanon?, 29 January 2024, [url](#), p. 30



(personal identity, reasons for leaving Syria and for return, information about their family and relatives) were investigated by the security services. They were subsequently classified by the GoS security services as draft evaders, evaders of reserve service, military deserters, political activists and others suspected of participating in opposition political activities, and individuals with opinions opposing GoS (often labelled as such due to their area of origin). Based on this classification and their previous activities they were then arrested and detained at security branches in Damascus (military police in Qaboun and the Palestine Branch), and according to testimonies, often subjected to torture.²⁶¹

Some detentions of returnees by the GoS appear to be motivated solely by financial gain.²⁶² Families of detainees were demanded to pay huge bribes to secure their release. UNCOI mentioned the case of a civilian originating from Hama who had been working abroad for over 15 years, who was detained shortly after returning for a family visit in mid-2023. He was accused of supporting armed groups and inciting sectarian strife. His family paid tens of thousands of dollars to intermediaries, ultimately securing his release without a trial.²⁶³

Some returnees from Lebanon including elderly individuals²⁶⁴ and those designated as ‘undesirable and posing a security and demographic threat’,²⁶⁵ were denied entry into Syria by the GoS security forces and were sent back to Lebanon.²⁶⁶ Some returnees who were deported from Lebanon mentioned that they were handed over to the SAA’s Fourth Division who offered them either entry into Syria or facilitated their return to Lebanon through smuggling groups allied with them. Returnees were reportedly blackmailed and extorted by the smuggling groups.²⁶⁷

Many returnees interviewed by OHCHR claimed that family members, neighbours or friends who also returned to GoS-held areas were subjected to the same human rights violations. They also claimed that they were detained despite having undergone ‘reconciliation’ and obtained clearance before returning and were subject to torture and ill-treatment in detention.²⁶⁸ SNHR documented the arrest, enforced disappearance and death of a Syrian originating from Deir Ez-Zor governorate who was deported from Lebanon in April 2024. He was subsequently arrested by the security forces at a checkpoint in Damascus without having the possibility to contact his family or a lawyer, and was detained at the Military Security

²⁶¹ Access Center for Human Rights, What Happens After The Forced Deportation Of Refugees From Lebanon?, 29 January 2024, [url](#), p. 12

²⁶² UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 11 March 2024, [url](#), paras. 61-62; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 55; 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, [url](#), p. 5

²⁶³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 11 March 2024, [url](#), paras. 61-62

²⁶⁴ SJAC, Intensified deportation campaigns by Lebanon and Türkiye amid EU funding pledges, 27 June 2024, [url](#)

²⁶⁵ Syria Direct, At risk in Lebanon, Syrians gamble on smuggling routes to Idlib, 8 July 2024, [url](#)

²⁶⁶ Syria Direct, At risk in Lebanon, Syrians gamble on smuggling routes to Idlib, 8 July 2024, [url](#); SJAC, Intensified deportation campaigns by Lebanon and Türkiye amid EU funding pledges, 27 June 2024, [url](#)

²⁶⁷ Access Center for Human Rights, What Happens After The Forced Deportation Of Refugees From Lebanon?, 29 January 2024, [url](#), p. 19; HRW, “I Can’t Go Home, Stay Here, or Leave”. Pushbacks and Pullbacks of Syrian Refugees from Cyprus and Lebanon’, 4 September 2024, [url](#), p. 36

²⁶⁸ OHCHR, “We did not fear death but the life there”. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), paras. 86-88





Intelligence Directorate's Palestine Branch (Branch 235). In June, his family received a death notification from the security services.²⁶⁹ In another case, a Syrian who left in 2009 and returned in 2023 from Lebanon claimed that he was arrested at a checkpoint, interrogated, and tortured in detention by security forces for the actions of his relatives.²⁷⁰ UNCOI reported on cases military deserters who were deported to Syria between mid-2023 and 2024 and were subsequently detained and tortured in GoS custody.²⁷¹ Women returnees reported being harassed and extorted at checkpoints. Sexual exploitation also occurred for those who did not have money to pay bribes.²⁷²

Returnees interviewed by OHCHR claimed that they had found their homes destroyed, looted, or occupied by members of SAA and affiliated armed groups in Hama and eastern Ghouta (Rural Damascus governorate), they were denied return to their homes and did not receive any assistance for rebuilding houses. Returnees to Damascus or Raqqa claimed that they found their homes mostly intact, whereas those who returned to Aleppo, Idlib, Rural Damascus, Homs and Dar'a governorates claimed that their houses were destroyed, looted or appropriated. In areas of Homs bordering Lebanon which are controlled by Hezbollah and other pro-GoS groups, properties of returnees have been reportedly confiscated.²⁷³ For further information on the situation of civilians originating from or residing in former opposition-held areas see section [1.1.2\(c\)](#).

1.3. Persons fearing recruitment by the government armed forces, military draft evaders, deserters and defectors

1.3.1. Changes to the military service law

All men between 18 and 42 years of age are required to perform military service for a duration of between 18 and 21 months, depending on their level of education. Once military service is completed, men can be called for reserve duty until 42 years of age.²⁷⁴ As of the end of 2025, the duration of the reserve service is envisaged to be of two years, determined by age and

²⁶⁹ SNHR, SNHR Condemns Syrian Regime Forces for Detention, Fatal Torture of A Refugee Forcibly Deported from Lebanon, 28 June 2024, [url](#)

²⁷⁰ AP, Some Syrian refugees risk returning to opposition-held areas as hostility in host Lebanon grows, 12 June 2024, [url](#)

²⁷¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/57/86], 10 September 2024, [url](#), para. 17

²⁷² OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), para. 97

²⁷³ OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), paras. 60-61

²⁷⁴ EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Military Service, April 2021, [url](#), p. 13





service years.²⁷⁵ It is not possible to conscientiously object to conscription,²⁷⁶ apart from Muslim and Christian religious leaders who have to pay a levy to be exempted.²⁷⁷

During the reporting period, the GoS issued some notable administrative orders regarding the recruitment of soldiers under voluntary service contracts and the reserve service, including duration, demobilisation and conditions for acquiring an exemption from reserve service. In December 2023, the Ministry of Defence of the GoS called for persons between the age 18-32²⁷⁸ to join the army as officers and personnel under voluntary service contracts. The volunteer contracts can be for periods of 5 and 10 years and include incentives such as salaries of up to 1 300 000 SYP [around EUR 90] and other bonuses and compensation. Those who complete 5 years of the contract are then exempted from mandatory military service²⁷⁹ while those who volunteered and served for 10 years will be exempted from any reserve service.²⁸⁰ A notable change from previous contracts for volunteers is the level of salary and entitlements, which are significantly better.²⁸¹ The GoS authorities stated that the objective of the decision is to ‘achieve an advanced army that relies on voluntary enlistment, through a new volunteer contract’.²⁸²

As part of the aforementioned initiative to reform the military service, the GoS announced, in June 2024, a three-phase plan for discharging tens of thousands of reservists.²⁸³ Starting from November 2025, the duration of the reserve service is envisaged to be two years.²⁸⁴ For more information see section [1.3.4](#).

Legal amendments were introduced during the reporting period to the conditions for acquiring exemptions for reserve service. For more information see section [1.3.5](#).

²⁷⁵ Enab Baladi, Syrian regime complies with Arab demands by amending military recruitment policies, 3 July 2024, [url](#); Asharq Al-Awsat, Damascus: Army to Rely on Volunteers, Discharge Tens of Thousands of Reservists, 28 June 2024, [url](#); AIMustafa, M., Syria’s Reserve Military Service Transformations and Objectives, Omran Center for Strategic Studies, 21 August 2024, [url](#)

²⁷⁶ UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of the Syrian Arab Republic [CCPR/C/SYR/CO/4], 25 July 2024, [url](#), para. 38; ICMP, Syria: Towards Addressing The Issue Of Missing Persons, 15 July 2021, [url](#), p. 10; Al-Monitor, Syrians dodge military conscription, 16 May 2022, [url](#)

²⁷⁷ USDOS, 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Syria, 30 June 2024, [url](#), Government Practices. Abuses Involving Discrimination or Unequal Treatment

²⁷⁸ Enab Baladi, “They turned us into killers”: Young men in regime’s historic stronghold refuse to join army, 11 December 2023, [url](#)

²⁷⁹ Enab Baladi, Assad issues decree allowing exemption fees for reserve service, 3 December 2023, [url](#)

²⁸⁰ AlArabiya News, Syria to demobilize tens of thousands of reservists: Defense official, 27 June 2024, [url](#)

²⁸¹ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024; Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence with EUAA, 28 August 2024; AIMustafa, M., Syria’s Reserve Military Service Transformations and Objectives, Omran Center for Strategic Studies, 21 August 2024, [url](#)

²⁸² AlArabiya News, Syria to demobilize tens of thousands of reservists: Defense official, 27 June 2024, [url](#)

²⁸³ Asharq Al-Awsat, Damascus: Army to Rely on Volunteers, Discharge Tens of Thousands of Reservists, 28 June 2024, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Major Amendments to Syria’s Conscription Law, 28 June 2024, [url](#)

²⁸⁴ AIMustafa, M., Syria’s Reserve Military Service Transformations and Objectives, Omran Center for Strategic Studies, 21 August 2024, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Syrian regime complies with Arab demands by amending military recruitment policies, 3 July 2024, [url](#); Asharq Al-Awsat, Damascus: Army to Rely on Volunteers, Discharge Tens of Thousands of Reservists, 28 June 2024, [url](#)



1.3.2. Recruitment of conscripts and reservists

(a) Recruitment practices

Although the SAA's need for manpower is low as a result of reduced military confrontations,²⁸⁵ systematic recruitment of conscripts for mandatory military service continues to take place.²⁸⁶ Draft evaders are mainly apprehended at checkpoints²⁸⁷ where their ID's and military booklet are verified²⁸⁸ or when applying for a service at state institutions.²⁸⁹

According to several experts, in most cases, recruitment no longer occurs through raids on the homes of draft evaders.²⁹⁰ A few sources noted however that raids for recruitment still happen,²⁹¹ but to a lesser extent than before 2018,²⁹² and that these raids are primarily for extortion purposes²⁹³ or for apprehending persons who have other pending security issues,²⁹⁴ rather than for recruitment. The extent of authorities carrying out recruitment raids, as noted by SOHR, depends on the level of control the GoS holds over a specific area, village, or town. Raids on homes occur in residential zones within cities, whereas this practice is less prevalent in rural areas where the GoS' authority is less secure²⁹⁵ or in areas recaptured through 'reconciliation' agreements in 2018.²⁹⁶

Syrian men are automatically registered as reservists after completing mandatory military service and can be called up for reserve duty based on how recently they completed their service. Those who finished within the past five years are usually called first, followed by those who completed service 5 to 10 years earlier, and finally, if necessary, those who completed service 10 to 15 years earlier. In cases of armed conflict and when the above categories have already been called up, there is also legal support for the call up of all men up to the age of 42, based on the needs of the armed forces. Army units in need of manpower request reinforcements to the military command of the SAA. The military command will begin calling up reservists who served within the past five years, prioritising those who were previously stationed in specific units where manpower is needed. Although everyone who has

²⁸⁵ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 34-35 [source: Al-Ghazi]

²⁸⁶ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024; AIMustafa, M., email correspondence with EUAA, 20 & 26 August 2024

²⁸⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 43, 49-50, 55, 61-62, 74 [sources: Aljasem, STJ, Ammar Hamou, Enab Baladi, AIMustafa]; DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), p. 24

²⁸⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 55 [source: Ammar Hamou]; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 33

²⁸⁹ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: SOHR], July 2023, [url](#), p. 19; Netherlands (The), MFA, Country of origin information report Syria, May 2022, [url](#), p. 36; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Military service, April 2021, [url](#), pp. 20-21

²⁹⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 42-43, 49-50, 55, 61-62 [sources: Aljasem, STJ, Ammar Hamou, Enab Baladi]

²⁹¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 67 [source: SNHR]

²⁹² Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 67, 71, 74 [sources: SOHR, SNHR, AIMustafa]

²⁹³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 67 [source: SNHR]

²⁹⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 49-50, 61-62 [source: STJ, Enab Baladi]

²⁹⁵ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 71 [source: SOHR]

²⁹⁶ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 61-62 [source: Enab Baladi]



completed their military service is assigned a reserve service number, not everyone is necessarily called up for active duty in practice.²⁹⁷

The need for reservists is at its minimum because SAA's need for manpower is low and the GoS also relies on affiliated militias for operations, which are more efficient and cheaper.²⁹⁸ In 2023, sources noted that while the army's need for reservists was low²⁹⁹ due to a decrease in military operations,³⁰⁰ they were still being recruited.³⁰¹ According to Syrian researcher Suhail Al-Ghazi's estimation, the recruitment of reservists has dropped by 60-70 % compared to the period before 2018.³⁰² The media organisation Enab Baladi stated that no calls for reservists were recorded between January and October 2023.³⁰³ Syria Direct editor Ammar Hamou stated that reservists are typically enlisted until they reach 40 years of age,³⁰⁴ however, sources also mentioned instances of individuals being called for reserve service beyond the age of 40.³⁰⁵ Sources had divergent opinions on whether public employees are being called for reserve service. Some sources stated that public employees were still being called up for reserve service³⁰⁶ while others indicated that, due to the SAA's reduced need for manpower, public employees were not currently called for reserve service or the likelihood of call-ups was very low.³⁰⁷ The GoS has reportedly suspended call-ups to reserve service of conscripted officers holding university degrees of at least five years, master's degrees or PhDs.³⁰⁸ These categories will serve compulsory service for a duration of one year and a half after which they are to be discharged.³⁰⁹

According to SOHR, call-up of reservists is conducted regardless of their military qualifications. On the other hand, Omran Center for Strategic Studies researcher Muhsen AlMustafa stated that military qualifications, such as infantry and armour specialisations, and the army's need for manpower influence the decision to call up reservists.³¹⁰ Ammar Hamou stated that the GoS recruits reservists from former opposition-held areas such as Eastern Ghouta and Douma (Rural Damascus), aiming to send them to the front and compensate losses incurred from

²⁹⁷ Sweden, Migrationsverket, Syrisk militärtjänst [Syrian military service], 22 April 2022, [url](#), p. 14

²⁹⁸ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), pp. 22-23

²⁹⁹ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 51; Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 34-35 [source: Al-Ghazi]; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 22

³⁰⁰ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 51

³⁰¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 49-50, 55, 71, 74 [sources: STJ, Ammar Hamou, SOHR, AlMustafa]; SNHR, email correspondence, 9 & 26 August 2024

³⁰² Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 34 [source: Al-Ghazi]

³⁰³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 62 [source: Enab Baladi]

³⁰⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 55 [source: Ammar Hamou]

³⁰⁵ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 51; Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 55 [source: Ammar Hamou]

³⁰⁶ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 43-44, 50, 62, 72 [sources: Al-Ghazi, STJ, Enab Baladi, SOHR]

³⁰⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 56, 67 [sources: Ammar Hamou, SNHR]

³⁰⁸ AlMustafa, M., Syria's Reserve Military Service Transformations and Objectives, Omran Center for Strategic Studies, 21 August 2024, [url](#)

³⁰⁹ AlMustafa, M., email correspondence with EUAA, 20 & 26 August 2024

³¹⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 71, 74 [sources: SOHR, AlMustafa]



loyalist areas.³¹¹ According to Suhail Al-Ghazi, loyalist communities ‘do not easily accept the call for reservists’.³¹²

During the reference period, there were some 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 2023 the Military Police arrested 850 persons wanted for military and reserve service in Aleppo governorate,³¹³ while an unspecified number of draft evaders were also arrested in Homs and Hama governorates.³¹⁴ SNHR reported during the reference period arrests and detention of persons evading military and reserve service in Rural Damascus, Hama,³¹⁵ and Dar’a governorate.³¹⁶ Most of the arrests were carried out at checkpoints or during raids.³¹⁷

(b) Regional differences

In Sweida governorate, the local Druze population has largely resisted compulsory and reserve conscription in the SAA throughout the conflict.³¹⁸ According to SNHR, recruitment for military and reserve service is not implemented in Sweida governorate. In some areas that were subject to ‘reconciliation’ agreements such as Kanaker and Zakia in Rural Damascus, the GoS encounters resistance from residents when carrying out raids to arrest draft evaders.³¹⁹

Some sources stated that, in general, the GoS is reluctant to enforce conscription laws in north-east Syria due to its limited power and control.³²⁰ According to journalist Wladimir van Wilgenbug, there is a de facto agreement between the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) and GoS, whereby GoS refrains from forced recruitment in north-east Syria.³²¹ However, some sources indicated that men of military age can be arrested by GoS authorities for evading military service, if they approach the security squares it controls in Hasaqa and Qamishli cities for public services such as renewing documents³²² or when travelling between SDF and GoS controlled areas,³²³ including by flying

³¹¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 55 [source: Ammar Hamou]

³¹² Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 34 [source: Al-Ghazi]

³¹³ NPA, Government arrests 850 people in Syria’s Aleppo to serve military service, 14 November 2023, [url](#)

³¹⁴ NPA, Syrian government recruiting campaign coincides with US-Iranian tension, 22 November 2023, [url](#)

³¹⁵ 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, [url](#), p. 16; 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, [url](#), p. 9

³¹⁶ 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, [url](#), p. 16

³¹⁷ 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, [url](#), p. 9

³¹⁸ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), pp. 24-25; Ezzi, M., The Regime’s Reach: Analyzing Damascus’ Approach to Suwayda after 2011, December 2023, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, [url](#), p. 7; OrientXXI, Syria. In Suwayda the Druze Start their Own Revolution, 29 September 2023, [url](#)

³¹⁹ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024

³²⁰ DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), pp. 61, 63 [sources: a Syrian Human Rights Organisation, Zaki Mohammad Hajji]

³²¹ DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), pp. 49, 73 [source: Wladimir van Wilgenbug]

³²² DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), pp. 49, 73 [sources: representation of the DAANES in Sulaymaniyah, Wladimir van Wilgenbug]

³²³ DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), pp. 63, 73 [sources: Zaki Mohammad Hajji, Wladimir van Wilgenbug]



between Qamishli and Damascus.³²⁴ According to a Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS in May 2024, those who are conscripted by the SAA in north-east Syria are given the possibility to serve in their area of origin (e.g. Qamishli).³²⁵

Representatives of the Department of Foreign Relations of the DAANES stated that the GoS has in rare cases forcibly conscripted persons in the security squares it controls but DAANES has been able to secure their release.³²⁶ The DAANES will intervene on behalf of persons arrested by GoS which have a connection to the administration but would refrain from intervening in cases where criminals would be arrested by GoS forces.³²⁷

(c) Conditions for conscripts

Conditions for conscripts serving in the SAA were reported to be very poor: they are treated harshly by commanding officers,³²⁸ the food received is insufficient and of poor quality,³²⁹ and the salaries are very low.³³⁰ Salaries for conscripts reportedly range between USD 3³³¹ and 8 per month.³³² According to SNHR there are cases where conscripts do not receive their salary at all.³³³ As a result of the poor conditions and salaries, conscripts engage in extorting money from civilians at checkpoints³³⁴, theft and robbery.³³⁵ Conscripts from an area of origin formerly or currently under opposition control would be treated worse than those from loyalist areas. They might be deployed to frontlines or have their requests for leave to visit family rejected.³³⁶

According to Muhsen AIMustafa, basic training for military personnel lasts 1.5 to 2 months and 6 months for non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and officers.³³⁷ Syrian researcher Suhail al-Ghazi³³⁸ indicated that training of conscripts lasts six months.³³⁹ Ali Aljaseem³⁴⁰ stated on the

³²⁴ DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), p. 63 [source: Zaki Mohammad Hajji]

³²⁵ DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), p. 61 [source: a Syrian Human Rights Organisation]

³²⁶ DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), p. 76 [sources: Fanar Al-Kait and Khaled Ibrahim, Department of Foreign Relations of the DAANES]

³²⁷ DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), p. 49 [source: representation of the DAANES in Sulaymaniyah]

³²⁸ AIMustafa, M., email correspondence with EUAA, 20 & 26 August 2024; Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 35, 71-72 [Al-Ghazi, SOHR]

³²⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 35, 43, 50, 62 [Al-Ghazi, Aljaseem, STJ, Enab Baladi]

³³⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 35, 43, 62, 67 [Al-Ghazi, Aljaseem, Enab Baladi, SNHR]

³³¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 62 [Enab Baladi]

³³² Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 67 [SNHR]

³³³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 67 [SNHR]

³³⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 43, 62, 67, 75 [Aljaseem, Enab Baladi, SNHR, AIMustafa]

³³⁵ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 55-56, 62 [STJ, Enab Baladi]

³³⁶ AIMustafa, M., email correspondence with EUAA, 20 & 26 August 2024

³³⁷ ACCORD, Response to a request on Syria: Obtaining a military ID for conscripts in the Syrian military (when, requirements); Obtaining a (two-part, metal) "military badge/identification tag" for conscripts in the Syrian military (when, requirements) [a-12377], 22 May 2024, [url](#)

³³⁸ Suhail al-Ghazi is a Syrian researcher who focuses on security and military developments in Syria in addition to governance and economical aspects of the Syrian conflict. His work has been published in various media outlets and think-tanks such as the Atlantic Council, ORSAM, Alsharq Forum and TIMEP.

³³⁹ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), p. 26

³⁴⁰ Ali Aljaseem is a PhD student at the Center for Conflict Studies - History of International Relations at Utrecht University and focuses on paramilitarism in Syria.





other hand that new conscripts will get a maximum of 45 days training and are then considered ready for deployment.³⁴¹

1.3.3. Deployment of conscripts and reservists

According to Muhsen AlMustafa,³⁴² military operations and the GoS' need of manpower are the main factors influencing the deployment of conscripts and reservists.³⁴³ The educational background of the conscript also plays a major role in deployment in positions such as mechanics, tank operators and in electrical engineering units.³⁴⁴ Conscripts and reservists cannot choose their place of deployment³⁴⁵ or the unit in which they are to serve.³⁴⁶ Traditionally, conscripts from loyalist areas tend to serve in the SAA's most important units such as the Republican Guard and the Special Forces. Alawites make up most conscripts in these units.³⁴⁷

Conscripts may be able to pay a bribe to the commander of the division to be assigned to a particular division or avoid specific duties.³⁴⁸ Bribing an officer to serve in a non-field position or not to serve at all is also a common practice.³⁴⁹ However, according to STJ, men in military service originating from former opposition-held areas would not be able to improve their situation through bribing due to the existing resentment against them.³⁵⁰ Bribery to influence the treatment of conscripts is less widespread in the elite units of the SAA (Republican Guard, Fourth Division, Special Forces) than in other units.³⁵¹

The use of conscripts from former opposition-held areas in active fighting that took place in early 2020 has been previously documented,³⁵² with the majority of casualties incurred by the SAA consisting of men from former opposition-held areas.³⁵³ Several sources assessed that conscripts originating from former opposition-held areas were deployed to areas witnessing

³⁴¹ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 24

³⁴² Muhsen AlMustafa is a researcher at the Omran Center for Strategic Studies focusing on security, military, and governance in Syria. His work has been published in various outlets and think-tanks such as TIMEP, Italian Institute for International Studies and Tawazun. For more information see [Bibliography](#).

³⁴³ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 26

³⁴⁴ AlMustafa, M., email correspondence with EUAA, 20 & 26 August 2024

³⁴⁵ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [sources: SOHR, SNHR, Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), pp. 19-20, 23, 27; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 26

³⁴⁶ DIS, Syria – The Special Forces and the elite units, April 2023 [sources: SNHR, A Human Rights Organisation], [url](#), p. 26

³⁴⁷ AlMustafa, M., email correspondence with EUAA, 20 & 26 August 2024; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 31

³⁴⁸ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024; DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [sources: SOHR, SNHR, Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), pp. 20, 23, 27; Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 75 [AlMustafa]; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 26

³⁴⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 53 [STJ]; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 26

³⁵⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 50 [STJ]

³⁵¹ AlMustafa, M., email correspondence with EUAA, 20 & 26 August 2024

³⁵² EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 31; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Military service, April 2021, [url](#), p. 23

³⁵³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 55 [Ammar Hamou]; Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence with EUAA, 28 August 2024





military operations³⁵⁴ such as against anti-GoS armed groups in Idlib and Manbij (Aleppo governorate)³⁵⁵ or against ISIL in Deir Ez-Zor governorate,³⁵⁶ in higher number than those originating from loyalist areas.³⁵⁷ Some sources stated that conscripts from former opposition-held areas were deployed to active fighting with minimal³⁵⁸ or no fighting experience.³⁵⁹ According to SNHR, draft evaders, military deserters and persons originating from former opposition-held areas who undergone ‘status settlement’ were often deployed to areas witnessing military operations.³⁶⁰ Aljaseem assessed that the risk of being deployed to active fighting is currently lower due to the decrease in military confrontations after February 2020.³⁶¹

1.3.4. Demobilisation of conscripts and reservists

An administrative order terminated the retention and call-up for reserve service as of 1 July 2024 of the categories of reservists who, by 30 June 2024, met these conditions: they were officers who had completed one or more years of actual reserve service; they were non-commissioned officers and reserve personnel with six or more years of reserve service; they were non-commissioned officers and reserve personnel who reached the age of 40 and had completed two years or more in reserve service.³⁶²

In June 2024, Major General Ahmed Sleiman announced a three-phase plan for discharging reservists due to begin in July 2024 and run until the end of October 2025. Tens of thousands of reservists are expected to be demobilised by the end of 2024.³⁶³ The first phase of the plan, spanning from 1 July to 31 December 2024, will involve the discharge of reservists based on their years of service: six years by June's end, five and a half years by August, five years by October, and four and a half years by the end of the year. The effectiveness of this phase will determine the continuation of the plan. In the second phase, commencing in 2025, reservists will be discharged as follows: four years of service by the end of January 2025, three and a half years by the end of February, three years by the end of March, two and a half years by the end of April, and two years by the end of May in 2025. The maximum reserve service duration in the third phase will be two years, determined by age and service years, with the schedule

³⁵⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 50, 55 [sources: STJ, Ammar Hamou]; SNHR, email correspondence, 9 & 26 August 2024; Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence, 28 August 2024; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 55

³⁵⁵ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 50 [STJ]

³⁵⁶ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 55 [Ammar Hamou]

³⁵⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 50 [STJ]; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 55

³⁵⁸ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 55

³⁵⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 55 [Ammar Hamou]

³⁶⁰ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024

³⁶¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 42-43 [Aljaseem]

³⁶² Enab Baladi, What's new in Syrian regime's administrative order on military service, 11 June 2024, [url](#)

³⁶³ Asharq Al-Awsat, Damascus: Army to Rely on Volunteers, Discharge Tens of Thousands of Reservists, 28 June 2024, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Major Amendments to Syria's Conscription Law, 28 June 2024, [url](#);



subject to adjustments based on enlistment rates.³⁶⁴ About 152 000 reservists in total are reportedly expected to be discharged by the end of the three-phase plan.³⁶⁵

Sources stated that demobilisation of reservists following the issuance of administrative orders has been observed in practice.³⁶⁶ Mushen AlMustafa reported that the GoS discharged military personnel who completed six years of reserve service by end of June 2024 and 23 718 military personnel who completed five and a half years of reserve service by end of July 2024.³⁶⁷

1.3.5. Implementation in practice of legal exemptions and deferrals

Legislative Decree 30/2007 allows deferrals for compulsory service and exemptions for certain categories of persons. This report does not cover all legal exemptions and deferrals,³⁶⁸ focusing on the main exemptions and deferrals observed in practice. These specific exemptions and deferrals are discussed in detail below.

(a) Exemption for only sons

Under the Syrian Military Service Law, a man of military age is exempted from service if he is the only son of his parents, regardless of their living status.³⁶⁹ This exemption also applies if his brother(s) have disabilities or illnesses that render them unable to support themselves.³⁷⁰ The exemption is renewed annually, until the mother turns 50,³⁷¹ the father reaches 60, one or both parents can no longer have children, or either parent passes away. After any of these events, the exemption is considered final, and no renewal is required.³⁷²

According to several sources, the exemption from military service for only sons is being implemented by the SAA and no cases of recruitment of only sons were reported.³⁷³

According to Muhsen AlMustafa, it is advisable for persons to carry the necessary documents pertaining to their exemptions or deferrals from military service at all times. Issues may arise if a person does not have relevant documents on him when questioned by the authorities. Such

³⁶⁴ Enab Baladi, Syrian regime complies with Arab demands by amending military recruitment policies, 3 July 2024, [url](#); Asharq Al-Awsat, Damascus: Army to Rely on Volunteers, Discharge Tens of Thousands of Reservists, 28 June 2024, [url](#)

³⁶⁵ AlMustafa, M., Syria's Reserve Military Service Transformations and Objectives, Omran Center for Strategic Studies, 21 August 2024, [url](#)

³⁶⁶ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024; AlMustafa, M., email correspondence with EUAA, 20 & 26 August 2024

³⁶⁷ Muhsen AlMustafa, [X], posted on 1 September 2024, [url](#)

³⁶⁸ The report does not cover the implementation of exemptions for persons employed in the Syrian Arab Army and for foundlings. See, Syria, Ministry of Defence, General Recruitment Directorate, [أفاعلال ؤماعلا نلااحلا](#) [General reasons for exemption], [url](#). For the list of possible deferrals see Syria, Ministry of Defence, General Recruitment Directorate, [لجئاتلا عاونأ](#) [Types of deferrals], [url](#)

³⁶⁹ Syria, Ministry of Defence, General Recruitment Directorate, [تعريف الوحيد](#) [Definition of the only son], [url](#)

³⁷⁰ Syria, Ministry of Defence, General Recruitment Directorate, [السليم المعافى لآخ أو لأخوة مصابين بعاهاات أو أمراض تمنعهم من إعاللة أنفسهم](#) [A healthy person to a brother or brothers who suffer from disabilities or diseases that prevent them from supporting themselves], [url](#)

³⁷¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 44 [source: Aljasem]

³⁷² Syria, Ministry of Defence, General Recruitment Directorate, [متى يعتبر إعفاء الوحيد نهائياً ولا حاجة لتجديد المعذرة؟](#) [When is the exemption of an only son considered final and there is no need to renew the exemption?], [url](#)

³⁷³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 36, 44, 51, 57, 63, 68, 72, 76 [sources: Al-Ghazi, Aljasem, STJ, Ammar Hamou, Enab Baladi, SNHR, SOHR, AlMustafa]



a situation may lead to the person being mistakenly enlisted, which can be time consuming to rectify.³⁷⁴

(b) Exemption for medical reasons

According to the law, an individual with a permanent medical condition may either be exempted, assigned to a non-combat (non-field service) role, or enlisted for regular military service based on their medical evaluation.³⁷⁵

Obtaining an exemption from military service for medical reasons³⁷⁶ or being assigned to non-combatant roles is increasingly difficult and issues of bribery and extortion are common.³⁷⁷ In some cases, if authorities discover that the medical exemption was wrongfully granted (e.g. via paying a bribe) they would require the person to undergo another medical examination.³⁷⁸

Anyone called for military service will undergo an initial basic medical examination, which includes checking height, weight, and eyesight, to determine fitness for military service. If further evaluation is needed, the individual will be referred to a medical committee at a military hospital. This committee assesses health issues and either grants an exemption or deems the person 'unfit for field operations'. A medical report is then prepared, and the individual reports to the Ministry of Defence. Those declared unfit for field operations are typically assigned to non-field positions.³⁷⁹

To determine if a person's medical condition makes them eligible for exemption or renders them unfit for field operations, authorities will assess the percentage or degree of disability at the time of the medical examination.³⁸⁰ The specific medical conditions that warrant exemption or disqualification from field operations are not clearly defined.³⁸¹ STJ assessed that a degree of disability of between 75 % to 80 % would generally lead to granting an exemption.³⁸² Obvious disabilities, such as blindness or complete paralysis,³⁸³ will result in exemption from military service. Additionally, medical reasons like obesity, poor eyesight, cancer, loss of a limb, and mental illnesses generally lead to being granted an exemption.³⁸⁴

STJ stated that medical assessments for persons with obvious disabilities are lengthy, taking several months to conclude. The source also mentioned a case of a person with around 60 %

³⁷⁴ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 29

³⁷⁵ Syria, Ministry of Defence, General Recruitment Directorate, General Recruitment Directorate, غير اللائق صحياً (للخدمة الإلزامية (الإعفاء الصحي) [Medically unfit for compulsory service (medical exemption)], [url](#). Men who have temporary medical conditions can apply to defer their military service (Syria, Ministry of Defence, General Recruitment Directorate, التأجيل الصحي [Deferral for medical conditions], [url](#))

³⁷⁶ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), pp. 24-25; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 30

³⁷⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 51 [source: STJ]; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 30

³⁷⁸ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 30

³⁷⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 57, 68 [sources: Ammar Hamou, SNHR]; DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), pp. 24-25

³⁸⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 51, 68 [sources: STJ, SNHR]

³⁸¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 51, 57, 63, 76 [sources: STJ, Ammar Hamou, Enab Baladi, AlMustafa]

³⁸² Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 51 [source: STJ]

³⁸³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 63, 68 [sources: Enab Baladi, SNHR]

³⁸⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 68, 72 [sources: SNHR, SOHR]



physical disability which was nonetheless recruited for military service and was later discharged after paying a bribe.³⁸⁵

Men will be deemed unfit for field operations if they have medical issues that disqualify them from deployment in field operations but do not qualify them for a medical exemption.³⁸⁶ They would serve their military service instead in fixed positions such as in an office, in logistics or in a kitchen.³⁸⁷ Bribery of medical committees to obtain a medical assessment that they are unfit for field operations is a common practice.³⁸⁸ According to Ammar Hamou, the assignment of an individual to fixed services is also based on the assessment made by the officer in charge.³⁸⁹

It is unclear which medical conditions would render a person unfit for field service. According to SOHR, medical conditions that would make someone assessed as unfit for field service are diabetes, poor vision, heart diseases.³⁹⁰ STJ on the other hand stated that, while before 2013 having a 40 % disability would make one eligible for serving in a non-field position, currently even persons with visual impairments that are not severe are being recruited for field operations.³⁹¹

Men ‘determined to serve in a non-field service’ in the military because of their specific health conditions can pay a fee of USD 3 000 to be exempted from military service.³⁹² According to several sources, in general the GoS enforces and respects in practice the exemption from serving in a non-field service.³⁹³

(c) Exemptions for reservists

According to legislative decree 20/2024 issued in August 2024, reservists who have reached the age of 38 and have not yet joined the service can pay an exemption fee of USD 4 800 or its equivalent in Syrian pounds (SYP) for the legal obligation to serve in the reserve. Those who have joined the reserve service, reached the age of 38, and are still serving, can also pay the exemption fee of USD 4 800 (or its equivalent in SYP) with a deduction of USD 200 for each month they have served in the reserve service.³⁹⁴

Legislative decree 20/2024 also allows reservists whose medical examinations show that they are minimally disabled or partially disabled to pay the sum of USD 3 000 to be exempted from

³⁸⁵ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 51 [sources: STJ]

³⁸⁶ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 45, 58 [sources: Aljasem, Ammar Hamou]

³⁸⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 45, 57 [sources: Aljasem, Ammar Hamou]

³⁸⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 58, 69, 72 [sources: Ammar Hamou, SNHR, SHOR]

³⁸⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 57 [source: Ammar Hamou]

³⁹⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 72 [source: SOHR]

³⁹¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 51-52 [source: STJ]

³⁹² Syria, Legislative Decree 31, President Bashar Al-Assad issues the LD # 31/2020, amending some articles of the LD# 30 date 03/05/2007, as amended, which contains the Military Service Law, [url](#), art. 1; AlMustafa, M., Fight or Flight: The Syrian Conscription Nightmare, ISPI, 5 June 2023, [url](#); DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts’ duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), p. 25

³⁹³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 45, 58, 68, [Aljasem, Ammar Hamou, SNHR]

³⁹⁴ AlMustafa, M., Syria’s Reserve Military Service Transformations and Objectives, Omran Center for Strategic Studies, 21 August 2024, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), “Reshaping Syria’s Military: The Strategic Evolution of Reserve Service under the Assad Regime”, 12 August 2024, [url](#)



service.³⁹⁵ Those who have served in army as part of a voluntary contract for 10 years are also exempted from reserve military service.³⁹⁶

(d) Exemption fee for Syrians living abroad

Syrians who reside abroad for one, two, three or four years may pay USD 10 000, 9 000, 8 000 or 7 000 respectively to be exempted from military service.³⁹⁷ Men who have exited the country illegally are also permitted to pay the fee to obtain the exemption.³⁹⁸ Exemption from reserve service is also acquirable by Syrians who have been residing abroad for at least one year and pay a fee of USD 5 000.³⁹⁹ It is not possible for men residing in Syria to pay a fee to be exempted for military service,⁴⁰⁰ apart for the exemption fee for reserve military service (see section (c)) or if they are first deemed unfit for field operations (see section (b)).

Several sources stated that in general the GoS does not conscript persons who paid the exemption fee.⁴⁰¹ The exemption fee for reserve service for Syrians living abroad is also implemented in practice.⁴⁰²

Persons who have other security issues with the GoS and have ‘settled their status’ may still face problems such as arrest upon return despite having paid the exemption fee.⁴⁰³ STJ mentioned cases of persons who paid the exemption fee and were arrested upon return, but their arrest was attributed to being wanted by the security branches.⁴⁰⁴

Sources noted that issues may arise if a person does not carry the proof of having paid the exemption fee on him when questioned by authorities. Such a situation may lead to the person being mistakenly enlisted.⁴⁰⁵ According to Suhail al-Ghazi, showing the military booklet

³⁹⁵ Enab Baladi, What does regime want from amending age of those eligible to pay military exemption fee?, 13 August 2024, [url](#); AIMustafa, M., Syria’s Reserve Military Service Transformations and Objectives, Omran Center for Strategic Studies, 21 August 2024, [url](#)

³⁹⁶ SANA, مرسوم تشريعياً بتعديل المادة (26) من قانون خدمة العلم, 26 August 2024, [url](#); [President al-Assad issues a legislative decree amending Article (26) of the Military Service Law], 1 August 2024, [url](#); Enab Baladi, New legislative decree lowers military service age in Syria to 38, 2 August 2024, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), “Reshaping Syria’s Military: The Strategic Evolution of Reserve Service under the Assad Regime”, 12 August 2024, [url](#)

³⁹⁷ SLJ, Legal Briefing – November 2020, 3 December 2020, [url](#); Syria, Legislative Decree 31, President Bashar Al-Assad issues the LD # 31/2020, amending some articles of the LD# 30 date 03/05/2007, as amended, which contains the Military Service Law, [url](#), art. 1; AIMustafa, M., Fight or Flight: The Syrian Conscription Nightmare, ISPI, 5 June 2023, [url](#)

³⁹⁸ Syria, Legislative Decree 31, President Bashar Al-Assad issues the LD # 31/2020, amending some articles of the LD# 30 date 03/05/2007, as amended, which contains the Military Service Law, [url](#); Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 52

³⁹⁹ AIMustafa, M., Fight or Flight: The Syrian Conscription Nightmare, ISPI, 5 June 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 52, 60, 77 [sources: STJ, Ammar Hamou, AIMustafa]

⁴⁰¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 40, 46, 59, 64, 69, 73, 77 [sources: Al-Ghazi, Aljasem, Ammar Hamou, Enab Baladi, SNHR, SOHR, AIMustafa]; Muhsen AIMustafa, email correspondence, 20 & 26 August 2024; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 30; DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts’ duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: SNHR], July 2023, [url](#), p. 21; Sweden, Migrationsverket, Syrisk militärtjänst (version 2.0) [Syria Military service] [source: former officer in the Syrian army; Syrian lawyer active in Damascus], 22 April 2022, [url](#), p. 8; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 53

⁴⁰² Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 46, 73 [sources: Aljasem, SOHR]

⁴⁰³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 52, 59 [sources: STJ, Ammar Hamou]

⁴⁰⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 52 [source: STJ]

⁴⁰⁵ Muhsen AIMustafa, email correspondence, 20 & 26 August 2024; Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 39, 64 [Al-Ghazi, Enab Baladi]; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 29





when questioned by the authorities is usually sufficient to prove the exemption/deferral. However, if the military booklet presents any suspicion to the authorities checking it, other documents proving the exemption/deferral need to be presented.⁴⁰⁶

According to sources interviewed by DIS in 2023, the majority of individuals paying the exemption fee were Syrian men residing in Gulf states, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq, with a smaller number from European countries and Türkiye.⁴⁰⁷ One reason for this is that they lack permanent residency in their current countries,⁴⁰⁸ forcing them to return to Syria eventually. Another reason is to obtain necessary documents, which are unavailable for those wanted for military service.⁴⁰⁹

(e) Deferral for students

No changes to the rules regarding the deferral of military service for students were reported during the reference period.⁴¹⁰ Students can postpone their conscription on a yearly basis while they are studying.⁴¹¹ A person studying in Syria wishing to defer his military service must be under a certain age depending on the type of educational program: 21 years for high-school students, 24 years for those enrolled in a two-year technical institute, 25 years for those enrolled in a three-year technical institute, 26 years for those enrolled in a four-year university program, 27 years for those enrolled in a five-year university program and 29 years for those enrolled in a six-years university program.⁴¹² Students postponing military service due to their studies must renew their deferral annually by demonstrating their ongoing enrolment in an educational program.⁴¹³

Generally, sources indicated that the GoS respects the deferral of military service for students.⁴¹⁴ According to SNHR, despite possessing a deferral due to their studies, students can still face arrest and detention at raids or checkpoints, where they are taken to a military police station and extorted. Parents are typically asked to pay a bribe for their child's release, and if they cannot afford it, other items such as a mobile phone or even a pack of cigarettes may be accepted. This practice of extortion is considered systematic by the SNHR, but the student will not be conscripted under any circumstances.⁴¹⁵

In 2023 the GoS issued a decision prohibiting students from repeating their final year of college more than three times, as it was discovered that some students were intentionally failing their final year of college in order to delay their enlistment in the military. A student in

⁴⁰⁶ DIS, Military service: recruitment procedure, conscripts' duties and military service for naturalised Ajanibs [source: Suhail al-Ghazi], July 2023, [url](#), p. 25

⁴⁰⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 52, 64 [STJ, Enab Baladi]

⁴⁰⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 64 [Enab Baladi]

⁴⁰⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 39 [Al-Ghazi]

⁴¹⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 58 [Ammar Hamou]

⁴¹¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military Service, May 2020, [url](#), p. 58

⁴¹² SANA, الرئيس الأسد يصدر مرسوما تشريعيا بتعديل مواد من قانون خدمة العلم [President al-Assad issues a legislative decree amending articles of the Military Service Law], 14 July 2019, [url](#)

⁴¹³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 37, 73 [sources: Al-Ghazi, SOHR]

⁴¹⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 37, 45, 52 [Al-Ghazi, Aljasem, STJ]

⁴¹⁵ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 69 [SNHR]





such a situation would not be granted exemption from military service and would risk conscription.⁴¹⁶

(f) Deferral for Syrians with residence abroad

Legislative Decree No. 31 of 2020 provides that any Syrian man of military service age with residence abroad can obtain a 90-day deferral of military service annually, allowing him to visit Syria without the risk of recruitment. This deferral can be secured by paying a fee at a Syrian embassy or diplomatic representation. Additionally, the individual can extend their stay in Syria for an extra 60 days by paying a fee of 200 USD.⁴¹⁷

In general, the provisions allowing visits to Syria for up to three months without recruitment for those residing abroad, are being enforced and the GoS respects this deferral policy.⁴¹⁸ The fee paid for this deferral is viewed as an important source of revenue for the GoS which therefore has interest in enforcing it.⁴¹⁹ It is mostly persons originating from loyalist areas or those without security issues who make use of this deferral.⁴²⁰ Persons originating from former opposition-held areas using this deferral may face problems upon return due to theirs or their family connection to the opposition or being on wanted lists.⁴²¹ Some sources noted that given the widespread practice of extortion practiced by security forces, persons using this deferral may be arrested for the purpose of being extorted.⁴²² According to Ammar Hamou, wealthy businessmen or Syrians living in Europe would be particularly vulnerable to extortion.⁴²³

1.3.6. Implementation practice for amnesties

The GoS regularly announces amnesties which cover offenses of army desertion or evasion from military service.⁴²⁴ Those who benefit from the amnesties will not be prosecuted for the offenses of draft evasion or desertion but will still be required to perform compulsory military service.⁴²⁵

In November 2023, the Decree No. 36 of 2023 provided an amnesty for the crimes of internal and external desertion but did 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

⁴¹⁶ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 31

⁴¹⁷ Syria, Legislative Decree No. 31 of 2020, 4 January 2021, [url](#), p. 2; Syria, Ministry of Defence, General Recruitment Directorate, أسس التأجيل بالإقامة [Basis for deferral due to residence], [url](#)

⁴¹⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 38, 45-46, 69, 73 [sources: Al-Ghazi, Aljasem, SNHR, SOHR]

⁴¹⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 46 [source: Aljasem]

⁴²⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 38, 45-46, [sources: Al-Ghazi, Aljasem]

⁴²¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 38 [source: Al-Ghazi]

⁴²² Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 38, 52, 58 [sources: Al-Ghazi, STJ, Ammar Hamou]

⁴²³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 58 [source: Ammar Hamou]

⁴²⁴ EUAA, Targeting of individuals, September 2022, [url](#), pp. 42-43; Both, Pieter, Manipulating National Trauma: The Assad Regime's Wartime Instrumentalisation of Presidential Amnesties, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 2

⁴²⁵ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 32; EUAA, Targeting of individuals, September 2022, [url](#), pp. 42-43



enemy (Article 160).⁴²⁶ Information on the practical implementation of Decree 36 was not available among the sources consulted.⁴²⁷

In September 2024, Assad issued a legislative decree granting a general amnesty for a range of offenses including military desertion (internal and external desertion crimes) and other minor crimes, committed before 22 September 2024.⁴²⁸ According to Human Rights Watch, the amnesty does not include persons convicted of crimes labeled as ‘a serious assault on society and the state’ therefore excluding political opponents or activists.⁴²⁹

According to some sources, the GoS has respected the amnesties and pardoned the offenses of draft evasion and desertion,⁴³⁰ as long as those pardoned have not been actively involved in combat against the GoS.⁴³¹ Those with other security issues (apart from draft evasion and desertion) with the GoS generally do not make use of amnesties as they do not trust the GoS to uphold them.⁴³² AIMustafa stated that he knew of cases where deserters made use of amnesties but were nonetheless arrested and in some cases died in detention.⁴³³

1.3.7. Treatment of draft evaders, deserters and defectors

(a) Draft evaders

According to some sources, the treatment of draft evaders depends on their individual circumstances.⁴³⁴ Draft evaders who have other security issues with the GoS can make use of ‘status settlement’ and amnesties to avoid prosecution.⁴³⁵ Those who do not solve their security issues, especially prominent figures, would risk arrest and forced disappearance.⁴³⁶ According to SNHR, there have been cases when ‘reconciled’ draft evaders with connections to the anti-GoS opposition have been interrogated and died under torture.⁴³⁷

Several sources indicated that in general draft evaders who are caught by authorities are sent directly to military service rather than being prosecuted.⁴³⁸ However, several sources mentioned the potential risk of imprisonment of draft evaders before commencing military service.⁴³⁹ SNHR

⁴²⁶ 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](#)

⁴²⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 11 March 2024, [url](#), para. 66

⁴²⁸ SANA, President al-Assad grants a general amnesty for crimes committed before September 22nd, 22 September 2024, [url](#)

⁴²⁹ HRW, Another Hollow Amnesty Will Not Solve Syria’s Detainee Crisis, 26 September 2024, [url](#)

⁴³⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 40, 48, 54, 66, 71, 74 [sources: Al-Ghazi, Aljasem, Enab Baladi, STJ, SNHR, SOHR]

⁴³¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 66, [source: Enab Baladi]

⁴³² Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 54, [source: STJ]

⁴³³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 78 [source: AIMustafa]

⁴³⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 77 [source: AIMustafa]; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 34

⁴³⁵ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 54 [source: STJ]

⁴³⁶ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 34

⁴³⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 70 [source: SNHR]

⁴³⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 54, 65, 70, 78 [sources: Ammar Hamou, Enab Baladi, SNHR, AIMustafa]; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), pp. 54-55; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), pp. 33-34

⁴³⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 47, 65, 73 [sources: Aljasem, Enab Baladi, SOHR]



stated that those wanted for military service are arrested primarily by military police patrols, detained in prisons affiliated with the respective unit and then referred to the military judiciary. Penalties for draft evasion include extending the duration of the service for up to six months and the payment of a fine equivalent to the salary of a first-class soldier for up to four months. Those who evade military service for more than six months or abstain from two consecutive enrolments are referred to the judiciary who tries them according to Articles 98 and 99 of the Military Penal Code No. 61 of 1950⁴⁴⁰ which prescribe imprisonment ranging from one month to five years, depending on the duration of the period the evader abstained from joining military service.⁴⁴¹ The maximum prison sentence observed in practice, according to SOHR, is nine months.⁴⁴²

Draft evaders, in most cases, serve their prison sentences in Sednaya military prison (Rural Damascus governorate).⁴⁴³ In a report covering the period from January 2020 to April 2023, the UNCOI noted that torture and ill treatment of detainees was practised in military prisons overseen by the Military Police (including Sednaya military prison).⁴⁴⁴ The same source also documented deaths in detention and executions occurring at Sednaya prison.⁴⁴⁵ UNCOI has documented cases of draft evaders who were subject to torture and ill-treatment in GoS detention.⁴⁴⁶ An international organisation working on Syria who was interviewed for this report assessed that for draft evaders and military deserters/defectors there is a high risk of being tortured while in detention of GoS security services.⁴⁴⁷ After serving their sentences, the draft evaders will be taken to do their military service.⁴⁴⁸

According to testimonies of Syrians forcibly returned from Lebanon in 2023, those who were draft evaders were enrolled in the SAA immediately after they were handed to the Syrian authorities.⁴⁴⁹ In some cases, those with security issues such as evading military and reserve service were investigated by the security services and depending on the gravity of the security issues they were handed over to various detention facilities run by security branches where they claimed to be subjected to torture and ill-treatment. They were subsequently enlisted in SAA.⁴⁵⁰

Some sources also note that draft evaders may be immediately sent to serve on frontlines or areas with military confrontations.⁴⁵¹ Some sources assessed that draft evaders originating

⁴⁴⁰ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024; AlMustafa, M., email correspondence with EUAA, 20 & 26 August 2024

⁴⁴¹ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024

⁴⁴² Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 73 [source: SOHR]

⁴⁴³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 66, 73 [sources: Enab Baladi, SOHR]

⁴⁴⁴ UNCOI, “No End in Sight”: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), para. 33

⁴⁴⁵ UNCOI, “No End in Sight”: Torture and ill-treatment in the Syrian Arab Republic 2020-2023, A/HRC/53/CRP.5, 10 July 2023, [url](#), para. 61

⁴⁴⁶ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/57/86], 10 September 2024, [url](#), para. 17

⁴⁴⁷ International organisation working on Syria, online interview, 13 September 2024

⁴⁴⁸ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024; Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 73 [source: SOHR]

⁴⁴⁹ Access Center for Human Rights, What Happens After The Forced Deportation Of Refugees From Lebanon?, 29 January 2024, [url](#), p. 15

⁴⁵⁰ Access Center for Human Rights, What Happens After The Forced Deportation Of Refugees From Lebanon?, 29 January 2024, [url](#), pp. 12, 17

⁴⁵¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 54, 70 [sources: Ammar Hamou, SNHR]





from former opposition-held areas would be viewed with suspicion⁴⁵² and be more likely to be imprisoned or sent to the front.⁴⁵³

(b) Military deserters and defectors

The treatment of military deserters depends on their individual case such as potential involvement in anti-GoS activities⁴⁵⁴ and the reason for desertion.⁴⁵⁵ According to sources, deserters and defectors will be dealt with by the GoS based on the nature of their escape (internal or external) and the penalties imposed by the Penal Code (Articles 100 to 104).⁴⁵⁶ The law does not differentiate between deserters and defectors and as a result, a deserter may be treated as a defector.⁴⁵⁷

According to Al-Ghazi, those who desert to see their families because they did not get a leave permission would be sentenced to prison, whereas deserters who would engage in anti-GoS activities might receive a death sentence.⁴⁵⁸ The same source stated that deserters originating from former opposition-held areas would be treated more harshly than those from loyalist areas even for minor offenses.⁴⁵⁹

Sources noted that in general, deserters would serve a prison sentence before being sent to military service.⁴⁶⁰ According to Enab Baladi, deserters among conscripts and reservists face up to nine months' imprisonment for a first offense. For a second desertion, the sentence can extend to two years. Upon a third desertion, the penalty increases to up to five years' imprisonment, after which the individual is required to complete their military service.⁴⁶¹ Two sources stated that deserters would serve their prison sentence in Sednaya military prison.⁴⁶²

To avoid imprisonment for evasion and desertion, individuals can go through the process of 'reconciliation/status settlement', whereby they can receive a pardon for their offenses before rejoining the army.⁴⁶³ This process occurs at 'status settlement' or 'reconciliation' centres established in various villages and areas under GoS control in Syria.⁴⁶⁴ However, even after completing this procedure, they are still required to perform military service.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁵² Hiba Zayadin, email correspondence with EUAA, 19 & 28 August 2024; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 55

⁴⁵³ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 55

⁴⁵⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 48 [source: Aljasem]

⁴⁵⁵ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 40 [source: Al-Ghazi]

⁴⁵⁶ AIMustafa, M., email correspondence with EUAA, 20 & 26 August 2024; SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024; Jusoor for Studies, email correspondence with EUAA, 28 August 2024; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 34

⁴⁵⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 78 [source: AIMustafa]

⁴⁵⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 40 [source: Al-Ghazi]

⁴⁵⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 40 [source: Al-Ghazi]

⁴⁶⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 54, 65, 70, 73, 78 [sources: Ammar Hamou, Enab Baladi, SNHR, SOHR, AIMustafa]

⁴⁶¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 65 [source: Enab Baladi]

⁴⁶² Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 66, 73 [sources: Enab Baladi, SOHR]

⁴⁶³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 47, 66 [sources: Aljasem, Enab Baladi]

⁴⁶⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 66 [source: Enab Baladi]

⁴⁶⁵ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 47, 66 [sources: Aljasem, Enab Baladi]





Entering a ‘reconciliation’/settlement with the GoS does not guarantee that the deserter/defector will be safe in the future. There are cases where neighbours denounce the person who underwent ‘reconciliation’/settlement to the intelligence services for previous activities. This situation would create additional security issues for the person which would have to be dealt with by interacting with the intelligence services.⁴⁶⁶ SNHR also reported that ‘reconciled’ evaders and deserters with unresolved security issues with the GoS have been subjected to interrogation, with some individuals dying under torture due to their connections with the opposition.⁴⁶⁷

According to testimonies of Syrians forcibly returned from Lebanon in 2023, deserters from military service were investigated by the security services and depending on the gravity of the security issues they were handed over to various detention facilities run by security branches where they claimed to be subjected to torture and ill-treatment. They were subsequently enlisted in SAA.⁴⁶⁸ UNCOI also reported on cases of military deserters deported to Syria between 2023-2024 who were subject to torture, ill-treatment and sexual violence in GoS custody, including at Sednaya prison and at branch 235 (‘Palestine branch’).⁴⁶⁹

SNHR stated that in practice defectors were generally arrested and subject to enforced disappearance, torture and execution after being tried by military field courts. During the reference period for this report, the source observed that defectors usually fled to Lebanon or to opposition-held areas. However, they would not join opposition armed groups but rather live there as civilians.⁴⁷⁰

In 2023, SNHR documented cases of army defectors who were arrested by GoS forces, despite having undergone ‘reconciliation’/‘status settlement’. The source did not provide additional details.⁴⁷¹ In the beginning of 2024, sources reported that the Lebanese authorities arrested an army defector originating from Dar’a governorate and allegedly deported him to Syria.⁴⁷² In July 2024, Foreign Policy reported that the defector’s family stated that he was currently detained in Sednaya military prison and had been subjected to torture. The family claimed that the authorities had asked for a payment of 2 000 USD to transfer the defector to the military judiciary and stand trial.⁴⁷³ According to a Lebanese NGO, another army defector originating from Homs governorate was arrested and reportedly deported to Syria by the Lebanese authorities in June 2024. According to the defector’s family, as of July 2024 he was

⁴⁶⁶ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 34

⁴⁶⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 70 [source: SNHR]

⁴⁶⁸ Access Center for Human Rights, What Happens After The Forced Deportation Of Refugees From Lebanon?, 29 January 2024, [url](#), p. 12

⁴⁶⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/57/86], 10 September 2024, [url](#), paras. 17-18

⁴⁷⁰ SNHR, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 & 26 August 2024

⁴⁷¹ 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, [url](#), p. 4

⁴⁷² Syria Direct, Detained, deported, disappeared: Assad’s critics face ‘nightmare’ in Lebanon, 9 February 2024, [url](#); HRW, Lebanon: Stepped-Up Repression of Syrians, 25 April 2024, [url](#); Cedar Centre for Legal Studies, Disappearance of a Syrian in Lebanon Sparks Concern, 12 February 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁷³ FP, Syrians in Lebanon Are Stuck in Limbo, 9 July 2024, [url](#)



being held in detention in Syria by the Military Intelligence branch 235 (also known as the Palestine Branch).⁴⁷⁴

According to information published by a pro-opposition website, the GoS issued a new directive prohibiting defectors from the army, security services, Ministry of Interior, and government employees who left Syria without a security clearance from obtaining passports abroad or through domestic departments via their families or associates. The implementation of the directive reportedly commenced in June 2024, when lists containing the names of defectors and public employees were disseminated. It is not clear whether the categories of persons affected by the directive would first have to solve their security issues with the GoS inside Syria as a prerequisite for having passports issued.⁴⁷⁵

(c) Draft evaders and military deserters above the age of 42

Men who have evaded compulsory military service and have not paid the exemption fee before reaching the age of 42, must pay a fee of USD 8 000⁴⁷⁶ or they risk having their property seized without notification or the opportunity to challenge the decision.⁴⁷⁷ If they do not own any property or real estate, the reserve seizure will be executed on the property of their family members.⁴⁷⁸ While older reports noted that the Ministry of Finance froze the assets of draft evaders and their family members,⁴⁷⁹ sources interviewed in 2023 stated that they were unaware of any instances where the GoS had confiscated the property of draft evaders and deserters under the aforementioned law.⁴⁸⁰

(d) Treatment of family members

In previous years sources stated that issues related to military service (e.g. draft evasion, desertion, defection) generally did not lead to direct repercussions for family members.⁴⁸¹ During the reference period of this report, sources stated that draft evasion and desertion as such would not lead to repercussions for family members⁴⁸² but rather that the political opinion ascribed to draft evaders and deserters by GoS authorities would be the cause of such repercussions.⁴⁸³ According to some sources, the treatment of family members depends on their area of origin⁴⁸⁴ and on whether they have other security issues with the GoS.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁷⁴ Cedar Centre for Legal Studies, The Enforced Disappearance of Mr. Abedullah Al Zohouri, 8 July 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁵ Syrian Observer (The), New Decisions Deny Passport to Category of Syrians, 16 May 2024, [url](#); Syria Report (The), Travel Documents Denied for Regime Defectors, 11 June 2024, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁶ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 78 [AIMustafa]; AIMustafa, M., The Selective Return of Syrian Refugees, TIMEP, 23 January 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁷ USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person, G. Property Seizure and Restitution; HRW, Syrian 'Military Evaders' Face Unlawful Seizure of Property, Assets, 9 February 2021, [url](#)

⁴⁷⁸ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 31

⁴⁷⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/48/70], 13 August 2021, [url](#), para. 42

⁴⁸⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 53, 60 [sources: STJ, Ammar Hamou]; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 31

⁴⁸¹ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 35; EUAA, Targeting of individuals, September 2022, [url](#), p. 46

⁴⁸² Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 48-49, 74, 79 [sources: Aljasem, SOHR, AIMustafa]

⁴⁸³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 48-49 [source: Aljasem]

⁴⁸⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 41-42, 54-55 [sources: Al-Ghazi, STJ]

⁴⁸⁵ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 54-55, 71 [sources: STJ, SNHR]



Family members of evaders/deserters originating from former opposition-held areas could be harassed, extorted,⁴⁸⁶ arrested and detained.⁴⁸⁷ According to Suhail Al-Ghazi, family members of draft evaders would also be tortured while in detention for the purpose of extracting information.⁴⁸⁸ Alternatively, families of draft evaders from loyalist communities, specifically Tartous and Damascus, usually do not experience any repercussions.⁴⁸⁹

In cases where the draft evaders/deserters have higher profile, such as being active in the opposition or fighting against GoS, their family members would also be at risk.⁴⁹⁰ If the draft evader/deserter has other security issues with the GoS, the risk of harassment, extortion and arrest for family members is higher.⁴⁹¹ According to Suhail Al-Ghazi, family members of military deserters would face more problems than those of draft evaders even if they do not originate from a pro-opposition area, since deserters can be perceived as defectors.⁴⁹²

Several sources indicated that family members who might face consequences are mostly first-degree relatives of draft evaders and deserters.⁴⁹³

According to Enab Baladi, family members of draft evaders/deserters can also face harassment and threats from both authorities and pro-GoS citizens. The source provided an example of a mother of a deserter who was subsequently demoted from her position as a school headmistress because of her son's desertion.⁴⁹⁴ Sometimes family members of draft evaders/deserters can be extorted by security forces such as at checkpoints or at their homes, just for the purpose of extracting money.⁴⁹⁵

Sources asserted that family members (of draft evaders and deserters) who left the country illegally would not necessarily face consequences upon their return due to the evasion/desertion of their family member.⁴⁹⁶ However, Suhail Al-Ghazi stated that if the draft evader left the country illegally, his family members might face problems with authorities.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁸⁶ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 41-42, 54 [sources: Al-Ghazi, STJ]

⁴⁸⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 41-42 [source: Al-Ghazi]

⁴⁸⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 42 [source: Al-Ghazi]

⁴⁸⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 41, 54-55 [sources: Al-Ghazi, STJ]

⁴⁹⁰ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), p. 35; Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 42, 79 [sources: Al-Ghazi, AIMustafa]

⁴⁹¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 54-55, 61, 71 [sources: Enab Baladi, STJ, SNHR]

⁴⁹² Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 41-42 [source: Al-Ghazi]

⁴⁹³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 48-49, 61, 71 [sources: Aljaseem, Ammar Hamou, SNHR]

⁴⁹⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), p. 61 [source: Enab Baladi]

⁴⁹⁵ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 42, 54, 79 [sources: Al-Ghazi, STJ, AIMustafa]

⁴⁹⁶ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 42, 71, 79 [sources: Al-Ghazi, SNHR, AIMustafa]

⁴⁹⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military service, January 2024, [url](#), pp. 41-42 [source: Al-Ghazi]



1.4. Persons fearing (forced) recruitment by Kurdish forces in areas under their influence

1.4.1. Implementation of the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty Law

The Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES) enforced the law on Mandatory Self-Defence Duty, as part of which conscripts serve in the Self-Defence Duty Forces (in Kurdish Hêzên XweParastinê: HXP⁴⁹⁸)⁴⁹⁹ in most areas under its control. The Kurdish authorities largely adhered to this law, including to regulations concerning the age of conscripts, the length of service, exemptions, and deferrals.⁵⁰⁰ Under Article 1-A of the Self-Defence Duty Law, men over the age of 18 from north-east Syria are obligated to perform the duty.⁵⁰¹ As of June 2024, men born in 1998 or later were being called up for Self-Defence Duty.⁵⁰² According to journalist Wladimir van Wilgenburg, the DAANES authorities generally respected and consistently enforced the recruitment age regulations outlined in the Self-Defence Duty Law.⁵⁰³

A Syrian Kurdish expert interviewed by DIS explained that the Self-Defence Duty was applicable in all cantons of the DAANES, including the predominantly Arab areas such as Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor, and Manbij. However, DAANES was said to be more cautious in enforcing the Self-Defence Duty law in these Arab-dominated regions. Similarly, Christians were not subjected to the same level of enforcement of the Self-Defence Duty law as Kurds. Christian youth typically joined the Christian police force, Sutoro, for three years, which exempted them from the Self-Defence Duty.⁵⁰⁴

Article 1-D of the Self-Defence Duty Law states that Syrian nationals originating from outside north-east Syria who have resided in north-east Syria for at least three consecutive years are required to perform the Self-Defence Duty.⁵⁰⁵ However, when interviewed by DIS, Syrian

⁴⁹⁸ The HXP are security forces under the management of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC). While considered auxiliary forces of the SDF, they have their own leadership. The SDF directs the tasks and deployment locations for the HXP. Typically, HXP members are not involved in active combat but are instead used for guarding checkpoints, securing AANES buildings, and performing other security-related duties within cities (Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 58). In comparison, the SDF functions as a professional military force, deployed to the frontlines and engaged in combat operations. (Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), p. 24)

⁴⁹⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), p. 13

⁵⁰⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁰¹ General Assembly of the Democratic Administration of North and East Syria, 2024 قانون رقم 1 واجب الدفاع الذاتي بعد التعديل [Law No. 1 Self-Defense Duty After Amendment 2024], 22 February 2024, [url](#), Article 1-A

⁵⁰² Baladi News, "الإدارة الذاتية "تحدد الفئة العمرية للتجنيد الإجباري بمناطق سيطرتها", 22 June 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁰³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: Wladimir van Wilgenburg], June 2024, [url](#), p. 71

⁵⁰⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: Syrian Kurdish expert], June 2024, [url](#), p. 50

⁵⁰⁵ General Assembly of the Democratic Administration of North and East Syria, 2024 قانون رقم 1 واجب الدفاع الذاتي بعد التعديل [Law No. 1 Self-Defense Duty After Amendment 2024], 22 February 2024, [url](#), Article 1-D



Kurdish expert and journalist Seyredin Yusuf expressed doubts about the consistency of conscription across all regions.⁵⁰⁶

The legislation permits individuals required to serve in the Self-Defence Duty to defer their service or obtain exemptions based on their specific circumstances.⁵⁰⁷ These rules, including exemptions for medical reasons and deferments for students or individuals residing abroad, were upheld and enforced by the DAANES according to expert sources interviewed by DIS.⁵⁰⁸ Article 3 of the Self-Defence Duty Law grants women the right to voluntarily join the Self-Defence Duty.⁵⁰⁹ Both Wladimir van Wilgenburg and a Syrian Kurdish expert reported that they were unaware of any cases of forced conscription of women.⁵¹⁰

According to Article 2 of the Self-Defence Duty Law the Self-Defence Duty lasts for 12 calendar months from the date of enlistment.⁵¹¹ Article 1 introduces two concepts that allow this duration to be extended: retention (*ehfefaz*) and reserve (*ehtiat*), both based on need.⁵¹²

DAANES authorities and a Syrian Kurdish expert confirmed that service duration could be extended during emergencies.⁵¹³ According to the DAANES Foreign Relations Department, local commanders decided on service extensions based on existing needs.⁵¹⁴ The DAANES Defence Department cited two situations for retention: late enlistment, leading to a one-to-two-month extension, and extraordinary crises, with a maximum extension of up to three months.⁵¹⁵ A former HXP (Self-Defence Duty Forces) recruit mentioned that his service was extended by two months due to delays in recruiting new conscripts, a situation that affected his entire group.⁵¹⁶ Sources were unaware of any recent cases where individuals were called up for reserve duty after being discharged.⁵¹⁷ Wladimir van Wilgenburg noted that the

⁵⁰⁶ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [sources: Syrian Kurdish expert and Seyredin Yusuf], June 2024, [url](#), pp. 50, 64

⁵⁰⁷ General Assembly of the Democratic Administration of North and East Syria, 2024 قانون رقم 1 واجب الدفاع الذاتي بعد التعديل [Law No. 1 Self-Defense Duty After Amendment 2024], 22 February 2024, [url](#), Articles 16-32

⁵⁰⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [sources: Syrian university professor, Syrian Kurdish expert, Syrian human rights organisation, Seyredin Yusuf], June 2024, [url](#), p. 43, 51, 61, 65

⁵⁰⁹ General Assembly of the Democratic Administration of North and East Syria, 2024 قانون رقم 1 واجب الدفاع الذاتي بعد التعديل [Law No. 1 Self-Defense Duty After Amendment 2024], 22 February 2024, [url](#), Article 3

⁵¹⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [sources: Syrian Kurdish expert and Wladimir van Wilgenburg], June 2024, [url](#), pp. 51, 70

⁵¹¹ General Assembly of the Democratic Administration of North and East Syria, 2024 قانون رقم 1 واجب الدفاع الذاتي بعد التعديل [Law No. 1 Self-Defense Duty After Amendment 2024], 22 February 2024, [url](#), Article 2

⁵¹² General Assembly of the Democratic Administration of North and East Syria, 2024 قانون رقم 1 واجب الدفاع الذاتي بعد التعديل [Law No. 1 Self-Defense Duty After Amendment 2024], 22 February 2024, [url](#), Article 1

⁵¹³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [sources: DAANES Representation in KRI, Syrian Kurdish expert and DAANES FRD], June 2024, [url](#), pp. 46, 52, 74

⁵¹⁴ Denmark DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: DAANES FRD], June 2024, [url](#), p. 74

⁵¹⁵ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: DAANES DD], June 2024, [url](#), p. 78

⁵¹⁶ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: previous Mandatory Self-Defence Duty conscript], June 2024, [url](#), p. 56

⁵¹⁷ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [sources: Syrian Kurdish expert and DAANES DD], June 2024, [url](#), pp. 52, 78





DAANES generally upheld the legal provisions regarding the length of the Self-Defence Duty.⁵¹⁸

1.4.2. Recruitment practices

(a) Self-Defence Duty Forces (in Kurdish: *Hêzên XweParastinê*, HXP)

Conscription for the Self-Defence Duty takes place once or twice a year.⁵¹⁹ Authorities announce the specific age groups eligible for conscription through online platforms. Once a man turns 18, he is expected to report to a recruitment centre to obtain and complete a military booklet.⁵²⁰ The HXP does not conscript individuals under the age of 18. Both a Syrian Kurdish expert and a Syrian human rights organisation interviewed by DIS reported that they had not encountered any instances of minors being conscripted into the HXP, either voluntarily or forcibly.⁵²¹ The HXP serves as an auxiliary force primarily tasked with guarding public buildings and supporting the SDF, and they are generally not involved in combat. There have been certain occasions where the HXP participated in combat, such as during the battle for Afrin in 2018, the clashes at Tell Abyad, ISIL attacks on Hasaka prison in 2022 and intense fighting in Deir Ez-Zor in summer 2023. According to the DAANES representation office in KRI, such situations do not occur often, and conscripts are usually not placed on the frontlines. A former HXP recruit confirmed to DIS that neither he nor any of the conscripts alongside him were deployed in active combat during his 2022 conscription.⁵²²

(b) SDF

SDF recruited both men and women on a voluntary contractual basis. The relatively high salary was an incentive for people to join.⁵²³ The recruitment of SDF personnel was managed by local military councils within the three military regions of the DAANES.⁵²⁴ The representation of DAANES in the KRI claimed that individuals interested in volunteering for the SDF were familiar with the recruitment process and the appropriate channels, making public advertising on social media unnecessary. The SDF conducted identity verification and background checks. Applicants were required to present their national ID card, family documents, and a local identity document known as *Shahadet al-Tariff/Nasnameh*.⁵²⁵

⁵¹⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: Wladimir van Wilgenburg], June 2024, [url](#), p. 71

⁵¹⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: previous Mandatory Self-Defence Duty conscript], June 2024, [url](#), p. 55

⁵²⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: Syrian Kurdish Expert], June 2024, [url](#), p. 51

⁵²¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [sources: Syrian Kurdish expert, Syrian Human Rights Organisation], June 2024, [url](#), pp. 51, 60

⁵²² Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), pp. 20-21

⁵²³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [sources: Syrian university professor, Syrian Kurdish expert, Seyredin Yusuf], June 2024, [url](#), p. 44, 53, 66

⁵²⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), p. 25

⁵²⁵ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: DAANES Representation in KRI], June 2024, [url](#), pp. 48, 49





(c) PKK

A Syrian university professor confirmed to DIS in 2024 that the PKK did not forcibly recruit members in north-east Syria. Instead, they used indirect methods to recruit young people through the Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM).⁵²⁶

(d) Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM)

The Revolutionary Youth Movement (Tevgera Ciwanên Şoreşger in Kurdish) a radical political youth organisation, affiliated with the Democratic Union Party (PYD)⁵²⁷ and the PKK⁵²⁸, recruited young people, including minors.⁵²⁹ There was agreement amongst the sources consulted by DIS that the RYM recruited minors through encouragement and political indoctrination, aiming to attract young people with cultural and ideological activities as well as socio-economic incentives.⁵³⁰ Some sources reported that there had been accusations of physical force, including kidnappings from schools or homes.⁵³¹ It was reported that minors had been recruited across north-east Syria, including in Qamishli, Sheikh Maqsoud, Manbij, Raqqa, and Ayn al-Arab/Kobane.⁵³² A Syrian university professor noted that the RYM's recruitment efforts were primarily carried out by young adults aged 18 and older, who focused mainly on recruiting adolescents.⁵³³

1.4.3. Prevalence of child recruitment

USDOS wrote in its 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report that forces recruiting children included the RYM, the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), the Women's Protection Units (YPJ) and the SDF. The RYM recruited, trained and used girls and boys from the age of 12. While the SDF implemented the action plan mandated by United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) to demobilise children and to end the recruitment and use of children, SDF-affiliated armed groups continued child recruitment in 2023.⁵³⁴

The United Nations verified for their report on children and armed conflict from June 2024 (covering the period from January to December 2023) the recruitment and use of 231 children by the SDF. 203 of these 231 children were recruited by the YPG/YPJ, 27 by internal security forces under the umbrella of the DAANES and one child was recruited by 'other components

⁵²⁶ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: Syrian University Professor], June 2024, [url](#), p. 46

⁵²⁷ Kurdistan 24, Revolutionary Youth Movement allegedly kidnaps, recruits children in Qamishli, Hasakah, 9 July 2024, [url](#); Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), p. 29

⁵²⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), p. 29; Enab Baladi, Al-Hasakah: Revolutionary Youth Movement kidnaps minor girls and recruits them, 14 March 2024, [url](#)

⁵²⁹ USDOS, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Syria, 24 June 2024, [url](#); Kurdistan 24, Revolutionary Youth Movement allegedly kidnaps, recruits children in Qamishli, Hasakah, 9 July 2024, [url](#)

⁵³⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: Syrian university professor, Syrian Kurdish expert, SNHR, Seyredin Yusuf, STJ], June 2024, [url](#), pp. 45, 54, 58, 67, 68

⁵³¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: SNHR, Seyredin Yusuf, STJ, Wladimir van Wilgenburg], June 2024, [url](#), p. 58, 67, 68, 72

⁵³² STJ, Syria: Over 50 Children Recruited in AANES Areas in 2023, 30 January 2024, [url](#), p. 3

⁵³³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: Syrian University Professor], June 2024, [url](#), p. 45

⁵³⁴ USDOS, 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Syria, 24 June 2024, [url](#)



of SDF'. A further 10 children were recruited by the Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement.⁵³⁵ STJ documented the recruitment of more than 52 children in DAANES areas in 2023. Of the recruited children, 29 were boys and 23 girls. The majority of recruitments occurred in Qamishli, where 22 cases were reported. This was followed by the Sheikh Maqoud area in Aleppo (13 cases), Manbij (7 cases), Raqqa (6 cases) and Ayn Al-Arab (4 cases). According to STJ, the RYM was responsible for 43 cases. The remaining recruitments were carried out by YPJ and other military groups connected to the SDF.⁵³⁶ According to ARK News, five children were recruited in October 2023, who ranged in age from 12 to 15 years old. They included boys and girls of Kurdish and Arab ethnicity and were recruited by the RYM as well as the YPG.⁵³⁷ Noon Post reported the recruitment of more than eight children, including two girls, in the city of Manbij by the RYM between January and March 2024. Further child recruitment operations took place in Tal Tamar, Sheikh Maqoud and Qamishli.⁵³⁸

As of July 2024, the SDF continued to recruit children, who were sent to military training camps. According to SNHR, the parents and families of the children were not allowed to contact them, and the SDF did not provide details about their situation.⁵³⁹

A Syrian university professor consulted by DIS noted an increase in the recruitment of minors by the RYM since 2022.⁵⁴⁰ The RYM is not a military organisation and does not conduct military training,⁵⁴¹ but it is speculated that minors recruited by the RYM may later join the ranks of the PKK or SDF as fighters.⁵⁴² According to the university professor, some minors joined training camps in the Qandil or Sinjar mountains.⁵⁴³ However, Kurdish media reports that verified instances of this occurring were limited, according to STJ.⁵⁴⁴ Families of recruited children told Enab Baladi in March 2024 that children were lured into recruitment by the RYM and abducted. The SDF was said to be unable to deter the RYM.⁵⁴⁵ SNHR wrote that recruitment and conscription of children had expanded to all areas under SDF control.⁵⁴⁶

⁵³⁵ UNSG, Children and armed conflict, A/78/842-S/2024/384, 3 June 2024, [url](#), para. 202

⁵³⁶ STJ, Syria: Over 50 Children Recruited in AANES Areas in 2023, 30 January 2024, [url](#), p. 3

⁵³⁷ ARK News, ARK documents: SDF kidnaps five children within a month and takes them to forced conscription, 3 November 2023, [url](#)

⁵³⁸ Noon Post, شمال شرق سوريا: الاختطاف والتجنيد بلاطفال الأطفال [Northeast Syria: Kidnapping and recruitment of children], 10 March 2024, [url](#)

⁵³⁹ 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, [url](#), p. 14; Kurdistan 24, Revolutionary Youth Movement allegedly kidnaps, recruits children in Qamishli, Hasakah, 9 July 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁰ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: Syrian University Professor], June 2024, [url](#), pp. 44-45

⁵⁴¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: Syrian University Professor], June 2024, [url](#), p. 45

⁵⁴² Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: Wladimir van Wilgenburg], June 2024, [url](#), p. 72

⁵⁴³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: Syrian University Professor], June 2024, [url](#), p. 45

⁵⁴⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: STJ], June 2024, [url](#), p. 69

⁵⁴⁵ Enab Baladi, Al-Hasakah: Revolutionary Youth Movement kidnaps minor girls and recruits them, 14 March 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁶ SNHR, On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women: SNHR's 12th Annual Report on Violations against Females in Syria, 25 November 2023, [url](#), pp. 39-40



1.4.4. Prevalence of forced recruitment to SDF

SNHR wrote in July 2024 that it had recorded an increased number of arrests or detentions of civilians for forced conscription. The conscripts were taken to SDF military training and recruitment camps, many of which were located in the SDF-controlled areas of Aleppo governorate.⁵⁴⁷ Baladi News confirmed in June 2024 that the SDF was conducting extensive arrest campaigns for recruitment purposes in areas under its control. They were concentrated mainly in the countryside, and it was difficult to know the exact number and the identity of those detained. Young men were taken to recruitment camps in Hasaka, Raqqa and Manbij.⁵⁴⁸ According to a correspondent from Enab Baladi in the governorate of Hasaka, SDF military police patrols were deployed end of June 2024 along all main roads, setting up approximately ten checkpoints on the road connecting Hasaka to its eastern and northern countryside. Vehicles were inspected for men wanted for Self-Defence Duty. According to a bus driver on the route from Qamishli to Al-Malikiyah in eastern Hasaka, passengers' IDs were usually inspected before the bus departs from the terminal and a signed paper was handed to the driver to facilitate passing through checkpoints. During the recruitment campaign at end of June, checkpoints ignored this paper and checked every single passenger.⁵⁴⁹ According to Zaman Al-Wasl, over 240 young people were arrested in late June/early July 2024 for the purpose of conscription by SDF forces in July in the countryside of Deir Ez-Zor, Hasaka and Raqqa.⁵⁵⁰

1.4.5. Consequences of draft evasion and desertion, including for family members

According to Article 15 of the Self-Defence Duty Law, individuals who evade conscription will be penalised with an additional month of service.⁵⁵¹ The names of evaders were published and shared with various checkpoints, where they were actively sought,⁵⁵² which restricted their movement. Evaders were detained and assigned to service when identified at checkpoints. Families were informed about the apprehension and conscription of their relatives.⁵⁵³ No incidents of violence or mistreatment of evaders or deserters at checkpoints were known to a former conscript of the Self-Defense Duty.⁵⁵⁴ As one expert explained to DIS, authorities took a more cautious approach in areas predominantly inhabited by Arabs, to avoid inflaming

⁵⁴⁷ 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, [url](#), p. 14

⁵⁴⁸ Baladi News, "تحديد الفئة العمرية للتجنيد الإجباري بمناطق سيطرتها", [“Autonomous Administration” determines the age group for compulsory recruitment in the areas under its control], 22 June 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁴⁹ Enab Baladi, Despite announcing its halting, SDF launches compulsory recruitment campaign in al-Hasakah, 27 June 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁰ Zaman Al-Wasl, SDF Arrests Hundreds of Young Men for Conscription in Northern and Eastern Syria, 2 July 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁵¹ General Assembly of the Democratic Administration of North and East Syria, 2024 [Law No. 1 Self-Defense Duty After Amendment 2024], 22 February 2024, [url](#), Article 15

⁵⁵² Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: Representation of the DAANES in KRI], June 2024, [url](#), p. 48

⁵⁵³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: Seyredin Yusuf], June 2024, [url](#), p. 66

⁵⁵⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: previous Mandatory Self-Defence Duty conscript], June 2024, [url](#), p. 57



tensions by arresting those who had evaded their duty.⁵⁵⁵ According to Muhsen AlMustafa, draft evaders fall under the provisions of the Self-Defence Duty Law and were treated accordingly. The Kurdish security agency (Asayish) searched the place of residence of those wanted for service, checked recruitment lists at checkpoints and arrested those wanted.⁵⁵⁶

The law does not specify any particular repercussions for deserters.⁵⁵⁷ According to a Syrian lawyer and a Syrian Kurdish expert, while evaders did not face additional punishment, deserters were subjected to investigations to determine their reasons for desertion.⁵⁵⁸ Many deserters chose to leave the region due to fears of potential repercussions, although the exact nature of these consequences was unclear. Periodic amnesties were announced for both evaders and deserters, contingent upon their reporting for and fulfilling their Self-Defence Duty.⁵⁵⁹ The most recent amnesty was issued in early May 2024.⁵⁶⁰

Sources interviewed by DIS had not heard of any reported cases of family members experiencing harassment or similar as a result of their relatives' evading or deserting,⁵⁶¹ even in situations where the evader was detained at a checkpoint.⁵⁶²

1.5. Kurds

1.5.1. Stateless Kurds

A 1962 census in Hasaka governorate, which required residents to prove that they had lived in Syria before 1945,⁵⁶³ deprived an estimated 120 000 Kurds of Syrian citizenship⁵⁶⁴ and led to the emergence of two groups of stateless Kurds.⁵⁶⁵ The first group, registered as *ajanib* (plural, 'foreigners'; singular, *ajnabi*), consisted of people who were able to provide proof of residency but failed to meet certain requirements. The second group, *maktoumeen* (plural, 'unregistered'; singular, *maktoum*), either could not provide the necessary documents or did

⁵⁵⁵ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: Syrian Kurdish Expert], June 2024, [url](#), p. 53

⁵⁵⁶ ACCORD, Anfragebeantwortung zu Syrien: Konsequenzen bei Verweigerung des Dienstes in den Selbstverteidigungskräften; Konsequenzen für Angehörige; Wahrnehmung von Personen, die den Dienst in den Selbstverteidigungskräften verweigern; Situation von Arabern; Einsatz von Rekruten im Rahmen der Selbstverteidigungspflicht an der Front [a-12188-v2] [source: Muhsen Al-Mustafa], 6 September 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁷ General Assembly of the Democratic Administration of North and East Syria, 2024 [التعديل](#) [Law No. 1 Self-Defense Duty After Amendment 2024], 22 February 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁵⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [sources: Civan Issa (lawyer) and Syrian Kurdish expert], June 2024, [url](#), pp. 42, 53

⁵⁵⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: Syrian Kurdish expert], June 2024, [url](#), p. 53

⁵⁶⁰ Rozana, "الإدارة الذاتية: عفو عام عن الفارين من الخدمة الإلزامية" ["Autonomous Administration": General amnesty for those who fled compulsory service], 1 May 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁶¹ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [sources: Syrian university professor, previous Mandatory Self-Defence Duty conscript], June 2024, [url](#), p. 44, 57

⁵⁶² Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria [source: Seyredin Yusuf], June 2024, [url](#), p. 66

⁵⁶³ STJ, Syria: 10 facts about the 1962 special Census of al-Hasakah, 4 October 2019, [url](#); StatelessHub, Syria, January 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁴ Benslama-Dabdoub, M., Colonial legacies in Syrian nationality law and the risk of statelessness, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 26-27

⁵⁶⁵ McGee, T., Implications of legal identity documentation issued by the Kurdish-led Self Administration in Northern Syria: competition and compromise with the central state, *Citizenship Studies* 27 (7), 11 March 2024, [url](#)



not participate in the census, rendering their residency in Syria illegal. The stateless status of the *ajanib* and *maktoumeen*, passed down from fathers to their children, led to severe marginalisation of the community, whose rights, including access to health, education, property ownership, and political participation, became severely limited.⁵⁶⁶

In April 2011, the Syrian government issued Decree 49 granting Syrian citizenship to the *ajanib* group of stateless Syrian Kurds.⁵⁶⁷ According to the April 2024 report by the DIS, in order to obtain the citizenship, *ajanib* persons had to transfer their registration from the Hasaka registry to the regular Syrian civil registry, after which they were issued a Syrian ID number, ID card, and a family book. Children born after naturalisation of their parents were granted Syrian citizenship automatically. DIS noted that Syrian authorities were generally ‘committed to granting nationality’ to *ajanib* persons who met the application requirements, with many successfully obtaining citizenship.⁵⁶⁸ However, some people with *ajanib* status were reportedly denied citizenship despite meeting the requirements, while in some other cases, a bribe had to be paid.⁵⁶⁹ Moreover, due to the requirement to apply for citizenship in person, some people reportedly refrained from doing so because of the mandatory military service,⁵⁷⁰ required in both in the GoS-controlled areas and DAANES,⁵⁷¹ as well as because of concerns about interacting with the authorities over security⁵⁷² or political issues.⁵⁷³

Maktoumeen Kurds were left outside of the scope of the 2011 decree.⁵⁷⁴ However, *maktoumeen* with *ajanib* ancestors could first register as *ajanib* and then apply for Syrian citizenship.⁵⁷⁵ The application process was reportedly often plagued by challenges and delays, with some persons resorting to personal connections⁵⁷⁶ and bribes.⁵⁷⁷ Many *maktoumeen* who completed the registration still faced uncertainty about their citizenship status.⁵⁷⁸

There are no official figures on the number of stateless Kurds in Syria.⁵⁷⁹ It was estimated that there were 517 000 stateless Kurds in Syria until 2011, including more than 171 000

⁵⁶⁶ StatelessHub, Syria, January 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁶⁷ StatelessHub, Syria, January 2024, [url](#); Denmark, DIS, Syria, Ajanib and Maktoumeen, Citizenship and Military Service, April 2024, [url](#), pp. 1, 6

⁵⁶⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria, Ajanib and Maktoumeen, Citizenship and Military Service, April 2024, [url](#), pp. 1, 8-10

⁵⁶⁹ Denmark, DIS, Syria, Ajanib and Maktoumeen, Citizenship and Military Service, April 2024, [url](#), p. 10

⁵⁷⁰ Syria Direct (The), ‘There is no future for us in Iraq either’: Statelessness plagues Syrian Kurdish refugees, 14 September 2022, [url](#); Denmark, DIS, Syria, Ajanib and Maktoumeen, Citizenship and Military Service, April 2024, [url](#), p. 10

⁵⁷¹ Syria Direct (The), ‘There is no future for us in Iraq either’: Statelessness plagues Syrian Kurdish refugees, 14 September 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁷² Denmark, DIS, Syria, Ajanib and Maktoumeen, Citizenship and Military Service, April 2024, [url](#), p. 10

⁵⁷³ Syria Direct (The), ‘There is no future for us in Iraq either’: Statelessness plagues Syrian Kurdish refugees, 14 September 2022, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁴ STJ, Statelessness in Syria: An Enduring Dilemma, 11 October 2022, [url](#), p. 3; StatelessHub, Syria, January 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁷⁵ Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of Origin information report Syria, May 2022, [url](#), p. 48;

Denmark, DIS, Syria, Ajanib and Maktoumeen, Citizenship and Military Service, April 2024, [url](#), pp. 1, 10

⁵⁷⁶ Denmark, DIS, Syria, Ajanib and Maktoumeen, Citizenship and Military Service, April 2024, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁷⁷ Syria Direct (The), ‘There is no future for us in Iraq either’: Statelessness plagues Syrian Kurdish refugees, 14 September 2022, [url](#); Denmark, DIS, Syria, Ajanib and Maktoumeen, Citizenship and Military Service, April 2024, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁷⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria, Ajanib and Maktoumeen, Citizenship and Military Service, April 2024, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁷⁹ Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of Origin information report Syria, May 2022, [url](#), p. 47



maktoumeen.⁵⁸⁰ Based on the data from the Personal Status Department of Hasaka, STJ estimated that, following the announcement of the decree 49/2011, some 326 500 persons with *ajanib* status obtained the Syrian citizenship, while around 19 750 *ajanib* persons remained stateless. Among persons with *maktoumeen* status, 50 400 people managed to obtain Syrian citizenship as of October 2019.⁵⁸¹ In the report covering 2023, USDOS noted that approximately 40 000 Kurds remained registered as *ajanib* and 160 000 as *maktoumeen* and being unable to acquire the Syrian citizenship.⁵⁸² According to StatelessHub,⁵⁸³ stateless Kurds who had successfully obtained Syrian citizenship were encountering ‘difficulties in transferring land and property into their names’ and securing the necessary formal documentation.⁵⁸⁴

In the GoS areas, stateless Kurds faced significant restrictions, including lack of access to government services and restrictions on travel abroad. Regarding their access to education, USDOS noted that, while stateless Kurds could generally enrol their children in schools and universities, they were ‘ineligible to receive a degree’ proving their academic achievements.⁵⁸⁵

In September 2022, Syria Direct noted that Kurdish authorities in north-east Syria made no distinction between stateless Kurds and Kurds with Syrian citizenship. The Kurdish authorities reportedly issued local identification documents to both groups, which were ‘often a simple sheet of paper with a photograph.’⁵⁸⁶ For more details on stateless Kurds in Syria, see the chapter on Stateless Kurds in the [EUAA 2022 report Syria: Targeting of Individuals](#).

1.5.2. Treatment of Kurds in territories controlled by the Syrian National Army

Human Rights Watch characterised the situation in areas under the control of the Türkiye-backed SNA as lawless and insecure.⁵⁸⁷ As noted in a joint report by Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights⁵⁸⁸ and YASA,⁵⁸⁹ the construction of large settlements for SNA fighters and their families in Afrin has reportedly led to the forced displacement and violations of property rights

⁵⁸⁰ STJ, *Statelessness in Syria: An Enduring Dilemma*, 11 October 2022, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁸¹ STJ, *Syria: 10 facts about the 1962 special Census of al-Hasakah*, 4 October 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁸² USDOS, *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Syria*, 22 April 2024, [url](#), Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties, G. Stateless Persons

⁵⁸³ Stateless Hub is a resource platform maintained by Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI), an NGO promoting ‘the right to a nationality and the rights of stateless people,’ see StatelessHub, *StatelessHub: Global and Reliable Information on Statelessness*, n.d., [url](#) and ISI, *About Us*, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁸⁴ StatelessHub, *Syria*, January 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁸⁵ USDOS, *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Syria*, 22 April 2024, [url](#), Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses, Children

⁵⁸⁶ Syria Direct, ‘There is no future for us in Iraq either’: Statelessness plagues Syrian Kurdish refugees, 14 September 2022, [url](#) 11

⁵⁸⁷ HRW, ‘Everything is by the Power of the Weapon’, *Abuses and Impunity in Turkish-Occupied Northern Syria*, 29 February 2024, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁸⁸ Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights is a UK-based NGO that monitors violations of human rights and humanitarian law, see Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights, *Our Story*, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁸⁹ YASA (Kurdish Center for Studies and Legal Consultancy) is a Germany-based NGO advocating for human rights of Kurdish population in their countries of origin, see YASA, *About YASA*, n.d., [url](#)



of local Kurdish residents.⁵⁹⁰ Sources reported on continuous ‘Turkification’ of Afrin⁵⁹¹ and other areas in the region.⁵⁹² In schools, Turkish and Arabic were reportedly imposed as compulsory subjects,⁵⁹³ while Kurdish was allocated only a few hours of classes a week.⁵⁹⁴ In practice, many schools, especially in the countryside, reportedly had no Kurdish teachers, preventing the Kurdish language instruction.⁵⁹⁵

Following the February 2023 earthquakes, SNA armed groups reportedly obstructed aid delivery to Afrin⁵⁹⁶ and Jinderis,⁵⁹⁷ which were among the areas most affected by the earthquake.⁵⁹⁸ Moreover, sources noted that Kurdish residents faced discrimination by various SNA factions, including Hamzat and Al-Amshat,⁵⁹⁹ distributing humanitarian aid to people affected by the earthquakes.⁶⁰⁰ Furthermore, in Afrin and other affected areas in the region, property theft and looting during searches for survivors were reportedly committed by volunteers and armed groups members, with no action taken by ‘*de facto* authorities’.⁶⁰¹

As noted by Human Rights Watch and USDOS, Kurdish residents faced significant human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrests and detentions, abductions, torture, killings, property seizures, and extortion by different SNA-affiliated security entities and armed groups.⁶⁰² In June 2024, STJ reported that interviews conducted in Afrin, Ras al-Ayn (Kurdish: Serê Kaniyê) and Tel Abyad revealed that SNA factions subjected the residents of the area to violence as a deliberate strategy aimed at intimidating the local population, particularly the Kurds, to drive them from their homes and subject them to financial extortion.⁶⁰³ Furthermore, in Afrin, the

⁵⁹⁰ Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and YASA, Escalating human rights violations in Syria’s Afrin: 2024 update, May 2024, [url](#), pp. 14-15

⁵⁹¹ Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and YASA, Escalating human rights violations in Syria’s Afrin: 2024 update, May 2024, [url](#), p. 1

⁵⁹² STJ, Northern Syria: Replacement of Kurdish Landmarks in Afrin and Turkification in Al-Bab, 29 August 2024, [url](#); NPA, Turkey targets next generation in north Syria by imposing language, 27 December 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁹³ Yek.Dem, Afrin Under Occupation (280): Deliberate neglect of Kurdish language education, settlement villages funded by Pakistan and Kuwait, arbitrary arrests, and property seizures in “Baadina” and “Shiyeh”, 12 March 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁴ ANHA, Reality of Kurdish Language following Turkification of Afrin, 15 May 2024, [url](#); Yek.Dem, Afrin Under Occupation (280): Deliberate neglect of Kurdish language education, settlement villages funded by Pakistan and Kuwait, arbitrary arrests, and property seizures in “Baadina” and “Shiyeh”, 12 March 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁵ Yek.Dem, Afrin Under Occupation (280): Deliberate neglect of Kurdish language education, settlement villages funded by Pakistan and Kuwait, arbitrary arrests, and property seizures in “Baadina” and “Shiyeh”, 12 March 2024, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁶ AI, The State of the World’s Human Rights, April 2024, [url](#), p. 359

⁵⁹⁷ Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, The State of Justice in Syria, March 2024, [url](#), p. 9

⁵⁹⁸ New Arab (The), Kurds allege looting, aid discrimination by Turkish-backed militias in Syria after earthquake, 23 February 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁹⁹ Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, The State of Justice in Syria, March 2024, [url](#), p. 9; AI, The State of the World’s Human Rights, April 2024, [url](#), p. 359

⁶⁰⁰ New Arab (The), Kurds allege looting, aid discrimination by Turkish-backed militias in Syria after earthquake, 23 February 2023, [url](#); Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and YASA, Escalating human rights violations in Syria’s Afrin: 2024 update, May 2024, [url](#), p. 11

⁶⁰¹ Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and YASA, Escalating human rights violations in Syria’s Afrin: 2024 update, May 2024, [url](#), p. 12

⁶⁰² HRW, “Everything is by the Power of the Weapon”, Abuses and Impunity in Turkish-Occupied Northern Syria, 29 February 2024, [url](#), p. 1; USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 22 April 2024, [url](#), Executive summary

⁶⁰³ STJ, In the Absence of Accountability: Torture as a Systematic Policy in Northern Syria, 26 June 2024, [url](#)





living conditions were reportedly further destabilized by internal conflicts by various SNA factions controlling Afrin subdistricts.⁶⁰⁴

Human Rights Watch noted that Türkiye's attempt to address widespread abuse allegations in areas under SNA control by establishing military and civil police forces under the supervision of the Syrian Interim Government (SIG) and military police, alongside a local grievance committee intended to help residents reclaim property, largely failed. Both police forces, and particularly the military police, were reportedly implicated in ongoing abuses, SNA factions continued to operate in populated areas, and the grievance committees proved ineffective against the influence of powerful faction commanders.⁶⁰⁵ In summer 2023, US sanctioned SNA factions Ahrar al Sharqiya, the Hamzat division, and Suleiman Shah brigade and the commanders of these formations for severe human rights abuses against civilians, in particular Syrian Kurds.⁶⁰⁶

As noted by UNCOI, the main pretext for arbitrary arrests and ill-treatment of Kurdish residents in the SNA-controlled areas was the person's perceived affiliation with DAANES, YPG, SDF⁶⁰⁷, and the Syrian government.⁶⁰⁸ Some detentions were also based on terrorism charges, membership in PKK, and cooperation with foreign entities.⁶⁰⁹ Alleged DAANES or PKK affiliation was also used as a pretext for torture, seizure of properties, and denial of access to homes and lands⁶¹⁰ and could also lead to enforced disappearances.⁶¹¹ As noted by STJ, accusations of collaborating with DAANES could be potentially leveraged against many Afrin residents, as DAANES was the area's *de facto* authority for several years and residents had to rely on its institutions for obtaining permissions and ID documents, accessing healthcare and education, and securing jobs.⁶¹²

In some instances, SNA factions used detention as a means of extortion, detaining individuals for extended periods without legal proceedings and subjecting them to torture and ill-treatment to force substantial payments from their families for their release.⁶¹³ In February 2024, UNCOI reported on torture and ill-treatment including severe beatings, simulated drowning, and threats to families during interrogation process in SNA-run detention facilities in

⁶⁰⁴ Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and YASA, Escalating human rights violations in Syria's Afrin: 2024 update, May 2024, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁰⁵ HRW, "Everything is by the Power of the Weapon", Abuses and Impunity in Turkish-Occupied Northern Syria, 29 February 2024, [url](#), p. 26

⁶⁰⁶ HRW, "Everything is by the Power of the Weapon", Abuses and Impunity in Turkish-Occupied Northern Syria, 29 February 2024, [url](#), p. 25

⁶⁰⁷ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/57/86], 10 September 2024, [url](#), para. 80

⁶⁰⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/54/58], 12 September 2023, [url](#), para. 77

⁶⁰⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 9 February 2024, [url](#), para. 77

⁶¹⁰ STJ, "Five Years of Injustice are Enough!", Investigative Study on Violations Against Kurds and Yazidis in Northern Syria, 13 November 2023, [url](#)

⁶¹¹ Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and YASA, Escalating human rights violations in Syria's Afrin: 2024 update, May 2024, [url](#), pp. 3-5

⁶¹² STJ, "Five Years of Injustice are Enough!", Investigative Study on Violations Against Kurds and Yazidis in Northern Syria, 13 November 2023, [url](#)

⁶¹³ Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and YASA, Escalating human rights violations in Syria's Afrin: 2024 update, May 2024, [url](#), p. 3





Afrin, l'zaz, Ma'arratah, Raju, and Hawar Kilis.⁶¹⁴ UNCOI also observed that sexual and gender-based violence against women in detention, including threats of sexual violence, continued despite investigations by the SNA into reports of rape and sexual abuses.⁶¹⁵ In March 2024, SOHR reported that it had documented over 8 700 abductions and arrests of Kurdish civilians from Afrin since 2018, with more than 1 100 of them remaining in detention.⁶¹⁶ Abductions, including with the use of violence, torture, and threats extended to the families of victims, were reportedly committed particularly by Hamzat, the Sultan Murad, and Montasser Billah factions.⁶¹⁷

Persons returning to the areas controlled by SNA were frequently detained for investigation and faced lengthy detentions without access to family members or lawyers. Moreover, SNA factions, particularly Suleiman Shah Brigade and Brigade 2011, reportedly affiliated with the Sultan Murad faction, imposed significant fines on returnees, informally referred to as 'a visa'.⁶¹⁸ Along with Kurdish communities in the region, these 'protection fees' were also imposed on Kurds deported from Türkiye.⁶¹⁹

Kurdish residents in SNA-controlled areas faced significant violations of housing, land, and property rights, with various SNA factions conducting land and property seizures.⁶²⁰ In some cases, forced confiscations involved swathes of villages, encompassing both homes and farmland.⁶²¹ Houses were seized from their owners regardless of their presence in the area, forcing them to rent elsewhere or remain homeless.⁶²² Despite having legal proof of ownership,⁶²³ many Kurdish residents were unable to reclaim their properties due to threats to their lives,⁶²⁴ fear of retaliation and lack of trust in the local justice system.⁶²⁵ Confiscated properties were repurposed for factions' uses, serving as headquarters, IDP shelters,⁶²⁶ or

⁶¹⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 9 February 2024, [url](#), para. 79

⁶¹⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 9 February 2024, [url](#), para. 81

⁶¹⁶ SOHR, Turkish occupation of Afrin six years later on – Over 8,700 kidnappings and arbitrary arrests and over 4,000 other violations by Turkish forces and their proxy factions, 17 March 2024, [url](#)

⁶¹⁷ Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and YASA, Escalating human rights violations in Syria's Afrin: 2024 update, May 2024, [url](#), p. 5

⁶¹⁸ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 9 February 2024, [url](#), para. 78

⁶¹⁹ Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, The State of Justice in Syria, March 2024, [url](#), p. 8

⁶²⁰ NPA, SNA militants seize, sell Kurds' houses in Syria's Afrin, 30 April 2024, [url](#); Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and YASA, Escalating human rights violations in Syria's Afrin: 2024 update, May 2024, [url](#), pp. 9-10; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/57/86], 10 September 2024, [url](#), paras. 98-99

⁶²¹ STJ, "Five Years of Injustice are Enough!", Investigative Study on Violations Against Kurds and Yazidis in Northern Syria, 13 November 2023, [url](#)

⁶²² NPA, SNA militants seize, sell Kurds' houses in Syria's Afrin, 30 April 2024, [url](#)

⁶²³ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 9 February 2024, [url](#), para. 85

⁶²⁴ Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and YASA, Escalating human rights violations in Syria's Afrin: 2024 update, May 2024, [url](#), pp. 9-10

⁶²⁵ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 9 February 2024, [url](#), para. 85

⁶²⁶ Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and YASA, Escalating human rights violations in Syria's Afrin: 2024 update, May 2024, [url](#), pp. 9-10; STJ, "Five Years of Injustice are Enough!", Investigative Study on Violations Against Kurds and Yazidis in Northern Syria, 13 November 2023, [url](#)





housing of SNA members and their families.⁶²⁷ Some properties were sold to IDPs from other regions, such as Homs,⁶²⁸ or to SNA fighters.⁶²⁹

SNA factions were also involved in cutting down olive trees.⁶³⁰ In areas controlled by Suleiman Shah Brigade and Sultan Murad Division, faction members confiscated olive harvests, imposed excessive taxes on land and olive oil profits, and arrested farmers or seized their olive trees if they could not pay.⁶³¹

1.5.3. Treatment of Kurds in territories under control of the Government of Syria

In November 2023, STJ reported that Kurds continued to face violations of their rights, including linguistic rights and rights to political participation.⁶³² In its report covering 2023, USDOS noted that the GoS consistently limited the use of the Kurdish language, restricted publication of books and other materials in Kurdish, and limited Kurdish cultural expression. Moreover, USDOS reported on arrests, detention, and ill-treatment in detention of Kurdish activists taking place during 2023.⁶³³

Since August 2022,⁶³⁴ the GoS forces have enforced blockades on the DAANES-controlled areas in Aleppo governorate,⁶³⁵ restricting residents' access to fuel and essential goods.⁶³⁶ After the February 2023 earthquakes, the GoS blocked trucks with humanitarian aid from Kurdish authorities, preventing them from entering Kurdish-majority neighbourhoods in Aleppo,⁶³⁷ including the neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah, thereby exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in these areas.⁶³⁸ As reported by STJ in April 2024, since September 2023, a partial blockade by the Fourth Division of the SAA has restricted residents' access to fuel and basic food items in the neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyah, the city of Tel Rifaat, and more than 50 towns and villages in the Shahba area.⁶³⁹ As noted by Amnesty International in its report covering 2023, flour and medications were among the

⁶²⁷ STJ, "Five Years of Injustice are Enough!", Investigative Study on Violations Against Kurds and Yazidis in Northern Syria, 13 November 2023, [url](#)

⁶²⁸ STJ, "Five Years of Injustice are Enough!", Investigative Study on Violations Against Kurds and Yazidis in Northern Syria, 13 November 2023, [url](#); NPA, SNA militants seize, sell Kurds' houses in Syria's Afrin, 30 April 2024, [url](#)

⁶²⁹ NPA, SNA militants seize, sell Kurds' houses in Syria's Afrin, 30 April 2024, [url](#)

⁶³⁰ Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and YASA, Escalating human rights violations in Syria's Afrin: 2024 update, May 2024, [url](#), p. 10

⁶³¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/55/64], 9 February 2024, [url](#), para. 84

⁶³² STJ, Diversity and the Syrian Constitution: Overbroad Texts that Fail to Protect Minority Rights, 29 November 2023, [url](#)

⁶³³ USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 22 April 2024, [url](#), Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses, Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

⁶³⁴ AI, Syria: Government forces must lift siege on civilians in predominantly Kurdish areas in Aleppo, 24 January 2023, [url](#)

⁶³⁵ STJ, Aleppo: Syrian Government Forces Block Essential Supplies to Kurdish Neighbourhoods, 5 April 2024, [url](#)

⁶³⁶ AI, Syria: Government forces must lift siege on civilians in predominantly Kurdish areas in Aleppo, 24 January 2023, [url](#); STJ, Aleppo: Syrian Government Forces Block Essential Supplies to Kurdish Neighbourhoods, 5 April 2024, [url](#)

⁶³⁷ AI, Syria: Vital earthquake aid blocked or diverted in Aleppo's desperate hour of need, 6 March 2023, [url](#)

⁶³⁸ AI, The State of the World's Human Rights, April 2024, [url](#), p. 359

⁶³⁹ STJ, Aleppo: Syrian Government Forces Block Essential Supplies to Kurdish Neighbourhoods, 5 April 2024, [url](#)





supplies affected by the blockage by the GoS forces. The blockage affected ‘tens of thousands of civilians’, including IDPs, who had to resort to burning household items and plastic to stay warm in harsh weather conditions.⁶⁴⁰

⁶⁴⁰ AI, The State of the World’s Human Rights, April 2024, [url](#), p. 359



2. Socio-economic situation with a focus on the cities of Damascus, Latakia and Tartous

2.1. Mobility and admittance

2.1.1. International flight connections

The Damascus Airport website shows international flight connections with Iran (Tehran), Iraq (Al Najaf, Erbil, Baghdad, Basra), Jordan (Amman), Lebanon (Beirut), the UAE (Sharjah, Abu Dhabi, Dubai), Oman (Muscat), Qatar (Doha), Kuwait (Kuwait city), Libya (Misurata), Sudan (Khartoum), Côte d'Ivoire (Abidjan), Pakistan (Karachi, Lahore) and Russia (Moscow).⁶⁴¹ The flight tracker FlightConnections, which provides information about current flight connections, indicated that, as of 8 July 2024, international flights were being operated to 10 cities in 4 countries, including the UAE (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah), Iraq (Baghdad, Erbil, Al Najaf, Basra), Pakistan (Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad), and Qatar (Doha).⁶⁴² Flightradar24 also showed flights arriving or scheduled to arrive from Moscow, Tehran, Dubai, Muscat, Cairo, and Kuwait city.⁶⁴³ In July 2024, it was reported that commercial flights between Saudi Arabia and Syria have been resumed after more than a decade, with Syrian Airlines flying to Riyadh.⁶⁴⁴ Websites Flightradar24 and FlightConnections did not show any scheduled internal or international flights to/from Latakia airport.⁶⁴⁵

According to the USDOS, the Syrian government has 'routinely' ordered the closure of the Damascus airport, reportedly due to violence or the threat of violence.⁶⁴⁶ There were reports of arrests of IDPs and returnees to GoS-controlled areas taking place at Damascus airport.⁶⁴⁷ Experts assessed that persons with security issues, including draft evaders, would be at risk of arrest at Damascus airport.⁶⁴⁸ During the reporting period, Damascus airport was temporarily

⁶⁴¹ Damascus international airport, Destinations, n.d., [url](#), accessed on 2 August 2024

⁶⁴² FlightConnections, Direct flights to Damascus (DAM), last updated 2 August 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁴³ Flightradar24, Damascus International Airport Syria (DAM/OSDI): Arrivals: 1 to 4 August 2024, n.d., [url](#)

⁶⁴⁴ AP, Syria and Saudi Arabia resume regular commercial flights as part of a thaw in relations, 10 July 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁵ Flightradar24, Latakia Bassel al Assad International Airport, 2 August 2024, [url](#); FlightConnections, Syria, last updated 2 August 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁴⁶ USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section 2 Respect Civil Liberties, E. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

⁶⁴⁷ 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, [url](#), p. 12; 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, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁴⁸ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), pp. 63, 73 [sources: Zaki Mohammad Hajji, Wladimir van Wilgenburg]



closed at least twice after sustaining damage from alleged Israeli airstrikes.⁶⁴⁹ For more information see section [2.1.3\(b\)](#).

2.1.2. Beirut – Damascus land route

The main road connecting the capital cities of Beirut and Damascus runs through the Al-Masnaa (Lebanon) / Jdeidet Yabous (Syria) border crossing, located 60 km from Damascus and 110 km from Beirut,⁶⁵⁰ and is the largest border crossing between the two countries.⁶⁵¹ The road remained open during the reporting period.⁶⁵² There were reports of alleged Israeli airstrikes hitting areas of the Beirut-Damascus highway in 2024.⁶⁵³ Arrests of Syrian returnees by the GoS forces including the Military Intelligence⁶⁵⁴ and the Fourth Division of the SAA have been reported to take place at the Al Masnaa border crossing during the reporting period.⁶⁵⁵ For more information, see section [1.2.3](#).

2.1.3. Freedom of movement

USDOS noted that the GoS restricted in-country movements and established checkpoints to monitor travels inside the areas under its control.⁶⁵⁶ Checkpoints are present along frontlines between different areas of control, as well as on roads connecting major cities and governorates.⁶⁵⁷ In its 2024 report, Freedom House described a ‘proliferation’ of checkpoints by government and militia forces, severely restricting the population’s freedom of movement.⁶⁵⁸ Earlier reports from 2023 noted that, while the number of checkpoints decreased compared to previous years, checkpoints at major city entrances were still in place. The SAA’s Fourth Division was reported to be a key actor controlling checkpoints at the entrances of urban centres, including Damascus city, and at the entrances to the ports of Latakia and Tartous.⁶⁵⁹ According to confidential sources interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2023, Latakia city has not had internal checkpoints for years, only a major checkpoint at the entrance of the city that travellers were required to pass through. In contrast to loyalist areas, the number of checkpoints was higher in former opposition-held

⁶⁴⁹ Al Jazeera, Syria says Israel hit Damascus, Aleppo airports again amid Gaza bombing, 22 October 2023, [url](#); Rudaw, Damascus airport in service after month-long hiatus: Monitor, 26 November 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁰ WFP, Logistics Cluster, n.d., 2.3.1. Land Border Crossing Al Masnaa, [url](#)

⁶⁵¹ CMI, National and international migration policy in Lebanon, 1 December 2022, [url](#), p. 13

⁶⁵² UN Security Council, United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. Report of the Secretary-General [S/2024/242], 18 March 2024, [url](#), para. 29; UN Security Council, United Nations Disengagement Observer Force. Report of the Secretary-General [S/2024/433], 4 June 2024, [url](#), para. 31; New Arab (The), Despite rumours, there is no closure of Masnaa border crossing between Lebanon and Syria, 27 June 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁵³ Crisis24, Syria: Suspected Israeli airstrike reported outside of Damascus on Beirut-Damascus highway Aug. 3, 3 August 2024, [url](#); SOHR, Having been attacked by Israeli drone on Damascus-Beirut highway | Fate of commander of Hezbollah and his escort remains unknown, 18 May 2024, [url](#); Times of Israel (The), Lebanese media: Israeli strike on vehicle on Beirut-Damascus highway, near border crossing, 9 July 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁴ Syria Direct, At risk in Lebanon, Syrians gamble on smuggling routes to Idlib, 8 July 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁵ 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, [url](#), p. 11

⁶⁵⁶ USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section D. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

⁶⁵⁷ OHCHR, “We did not fear death but the life there”. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), para. 48

⁶⁵⁸ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024 - Syria, 29 February 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁵⁹ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), pp. 46-47





areas.⁶⁶⁰ According to reports, the number of checkpoints inside Damascus city has significantly decreased.⁶⁶¹ However, checkpoints remain on roads connecting Damascus to areas in Rural Damascus that were under opposition control during the conflict.⁶⁶²

Bribery and extortion were reported to be widespread at checkpoints across Syria⁶⁶³ and it was even possible for individuals wanted by the GoS who paid bribes to the personnel manning checkpoints to travel between different areas of control without being arrested.⁶⁶⁴

Persons wishing to enter or exit GoS-held areas,⁶⁶⁵ including IDPs wanting to return to their area of origin⁶⁶⁶ or visit their property⁶⁶⁷ need to obtain a security clearance from the GoS security forces.⁶⁶⁸ The GoS has denied security clearance for certain categories of persons including perceived opponents of the GoS and their relatives, former opposition members⁶⁶⁹ and persons originating from areas which were viewed as opposition strongholds.⁶⁷⁰

(a) Specific groups/impact on civilians

Both male and female interviewees for an OHCHR report expressed fear of passing through checkpoints due to potential harassment. This includes the possibility of extortion for money and personal items, arrest, detention, ill-treatment including sexual violence, and disappearance, even when they possess all necessary documentation.⁶⁷¹

Men were reportedly more scrutinised when passing through GoS checkpoints due to issues related to military service. As a result, many men of military age avoid leaving their houses due to fear of being conscripted. By comparison women were reported to encounter less problems at checkpoints as they are less likely to be perceived as active in political activism than men. However, in some cases women reported restrictions on their freedom of

⁶⁶⁰ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 40

⁶⁶¹ Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: General Country of Origin Information Report on Syria, August 2023, [url](#), p. 40; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), pp. 46-47; SOHR, Amid removing checkpoints in different provinces | Regime forces remove the largest checkpoint in Damascus, 29 September 2023, [url](#); Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024

⁶⁶² Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024

⁶⁶³ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), p. 62; EUAA, COI Report Syria: Country focus, October 2023, [url](#), pp. 47-48

⁶⁶⁴ Denmark, DIS, Syria Military recruitment in North and East Syria, June 2024, [url](#), p. 62

⁶⁶⁵ USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section D. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

⁶⁶⁶ Syria Report (The), IDPs Return to Regime-Controlled Areas in Idlib and Hama, 18 June 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁷ SJAC, Human Rights Violations in Syria - April 2024, 20 May 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁶⁸ Syria Report (The), IDPs Return to Regime-Controlled Areas in Idlib and Hama, 18 June 2024, [url](#); SJAC, Human Rights Violations in Syria - April 2024, 20 May 2024, [url](#); USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section D. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

⁶⁶⁹ USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section D. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country; TDA, Violating the HLP Rights Post the Trilogy (Siege, Destruction, Displacement), January 2024, [url](#), pp. 21, 56

⁶⁷⁰ Syria Report (The), Bribes, Security Services, Major Obstacle to Return in Al-Tadhamon, 14 November 2023, [url](#); USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section D. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

⁶⁷¹ OHCHR, “We did not fear death but the life there”. The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), para. 48





movement, sexual harassment and arbitrary detention.⁶⁷² Legal and cultural restrictions also limited women's freedom of movement in many areas.⁶⁷³

Having identity documents, birth certificates and other personal documents⁶⁷⁴ was essential for being able to move freely.⁶⁷⁵ Returnees with civil documentation issued by authorities in areas outside the control of GoS in north-east and north-west Syria claimed that they were subjected to additional screening, harassment and arrest when passing through GoS checkpoints.⁶⁷⁶ Persons originating from a former opposition held area might encounter problems when passing through particular checkpoints such as being demanded to pay higher bribes, and being subjected to threats and harassment.⁶⁷⁷

IDPs wishing to return to their homes in former opposition-held areas in Damascus experienced harassment, threats and extortion when interacting with the security branches for the purpose of obtaining a security clearance.⁶⁷⁸ Some were denied access to their properties⁶⁷⁹ despite having a security clearance⁶⁸⁰ or had to pay bribes to authorities to gain access.⁶⁸¹

According to the USDOS, the Syrian government extensively banned international travel of opposition members. Moreover, journalists and human rights or civil society activists were often banned from travelling abroad or were interrogated upon return.⁶⁸²

(b) Security incidents affecting Damascus airport

There were instances during the reporting period where Israeli airstrikes temporarily disrupted the operations of the Damascus airport. For example, in mid-October 2023, reported airstrikes by Israel on Damascus airport rendered it temporarily out of service.⁶⁸³ 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.⁶⁸⁴ There were limited reports that some international civilian flights landed on Latakia airport in November 2023 while

⁶⁷² OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), paras. 51-52

⁶⁷³ USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section D. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

⁶⁷⁴ UNHCR, UNHCR Legal Assistance in Syria. January – December 2022, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 3

⁶⁷⁵ OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), para. 68; UNHCR, UNHCR Legal Assistance in Syria. January – December 2022, 2 May 2023, [url](#), p. 3

⁶⁷⁶ OHCHR, "We did not fear death but the life there". The Dire Human Rights Situation Facing Syrian Returnees, February 2024, [url](#), para. 70

⁶⁷⁷ Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024

⁶⁷⁸ Syria Report (The), Bribes, Security Services, Major Obstacle to Return in Al-Tadhamon, 14 November 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁷⁹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 69

⁶⁸⁰ Syria Report (The), Bribes, Security Services, Major Obstacle to Return in Al-Tadhamon, 14 November 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁸¹ UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/52/69], 7 February 2023, [url](#), para. 69; Syria Report (The), Bribes, Security Services, Major Obstacle to Return in Al-Tadhamon, 14 November 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁸² USDOS, 2023 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Syria, 23 April 2024, [url](#), Section D. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

⁶⁸³ 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](#)

⁶⁸⁴ Reuters, Syria says Israel strike puts Damascus airport out of service, 26 November 2023, [url](#)





Damascus and Aleppo airports were out of service.⁶⁸⁵ By the end of November 2023, the Damascus airport was back in service.⁶⁸⁶

During the reference period, there were reports of security incidents in Damascus city, including Israeli airstrikes targeting Iran-linked military personnel and several improvised explosive devices attacks by unknown perpetrators. The attacks generally led to material damage and, on some occasions, limited civilian casualties.⁶⁸⁷ Further information is available in the [EUAA COI report: Syria - Security situation](#).

2.1.4. Administrative requirements for settling in the cities of Damascus, Latakia and Tartous

Obtaining a security clearance from the GoS security services is required for anyone wanting to buy or rent a house,⁶⁸⁸ including for establishing residence in any part of Damascus city⁶⁸⁹ or in the cities of Latakia and Tartous.⁶⁹⁰ The approval of an individual's security clearance was influenced by various factors, including their background, place of origin, and activities over the past years.⁶⁹¹ Other important factors required for obtaining a security clearance were having government connections, paying bribes,⁶⁹² and proving that no family members have been affiliated with opposition groups or activism.⁶⁹³ In Damascus city, the *mukhtar* often plays a role in the process of obtaining a security clearance.⁶⁹⁴ Prospective residents have to first submit their lease agreements and related documentation to the *mukhtar*, who subsequently forward these materials to the relevant security authorities for review. In some cases, prospective returnees submitted their applications directly to security services. Generally, returnees had to prove ownership of property to settle in the area where they lived prior to displacement. The security screening process for IDPs relocating to Damascus was stricter than for existing Damascus residents undergoing intra-city moves.⁶⁹⁵

Officially, there are no specific laws preventing population to live/settle in specific areas on ethnic or sectarian grounds. However, in practice, people will settle in places where they have family connections, tribal kinship or similar sectarian background. For instance, Druze from Sweida would most probably go to Jaramana (Rural Damascus) which is mostly populated by Druze. Persons coming from northern areas or from rural areas might find more difficulties to

⁶⁸⁵ Asharq Al-Awsat, Syrian Regime Diverts Flights to Latakia Airport after Latest Israeli Strikes, 12 November 2023, [url](#); Alma Research and Education Center, Latakia – Khmeimim / Bassel al-Assad International Airport – A new Iranian gateway for the transport of weapons and military equipment?, 14 December 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁶ Rudaw, Damascus airport in service after month-long hiatus: Monitor, 26 November 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁷ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update Syrian Arab Republic - Issue 23/ April 2024, 11 June 2024, [url](#), p. 9; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update Syrian Arab Republic - Issue 24/May 2024, 15 July 2024, [url](#), p. 9; Haid, H., Surge in bomb attacks show fragile security in regime-held areas of Syria, Al Majalla, 21 April 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁸⁸ UN Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of the Syrian Arab Republic [CCPR/C/SYR/CO/4], 25 July 2024, [url](#), para. 34; Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024

⁶⁸⁹ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), pp. 52-53

⁶⁹⁰ Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024

⁶⁹¹ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), pp. 52-53; Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024

⁶⁹² Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024

⁶⁹³ SJAC, Human Rights Violations in Syria - April 2024, 20 May 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁴ Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024; EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), pp. 52-53

⁶⁹⁵ EUAA, COI Report: Syria – Country Focus, October 2023, [url](#), pp. 52-53





settle in some areas of Latakia and Tartous due to financial reasons, being perceived as more rural, or potentially linked to the opposition. Persons belonging to the middle class, higher-middle class and businessman are generally more welcomed as they have more money. Persons who were part of armed groups or engaged in political activities against the GoS, may be refused settlement in a particular apartment, building or neighbourhood to avoid attracting potential problems.⁶⁹⁶ SJAC observed that individuals who do not originate from Damascus, Latakia or Tartous cities might encounter difficulties when settling in these areas such as facing discrimination or harassment, lack of financial resources and the absence of family relations.⁶⁹⁷

In some areas in and around Damascus who have been associated with the anti-GoS opposition during the conflict, access of residents to property and return were limited. In the neighbourhood of Jobar, residents are prevented from returning due to a GoS zoning plan awaiting approval. Instead, they would receive shares in new developments. Residents of the Mezzeh-Basateen al-Razi area of Damascus who were evicted due to urban planning projects have yet to receive compensation.⁶⁹⁸

By September 2023, around 7 000 Palestinian refugees had returned to Yarmouk camp.⁶⁹⁹ Displaced residents could return after obtaining a security clearance from the intelligence service or they could visit their property via a temporary security clearance.⁷⁰⁰ In 2023, authorities used Law No. 3 of 2018 to demolish structures in war-damaged, formerly opposition-held areas, including Yarmouk camp. Displaced owners had 30 days to appeal the decision but in some cases they were not notified of the demolitions and were unable to appeal the decision.⁷⁰¹

2.2. Socio-economic overview

2.2.1. Economy

In 2023, the economic situation in Syria continued to deteriorate, with the country's real GDP declining by 1.2 % and projected to decline by an additional 1.5 % in 2024,⁷⁰² which is less than half of Syria's GDP in 2011.⁷⁰³ As noted by the World Bank in its spring 2024 report, economic activity in Damascus as well as in the port cities of Latakia and Tartous declined sharply, partially due to a 50 % reduction in international trade since 2019. Furthermore, the western

⁶⁹⁶ Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024

⁶⁹⁷ SJAC, email correspondence with EUAA, 9 September 2024

⁶⁹⁸ Enab Baladi, Damascus governorate: No return for Jobar residents due to zoning plan, 19 August 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁹⁹ UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 Humanitarian Needs Overview (February 2024), 3 March 2024, [url](#), p. 47

⁷⁰⁰ Syria Report (The), Looting and Illegal Property Sales in Palestinian Refugee Camp, 7 February 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁰¹ SJAC, October 2023: State of Justice in Syria 2024, March 2024, [url](#), p. 9

⁷⁰² World Bank (The), Syria Economic Monitor, Conflict, Crises, and the Collapse of Household Welfare, Spring 2024, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 27

⁷⁰³ UNICEF, Whole of Syria – Social Protection Report, January to October 2023, November 2023, [url](#), p. 1



coastline areas were negatively impacted by a 10 % reduction in port visits compared to 2023.⁷⁰⁴

In the aftermath of the February 2023 earthquakes and the outbreak of the Middle East conflict in October 2023,⁷⁰⁵ the Syrian pound (SYP) saw a 141 % depreciation against the US dollar.⁷⁰⁶ In May 2024, the official exchange rate for the Syrian pound stood at SYP 13 500 per 1 US dollar, up from SYP 13 000 in January 2024. In the informal market, the exchange rate in May 2024 ranged between SYP 14 700 and SYP 14 850 per 1 US dollar, compared to a figure between SYP 12 200 and SYP 14 600 in early January 2024.⁷⁰⁷

Syria faced a fuel crisis⁷⁰⁸ that significantly impacted agricultural production,⁷⁰⁹ as well as 'recurrent economic and climate shocks' that affected per capita income across the country.⁷¹⁰ The raise of the price of subsidised gasoline in August 2023⁷¹¹ caused the growth of fuel prices by 300 %, impacting transportation costs and the prices of basic commodities.⁷¹² Towards the end of 2023 and beginning of 2024, the Syrian government brought the prices for subsidised gasoline and diesel close to their market values,⁷¹³ while transportation fares reportedly surged by 1 000 %.⁷¹⁴

The reduction of government subsidies caused a surge in consumer price inflation, estimated by the World Bank to increase by 93 % in 2023.⁷¹⁵ As noted by the Syrian Center for Policy Research (SCPR),⁷¹⁶ in 2023 annual inflation exceeded 100 % in 12 out of 14 Syrian governorates, with price levels for most goods and services having doubled throughout the year. According to SCPR, Hasaka governorate experienced the highest inflation rate at 148 %, followed by the governorates of Raqqqa at 137 % and Tartous at 135 %. Annual inflation in Latakia governorate stood at 127 % and in Damascus governorate at 124 %.⁷¹⁷

In May 2024, consumer prices reportedly increased further as a result of the increase in fuel prices and the introduction of new taxes on imported items, such as white sugar and solar panels.⁷¹⁸

⁷⁰⁴ World Bank (The), Syria Economic Monitor, Conflict, Crises, and the Collapse of Household Welfare, Spring 2024, 24 May 2024, [url](#), pp. xi, 7-9

⁷⁰⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update, Issue 24, May 2024, [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁰⁶ World Bank (The), Syria Economic Monitor, Conflict, Crises, and the Collapse of Household Welfare, Spring 2024, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. xi

⁷⁰⁷ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update, Issue 24, May 2024, [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁰⁸ Omran Centre, Monthly Briefing on The Events of The Syrian Scene – June 2024, 19 July 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁰⁹ Syria Direct, Fuel crisis and weak subsidies threaten Syria's northeastern bread basket, 2 February 2024, [url](#)

⁷¹⁰ Al-Attar, J., Syria's Agricultural Crisis, Sada, Carnegie Endowment, 2 January 2024, [url](#)

⁷¹¹ World Bank (The), Syria Economic Monitor, Conflict, Crises, and the Collapse of Household Welfare, Spring 2024, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 20

⁷¹² Enab Baladi, Economic Malfunction: People's need is 55 times minimum salary in Syria, 25 September 2023, [url](#)

⁷¹³ World Bank (The), Syria Economic Monitor, Conflict, Crises, and the Collapse of Household Welfare, Spring 2024, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 20

⁷¹⁴ Syrian Observer (The), Real Estate Prices in Damascus Jump by 200%, 6 May 2024, [url](#)

⁷¹⁵ World Bank (The), Syria Economic Monitor, Conflict, Crises, and the Collapse of Household Welfare, Spring 2024, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. xi

⁷¹⁶ SCPR (Syrian Center for Policy Research) is an independent think tank, undertaking research on political, economic, and social matters in Syria, see SCPR, About Us, n.d., [url](#)

⁷¹⁷ SCPR, SCPR'S Annual Bulletin for Consumer Price Index and Inflation in Syria 2023, 'A crumbling economy', Issue 2, June 2024, [url](#), pp. 13-14

⁷¹⁸ Syrian Observer (The), Real Estate Prices in Damascus Jump by 200%, 6 May 2024, [url](#)



In an interview with EUAA, Joseph Daher, professor at the University of Lausanne and at the European University Institute, noted that, compared to other regions in Syria, Damascus, Latakia, and Tartous saw more local investments and economic activity. According to the expert, this was attributed to the expansion of real estate construction in these cities, driven by an influx of IDPs or people moving in these cities, as well as investments in leisure and tourism sectors. However, despite these developments, the socio-economic conditions in these cities remained poor, with extremely low wages contributing to widespread poverty.⁷¹⁹

2.2.2. Humanitarian situation and assistance

The declining economic situation, marked by high inflation, the depreciation of the Syrian pound, and the rising prices of commodities⁷²⁰ has increased humanitarian needs.⁷²¹ Yet, the access of Syrian households to humanitarian aid remained limited, as the country continued facing funding deficits.⁷²² In June 2024, director of coordination of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) noted that Syria was facing the ‘highest levels of humanitarian need’ since 2011, yet only 13 % of the UN’s humanitarian appeal received funding.⁷²³ Following the February 2023 earthquake, humanitarian assistance flows to Syria were reportedly initially improved, decreasing during the rest of 2023.⁷²⁴

In 2024, UNOCHA estimated that 16.7 million Syrians out of the total population of 23.46 million were in need of humanitarian assistance, marking an increase from 15.3 million in 2023 and the highest number since 2012.⁷²⁵ According to UNOCHA, in Damascus governorate (total population 1.81 million), 900 000 people were estimated to need humanitarian assistance in 2024, 2 % more than in 2023. In Latakia governorate (total population 1.3 million), the number of people in need reached 800 000 people and in Tartous governorate 500 000 people (total population 940 000). Furthermore, UNOCHA categorised 268 out of 270 sub-districts in Syria as ‘being under severe or extreme conditions.’ Among these sub-districts, Dana in Idlib governorate and Jebel Saman in Aleppo governorate had the highest number of people in need, followed by the sub-district of Damascus, which had 900 000 people in need and the sub-district of Latakia, which had 500 000 people in need.⁷²⁶ According to Syria Humanitarian Fund (SHF) report by UNOCHA, 284 000 people were assisted in Latakia governorate, 79 000 in Damascus governorate, and 2 000 people in Tartous governorate in 2023.⁷²⁷

As of 31 July 2023, UNHCR and UNOCHA estimated the number of IDPs in Damascus governorate at 589 880 people. Latakia governorate reportedly had 447 336 IDPs and Tartous governorate 171 149 IDPs.⁷²⁸ After Aleppo and Idlib governorates, Latakia governorate

⁷¹⁹ Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024

⁷²⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), p. 13

⁷²¹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), p. 13; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update, Issue 24, May 2024, [url](#), p. 4

⁷²² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update, Issue 24, May 2024, [url](#), p. 5

⁷²³ UN, ‘Syria Facing Highest Levels of Humanitarian Need Since Start of 13-Year Crisis’, Senior Official Tells Security Council, 25 June 2024, [url](#)

⁷²⁴ World Bank (The), Syria Economic Monitor, Conflict, Crises, and the Collapse of Household Welfare, Spring 2024, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. xi

⁷²⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), pp. 3, 6-7

⁷²⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), pp. 3, 37-38

⁷²⁷ UNOCHA, Syria Humanitarian Fund 2023, Annual Report, 6 June 2024, [url](#)

⁷²⁸ UNHCR, Operational Data Portal, Syrian Arab Republic, 31 July 2023, [url](#)



had the highest number of internal displacements caused by the February 2023 earthquake.⁷²⁹ The majority of people displaced due to the February 2023 earthquakes had fled the conflict before and were ‘living in highly vulnerable conditions in makeshift settlements.’⁷³⁰

No further information was found regarding the humanitarian situation specifically in Damascus, Latakia, and Tartous.

2.2.3. Employment

According to the World Bank, 6.3 million Syrians were employed as of 2022.⁷³¹ For 2023, the World Bank estimated the labour force participation rate for persons older than 15 years old to be at 63.6 % for men and 14.1 % for women.⁷³² The World Bank noted that the increase in labour force participation in Syria between 2010 and 2022 was particularly significant among women, which can be explained by the increased need for women to contribute to households’ financial needs, possibly offsetting the absence of adult men in the household.⁷³³ In an interview with EUAA, Joseph Daher noted that the rise of women employment did not alleviate wage and job security disparities. On the contrary, women’s growing presence in public and societal roles has made them ‘the target of attacks and sexual harassment.’⁷³⁴

According to Freedom House, access to employment in Syria often depended ‘on personal, political, or communal affiliations’.⁷³⁵ With limited formal job opportunities, many Syrians were employed in the informal sector and in services.⁷³⁶ In an interview with EUAA, Joseph Daher noted that much of Syria’s economy was informal, including in Damascus, Latakia, and Tartous. However, he noted that these three cities also had a significant number of people employed in the public sector.⁷³⁷

As noted by Joseph Daher, there was ‘a bit more job creation’ in Damascus, Latakia, and Tartous, compared to other regions. Moreover, these cities, and particularly Latakia, witnessed ‘a change in the economic demography’ due to the influx of people from Aleppo and northern Syria, who opened small or micro companies. The expert noted that small companies were likely unregistered or did not register all their employees. Additionally, Daher noted an increase in the number of private security companies, ‘primarily in Damascus and, to a lesser extent, in Latakia and much less in Tartous,’ which employed former militia members.⁷³⁸

⁷²⁹ IDMC, Shaken to the core in Syria, 9 August 2023, [url](#)

⁷³⁰ IDMC, Syria - Disasters compound challenges for IDPs and drive first increase in displacements in four years, 14 May 2024, [url](#)

⁷³¹ World Bank Group (The), The Welfare of Syrian Households after a Decade of Conflict, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 19

⁷³² World Bank Group, Syrian Arab Republic, n.d., [url](#)

⁷³³ World Bank Group (The), The Welfare of Syrian Households after a Decade of Conflict, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 19

⁷³⁴ Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024

⁷³⁵ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2024, n.d., [url](#)

⁷³⁶ World Bank Group (The), The Welfare of Syrian Households after a Decade of Conflict, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. x

⁷³⁷ Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024

⁷³⁸ Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024



The scarcity of employment opportunities led to a high level of unemployment across the country.⁷³⁹ As noted by the World Bank, the female unemployment rate in 2022 was 24 %, compared to 9 % among men.⁷⁴⁰ According to SCPR, in June 2023, unemployment rate in Syria reached 52 %.⁷⁴¹ In the period between January 2023 and October 2023, the unemployment rate among young people aged 18-24 was reportedly close to 75 %.⁷⁴² According to the Central Bureau of statistics, as reported by pro-government newspaper Al-Watan, Rural Damascus governorate, held the highest unemployment rate (24 %) with more than 338 000 of unemployed. It was followed by Latakia governorate where the unemployment rate stood at 14 % (over 192 000 unemployed people), Tartous governorate with the unemployment rate of 11 % (over 150 000 unemployed people), and Damascus governorate where unemployment rate was estimated at 10 % (around 145 000 unemployed people).⁷⁴³

According to a survey on the socio-economic situation in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo and Homs commissioned by the Country of Origin Information (COI) Unit of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum,⁷⁴⁴ 29 % of the Damascus respondents reported that they worked continuously, 25 % occasionally, while 8 % stated that they were unemployed.⁷⁴⁵

In an attempt to offset the rising inflation, the GoS increased salaries of public sector employees, military personnel and retired persons by 100 % in August 2023⁷⁴⁶ and by 50 % in February 2024.⁷⁴⁷ In May 2024, UNOCHA reported that the average monthly salary of a public sector employee was around 20 US dollars.⁷⁴⁸ In June 2024, SCPR reported that wages in the GoS-controlled areas remained the lowest in Syria, with inflation causing a 30 % decrease in the purchasing power of public sector wages in such areas.⁷⁴⁹ In Damascus, according to UNOCHA, the average monthly salary in the public sector was between SYP 375 000 [EUR 28⁷⁵⁰] and SYP 400 000 [EUR 30] as of May 2024.⁷⁵¹

⁷³⁹ World Bank Group (The), The Welfare of Syrian Households after a Decade of Conflict, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 21; SCPR, SCPR'S Annual Bulletin for Consumer Price Index and Inflation in Syria 2023, "A crumbling economy", Issue 2, June 2024, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁴⁰ World Bank Group (The), The Welfare of Syrian Households after a Decade of Conflict, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 21

⁷⁴¹ SCPR, SCPR'S Annual Bulletin for Consumer Price Index and Inflation in Syria 2023, "A crumbling economy", Issue 2, June 2024, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁴² UNICEF, Whole of Syria, Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP), January to October 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁴³ Al-Watan, [...] معدل البطالة ارتفع 23,7 ووقرة العمل انخفضت من 6.5 ملايين إلى 5.9 ملايين خلال سنوات الحرب [...] [The unemployment rate rose 23.7 percent and the labor force fell from 6.4 million to 5.9 million during the war years [...]], 28 August 2024, [url](#); Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024

⁷⁴⁴ In Syria, data collection took place between August and September 2023. It should be noted that 27 % of respondents in Damascus were students. See, Statistics Lebanon Ltd. and Austria, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2023, 2023, [url](#), pp. 10-11

⁷⁴⁵ Statistics Lebanon Ltd. and Austria, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2023, 2023, [url](#), pp. 11-12

⁷⁴⁶ SCPR, SCPR'S Annual Bulletin for Consumer Price Index and Inflation in Syria 2023, "A crumbling economy", Issue 2, June 2024, [url](#), pp. 24

⁷⁴⁷ Arab News, Syria raises public-sector salaries as inflation soars, 6 February 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁴⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update, Issue 24, May 2024, [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁴⁹ SCPR, SCPR'S Annual Bulletin for Consumer Price Index and Inflation in Syria 2023, "A crumbling economy", Issue 2, June 2024, [url](#), pp. 24-25

⁷⁵⁰ The calculation was made based on the European Commission's official monthly accounting rates for the euro for Syrian Pound (SYP) for a respective month. EC, Exchange rate (InforEuro), n.d., [url](#), accessed 27 August 2024

⁷⁵¹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update, Issue 24, May 2024, [url](#), p. 5



2.2.4. Poverty

As of 2023, more than 90 % of the Syrian population lived in poverty.⁷⁵² As noted by the World Bank, as of 2022, which is the latest data, 5.7 million Syrians were impacted by extreme poverty, defined as living on less than 2.15 US dollars per person per day. Another 14.5 million people lived in poverty, defined as less than 3.65 dollars per person per day.⁷⁵³ As of 2022, in Damascus, Latakia, and Tartous governorates, extreme poverty affected 12-25 % of the population. The poverty rate exceeded 88 % in Tartous governorate and stood at a figure between 75-88 % in Latakia governorate and at 44 % in Damascus governorate.⁷⁵⁴ Poverty rates were reportedly highest among households headed by women and IDP households.⁷⁵⁵

Currency depreciation, rising inflation, disrupted supply networks, and increased costs of transportation have driven up the prices of household goods.⁷⁵⁶ Most Syrian households faced significant difficulties in meeting basic needs, with over two-thirds of households being partially or completely unable to meet their basic needs due to rising prices and unemployment.⁷⁵⁷ As a result, many households reportedly had to rely on borrowing money, buying goods on credit, and use child labour as coping mechanisms.⁷⁵⁸ As noted by UNOCHA, the economic crisis had a profound impact on Latakia and Tartous governorates, with a large number of population in some of their sub-districts being unable to meet their basic needs as of 2022.⁷⁵⁹

In March 2024, the World Food Programme (WFP) reported that the cost of 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 – was SYP 2 756 489 [EUR 203].⁷⁶⁰ In May 2024, UNOCHA reported that the cost of living in Syria measured by MEB nearly doubled compared to a year before, resulting in the minimum wage covering only 10% of MEB and 20 % of a family's monthly food needs.⁷⁶¹ According to UNOCHA, in June 2024, a local survey revealed that the average monthly cost of living for a family of five in Damascus increased to over SYP 13 million [EUR 953]. The same month, 'the

⁷⁵² UNICEF, Whole of Syria – Social Protection Report, January to October 2023, November 2023, [url](#), p. 1; HRW, Syria, Events of 2023, n.d., [url](#); Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024

⁷⁵³ World Bank Group (The), The Welfare of Syrian Households after a Decade of Conflict, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. x

⁷⁵⁴ World Bank (The), Syria Economic Monitor, Conflict, Crises, and the Collapse of Household Welfare, Spring 2024,

24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 32; World Bank Group (The), The Welfare of Syrian Households after a Decade of Conflict, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 38

⁷⁵⁵ World Bank (The), Syria Economic Monitor, Conflict, Crises, and the Collapse of Household Welfare, Spring 2024, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 32; World Bank Group (The), The Welfare of Syrian Households after a Decade of Conflict, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 39

⁷⁵⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update, Issue 24, May 2024, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁵⁷ World Bank (The), Syria Economic Monitor, Conflict, Crises, and the Collapse of Household Welfare, Spring 2024, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 24

⁷⁵⁸ World Bank (The), Syria Economic Monitor, Conflict, Crises, and the Collapse of Household Welfare, Spring 2024, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 25

⁷⁵⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), p. 25

⁷⁶⁰ WFP, Syria Country Office, Market Price Watch Bulletin, March 2024, [url](#), p. 2

⁷⁶¹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update, Issue 24, May 2024, [url](#), p. 5



minimum monthly cost required to survive' reached SYP 8 100 000 [EUR 594], reflecting a 4.1 % increase since the end of March.⁷⁶²

Receiving remittances from abroad was the most significant factor in reducing the risk of poverty.⁷⁶³ In 2022, remittances from abroad accounted for 12 % of total household income in Syria, which constituted a significant rise from around 3 % in 2009.⁷⁶⁴ According to the Humanitarian Needs Assessment Programme (HNAP) survey data, as reported by the World Bank, in 2022, 37 % of Syrian households (equivalent to 1.54 million households) received monthly remittances averaging 57 US dollars, which constituted more than one-third of their total income. The total value of remittances reached approximately 1.05 billion US dollars, constituting a 39 % increase from 2021. Geographically, receiving remittances from abroad was 'relatively more common' in the households located in the areas under GoS control (40 %) and formerly displaced households (60 %). Households in Damascus, Deir Ez-Zor, and Homs governorates received the highest share of remittances, with Damascus having a share of 67 %. In Latakia governorate, 67 % of households received remittances in 2022, while in Tartous governorate, the figure was 16 %.⁷⁶⁵

In an interview with EUAA, Joseph Daher noted that, for the majority of Syrians, their income was insufficient to cover the cost of living. Therefore, remittances from abroad were vital, averaging between 50 and 100 US dollar per month, which was 2 to 4 times the minimum salary.⁷⁶⁶

2.2.5. Food security

Food security in Syria was deeply affected by trade and financial restrictions, which hindered the import of essential agricultural equipment, as well as by disrupted supply chains and increased production costs, all of which caused a significant decline in the country's agricultural output, including in key crops and livestock, leaving Syria unable to meet its national needs.⁷⁶⁷ Furthermore, cuts to government subsidies for fuel and fertilisers, along with rising transportation, irrigation, and mechanisation costs, drove up the prices of basic food items like meat, dairy, and eggs, making them unaffordable for most Syrians.⁷⁶⁸

Additionally, the country's food security was negatively impacted by climate change, particularly by drought.⁷⁶⁹ In June 2024, UNOCHA reported that wildfires devastated more than 3 000 hectares of land in Aleppo, Hasaka, Homs, Hama, Sweida, Latakia, and Tartous, impacting forests and cultivated areas and endangering lives, properties, infrastructure, and livelihoods. In the governorates of Tartous and Latakia, at least nine fires were extinguished, resulting in damage to around six hectares of crop fields in Latakia governorate and three

⁷⁶² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update – Syria, Wildfires Impact Crops and Livelihoods, June 2024, [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁶³ World Bank Group (The), The Welfare of Syrian Households after a Decade of Conflict, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 39; Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024

⁷⁶⁴ World Bank Group (The), The Welfare of Syrian Households after a Decade of Conflict, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 21

⁷⁶⁵ World Bank Group (The), The Welfare of Syrian Households after a Decade of Conflict, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 22

⁷⁶⁶ Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024

⁷⁶⁷ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), p. 76

⁷⁶⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update, Issue 24, May 2024, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁶⁹ Al-Attar, J., Syria's Water and Food Security Crisis, Sada, Carnegie Endowment, 4 April 2024, [url](#)



hectares in Tartous governorate.⁷⁷⁰ Food insecurity was reportedly one of the drivers of internal migration, where people from the eastern parts of the country, such as Hasaka, Deir Ez-Zor, and Raqqa governorates, moved to major cities, including Damascus.⁷⁷¹

UNOCHA's assessment of over 42 000 households in Syria revealed a worsening food security situation across the country, with 66 % of the population, equalling to almost 15.5 million people, in need of 'food or livelihood support and agricultural assistance, or assistance from national safety nets.'⁷⁷² At least 12.9 million Syrians were in need of food assistance, including over 2.1 million people living in camps. An additional 2.6 million were 'at risk of food insecurity.'⁷⁷³ According to HungerMap, a remote monitoring system by the WFP, insufficient food consumption affected 11.3 million Syrians, or over 40 % of the country's population. Moreover, 11.5 % of children under 5 years old suffered from acute malnutrition and almost 28 % of chronic malnutrition.⁷⁷⁴ In 2023, the Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM)⁷⁷⁵ prevalence in Latakia governorate was reported at 10 %, indicating an emergency-level situation.⁷⁷⁶ Across all governorates, an almost twofold increase in GAM prevalence in 2023 was recorded.⁷⁷⁷

In May 2024, UNOCHA reported that food prices in Syria surged by 83 % compared to the previous year.⁷⁷⁸ As reported by WFP, in March 2024, the cost of a food basket for a family of five⁷⁷⁹ reached SYP 957 731 [EUR 71], which was an 87 % increase from March 2023.⁷⁸⁰ Food inflation had different rates across governorates, with the cost of a food basket for a family of five being highest in GoS areas.⁷⁸¹ Between March 2023 and March 2024, the cost of food basket increased by 95 % in Tartous governorate, which was the highest figure among all governorates in Syria, 91 % in Damascus governorate, and 77 % in Latakia governorate. The annual increase in the price of the food basket was due to the rise in the prices of rice, lentils, sugar, and bread prices, increasing 96 %, 107 %, 108 %, and 109 % respectively.⁷⁸²

In May 2024, in Damascus city, the cost of commodities, vegetables, and fruits increased by 70 % compared to May 2023.⁷⁸³ According to a survey on the socio-economic situation in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs, only 7 % of Damascus residents were able to provide

⁷⁷⁰ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update – Syria, Wildfires Impact Crops and Livelihoods, June 2024 [url](#), pp. 12-13

⁷⁷¹ Al-Attar, J., Syria's Water and Food Security Crisis, Sada, Carnegie Endowment, 4 April 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁷² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), p. 75

⁷⁷³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), p. 7

⁷⁷⁴ WFP, HungerMap, Syrian Arab Republic, n.d., [url](#), accessed 2 August 2024

⁷⁷⁵ As defined by Food Security Cluster, 'global acute malnutrition (GAM) is the prevalence, or proportion, of children ages 6-59 months in a given population considered severely acutely malnourished (SAM) or moderately acutely malnourished (MAM),' see, Food Security Cluster, FSC Indicator Handbook, n.d., [url](#)

⁷⁷⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), p. 8

⁷⁷⁷ UNICEF, Whole of Syria, Humanitarian Situation Report, January – December 2023, n.d., [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁷⁸ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update, Issue 24, May 2024, [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁷⁹ The standard food basket includes food items necessary to provide 2,060 kcal per day for a family of 5 for one month. It includes 37 kg bread, 19 kg rice, 19 kg lentils, 5 kg of sugar, and 7 litres of vegetable oil. See, UNOCHA Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), p. 17

⁷⁸⁰ WFP, Syria Country Office, Market Price Watch Bulletin, March 2024, [url](#), p. 1

⁷⁸¹ World Bank (The), Syria Economic Monitor, Conflict, Crises, and the Collapse of Household Welfare, Spring 2024, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 19

⁷⁸² WFP, Syria Country Office, Market Price Watch Bulletin, March 2024, [url](#), p. 1

⁷⁸³ Omran Center, Monthly Briefing on The Events of The Syrian Scene, May 2024, 6 June 2024, [url](#)



enough food for their families. Meanwhile, 32% of residents indicated that they struggled to do so and 17 % were unable to provide enough food.⁷⁸⁴

2.2.6. Housing, water, and sanitation

(a) Housing

In GoS areas, ‘the prices of construction materials continue to rise on both the official and black markets’, resulting in ‘a steady increase in property market prices.’⁷⁸⁵ Since 2011, real estate prices in Damascus have doubled. In May 2024, minimum real estate prices in the capital were reportedly around 500 million Syrian pounds [EUR 37 322].⁷⁸⁶

Among Damascus respondents of the survey conducted for the COI unit of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, 13 % stated that they were not able to afford housing costs and 27 % indicated they hardly managed to do so. According to the survey, 51 % of Damascus respondents were ‘just about manage to afford the housing costs’ and 9 % were able ‘to afford the housing costs.’⁷⁸⁷ In June 2024, a local media source noted that, while before 2011, homelessness was a rare phenomenon, due to the conflict, the arrival of IDPs, and ‘skyrocketing’ rental prices, ‘sidewalks and gardens of Damascus’ became ‘full of homeless people’.⁷⁸⁸

Electricity access remained ‘a critical challenge’ across the country,⁷⁸⁹ with power outages lasting up to 20 hours,⁷⁹⁰ including in Damascus.⁷⁹¹ In September 2023, Damascus experienced a 19.3 % decline in electricity access compared to September 2022. In contrast, Latakia was one of the governorates that saw some improvements, likely driven by efforts from local social society and international organisations, particularly concerning urban areas.⁷⁹² In 2024, electricity fees rose significantly, with the price of one kilowatt-hour (kWh) in Damascus increasing from SYP 5 000 [EUR 0.37] to SYP 7 500 [EUR 0.54] in February 2024, with some reports suggesting prices ranging between 9 500 [EUR 0.67] and 11 500 [EUR 0.84].⁷⁹³ In June 2024, electricity companies in Damascus and its countryside reportedly raised their kWh rates in several locations due to fuel shortages, government-imposed increase of fuel prices, rising temperatures, and the beginning of the harvest season.⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁸⁴ Statistics Lebanon Ltd. and Austria, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2023, 2023, [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁸⁵ Syria Report (The), Property Prices and Construction Material Costs Soar, 31 October 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁶ Syrian Observer (The), Real Estate Prices in Damascus Jump by 200%, 6 May 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁷ Statistics Lebanon Ltd. and Austria, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2023, 2023, [url](#), p. 5

⁷⁸⁸ NPA, Over-decade crisis turns Damascus to capital of homelessness, 5 June 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁸⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), p. 72

⁷⁹⁰ France24, Power cuts in Syrian capital drive workers, students to cafes, 13 February 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁹¹ Daher, J., Dark times: Syria struggles with increasingly longer power cuts, Al-Majalla, 27 May 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁹² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), p. 72

⁷⁹³ Daher, J., Dark times: Syria struggles with increasingly longer power cuts, Al-Majalla, 27 May 2024, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁴ Omran Center, Monthly Briefing on The Events of The Syrian Scene – June 2024, 19 July 2024, [url](#)



(b) Water and sanitation

According to UNOCHA, 54 % of Syrians had ‘access to an improved water source,’⁷⁹⁵ with female-headed households often facing ‘more evident water insufficiency’ than those headed by men. While 90 % of Syrians had ‘access to improved sanitation,’ 29 % faced ‘challenges in accessing functional toilets or with wastewater disposal.’ According to UNOCHA estimates, more than 13.5 million Syrians needed water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) assistance, while another 1.5 million were in acute need. Latakia and Tartous governorates were new geographical regions with people in need of WASH assistance. In Tartous governorate, 33 % of residents reportedly did not have ‘access to the sewage system.’⁷⁹⁶

According to a survey commissioned by the COI Unit of the Austrian Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, 61 % of Damascus residents said they always had access to clean drinking water, 8 % stated that they seldomly had access to drinking water, and 2 % said that they never had access. The mode of access to drinking water was not specified in the survey.⁷⁹⁷ In November 2023, a media source reported that Damascus neighbourhoods and its countryside commonly faced water scarcity, with most of residents relying ‘almost entirely on tanker water for domestic use and drinking.’ Moreover, the water supplied by the tankers was ‘not guaranteed to be clean.’⁷⁹⁸

As reported by the World Health Organisation in October 2023, in Latakia governorate, water quality monitoring showed that all water samples taken in five ‘earthquake IDP shelters’ were safe for drinking. However, in residential areas of the governorate, 16 out of 50 samples (32 %) revealed contamination.⁷⁹⁹

In November 2023, the GoS increased the price of bottled water produced by state-owned factories by 74 %, marking the third increase in 2023. As noted by the Syria Report, the reliance on bottled water for drinking has increased among the Syrian population due to frequent electricity shortages disrupting water pump operations and the deteriorated quality of tap water, caused by damage to water infrastructure during the conflict.⁸⁰⁰

Further information on housing, water, and sanitation specifically in the cities of Damascus, Latakia, and Tartous could not be found.

2.2.7. Health care

Access to basic health services in Syria remained a major challenge, as nearly 40 % of primary and secondary health care facilities were non-functional or functioned partially. Many facilities operated in damaged buildings, lacked capacity, WASH services, infection control, and accessibility for people with mobility issues.⁸⁰¹ Functional hospitals were primarily located in

⁷⁹⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), p. 87

⁷⁹⁶ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), pp. 87-88

⁷⁹⁷ Statistics Lebanon Ltd. and Austria, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2023, 2023, [url](#), p. 6

⁷⁹⁸ Enab Baladi, Drought sweeps Syria: Water war is coming, 28 November 2023, [url](#)

⁷⁹⁹ WHO, Whole of Syria, Cholera Outbreak Situation Report No. 20, 23 October 2023, [url](#), p. 5

⁸⁰⁰ Syria Report (The), Government Raises Bottled Water Prices by 74 Percent, 14 November 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁰¹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), p. 79



major cities, including Damascus, Latakia, and Tartous; however, access to health care in the hospitals in these cities was negatively impacted by ‘overwhelming number of patients’ and damaged equipment.⁸⁰² The February 2023 earthquakes severely damaged six health centres in Latakia and Tartous governorates, rendering them out of service. Moreover, 133 primary health centres and 18 hospitals were partially damaged in Aleppo, Hama, Latakia, and Tartous governorates. The earthquake also damaged critical medical equipment, such as C-arms, MRIs, and CT scans.⁸⁰³ No further information on the destruction and rehabilitation of hospitals in Latakia and Tartous was found.

In an interview with EUAA, Joseph Daher noted that the health care situation in Damascus, Latakia, and Tartous was generally better compared to other areas, because these cities still had a lot of health care facilities, as they did not experience the same level of war-related destruction. However, the health care provision in these cities was affected by such challenges such as ‘low salaries, bribes, corruption, lack of doctors, nurses, lack of medicines, lack of energy resources, etc.’⁸⁰⁴

Throughout 2023, the Syrian Ministry of Health increased medicine prices three times,⁸⁰⁵ ranging each time from 50⁸⁰⁶ to 100 %.⁸⁰⁷ In February 2024, the Ministry of Health increased prices of medicines further by 70 – 110 %. According to SCPR, in Damascus, the inflation level for medicines stood at 25.7 %.⁸⁰⁸ Due to increased medicine costs, Syrians faced difficulty of covering the cost of treatment of even minor illnesses.⁸⁰⁹ Due to restrictions, imported medicines were reportedly ‘almost non-existent’ in the country, which affected patients with severe medical conditions, such as cancer and multiple sclerosis.⁸¹⁰

The Syrian Ministry of Health increased the fees for medical examinations and hospitalisation by up to 600 % for both public and private hospitals.⁸¹¹ Following an increase of June 2024, a cost of an examination by a general practitioner was set at SYP 25 000 [EUR 2] and by a specialist at SYP 40 000 [EUR 3].⁸¹² In January 2024, an overnight treatment in a private medical hospital in Damascus reportedly costed over 5 million Syrian pounds [EUR 365].⁸¹³

Syria remained one of ‘the most severely impacted countries’ by cholera.⁸¹⁴ As of October 2023, more than 217 500 acute watery diarrhoea (AWD) and cholera cases were reported in

⁸⁰² National (The), Syria’s healthcare system on life support after 13 years of war and western sanctions, 14 March 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁰³ UNICEF, Syrian Arab Republic, Consolidated Emergency Report 2023, March 2024, [url](#), p. 10

⁸⁰⁴ Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024

⁸⁰⁵ Enab Baladi, Patients deprived of medicines due to high prices in Syria, 4 February 2024, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁶ NPA, Syrian government raises medicine prices, 8 August 2023, [url](#); AP, Syria’s pharmacies syndicate says drug prices to increase 50% as the country’s pound hits a new low, 8 August 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁷ Syrian Observer (The), Regime Raises Drug Prices by 70 to 100 %, 8 December 2023, [url](#)

⁸⁰⁸ SCPR, Monthly Bulletin for Consumer Price Index and Inflation in Syria, Issue 12 – December 2023, 8 March 2024, [url](#), p. 5

⁸⁰⁹ Enab Baladi, Patients deprived of medicines due to high prices in Syria, 4 February 2024, [url](#)

⁸¹⁰ National (The), Syria’s healthcare system on life support after 13 years of war and western sanctions, 14 March 2024, [url](#)

⁸¹¹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update – Syria, Wildfires Impact Crops and Livelihoods, June 2024 [url](#), p. 5

⁸¹² Syrian Observer (The), Government Raises Examinations and Hospital Fees by 600 %, 27 June 2024, [url](#)

⁸¹³ ARK, The cost of one night in Damascus private hospitals reaches 5 million Syrian pounds, 26 January 2024, [url](#)

⁸¹⁴ IFRC, Joint statement: Millions at risk from cholera due to lack of clean water, soap and toilets, and shortage of cholera vaccine, 20 March 2024, [url](#)





all 14 governorates, resulting in 106 deaths.⁸¹⁵ Among these cases, 43 cases, including one resulting in death, were recorded in Damascus governorate, 184 in Latakia governorate, and 35 in Tartous governorate.⁸¹⁶

2.2.8. Education

According to USDOS, the GoS provided free education to all children with Syrian citizenship from primary school to university.⁸¹⁷ As noted by the World Bank, 46.8 % of Syrian girls and 39.8 % of boys completed lower secondary school in 2022.⁸¹⁸ In February 2024, UNOCHA reported that more than 2.45 million children in Syria were out of school and over a million of children were at risk of dropping out. For Damascus governorate, UNOCHA reported that 46 % of children were out of school, which made the Damascus governorate one of the governorates with the highest rates of children out of school.⁸¹⁹

According to World Bank staff calculations based on data from HNAP Demographic and WASH survey of summer 2022, the percentage of out-of-school children and youth varied significantly by age group and location. In Damascus governorate, 3 % of children aged 6-11, 2 % of children aged 15-17, and 20 % of those aged 18-24 were out of school, with no children in the age group of 12-14 reported to be out of school. In Latakia governorate, there were no children aged 6-11 out of school; the rates for not attending school were, however, 2 % for children aged 6-11, 21 % for children aged 15-17, and 31 % for those aged 18-24. In Tartous governorate, no children aged 12-14 were out of school, while 5 % of children aged 6-11, 7 % of those aged 15-17, and 43 % of those aged 18-24 did not attend school.⁸²⁰

According to a survey on the socio-economic situation in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs, 31 % of respondents in Damascus city stated that all their children were able to attend school, while 32 % of respondents indicated that none of their children were able to attend school.⁸²¹

As noted by UNOCHA, the difficult economic situation was the main obstacle to accessing education in Syria. Despite the availability of free education and handbooks, Syrian parents had often to withdraw their children from school to reduce costs on indirect expenses, such as school supplies and transportation. In other cases, families had to resort to negative coping strategies, such as child marriage.⁸²² In September 2024, UNOCHA noted that the Syrian Ministry of Education (MoE) had doubled schoolbook prices for the 2024-2025 academic year, raising the cost to over SYP 200 000 [15 EUR] per grade, which could potentially increase drop-out rates. UNOCHA also noted that MoE provided free schoolbooks for students in

⁸¹⁵ WHO, Whole of Syria, Cholera Outbreak Situation Report No. 21, 23 November 2023, [url](#), pp. 1-2; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), p. 79

⁸¹⁶ WHO, Whole of Syria, Cholera Outbreak Situation Report No. 21, 23 November 2023, [url](#), p. 2

⁸¹⁷ USDOS, 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Syria, [url](#), Section 6. Discrimination and Social Practices, Children, 22 April 2024

⁸¹⁸ World Bank Group, Syrian Arab Republic, n.d., [url](#)

⁸¹⁹ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), p. 73

⁸²⁰ World Bank Group (The), The Welfare of Syrian Households after a Decade of Conflict, 24 May 2024, [url](#), p. 30

⁸²¹ Statistics Lebanon Ltd. and Austria, Federal Office for Immigration and Asylum, Syria: Socio-Economic Survey 2023, 2023, [url](#), p. 8

⁸²² UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), p. 74





grades one to nine.⁸²³ In the interview with EUAA, Joseph Daher noted that ‘the cost of a child going to school was nearly SYP 2 000 000 [146 EUR], while the minimum salary for public sector employees was SYP 300 000’ [22 EUR].⁸²⁴

In its 2024 report, UNOCHA noted that 890 schools in GoS-controlled areas were permanently damaged. The availability of schools was further reduced in the areas where school facilities were turned into temporary shelters. Additionally, schools faced challenges such as overcrowding, lack of furniture and supplies, inadequate WASH facilities, and lack of electricity.⁸²⁵ According to a media source, the Syrian Ministry of Education reported a significant decrease in the number of schools: from over 22 200 schools in 2010 to 14 505 schools in 2023, while the number of schoolchildren had grown to around 4 million.⁸²⁶ In an interview with Al-Watan Newspaper in February 2024, the governor of Latakia governorate reportedly noted that, while 850 schools were damaged across the governorate, only 71 of them were restored.⁸²⁷

In addition to the decline in the number of schools, Syria faced a shortage of qualified teachers.⁸²⁸ In Damascus city, a media source reported on a shortage of teachers at the start of the school year in September 2023.⁸²⁹

Further information on the situation regarding education specifically in the cities of Damascus, Latakia, and Tartous could not be found.

⁸²³ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Update Syria, Issue 26 July 2024, 4 September 2024, [url](#), p. 5

⁸²⁴ Daher, J., online interview with EUAA, 23 August 2024

⁸²⁵ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, Syrian Arab Republic, February 2024, [url](#), p. 74

⁸²⁶ As-Safir Al-Arabi, Current State of Education in Syria: A Mediocrity Contest, 26 December 2023, [url](#)

⁸²⁷ NPA, Latakia governor says aid received for quake-hit people insufficient, 6 February 2024, [url](#)

⁸²⁸ As-Safir Al-Arabi, The Current State of Education in Syria: A Mediocrity Contest, 26 December 2023, [url](#);

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⁸²⁹ Syrian Observer (The), Two Weeks after Start of School Year: Damascus Schools Without Teachers, 19 September 2023, [url](#)



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Joseph Daher, online interview with EUAA, 27 August 2024. Joseph Daher teaches at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, and is an affiliate professor at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy, where he co-coordinates the 'Syrian Trajectories' research project. He is the author of 'Syria after the Uprisings, The Political Economy of State Resilience' (2019) and 'Hezbollah, the Political Economy of Lebanon's Party of God'. He is also the author of numerous reports and articles in relations to Syria's economy, including the research collection entitled 'Structured Chaos: how nonprofits in conflict settings became an economic sector'.

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Muhsen AlMustafa, email correspondence with EUAA, 20 & 26 August 2024. Muhsen AlMustafa is a researcher at the Omran Center for Strategic Studies. He is also a former Non-resident Fellow at TIMEP focusing on security, military, and governance in Syria. He has published a number of studies and articles on the Syrian military establishment, legal issues, gender, and elections in the context of the Syrian army and constitution. He previously participated in Tawazun, the Index of Arab Civil-Military Relations launched by the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center.

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Annex 2: Terms of Reference

The research should focus on the period between September 2023 and August 2024. Background information and older trends should be kept very brief and crosslinked as much as possible with previous reports published: [Country focus \(October 2023\)](#), [Targeting of Individuals \(September 2022\)](#), and [Socio-economic situation in Damascus city \(August 2022\)](#).

Research should cover the following:

1. Profiles

- Persons perceived to be opposing the Government of Syria (GoS)**
 - Which profiles are perceived as opposing the government?
 - Treatment of persons perceived as opposing the government
 - Treatment of family members
- Persons fearing recruitment by the government armed forces, military draft evaders, deserters and defectors**
 - Changes to the Syrian military service law, including legal status of conscientious objectors
 - Recruitment and deployment strategies of conscripts and reservists
 - Demobilisation of conscripts and reservists
 - Implementation in practice of legal exemptions and amnesties
 - Treatment of draft evaders, deserters and defectors including of family members
- Persons fearing (forced) recruitment by Kurdish forces in areas under their influence**
 - Implementation of the Mandatory Self-Defence Duty Law
 - Recruitment practices
 - Prevalence of child recruitment
 - Prevalence of forced recruitment to SDF
 - Consequences of draft evasion and desertion, including for family members
- Kurds**
 - Recent situation of Kurds (incl. stateless Kurds)
 - Instances of targeting of Kurds during the reference period by different armed actors

2. Socio-economic situation with a focus on cities of Damascus, Latakia and Tartous





The chapter should focus on the socio-economic situation in the cities of Damascus, Latakia, and Tartous. The chapter should address internal mobility issues relating to accessibility (freedom of movement and admittance) and key socio-economic indicators: housing, food security, water and sanitation, health care, education, livelihood opportunities such as employment.

- ❑ **Mobility and admittance**
- ❑ **Socio-economic overview**
 - Economy
 - Humanitarian situation and assistance
 - Employment
 - Poverty
 - Food security
 - Housing, water, and sanitation
 - Health care
 - Education





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