



# Syria: Targeting of Individuals

# **Syria: Targeting of Individuals**

## **Country of Origin Information Report**

**September 2022**



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- France, Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA), Information, Documentation and Research Division
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It must be noted that 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 (2019). 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 19 August 2022. 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
<b>AANES</b>	Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
<b>Ajanib</b>	Ajanib and Maktoumeen Kurds are residents of Hasaka governorate who were not officially registered during a census carried out in 1962 and have since been left stateless together with their descendants
<b>GAPAR</b>	General Administration for Palestinian Arab Refugees
<b>GoS</b>	Government of Syria
<b>HTS</b>	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
<b>KNC</b>	Kurdish National Council
<b>LGBTIQ</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual, Intersex and Queer/Questioning
<b>Maktoumeen</b>	See Ajanib
<b>PKK</b>	Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê)
<b>PYD</b>	Democratic Union Party (Kurdish)
<b>SAA</b>	Syrian Arab Army
<b>SDF</b>	Syrian Democratic Forces
<b>SHRC</b>	Syrian Human Rights Committee
<b>SNA</b>	Syrian National Army
<b>SNHR</b>	Syrian Network for Human Rights





<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>SOHR</b>	Syrian Observatory of Human Rights
<b>STJ</b>	Syrians for Truth & Justice
<b>UNCOI</b>	Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNOCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>YPG</b>	Kurdish People's Protection Units





# Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide relevant information regarding the targeting of individuals in Syria, for international protection status determination, including refugee status and subsidiary protection, and in particular for use in the update of EUAA's Country Guidance on Syria.

This report addresses topics related to the targeting of individuals by different armed actors operating in Syria, including the Government of Syria, the Syrian Democratic Forces, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, the Syrian National Army, and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant among others. Targeting of individuals by sectors of society is also addressed where relevant.

This report is an update of the [EUAA COI Report: Syria – Targeting of individuals \(March 2020\)](#). It also provides updated information on profiles and topics covered previously in the following EUAA COI reports: [EUAA COI Report – Situation of women \(February 2020\)](#), [EUAA COI Report – Military service \(April 2021\)](#), and [EUAA COI Report – Situation of returnees from abroad \(June 2021\)](#).

The reference period for the events described in this report is from January 2020 until August 2022. For certain profiles the reference period is slightly different, depending on when they were last updated in a EUAA COI report: (March 2021 – August 2022 for Persons fearing recruitment by the government armed forces, military draft evaders and deserters, and May 2021 – August 2022 for Returnees from abroad perceived as opposition).

## Methodology

This report is produced in line with the EUAA COI Report Methodology (2019)<sup>1</sup> and the EUAA COI Writing and Referencing Style Guide (2019).<sup>2</sup>

This report was jointly drafted by EUAA COI Sector and ACCORD, and reviewed by EUAA and national COI departments in EU+ countries<sup>3</sup> mentioned in the [Acknowledgements](#) section.

## Defining the terms of reference

The terms of reference (ToR) of this report were defined by the 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 for this report can be found in the [Annex II: Terms of Reference](#).

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<sup>1</sup> EUAA, EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>2</sup> EUAA, Writing and Referencing Guide for EUAA Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, June 2019, [url](#)

<sup>3</sup>





## Collecting information

The information gathered is a result of research using public, specialised paper-based, electronic, and oral sources until 4 August 2022. Some additional information was added during the finalisation of this report in response to feedback received during the quality control process, until 19 August 2022.

## 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 almost all of them were implemented in the final draft of this report, which was finalised on 19 August 2022. EUAA also performed the final quality review and editing of the text.

## Sources

The information in this report results from desk research of public specialised paper-based, electronic and oral sources, which were consulted within the time frame and the scope of the research.

The report draws from current publications of the UN Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry, as well as from Syrian human rights organisations such as the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) and the Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC). In addition to the paper-based and electronic sources that were consulted, drafters conducted an extensive interview in English via email correspondence with a Syrian academic, who has rare access to state military and security actors as well as employees at various government institutions in the capital. The source preferred anonymity for security reasons and to ensure the safety of his contacts.

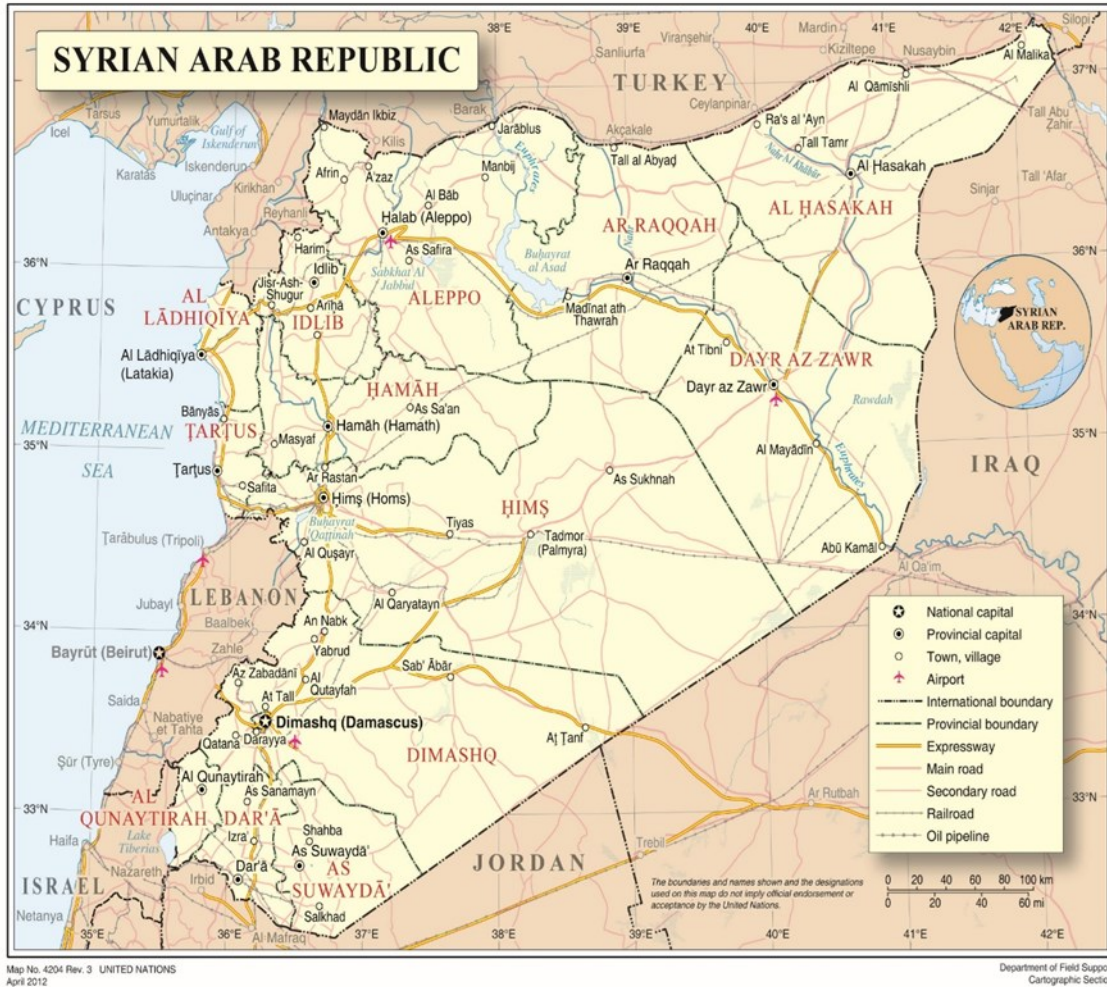
The sources that are used in this report are further described in the [Bibliography](#) section.

## Structure and use of the report

The report is divided into sections that each discuss the different profiles of targeted persons as defined in the [ToR](#) according to the actor(s) targeting them. For the profiles that may be targeted by multiple actors, information was further split by actors of targeting.



# Maps



Map 1: Syrian Arab Republic, © United Nations<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Syria, Map No. 4204 Rev. 3, April 2012, United Nations, [url](#)



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

## 1.1 Treatment of persons perceived to be opposing the Government of Syria

Civilians' vulnerability to becoming targets of the GoS or other actors is influenced by a number of factors such as one's individual profile, where in the country the person is located, the stage of conflict, and—crucially—which actor is in control of the relevant area. Thus, an individual's likelihood of being targeted may be subject to changes over time.<sup>5</sup> As a confidential source interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs observed, 'anyone who speaks out as an opponent of the ruling group in the part of the country where he or she is located runs the risk of being persecuted by that group'.<sup>6</sup>

As of July 2022, the GoS had control over approximately two-thirds of the country's territory. Besides the nation's capital Damascus city and its surrounding Rural Damascus (Rif Dimashq) governorate, the GoS's control stretched across Tartous and Latakia in the west, parts of Idlib and Aleppo in the north, Hama, Homs and parts of Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zor in the centre and south-east, and Dar'a, Sweida and Quneitra in the south.<sup>7</sup>

The forces through which the GoS exerts power comprise the Syrian Armed Forces, which consist of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) (including the Republican Guard), the navy, the air force, the air defence forces and the National Defence Forces (NDF) (a pro-government militia).<sup>8</sup> Local pro-GoS militias and foreign Shiite militias have been operating alongside the regular armed forces.<sup>9</sup>

Syria's security apparatus, meanwhile, is composed of four main intelligence agencies: the Department of Military Intelligence, Air Force Intelligence Directorate, General Intelligence Directorate and Political Security Directorate. Each agency has central branches in Damascus as well as regional-, city-, and local-level branches across the country.<sup>10</sup> These branches are called 'security branches'.<sup>11</sup> As Human Rights Watch noted, nearly all security branches have

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<sup>5</sup> Sweden, Migrationsverket, *Syrien - Säkerhetssituationen och civilas utsatthet april–november 2021* [Report on the security situation and vulnerability of civilians (covering April - November 2021)], 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 40

<sup>6</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, 14 June 2021, [url](#), p. 75

<sup>7</sup> Liveuamap, *Syria* [Map], 11 July 2022, [url](#); see also ACLED, *The State of Syria: Q3 2021 – Q4 2021*, as of 31 December 2021, [url](#); ISW, *Syria Situation Report: March 22 - April 19, 2021*, 23 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>8</sup> US, CIA, *World Factbook, Syria*, last updated 6 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>9</sup> Ezzi, M., *The Regime and Loyal Militias Will Struggle to Disentangle Their Relationship*, Chatham House, July 2017, [url](#); Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *The Security Landscape in Syria and its Impact on the Return of Refugees: An Opinion Survey*, 17 December 2020, [url](#), p. 34; Abu Layla, O., *How Iranian Militias Have Swallowed Deir Ezzor*, WINEP, 16 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>10</sup> HRW, *"Our Lives Are Like Death": Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan*, 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>11</sup> SNHR, *Syrian Security Branches and Persons in Charge*, 1 April 2013, [url](#), p. 1



unofficial detention facilities of varying size in their basements. In addition, these agencies 'also have other secret detention sites'.<sup>12</sup>

One estimate published in December 2020 put the number of members of the security apparatus at around 100 000, which amounted to '1 secret police officer for every 129 citizens'.<sup>13</sup> According to the European Institute of Peace (EIP), a Brussels-based non-profit foundation specialised in conflict resolution, the GoS has at its disposal an extensive range of tools for intelligence gathering, surveillance and for 'punishing anyone perceived to be a dissident or insufficiently loyal' to it.<sup>14</sup>

In GoS-controlled areas, enforced disappearances, military trials, and torture were reportedly 'rampant'<sup>15</sup>, with sources indicating that any suspicion of anti-GoS activity was sufficient to put a person at risk of arrest<sup>16</sup> and reprisal by the authorities.<sup>17</sup> A wide range of categories of individuals have been targeted by the GoS<sup>18</sup>, including political activists<sup>19</sup>, protesters<sup>20</sup> and others who expressed criticism of the government (including on social media)<sup>21</sup>, lawyers and human rights defenders<sup>22</sup>, pro-democracy student activists, members of political parties other than the ruling Baath Party<sup>23</sup>, men of military age<sup>24</sup>, returnees from abroad<sup>25</sup>, IDPs returning from parts of Syria outside of GoS control<sup>26</sup>, and former armed opposition fighters who then settled their position with the GoS through so-called reconciliation<sup>27</sup> agreements.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the authorities went after individuals who did not themselves participate in opposition activities but whose family members or neighbourhoods were associated with such

<sup>12</sup> HRW, "Our Lives Are Like Death": Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan, 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>13</sup> Omran Center for Strategic Studies, The Security Landscape in Syria and its Impact on the Return of Refugees: An Opinion Survey, 17 December 2020, [url](#), p. 34

<sup>14</sup> EIP, Refugee Return to Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, p. 23

<sup>15</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022: Syria, February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>16</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2022 Country Report - Syria, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>17</sup> SJAC, The State of Justice in Syria 2022, March 2022, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>18</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 15

<sup>19</sup> AI, Ten years on justice for Syrians more important than ever, 12 March 2021, [url](#); Sweden, Migrationsverket, Syrien - Säkerhetssituationen och civilas utsatthet april–november 2021 [Report on the security situation and vulnerability of civilians (covering April - November 2021)], 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 40

<sup>20</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 46; USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>21</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, 14 June 2021, [url](#), p. 75

<sup>22</sup> AI, Ten years on justice for Syrians more important than ever, 12 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>23</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 48, 58

<sup>24</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 15

<sup>25</sup> AI, "You're going to your death", Violations against Syrian refugees returning to Syria, 7 September 2021, [url](#), pp. 27-28

<sup>26</sup> MEI, Data shows nowhere in Syria is safe for return, 22 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>27</sup> GoS has entered into so-called reconciliation agreements with different actors in most of the areas the GoS forces have recaptured from various anti-government groups. The reconciliation agreements 'ranged from compromises in which after a cease fire opposition fighters remained involved in security and governance roles in their areas, to cases of virtual opposition surrender involving evacuations of fighters or even whole populations'. See: Hinnebusch, R., and Imady, O., Syria's reconciliation agreements, Centre for Syrian Studies. University of St. Andrews, 12 February 2017, [url](#), p. 1; Adleh, F. and Favier, A., "Local reconciliation agreements" in Syria: A non-starter for peacebuilding, European University Institute, June 2017, [url](#), pp. 1-2. Detailed information on the so-called reconciliation agreements and impact on the population is available in the EUAA COI Report: [Syria - Exercise of authority in recaptured areas \(January 2020\)](#)

<sup>28</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 8, 46



activities.<sup>29</sup> In many cases, an individual's level of vulnerability to being targeted was linked to more than one aspect of their identity including, for example, aspects of place of residence, political opinion or religious affiliation.<sup>30</sup>

### 1.1.1 Arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance

Since the beginning of the Syrian uprising in 2011, the GoS carried out mass arrests during protests and military operations. It also arbitrarily detained individuals at checkpoints and borders<sup>31</sup> or during raids.<sup>32</sup> Sources varyingly estimated that tens of thousands<sup>33</sup> or even hundreds of thousands<sup>34</sup> of people, including political activists, human rights defenders, journalists, humanitarian aid workers and lawyers have been arbitrarily detained and forcibly disappeared<sup>35</sup>, often in 'a sweeping and indiscriminate manner'.<sup>36</sup> Arbitrary detention was reported to take place in civil and military prisons as well as in security branches of intelligence agencies.<sup>37</sup> Many of the reported arrests without judicial warrants were carried out by forces affiliated with the country's four main intelligence agencies.<sup>38</sup> As the EIP explained, the security branches of the intelligence agencies take into custody individuals who have initially been detained by the police or—in the case of wanted persons—by the branch itself or another intelligence agency. Many returnees from abroad and reconciled individuals are summoned for interrogation. Once a person is in the custody of a security branch, a 'cycle of information gathering, interrogation, and (often) torture begins'.<sup>39</sup> The UN Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry (UNCOI) in March 2021 noted that of more than 500 former detainees of GoS and pro-GoS forces it interviewed<sup>40</sup>, almost none were allowed to present their case before the judiciary within a reasonable time. Persons arrested were usually not told the reason for their arrest and if informed of their charges, they were not presented with any evidence supporting the accusations against them.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 47

<sup>30</sup> Sweden, Migrationsverket, Syrien - Säkerhetssituationen och civilas utsatthet april–november 2021 [Report on the security situation and vulnerability of civilians (covering April - November 2021)], 31 December 2021, [url](#), p. 40

<sup>31</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 15

<sup>32</sup> SNHR, At Least 2,218 Arbitrary Arrests/ Detentions Documented in Syria in 2021, 242 of Them in December: Detainees in 2021 Include 85 Children and 77 Women, 2 January 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>33</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 15

<sup>34</sup> SNHR, At Least 2,218 Arbitrary Arrests/ Detentions Documented in Syria in 2021, 242 of Them in December: Detainees in 2021 Include 85 Children and 77 Women, 2 January 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>35</sup> AI, Ten years on justice for Syrians more important than ever, 12 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>36</sup> SNHR, At Least 2,218 Arbitrary Arrests/ Detentions Documented in Syria in 2021, 242 of Them in December: Detainees in 2021 Include 85 Children and 77 Women, 2 January 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>37</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 37

<sup>38</sup> SNHR, At Least 2,218 Arbitrary Arrests/ Detentions Documented in Syria in 2021, 242 of Them in December: Detainees in 2021 Include 85 Children and 77 Women, 2 January 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>39</sup> EIP, Security and Detention in Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, p. 25

<sup>40</sup> The UNCOI conducted an analysis of 2 658 testimonies relating to arbitrary detention by forces belonging to main groups of parties to the conflict for the period 2011–2020. UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para 13

<sup>41</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 16



During the year 2020, the Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) documented 908 cases of arbitrary arrest by the GoS forces<sup>42</sup>, followed by 1 032 cases during the year 2021<sup>43</sup> and 471 in the first six months of 2022.<sup>44</sup> Across the years 2020 and 2021, the highest occurrences of such arrests were recorded in Dar'a, Rural Damascus and Aleppo governorates.<sup>45</sup> The Syrian Human Rights Committee (SHRC) noted that during 2021, residents of areas that had undergone reconciliation with the GoS were specifically targeted, particularly in Dar'a and Rural Damascus.<sup>46</sup>

Many protesters detained by the GoS forces between 2011 and 2021 were subsequently classified as forcibly disappeared.<sup>47</sup> Estimates of human rights organisations regarding the number of such disappearances since 2011 have varied widely, although all suggest that disappearances are a common practice.<sup>48</sup> During 2020, approximately 1 185 persons were forcibly disappeared (across all parties to the conflict).<sup>49</sup> For 2021, SHRC noted a significant reduction in new enforced disappearances.<sup>50</sup>

On 30 April 2022, Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad issued Legislative Decree No 7 of 2022 which included a general amnesty for 'terrorism crimes' (as stipulated in the Anti-Terrorism Law No 19 of 2012 and Syria's Criminal Law No 148 of 1949) committed by Syrians before 30 April 2022, with the exception of crimes that led to a person's death.<sup>51</sup> The UN Security Council wrote that the amnesty applies to persons who have been sentenced for committing terrorist crimes, to those being investigated on charges of having committed such crimes and those who are wanted for terrorism crimes committed in the country and abroad. The amnesty did not cover persons charged under other laws, political prisoners and prisoners of conscience detained on non-terrorism related charges.<sup>52</sup> On its website, the Syrian embassy in Bahrain stated that it started receiving applications from Syrian nationals living abroad who

<sup>42</sup> SNHR, At Least 1,882 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest/ Detention Documented in Syria in 2020, 149 of Them in December: Detainees Include 52 Children and 39 Women, 2 January 2021, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>43</sup> SNHR, At Least 2,218 Arbitrary Arrests/ Detentions Documented in Syria in 2021, 242 of Them in December: Detainees in 2021 Include 85 Children and 77 Women, 2 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>44</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in January 2022, 4 February 2022, [url](#), p. 22; SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in February 2022, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 19; SNHR, At Least 1,024 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in the First Half of 2022, Including 49 Children and 29 Women, with 164 of These Cases Documented in June, 5 July 2022, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>45</sup> SNHR, At Least 1,882 Cases of Arbitrary Arrest/ Detention Documented in Syria in 2020, 149 of Them in December: Detainees Include 52 Children and 39 Women, 2 January 2021, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>46</sup> SNHR, At Least 2,218 Arbitrary Arrests/ Detentions Documented in Syria in 2021, 242 of Them in December: Detainees in 2021 Include 85 Children and 77 Women, 2 January 2022, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>47</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 46

<sup>48</sup> SNHR, The Tenth Annual Report on Torture in Syria on the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, 26 June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>49</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>50</sup> Syrian Network, [Twitter], posted on: 10 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>51</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 47

<sup>52</sup> Syria Report, (The), Syria's Latest Amnesty Decree and 'Terrorism' Convicts, 11 May 2022, [url](#); COAR, 'Terrorism' Amnesty Is Wartime Syria's Most Sweeping, 9 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>53</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/492], 16 June 2022, [url](#), para 27



wish to officially verify whether they are included in the amnesty, and emphasised that the applications must be submitted in person.<sup>53</sup>

Regarding the implementation of the amnesty, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) noted in a June 2022 report that it received information on the release of dozens of detainees and prisoners from the GoS security branches, detention centres and prisons.<sup>54</sup> The SNHR subsequently reported in July 2022 that following the decree's entry into force, some 539 individuals were released from various civil and military prisons and security branches.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, the source noted that at least 132 000 Syrians arrested by the GoS since March 2011 were still in detention or forcibly disappeared as of May 2022.<sup>56</sup>

There were reports that family of detainees recently released by the amnesty were extorted under the threat that otherwise their files would not be closed and they therefore ran the risk of being rearrested.<sup>57</sup>

### 1.1.2 Torture, other forms of ill-treatment and extrajudicial killings

Besides arbitrary detentions and enforces disappearances, the GoS was reported to use torture and sexual violence as a method of control, intimidation and extortion.<sup>58</sup> Former members of the intelligence apparatus indicated that persons detained by the GoS were systematically subjected to torture and other ill-treatment.<sup>59</sup> SNHR noted that in the absence of any discernible fixed rules or boundaries for interrogators, the amount and frequency of torture inflicted on a detainee entirely depended upon the mood of the person in charge of the relevant security branch. The source lists the following GoS entities as having been implicated in torture as 'perpetrators, enablers or accomplices': the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Interior, the intelligence services, the judiciary, civil prisons, military hospitals, the Ministry of Endowments (Awqaf), and the Office of Burial Services.<sup>60</sup>

Between March 2011 and June 2020, SNHR documented at least 14 235 deaths from torture at the hands of the GoS.<sup>61</sup> SNHR recorded 130 deaths from torture in GoS custody during the full

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<sup>53</sup> Syria, Embassy of the Syrian Arab Republic in Manama, اعلان حول مرسوم العفو الرئاسي [Announcement regarding the presidential amnesty decree], n. d., [url](#)

<sup>54</sup> UN Security Council, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021); Report of the Secretary-General [S/2022/492], 16 June 2022, [url](#), para 27

<sup>55</sup> SNHR, At Least 1,024 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in the First Half of 2022, Including 49 Children and 29 Women, with 164 of These Cases Documented in June, 5 July 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>56</sup> SNHR, The Syrian Regime Has Released 476 People Under Amnesty Decree 7/2022 and Is Still Detaining Some 132,000 of Those Arrested Since March 2011, 16 May 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>57</sup> New Arab (The), Syrian regime 'blackmails' families of released detainees, demands money, 24 May 2022, [url](#); Daily Sabah, Assad regime releases prisoners in exchange for money despite amnesty, 16 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>58</sup> SJAC, The State of Justice in Syria 2022, March 2022, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>59</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 25

<sup>60</sup> SNHR, The Tenth Annual Report on Torture in Syria on the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, 26 June 2021, [url](#), pp. 2, 8

<sup>61</sup> SNHR, The Ninth Annual Report on Torture in Syria on the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, 26 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 7-8



year of 2020<sup>62</sup>, 78 in 2021<sup>63</sup> and 90 in the first six months of 2022.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, the UNCOI, between March 2011 and December 2020, interviewed a total of 474 individuals who were direct victims of torture and 463 who were subjected to inhuman treatment by GoS forces. Moreover, 1 170 interviewees were witnesses or had credible information of such violations.<sup>65</sup>

On 30 March 2022, GoS passed a law criminalising torture with a three-year prison sentence or the death penalty if torture includes rape or murder.<sup>66</sup> Human rights groups pointed out that the GoS has not taken action in investigating or holding accountable those involved in torture.<sup>67</sup> SNHR stated that new law does not include crimes of torture committed before the law's date of entry into force, therefore not covering crimes of torture committed since the start of the conflict.<sup>68</sup> The same source documented 90 deaths by torture attributed to GoS affiliated forces in the first half of 2022.<sup>69</sup>

### 1.1.3 Wanted lists

The authorities reportedly kept extensive lists of persons wanted for arrest or questioning.<sup>70</sup> In mid-2018, the head of Air Force Intelligence, Jamil Hassan, was reported as saying in a private meeting that the country's wanted lists contained 3 million names, which amounted to 12.5 % of Syria's population before the conflict. These lists reportedly included the names of individuals suspected of involvement in perceived opposition activities such as participation in protests, working for NGOs, human rights activists and local council officials in areas controlled by the opposition, and men wanted for military service.<sup>71</sup> People were not informed if their name was added to a wanted list or if they were wanted for arrest.<sup>72</sup>

There was no clear, legal procedure for persons to be able to check their 'wanted status' and the process was not protecting returnees from human rights abuses.<sup>73</sup> Walid Al-Nofal, an independent reporter interviewed by Human Rights Watch in June 2021, explained that 'there is no centralised database for 'wanted' lists', and one security clearance 'will not necessarily include all agencies'.<sup>74</sup> Another expert interviewed by Human Rights Watch in July 2021, researcher Suhail Al-Ghazi, stated on the other hand that 'there may be a centralised database

<sup>62</sup> SNHR, Extrajudicial Killing Claims the Lives of 1,734 Civilians in Syria in 2020, Including 99 in December, 1 January 2021, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>63</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>64</sup> SNHR, 568 Civilians, Including 115 Children, 53 Women, and 101 Victims Who Died Due to Torture, Were Documented Killed in Syria in the First Half of 2022, 2 July 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>65</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 20

<sup>66</sup> HRW, Torture in Syrian Prisons is Not a Joke, 1 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>67</sup> MEE, UN to launch drive to uncover Syria's missing as death toll rises, 29 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>68</sup> SNHR, At Least 1,024 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in the First Half of 2022, Including 49 Children and 29 Women, with 164 of These Cases Documented in June, 5 July 2022, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>69</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in June and the First Half of 2022 At Least 47 Attacks on Vital Civilian Facilities Documented, Including Six on Medical Facilities, 7 July 2022, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>70</sup> EIP, Refugee Return to Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, p. 25

<sup>71</sup> HRW, "Our Lives Are Like Death": Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan, 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 49

<sup>72</sup> EIP, Refugee Return to Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, p. 25

<sup>73</sup> HRW, "Our Lives Are Like Death", 20 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 50-51; AI, "You're going to your death", 7 September 2021, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>74</sup> HRW, "Our Lives Are Like Death" [Source: Walid al-Nofal, independent reporter], 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 49





of wanted lists’, but at the same time ‘different intelligence branches maintain their own lists’. Since 2011, computers have been installed at checkpoints where the security officers ‘type in the name of the person and they arrest them if the name appears’.<sup>75</sup>

It is common practice for individuals wanting to return to Syria to use their informal network of personal connections or to pay a broker to check whether they are on any wanted list before approaching the Syrian authorities.<sup>76</sup> According to EIP, most people who paid middlemen to check whether they were on wanted lists, could not access information about a particular list of ‘high-value targets’ including ‘fugitives, activists, and others perceived to be of particular interest to the security apparatus’, even by paying bribes.<sup>77</sup> Thus, returnees who appear on this list ‘may be able to pass through the border crossing without problems, but will then be detained afterwards’, the source noted.<sup>78</sup>

Lists may also be held at the local level. A July 2021 report from Dar’a governorate indicated that a list of wanted persons in the city of al-Sanamayn contained 139 names, including those of former members of armed opposition groups who were in control of southern Syria until July 2018. According to a local source interviewed by the new website Enab Baladi, the GoS was updating wanted persons lists on an almost daily basis.<sup>79</sup>

Persons on wanted lists were vulnerable to being arrested or forcibly disappeared ‘at official ports of entry and exit, such as land border crossings and airports, as well as checkpoints and government offices on regime-held territory’.<sup>80</sup> Human Rights Watch received reports of returnees who were faced with human rights violations and persecution, despite having had their name checked against wanted lists, with the checks coming back clear.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, EIP stated that there have been cases of returnees who had their names checked and were informed that it was safe for them to return and who then ended up being detained ‘almost immediately after they cross back into government-held territory’.<sup>82</sup>

## 1.2 Specific profiles perceived by the government as opposition

### 1.2.1 Members of political opposition parties

The GoS has been reported to ban ‘genuine’ political opposition.<sup>83</sup> Political opponents of the GoS have been among those arrested, tortured and disappeared by the GoS since the conflict

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<sup>75</sup> HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death” [Source: Suhail al-Ghazi, researcher, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Istanbul], 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>76</sup> EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Situation of returnees from abroad, June 2021, [url](#), p. 20; HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death” [Source: Suhail al-Ghazi, researcher, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Istanbul], 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 48

<sup>77</sup> EIP, Refugee Return to Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, pp. 25-26

<sup>78</sup> EIP, Refugee Return to Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, pp. 26-27

<sup>79</sup> Enab Baladi, More Daraa residents wanted by regime forces, 7 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>80</sup> EIP, Refugee Return to Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, p. 25

<sup>81</sup> HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death”, 20 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 50-51

<sup>82</sup> EIP, Refugee Return to Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, p. 26

<sup>83</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022: Syria, February 2022, [url](#)



began in 2011.<sup>84</sup> Although the government, through a decree in 2011<sup>85</sup> and constitutional reforms in 2012, formally eased rules regarding political participation of parties other than the ruling Baath Party<sup>86</sup>, the decree also banned parties that are ‘based on religion, regional affiliation, and other criteria’. According to Freedom House, ‘in practice, all legal political groups and independents are either part of, allied with, or heavily vetted’ by the authorities.<sup>87</sup> The US Department of State (USDOS) noted that the GoS had ‘little tolerance’ even for parties allied with the Baath Party as part of the National Progressive Front.<sup>88</sup> However, a Syrian academic interviewed by the EUAA observed that the GoS was relatively tolerant towards independent politicians and members of parties labelled as ‘domestic’ opposition (such as the coalition Popular Front for Change and Liberation), for as long as they focused on promoting national dialogue and a peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis, reaffirm the unity and territorial integrity of Syria, and refrain from calling for the toppling of the Syrian President. Nevertheless, members of domestic opposition are not completely immune to arrest, and many of them were, on several occasions, harassed or even briefly arrested by security forces.<sup>89</sup>

In an email response from April 2022, a Syrian academic interviewed by the EUAA wrote that the GoS security forces target members of political parties who ‘cross the red line’, which is to openly call for the overthrow of the President.<sup>90</sup> The GoS used its intelligence and security apparatus to ‘monitor and punish opposition movements that could meaningfully challenge to Assad’s rule’<sup>91</sup> and reportedly harassed parties such as the Communist Union Movement, Arab Social Union and Communist Action Party. There were reports of arrests of members of prohibited Islamist parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood of Syria and Hizb ut-Tahrir.<sup>92</sup> One opposition party known for taking a hard-line stance towards the GoS is the leftist Syrian Democratic People’s Party (SDPP).<sup>93</sup> A leading SDPP member was arrested in Damascus and disappeared in October 2013<sup>94</sup> and as of April 2020, his whereabouts remained unknown.<sup>95</sup> Thus, human rights groups reported that opposition activists shied away from forming parties out of fear that the GoS might use party lists to pursue opposition members.<sup>96</sup>

Further information regarding the treatment of members of political opposition parties could not be found within the time constraints of this report.

<sup>84</sup> NPR, Syrian Election Shows The Extent Of Assad's Power, 27 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>85</sup> This decree permitted new political parties to register but also came with significant obstacles regarding the formation of new parties. Also, it prohibited parties on the basis of criteria such as religious and regional affiliation. Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022: Syria, February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>86</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022: Syria, February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>87</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022: Syria, February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>88</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 58

<sup>89</sup> Syrian academic, email correspondence, 25 April 2022

<sup>90</sup> Syrian academic, email correspondence, 25 April 2022

<sup>91</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022: Syria, February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>92</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 58

<sup>93</sup> Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, The Syrian Democratic People’s Party, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>94</sup> Al, Between Prison and the Grave, November 2015, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>95</sup> Elaph, العميم "فائق المير أسعد" [„General“ Fa’iq Al-Mir As’ad], 22. April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>96</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 48



## 1.2.2 Political activists and protesters

Since the uprising began in 2011, individuals who voiced their dissent through protests faced repression from the security apparatus<sup>97</sup>, which as of 2021 ‘monitored political meetings and relied on informer networks’.<sup>98</sup> These repressions included firing live bullets, killings and arrests without judicial warrants, with the detainee often not knowing which security organ was behind the arrest.<sup>99</sup> Following their arrest, participants in protests were subjected to ‘beatings, insults, threats’ and denial of access to their families or lawyers. As SNHR observed, torture has been commonly inflicted upon political protesters since the early days of the uprising. Many of these detainees were later classified as forcibly disappeared. Moreover, torture, both physical and psychological, often resulted in the detainee’s death.<sup>100</sup>

Persons who took part in previous opposition activities, for instance by joining a protest during the early stages of the uprising, were targeted with arbitrary arrests ‘individually in a slow systematic manner’ in more recent years (including in 2021) as the GoS reportedly considered ‘any sort of opposition a crime that is not subject to the statute of limitations nor to settlements sponsored by Russia’.<sup>101</sup>

Other arrests were carried out in connection with current opposition activities, especially targeting participants of protests against the GoS or military operations in Dar’a governorate.<sup>102</sup>

In June 2020, security forces responded to protests in the city of Sweida by beating and arresting protesters.<sup>103</sup> While the demonstrators were initially expressing their concerns about rapidly deteriorating economic conditions, the protests soon began to include ‘calls for “regime change”, the withdrawal of Russian and Iranian forces from Syria, and the release of detainees’.<sup>104</sup> On 15 June 2020, reports emerged that demonstrators were attacked by uniformed security forces and pro-government militiamen, commonly referred to as *shabiha*.<sup>105</sup> As documented by the UNCOI, at least 15 men were detained in connection with these protests and allegedly held at Military Police branch in Sweida, with ‘neither lawyers nor family members [...] permitted to make contact’ with them.<sup>106</sup> Following the arrests, three detainees were informed that they would be transferred to Sweida Criminal Court for trial. Meanwhile, the authorities reportedly threatened to transfer the remaining arrested men to the anti-terrorism court in Damascus.<sup>107</sup> While the UNCOI stated that it was informed in July 2020 that

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<sup>97</sup> SNHR, On the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Popular Uprising, 15 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>98</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 41

<sup>99</sup> SNHR, On the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Popular Uprising, 15 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>100</sup> SNHR, The Tenth Annual Report on Torture in Syria on the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, 26 June 2021, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>101</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 46

<sup>102</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 46

<sup>103</sup> HRW, Syria: Protesters Describe Beatings, Arrests, 28 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>104</sup> AI, Syria: Peaceful protesters detained in Sweida must be released immediately, 24 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>105</sup> HRW, Syria: Protesters Describe Beatings, Arrests, 28 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>106</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/45/31, 14 August 2020, [url](#), para. 24

<sup>107</sup> AI, Syria: Peaceful protesters detained in Sweida must be released immediately, 24 June 2020, [url](#)



the protesters had been released ‘following pressure from local actors’<sup>108</sup>, the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre (SJAC) reported as of December 2020 that ‘while some of these individuals were released after short periods in detention, the fates of others remain unknown.’<sup>109</sup>

Also in June 2020, patrols of the Airforce Intelligence in the city of Saqba (Rural Damascus governorate) attempted to arrest young people who had blocked a highway and distributed leaflets calling on local residents to demonstrate against the worsening living conditions due to high prices and lack of job opportunities.<sup>110</sup>

In February 2021, a number of civilians, including government employees, were arrested in Latakia (a GoS stronghold) after criticising poverty and government corruption on social media.<sup>111</sup>

New protests over deteriorating living conditions and government corruption erupted in Sweida city in February 2022. While there were no reports of clashes, ‘busloads of armed Syrian security forces reached Sweida from Damascus and other neighbouring cities to patrol the city’, in what an activist described as ‘a show of force and oppression’.<sup>112</sup> While security forces were reinforced in the governorate, there were no harsh crackdowns or large-scale arrests<sup>113</sup>, although it was later reported that the GoS imposed an ‘economic blockade’ on Sweida as a punishment for these protests.<sup>114</sup> According to a local student activist, this resulted in a further increase in prices of groceries and basic items.<sup>115</sup>

Arrests were also reported among individuals with ‘a clear political position’, including civil society activists.<sup>116</sup> Both in 2020 and 2021, it was reported that GoS forces ‘detained individuals linked to local human rights groups, prodemocracy student groups, and other organizations perceived to be supporting the opposition, including humanitarian groups’.<sup>117</sup> However, as SHRC noted, this group represented ‘the lowest number among the detainees’ in 2021, with the majority of them freed soon after their arrest.<sup>118</sup> At the same time, numerous prominent civilian activists arrested after the uprising in 2011 reportedly remained in detention as of end of 2021.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>108</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/45/31, 14 August 2020, [url](#), para. 24

<sup>109</sup> SJAC, The State of Justice: Syria 2021, March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>110</sup> SOHR, Rif Dimashq | Unknown individuals set tires on fire and block side streets in Saqba, protesting deteriorating living conditions, 19 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>111</sup> MEE, Arrests in Syria's Latakia signal discontent among pro-Assad communities, 4 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>112</sup> Al Jazeera, Syria: Sweida protesters decry corruption, poor living standards, 11 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>113</sup> COAR, Swelling As-Sweida Protests Highlight Discontent Across Government Areas, 14 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>114</sup> Al Jazeera, ‘Economic blockade’: Syrian city punished for anti-govt protests, 21 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>115</sup> Al Jazeera, ‘Economic blockade’: Syrian city punished for anti-govt protests, 21 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>116</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 46

<sup>117</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Syria, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 48; USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 48

<sup>118</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 46

<sup>119</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 21



### 1.2.3 Civilians originating from, or residing in areas perceived to be opposing the government/reconquered areas

Since the uprising began in 2011, GoS forces targeted a variety of groups in ‘restive’ areas, including military-aged men, human rights activists, health and rescue workers, family members of wanted persons<sup>120</sup>, and other residents whose regional or personal affiliations were associated with opposition activities.<sup>121</sup> Arbitrary detention of civilians was documented in reconquered areas.<sup>122</sup> Between July 2020 and June 2021, the UNCOI received 13 reports of deaths in detention from Dar’a and Rural Damascus, including the death of a man who was arrested in 2018 after the recapture of the area by GoS forces despite having reconciled.<sup>123</sup>

Residents who were displaced from Aleppo city during the conflict to other areas held by anti-GoS armed groups or to Turkey were reportedly viewed with suspicion of sympathising with the opposition by the GoS. Local sources interviewed by the International Crisis Group in Aleppo stated that individuals who underwent reconciliation have been asked to visit the intelligence services branch where some have been arrested or forcibly disappeared.<sup>124</sup>

Civilians who fled besieged areas (for example, eastern Aleppo governorate and eastern Ghouta in Rural Damascus) were subjected to internment in facilities called ‘IDP’ shelters, the UNCOI reported.<sup>125</sup> Also, the GoS engaged in practices of seizing lands and properties of its opponents, redistributing these assets among members of the security services and local pro-GoS militias. Amongst others, it did so on the basis of Legislative Decree 63 of 2012 that allows confiscation of property owned by those perceived by the GoS to be ‘terrorists’. In what was reported as a new development, in the suburbs of Hama city and the eastern and southern suburbs of the city of Idlib where the GoS retook control in 2019 and 2020, security committees announced a series of public auctions between June and November 2020, offering temporal leases on agricultural lands belonging to persons who fled to areas outside GoS control.<sup>126</sup> People who had their land and property confiscated in these two governorates in 2020 reported that it was seized ‘without notice or compensation’.<sup>127</sup>

Human Rights Watch Syria researcher pointed out that individuals in GoS-controlled areas who are originally from areas currently controlled by anti-government groups may also be perceived as holding anti-government views.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 15

<sup>121</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 47

<sup>122</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 17

<sup>123</sup> 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. 31, 33

<sup>124</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Ruling over Aleppo’s Ruins, 9 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 19-20

<sup>125</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 17

<sup>126</sup> SNHR, Public Auctions of Forcibly Displaced People’s Lands Are Another Syrian Regime Method to Seize Its Opponents’ Property in a Widespread and Deliberate Manner, 14 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 2-3, 6, 8

<sup>127</sup> HRW, Syria: Government Stealing Opponents’ Land, 8 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>128</sup> UNHCR, International Protection Considerations with Regard to People Fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic – Update IV, March 2021, [url](#), p. 96, footnote 460



Individuals in territories retaken by the GoS forces were ‘under constant risk’ of military conscription raids conducted by the GoS in those areas, according to the Omran Center for Strategic Studies.<sup>129</sup> Regarding persons who were forcibly conscripted by GoS forces in those areas, Sara Kayyali assessed that these individuals were ‘very likely to be considered as holding an anti-government opinion’.<sup>130</sup>

Local media and human rights groups reported about several arrests of young men in Dar’a governorate in late 2021 and early 2022<sup>131</sup>, including individuals who had accepted reconciliation deals.<sup>132</sup>

Meanwhile, in Dar’a, the authorities released 62 detainees in November 2020 who had previously been detained for what a pro-GoS newspaper referred to as ‘incidents’ in the governorate.<sup>133</sup> Detainee releases were also reported in Damascus.<sup>134</sup> In February and March 2021, the GoS released more than 100 detainees from Dar’a, most of whom had been arrested despite signing reconciliation agreements in 2018. Those released comprised rebel fighters, recruits within the ranks of the GoS forces, and civilians, including a small number of women and former employees of humanitarian organisations.<sup>135</sup> In November and December 2021, dozens of more people, again mostly people from Dar’a who had been detained between 2018 and 2020, were released.<sup>136</sup> As reported by the NGO Syrians for Trust and Justice (STJ), the families of a number of released detainees had to pay ‘exorbitant sums of money or bribes’ to lawyers or GoS officers to have their loved ones freed.<sup>137</sup>

GoS forces carried out arrests in eastern Ghouta of former opposition fighters who have undergone reconciliation and of ‘workers who had participated and served in civil affairs in institutions that used to be active during the [armed] factions’ control of the region’.<sup>138</sup> In November 2020, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that a former civil servant at the local council of Al-Rastan city (northern countryside of Homs governorate) who was arrested for ‘dealing with the opposition factions’ subsequently died under torture.<sup>139</sup> More generally, the GoS did not permit employees to return to their previous workplaces in

<sup>129</sup> Omran Center for Strategic Studies, The Security Landscape in Syria and its Impact on the Return of Refugees: An Opinion Survey, 17 December 2020, [url](#), p. 34

<sup>130</sup> UNHCR, International Protection Considerations with Regard to People Fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic – Update IV, March 2021, [url](#), p. 96, footnote 460

<sup>131</sup> NPA, Government forces arrest young men in Syria’s Daraa, 5 October 2021, [url](#); NPA, Government armed group arrests young men in Syria’s Daraa, 17 January 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Reacting to arrest of three young men | Gunmen block Damascus-Daraa highway, 7 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>132</sup> SOHR, Reacting to arrest of three young men | Gunmen block Damascus-Daraa highway, 7 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>133</sup> Washington Post, Escalating violence in strategic Syrian city belies Assad’s claim that he’s in control, 24 November 2020, [url](#)

<sup>134</sup> HRW, World Report 2022 - Syria, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>135</sup> STJ, Daraa: Dozens Arrested and Released After Signing Government Settlement Agreement, 1 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>136</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 32

<sup>137</sup> STJ, Daraa: Dozens Arrested and Released After Signing Government Settlement Agreement, 1 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>138</sup> SOHR, Eastern Ghouta: Chronic crises...lack of basic services...Syrian regime blamed for deliberately marginalizing the region, 3 December 2020, [url](#)

<sup>139</sup> SOHR, Arrested two years ago: Civilian from Al-Rastan north of Homs dies under torture in regime prisons, 14 November 2020, [url](#)







areas it had recaptured from opposition forces as it perceived them as ‘traitors’, the Omran Centre for Strategic Studies observed in late 2020.<sup>140</sup>

For information on the treatment of returnees from abroad originating from areas previously under opposition control, please see Subsection [1.2.5 Specific profiles of returnees from abroad interpreted as opposition](#).

## 1.2.4 (Former) members of anti-government armed groups

The GoS entered into so-called reconciliation agreements with different actors in areas its forces recaptured from various anti-GoS groups.<sup>141</sup> Between July 2018, when reconciliation agreements were signed between the GoS and opposition movements in Dar’a<sup>142</sup>, and November 2020, a total of 193 former rebel fighters who had put down their arms were killed, including by unidentified assailants, according to the Daraa Martyrs Documentation Office, a Belgium-based monitoring group. Among the victims were individuals who had agreed to join the Syrian armed forces or had returned to life as civilians.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, between July 2018 and February 2021, the same source estimated that 92 former opposition members and defectors were forcibly disappeared across southern Syria, while ‘the number of people who have been killed under torture during the same time and whose families were notified of their death has reached 31.’<sup>144</sup> Assassinations of former reconciled rebel fighters were further reported in 2022 in Dar’a, with one local media activist claiming that the perpetrators are affiliated with the GoS.<sup>145</sup>

In Dar’a, following months of heavy fighting and a siege of the anti-GoS stronghold and regional capital Dar’a Al-Balad, a reconciliation agreement brokered by Russia was announced in September 2021. The agreement ‘mandated the entry of the Syrian government to these areas, and that civilians and opposition fighters sign so-called reconciliation agreements to be allowed to stay’.<sup>146</sup> GoS forces reportedly signed reconciliation agreements with more than 12 000 people and collected 1 700 weapons.<sup>147</sup> The GoS transferred persons who refused to join reconciliation agreements to Idlib governorate.<sup>148</sup>

The GoS reportedly subjected those refusing to join reconciliation agreements to ‘threats and retaliatory acts’. For example, in October 2020, gunmen in Dar’a shot dead Adham al-Karad, a

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<sup>140</sup> Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *The Security Landscape in Syria and its Impact on the Return of Refugees: An Opinion Survey*, 17 December 2020, [url](#), p. 34

<sup>141</sup> Adleh, F. and Favier, A., “Local reconciliation agreements” in Syria: A non-starter for peacebuilding, EUI, June 2017, [url](#), pp. 1-2; Syria Direct, *Reconciliation without forgiveness: Defectors and former opposition members face ‘deferred execution’*, 9 February 2021, [url](#); Al-Monitor, *Syrian government completes reconciliation deals in Daraa area*, 25 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>142</sup> Syria Direct, *Reconciliation without forgiveness: Defectors and former opposition members face ‘deferred execution’*, 9 February 2021, [url](#)

<sup>143</sup> Washington Post, *Escalating violence in strategic Syrian city belies Assad’s claim that he’s in control*, 24 November 2020, [url](#)

<sup>144</sup> Syria Direct, *Reconciliation without forgiveness: Defectors and former opposition members face ‘deferred execution’*, 9 February 2021, [url](#)

<sup>145</sup> Al Monitor, *Who’s to blame for ongoing assassinations in Syria’s Daraa province?*, 10 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>146</sup> HRW, *World Report 2022 - Syria*, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>147</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77*, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 20

<sup>148</sup> HRW, *World Report 2022 - Syria*, 13 January 2022, [url](#)





well-known former rebel commander who ‘continued to voice opposition to the government even after Assad’s forces recaptured the area’.<sup>149</sup> In October 2021, GoS forces destroyed houses of former opposition fighters in eastern Dar’a who were reluctant to reconcile. Moreover, two men were killed and another was arrested in a further raid by GoS forces targeting persons refusing to reconcile.<sup>150</sup> In summer 2021, the SAA detained dozens of villagers following deadly armed clashes with residents of Al-Mutai village in eastern Dar’a. While most of them were freed soon thereafter (with some reportedly showing signs of ill-treatment), one detainee died from torture.<sup>151</sup>

At the same time, safeguards provided in reconciliation agreements reportedly failed to guarantee protection, and GoS forces have been reported to target residents of retaken areas who had signed such agreements with arbitrary detention, disappearances, and mistreatment.<sup>152</sup> Several persons interviewed between July 2020 and June 2021 by the UNCOI emphasised that even for those who did accept reconciliation, ‘the spectre of arbitrary arrests remained omnipresent.’<sup>153</sup> A January 2022 academic paper by researcher Abdullah Al-Jabassini<sup>154</sup> quoted an interviewee from Dar’a as saying that ‘many people who were assassinated or arrested had settled their status.’<sup>155</sup> Sources reported that a number of former members of opposition armed groups were reportedly arrested in Dar’a<sup>156</sup> and eastern Ghouta<sup>157</sup> during the reporting period.

### 1.2.5 Returnees from abroad perceived as opposition

The GoS’s treatment of returnees from abroad has been covered extensively in Sections 2, 3 and 5 of the [EUAA COI Report on Syria: Situation of Returnees from abroad \(June 2021\)](#). This subsection will therefore focus on relevant information that has become available since April 2021.

<sup>149</sup> Washington Post, Escalating violence in strategic Syrian city belies Assad’s claim that he’s in control, 24 November 2020, [url](#)

<sup>150</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 34

<sup>151</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 40

<sup>152</sup> HRW, World Report 2022 - Syria, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>153</sup> 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. 33

<sup>154</sup> Abdullah Al-Jabassini holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from the University of Kent, United Kingdom. He is a Non-Resident Scholar at the Middle East Institute (Washington, D.C., United States), and a Research Fellow for the Wartime and Post-Conflict in Syria (WPCS) project at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies of the European University Institute (Florence, Italy). His research is focused on southern Syria, specifically Dar’a governorate. See [url](#)

<sup>155</sup> Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, Wartime and Post-Conflict in Syria, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>156</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 32

<sup>157</sup> SOHR, Eastern Ghouta: Chronic crises...lack of basic services...Syrian regime blamed for deliberately marginalizing the region, 3 December 2020, [url](#)



UNHCR counted 35 680 self-organised returns from neighbouring countries to Syria in 2021 and 16 676 for 2022, from a total number of about 5 607 233 registered refugees from Syria, as of May 2022.<sup>158</sup>

**(a) Security clearance and ‘status settlement/reconciliation’**

Individuals returning to Syria may need to go through two return procedures: security clearance and status settlement.<sup>159</sup> These procedures are run by the Syrian intelligence.<sup>160</sup> However, sources indicated that no clear-cut distinction existed between making an application for security clearance and settling one’s status.<sup>161</sup> As the EIP observed, ‘there is no single set of uniform procedures that a returnee must undergo before going back to Syria, nor any process that provides guarantees about security on their return, even where there is a process for specific groups or in specific circumstances.’<sup>162</sup>

Sources indicated that Syrian citizens are generally not formally obliged to obtain security clearance as no such general requirement exists under Syrian law.<sup>163</sup> Indeed, Human Rights Watch quoted a Syrian lawyer as saying that both the security clearance and the reconciliation process were extra-legal in nature and that they were in violation of the Syrian Constitution.<sup>164</sup>

Although security clearance (*muwafaka amniya*) was defined by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) 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’<sup>165</sup>, in practice this process can take a number of different forms. Thus, more broadly speaking, obtaining security clearance can be understood as a background check<sup>166</sup> on whether an individual has an ‘unsettled’ security issue such as participation in protests, criticising the government or taking up arms against the GoS.<sup>167</sup>

Sources emphasised that completing security clearance did not guarantee that individuals would not be arrested or detained by the authorities upon returning to Syria.<sup>168</sup> Amnesty International (AI) documented 12 cases of refugees<sup>169</sup> who went through security clearance at the Syrian embassy in Amman or returned through an organised return operation and where nevertheless arrested by intelligence officials upon their return.<sup>170</sup> According to Nessma Bashi,

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<sup>158</sup> UNHCR, Operational Data Portal, Refugee Situation, updated 31 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>159</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Issues regarding return, October 2021, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>160</sup> 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](#)

<sup>161</sup> 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

<sup>162</sup> EIP, Refugee Return to Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, p. 29

<sup>163</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Issues regarding return [source: Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs], October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death”: Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan, 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 48

<sup>164</sup> HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death”: Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan, 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 49

<sup>165</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Issues regarding return, October 2021, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>166</sup> HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death”: Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan, 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 48

<sup>167</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Issues regarding return, October 2021, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>168</sup> EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Situation of returnees from abroad, June 2021, [url](#), pp. 20-21; HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death”: Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan, 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 50; AI, “You’re going to your death”, Violations against Syrian refugees returning to Syria, 7 September 2021, [url](#), pp. 16-17; Syria Direct, ‘Syria is safe, refugees should return’: The dangers of the growing narrative, 29 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>169</sup> Amnesty International interviewed ‘a total of 41 Syrian individuals: 20 returnees; and 19 relatives and two close friends of returnees who were subjected to violations’(see: AI, “You’re going to your death”, 7 September 2021, [url](#), p. 9). Interviews concerning the twelve cases of refugees who were arrested despite security clearance were conducted on 21 October, 16 November 2020 and on 19 January, 7 April, 20, 21 May 2021. (see: AI, “You’re going to your death”, 7 September 2021, [url](#), p. 17)

<sup>170</sup> AI, “You’re going to your death”, 7 September 2021, [url](#), p. 17



Legal Fellow at the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, security clearance ‘could mean that they make it to Syria for a day and the next day they get a call and need to go to a security branch’.<sup>171</sup>

As part of their return process, many returnees were required to fill out return or reconciliation forms in order to reconcile their status with the state authorities ‘while attempting to demonstrate a clean record or seek “forgiveness” from the state’.<sup>172</sup> While AI noted that this process was not available abroad and could only be undertaken once the returnee is back in Syria<sup>173</sup>, the EIP indicated that certain issues could be settled from abroad, including rectifying illegal departure without an exit stamp (if the person fled from the impact of armed groups’ attacks in their area), failure to complete military service, or bureaucratic issues.<sup>174</sup>

According to Suhail al-Ghazi, a Syrian researcher specialised in return dynamics, most returnees, including but not limited to those who are from recaptured areas or who left illegally, are required to provide personal information to the authorities and ‘reconciliate’.<sup>175</sup> As explained by Human Rights Watch, most returnees were required to undergo the process of reconciliation, no matter the circumstances of how they left (whether legally or illegally) and whether they were intending to return to a retaken or a reconciled area.<sup>176</sup> Human Rights Watch was told that most of the men interviewed who had returned to Syria from Jordan had to settle their status.<sup>177</sup>

As part of the reconciliation process, returnees were obliged to provide personal information to the GoS.<sup>178</sup> According to EIP, return forms had the specific aim to gather intelligence.<sup>179</sup> EIP noted that these forms ask questions on the individual’s or their relatives’ past that create ‘interest profiles’ that would ‘likely lead to [their] interrogation and/or arrest’. In recent years, this also included requests to provide information relating to social media accounts (either their own or those of diaspora members), sometimes including passwords to log into those accounts.<sup>180</sup>

The UNCOI reported on the case of a returnee from abroad to Homs governorate in December 2019 after having underwent reconciliation, who was arrested, detained and tortured by the intelligence services. He was subsequently released after his family paid bribes for his release.<sup>181</sup> The news network SY24 reported in December 2021 on the arrest of a family upon their return to Damascus from northern Syria, despite the father of the family having had applied for reconciliation.<sup>182</sup>

<sup>171</sup> Syria Direct, ‘Syria is safe, refugees should return’: The dangers of the growing narrative, 29 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>172</sup> EIP, Refugee Return to Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, pp. 30-31

<sup>173</sup> AI, “You’re going to your death”, Violations against Syrian refugees returning to Syria, 7 September 2021, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>174</sup> EIP, Refugee Return to Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, pp. 29-30

<sup>175</sup> HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death”: Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan, 20 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 47-48

<sup>176</sup> HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death” [Source: Suhail al-Ghazi, researcher, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Istanbul], 20 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 47-48

<sup>177</sup> HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death”, 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 48

<sup>178</sup> HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death” [Source: Suhail al-Ghazi, researcher, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Istanbul], 20 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 47-48

<sup>179</sup> EIP, Refugee Return to Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, p. 30

<sup>180</sup> EIP, Refugee Return to Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, pp. 30-31

<sup>181</sup> 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. 33

<sup>182</sup> SY24, مخابرات النظام تعتقل عائلة كاملة في دمشق [Regime intelligence arrests whole family in Damascus], 17 December 2021, [url](#)





As an additional requirement to return, it was reported that all citizens entering Syria had to exchange USD 100 at the border, using the Syrian Central Bank's exchange rate<sup>183</sup>, which resulted in travellers merely receiving a fraction of the amount in return.<sup>184</sup> The compulsory exchange of USD 100 was critiqued for infringing freedom of movement.<sup>185</sup> Some returnees further reported having to pay household bills for properties and back-dated taxes, from the time the property was vacated until their return.<sup>186</sup>

### **(b) Consequences of illegal exit and applying for asylum abroad**

In 2019, Syria's Ministry of Interior issued Circular No 342 which stated that persons who left Syria irregularly without obtaining an exit stamp would not face issues with the authorities upon return. Thus, the EIP observed that returnees are no longer obliged to report to a security branch to answer questions regarding their irregular exit. However, for purposes of paying overdue bills and taxes, they are required to explain the reasons for their departure to the criminal police. This reportedly 'takes the form of a criminal investigation' and the police 'may forward their explanation of their unlawful exit to a security branch'. This information, and the fact of illegal exit itself, may be 'sufficient grounds to prompt a summons, interrogations, and/or arrest and detention'. Moreover, EIP noted that there is 'little monitoring' as to how policies such as Circular No 342 are implemented in practice.<sup>187</sup>

DIS indicated that 'officially, a person who has exited illegally from Syria might be subjected to prosecution upon return, unless the person has obtained a status settlement prior to return'.<sup>188</sup> A Syrian human rights organisation that requested anonymity interviewed in April 2022 by DIS stated that those who left Syria illegally have to report to local intelligence services where they 'will be questioned about the reason for their leave and about their activities while staying abroad'. According to the source, if someone reported them to the authorities for being involved in opposition activities, they would 'risk being subject to further interrogation, detention and/or money extortion', otherwise nothing more would happen to them.<sup>189</sup>

A Syrian expert in Turkey told EIP in August 2021 that returnees who had left the country illegally, that is, without an exit stamp, were required to officially explain to criminal police their reasons for leaving irregularly. The criminal police had the power to forward the statement to a security branch, as such making the individual into a 'person of interest', which might 'prompt a summons, interrogations, and/or arrest and detention'.<sup>190</sup>

According to returnees' testimonies collected by AI, Syrian officials perceived individuals who left the country as having been disloyal and supportive of the opposition 'either because of the fact that they fled or because of the place where they sought refuge'. Refugees were

<sup>183</sup> Syrian Today, [مطار دمشق الدولي.. مصيدة يصعب الخروج منها دون أضرار](#) [Syrians: Damascus international airport a trap that's hard to get out of without damage], 29 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>184</sup> In January 2022 the formal exchange rate was SYP 2,500/USD. At the same time, the informal market exchange rate in Damascus was SYP 3,661/USD. (see: WFP Syria, Market Price Watch Bulletin, February 2022, Issue 87, 16 March 2022, [url](#), p. 5)

<sup>185</sup> Atlantic Council, Strapped for dollars, the Syrian government is forcing its citizens to pay up, 5 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>186</sup> HRW, "Our Lives Are Like Death", 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 55

<sup>187</sup> EIP, Refugee Return to Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, pp. 48-49

<sup>188</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Treatment upon return, May 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>189</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Treatment upon return [source: Syrian human rights organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>190</sup> EIP, Refugee Return to Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, pp. 48-49





perceived ‘as traitors, given that they readily incriminate the Syrian government before host counties in order to obtain protection there’.<sup>191</sup>

Meanwhile, the DIS cited a Syrian human rights organisation that requested anonymity interviewed in April 2022 as saying that the mere fact of having applied for asylum abroad does not make an individual subject to mistreatment, noting that the GoS is aware that large numbers of Syrians living abroad are refugees and that applying for asylum was the only pathway for them to get residency in their host country.<sup>192</sup>

According to the Voices for Displaced Syrians Forum (VDSF) and Operations and Policy Center (OPC)<sup>193</sup>, nearly half (48%) of the returnees to GoS areas interviewed<sup>194</sup> reported that they or a family member had experienced persecution due to having left Syria illegally, for applying for asylum abroad or because of their area of origin.<sup>195</sup>

### (c) Treatment of returnees

Due notably to GoS restrictions on UN and UNHCR, no systematic monitoring of returnees has been carried out and as a result, and as a result, obtaining information about the extent of mistreatment and violations committed by GoS against returnees is not possible.<sup>196</sup> In a panel discussion organised by the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center and the European Institute of Peace on 11 April 2022, a researcher from Human Rights Watch stated that she ‘cannot identify a profile which will predict who will or will not face human rights abuse on return’.<sup>197</sup> According to a Syrian human rights organisation that requested anonymity interviewed in April 2022 by DIS ‘there is no clear pattern for the way the returnees are treated by the authorities’, noting that the individual officer in charge of the checkpoint or of the case of the returnee plays a significant role in the outcome.<sup>198</sup>

Sources noted that persons who departed from Syria were viewed with suspicion by the Syrian authorities for leaving the country.<sup>199</sup> According to Suhail al-Ghazi, ‘nearly everyone who returns will face some form of interrogation’. ‘Whether it’s a cup of tea with the security agencies or a full-blown torture session, they want to know why people left.’<sup>200</sup> According to a Syrian human rights organisation that requested anonymity interviewed by DIS in April 2022, in general terms, returnees who have not engaged in opposition activities and departed Syria

<sup>191</sup> AI, “You’re going to your death”, Violations against Syrian refugees returning to Syria, 7 September 2021, [url](#), pp. 6, 15

<sup>192</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Treatment upon return [source: Syrian human rights organisation], May 2022, [url](#), pp. 9-10

<sup>193</sup> Operations and Policy Center (OPC, formerly Orient Policy Center) is a Syrian-led and owned ‘independent think tank and service provider. Established in 2014, OPC conducts original research and provides consulting services to enhance policymaking, development programs, and humanitarian response projects’.

The report was conducted together with Voices for Displaced Syrians Forum (VDSF), which ‘gathers 40+ Syrian civil society organizations operating in Syria and refugee-hosting countries, including Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq. Established in 2019, the VDSF advocates for the achievement of durable solutions to protect, respond to, and improve the quality of life of displaced Syrians inside Syria and abroad’. (See: VDSF and OPC, Is Syria Safe for Return? Returnees’ Perspective, November 2021, [url](#), p. 2)

<sup>194</sup> Interviewees in GoS-controlled areas were interviewed in Damascus and Jaramana, with a sample of 300 respondents, divided equally between residents, IDPs and returnees included. (See: VDSF and OPC, Is Syria Safe for Return? Returnees’ Perspective, November 2021, [url](#), p. 13)

<sup>195</sup> VDSF and OPC, Is Syria Safe for Return? Returnees’ Perspective, November 2021, [url](#), p. 38

<sup>196</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Treatment upon return, May 2022, [url](#), pp. 5; 22

<sup>197</sup> Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center and EIP, The Context of a Refugee Return in Syria [online video], 11 April 2022, [url](#), [17:35-17:57]

<sup>198</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Treatment upon return [source: Syrian human rights organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>199</sup> HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death”: Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan, 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 28; SJAC, The State of Justice in Syria 2022, March 2022, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>200</sup> HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death”: Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan, 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 29





only due to the war tend not to face problems upon return unless somebody in their absence has reported them to the authorities alleging that they were, for example, involved in activities opposing the GoS. However, the same source noted that ‘profiled’ opposition members and their families tended to be interrogated, detained, and extorted for money upon their return.<sup>201</sup>

Several reports published during the reference period documented violations against returnees based on interviews with returnees and their relatives.<sup>202</sup> AI documented 66 cases of individuals – children, women and men – who were subjected to human rights violations upon their return to Syria. Among the 66 cases, 59 were subjected to ‘unlawful or arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment including rape and sexual violence, and enforced disappearance’, after returning to Syria, due to being perceived as affiliated with the opposition, as a result of their displacement.<sup>203</sup> It further documented 33 cases of returnees being tortured or ill-treated during detention and interrogation<sup>204</sup>, with violations being committed by Syrian authorities against women and men alike. One third of the cases involving human rights violations against returnees documented by AI took place in Damascus or the Damascus area.<sup>205</sup>

SNHR recorded approximately 218 arrests of returnees (refugees and IDPs) to areas under government control during 2021, including women and children.<sup>206</sup> SHRC documented an undisclosed number of arrests at international travel ports, especially Damascus International Airport, during the same year.<sup>207</sup>

Returnees from abroad were arrested for a variety of reasons, most frequently on broad accusations of ‘terrorism’, often based on the claim that a relative was affiliated with the political/armed opposition or because the returnee originated from an area previously held by the opposition<sup>208</sup> or considered pro-opposition, such as Zabadani or Ghouta in Rural Damascus governorate. Out of the 66 total cases recorded by AI, security organisations detained eight returnees ‘because one of their close relatives was an alleged “terrorist”’.<sup>209</sup>

Sources reported on cases of returnees who were arrested, forcibly disappeared or killed by the intelligence services for sending money from abroad to support their family in Dar’a (accusation of financing terrorism)<sup>210</sup>, for their alleged participation in protests or political opposition groups in the early days of the Syrian uprising or for purportedly criticising Syria.<sup>211</sup> Others were accused of spying on behalf of or otherwise supporting the governments of their host countries (e.g. Lebanon, Turkey or the Gulf countries).<sup>212</sup> The authorities reportedly also

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<sup>201</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Treatment upon return [source: Syrian human rights organisation], May 2022, [url](#), pp. 9-10

<sup>202</sup> See especially the following reports: AI, “You’re going to your death”, Violations against Syrian refugees returning to Syria, 7 September 2021, [url](#); HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death”: Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan, 20 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 48-50

<sup>203</sup> AI, “You’re going to your death”, 7 September 2021, [url](#), pp. 5, 7

<sup>204</sup> AI, “You’re going to your death”, 7 September 2021, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>205</sup> AI, “You’re going to your death”, 7 September 2021, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>206</sup> SNHR, Eleventh Annual Report, 21 January 2022, [url](#), p. 24

<sup>207</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 46

<sup>208</sup> AI, “You’re going to your death”, Violations against Syrian refugees returning to Syria, 7 September 2021, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>209</sup> AI, “You’re going to your death”, Violations against Syrian refugees returning to Syria, 7 September 2021, [url](#), pp. 28-29

<sup>210</sup> HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death”: Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan, 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>211</sup> AI, “You’re going to your death”, Violations against Syrian refugees returning to Syria, 7 September 2021, [url](#), pp. 29, 31

<sup>212</sup> AI, “You’re going to your death”, Violations against Syrian refugees returning to Syria, 7 September 2021, [url](#), p. 20



targeted returnees who professed support for the GoS, which according to AI confirmed the government's 'hostile perceptions towards those who sought safety outside of the country'.<sup>213</sup>

Most formerly detained returnees interviewed by Human Rights Watch indicated that they had been subjected to several types of torture, 'from beatings with metal rods or wooden sticks to electric shocks, often inflicted with escalating levels of pain.'<sup>214</sup> Among the 66 total cases documented by AI were 14 cases of sexual violence against women, children and men committed by members of the security apparatus, including seven instances of rape.<sup>215</sup>

A detention expert told EIP in May 2021 that returnees who were detained after returning to Syria regularly reported that security branch interrogators requested lists of names of family, friends, colleagues, neighbours, refugees, IDPs or people of the same (displaced) community as the returnees, using torture to extract the information.<sup>216</sup>

Syrians may be named in so-called personal grievance cases filed against them by individual plaintiffs, including GoS loyalists. This was reported to be an 'increasingly prevalent' phenomenon particularly in areas that were previously held by the opposition or have been 'associated with significant opposition activity'. The accused person is not notified, and the case may not appear on the wanted lists held by the Passports and Immigration Department. Depending on the nature of the claim, such a case may be processed via the security system rather than the civilian justice system. In one example, the EIP quoted a local source from a town in Homs governorate who estimated that as many as 75 % of refugees from the town in Homs governorate have been denounced in personal grievance cases filed by GoS loyalists. Besides, the authorities may also pursue individuals not on the basis of their personal profile (which may be verifiable on a wanted list) but along 'community or family lines'. According to the EIP, this may create 'risks not linked to specific geographical areas or governorates'.<sup>217</sup>

As regards Legislative Decree No 7 issued on 30 April 2022 (see Section [1.1.1 Arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance](#) for more details), the chairperson of the Arab and Foreign Affairs committee at the Syrian People's Assembly stated that the amnesty covers more than 95% of Syrians abroad who are in the opposition. He added that the decree is intended to encourage the return of Syrian refugees to Syria.<sup>218</sup> However, Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ), an independent NGO documenting human rights violations in Syria, stated on 25 May 2022 that 'it will be difficult, and even impossible, for the Syrian judiciary to apply Decree No 7 to tens of thousands of male and female detainees and forcefully disappeared people held by security services' due to the impunity those security services enjoy, and 'to free those held by the pro-regime Syrian National Defence and the armed militias active in Syria, such as the Iranian and Lebanese, since their prisons and detention centres are beyond the state's control'.<sup>219</sup>

<sup>213</sup> AI, "You're going to your death", Violations against Syrian refugees returning to Syria, 7 September 2021, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>214</sup> HRW, "Our Lives Are Like Death": Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan, 20 October 2021, [url](#), p. 36

<sup>215</sup> AI, "You're going to your death", Violations against Syrian refugees returning to Syria, 7 September 2021, [url](#), pp. 22-23

<sup>216</sup> EIP, Refugee Return to Syria [Source: Detention Expert], September 2021, private document held on file, p. 24

<sup>217</sup> EIP, Refugee Return to Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, pp. 27-28

<sup>218</sup> Syria, People's Assembly, بطرس مرجانة ضيف جريدة الوطن [Boutros Marjaneh interviewed by Al-Watan Newspaper], 30 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>219</sup> STJ, Syria: Amnesty Decree No.7 is an Inadequate Step Considering Law No. 19 and the Counter-Terrorism Court, 25 May 2022, [url](#)





The pro-opposition media Orient News reported on 31 May 2022 that 33 Syrian men returning from Lebanon were arrested at checkpoints in the outskirts of Qutaifeh in Rural Damascus. The source added that the returns took place in the wake of the amnesty decree and that the majority of the arrested men were draft evaders.<sup>220</sup> Moreover, SY24, reported on 7 June 2022 that a family of three, including a 12-year-old child, were arrested in Barzeh neighbourhood in Damascus city by the political security branch. According to the source, the family had returned from Lebanon in early March 2022 and the arrest was based on accusations of collaboration with foreign entities and providing logistical information on the positions and movements of the GoS forces in Damascus.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Orient News, 33 شباباً سوريا يدفعون ثمنا باهظاً لتصديقهم "عفو" بشار الأسد [33 Syrian young men pay a high price for believing Bashar Al-Assad's amnesty], 31 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>221</sup> SY24, العفو الكاذب.. أمن النظام يعتقل عائلة عادت حديثاً إلى دمشق, " [the false amnesty.. Regime security arrest a newly returned family to Damascus], 7 June 2022, [url](#)





## 2. Persons fearing recruitment by the government armed forces, military draft evaders and deserters

Please see the [EUAA COI Report on Syria: Military service](#) published in April 2021 for more detailed background information. The following section mainly focuses on recent developments not included in the April 2021 report.

### 2.1 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.<sup>222</sup>

According to sources cited in a June 2021 report by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reservists ‘can be called up for military training and active service in the event of war or emergencies’. Usually they ‘perform the same duties assigned to officers and recruits performing their compulsory service’.<sup>223</sup>

The law permits exemptions from military service for certain categories of individuals. The only male child of a family and students may be exempted and there may be exemptions on health grounds.<sup>224</sup> Students can defer their conscription on a yearly basis while they are studying.<sup>225</sup> The law also allows for the payment of an exemption fee; however, this only applies for people residing abroad and reservists are not eligible for the payment of the fee.<sup>226</sup>

In November 2020 Legislative Decree 31/2020 amended key provisions of Legislative Decree 30/2007 (Syrian Military Service Law). Syrians who reside abroad for one, two, three or four years may now pay USD 10 000, 9 000, 8 000 or 7 000 respectively to acquire exemptions.<sup>227</sup> Persons subject to military service, who want to pay the exemption fee and ‘whose residence has exceeded five years after reaching the age of military enlistment shall

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<sup>222</sup> EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Military Service, April 2021, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>223</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, 14 June 2021, [url](#), p. 38

<sup>224</sup> EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Military Service, April 2021, [url](#), pp. 28-32

<sup>225</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria Military Service, May 2020, [url](#), p. 58; Syrian academic, email correspondence, 25 April 2022

<sup>226</sup> EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Military Service, April 2021, [url](#), pp. 28-32

<sup>227</sup> 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



be fined USD 200 for each year delay'.<sup>228</sup> Residents 'determined to serve in a non-field service' in the military can now pay USD 3 000 for an exemption.<sup>229</sup>

Article 97 of Legislative Decree 30/2007 applies to men who have evaded compulsory military service and have not paid the exemption fee when reaching the age of 43 years.<sup>230</sup> Since passing the first version of the country's conscription law, Legislative Decree 30/2007, Article 97 has been amended five times until December 2019.<sup>231</sup> In February 2021, Article 97 was again amended and now 'empowers the Ministry of Finance to immediately confiscate and sell an individual's property without providing notice or giving the individual an opportunity to challenge the decision'. Previously the law 'required a conditional assets seizure for those who failed to pay the exemption fee, pending court judgment'.<sup>232</sup> The head of the army's Exemption and Reserve branch, Brigadier-General al-Bitar had threatened in a video from February 2021 that '42-year-old draft evaders will not be exempted from mandatory service unless they paid the exemption fee in cash' adding that 'those who do not pay will be penalized by the executive seizure of their assets, or those of their relatives'.<sup>233</sup> After public outcry the Syrian foreign ministry clarified that relatives would not be impacted.<sup>234</sup> However, the report by the UNCOI published August 2021 noted that the Ministry of Finance froze the assets of individuals and their family members based on the recent amendments.<sup>235</sup>

## 2.2 Legal status of conscientious objectors

Article 46 of the Syrian Constitution of 2012 states that 'compulsory military service shall be a sacred duty' and 'defending the territorial integrity of the homeland and maintaining the secrets of state shall be a duty of every citizen'.<sup>236</sup>

It is not possible to conscientiously object to conscription<sup>237</sup>, although Legislative Decree 30/2007 allows deferrals for compulsory service and exemptions for certain persons.<sup>238</sup> According to the USDOS, in 2020, the 'government continued to exempt Christian and Muslim religious leaders from military service based on conscientious objection'. However, Muslim religious leaders were required to pay a levy for exemption.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> 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

<sup>229</sup> 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

<sup>230</sup> EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Military Service, April 2021, [url](#), p. 34

<sup>231</sup> Al-Mustafa, M., Drain Society, Feed the Military, Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, 20 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>232</sup> HRW, Syrian 'Military Evaders' Face Unlawful Seizure of Property, Assets, 9 February 2021, [url](#)

<sup>233</sup> Enab Baladi, Syrian regime haunts draft evaders in Aleppo, 28 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>234</sup> Atlantic Council, Strapped for dollars, the Syrian government is forcing its citizens to pay up, 5 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>235</sup> 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

<sup>236</sup> Syria, Constitution, Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic, 26 February 2012, [url](#), art. 46

<sup>237</sup> 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](#)

<sup>238</sup> TIMEP, TIMEP Brief: Conscription Law, 22 August 2019, [url](#)

<sup>239</sup> USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report 2020 - Syria, 12 May 2021, [url](#), p. 9



## 2.3 Recruitment strategies

Since March 2020 Syria has seen no major military offensives across formal frontlines.<sup>240</sup> Skirmishes, shelling, and airstrikes continued, but the frontlines were basically frozen. According to the Center for Operational Analysis and Research (COAR), localised violence continued, but scope and intensity of the armed conflict in the country were ‘pale in comparison to conditions witnessed between 2012 and 2019’.<sup>241</sup>

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 and the cessation of major military operations in Syria in early 2020, military recruitment drives by the SAA reportedly slowed down. However, the SAA regularly called on new conscripts and reservists.<sup>242</sup> In October 2021, a circular was issued, ‘announcing the conscription of male Syrians in age of conscription’.<sup>243</sup>

The GoS sends out notifications to the houses of men who have reached the age of military service, telling them to register for military service. The names of the men called up for military service are recorded in a central database which is accessed by officers at checkpoints and at the border.<sup>244</sup>

In July 2021, in Aleppo, the Military Police and Military Security Service were ‘operating patrols across the city after Aleppo’s draft centers ordered mandatory military evaders to join the army following Eid al-Adha holidays’. A member of the Military Security Service said that the campaign aims to get hold of over 14 000 potential recruits in the governorate.<sup>245</sup> In September 2021, mobile checkpoints were deployed in Homs governorate and eight civilians, among them young men wanted for military service, were arrested.<sup>246</sup>

Professor Uğur Ümit Üngör<sup>247</sup> noted in December 2021 that even if the authorities are not actively searching for draft evaders they might be caught at checkpoints when travelling between or around cities.<sup>248</sup> Professor Uğur Üngör describes the situation of two draft evaders, who were in hiding and did not leave their house over years. At checkpoints lists of draft evaders are checked and ‘if you’re on the list, they arrest you on the spot’.<sup>249</sup> A former officer in the Syrian army interviewed by the Swedish Migration Agency in April 2022 stated

<sup>240</sup> COAR, Syria in 2022: New Aid Approaches For an Evolving Crisis, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 3; BBC News, Why has the Syrian war lasted 11 years?, 15 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>241</sup> COAR, Syria in 2022: New Aid Approaches For an Evolving Crisis, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>242</sup> EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Military Service, April 2021, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>243</sup> NRC, Quarterly Legal and Policy Return Update, October - December 2021, private document held on file, p. 5

<sup>244</sup> EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Military Service, April 2021, [url](#), p. 20

<sup>245</sup> Enab Baladi, Syrian regime haunts draft evaders in Aleppo, 28 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>246</sup> Enab Baladi, قوات النظام تعتقل مدنيين في ريف حمص الشمالي [Regime forces arrest civilians in the northern Homs countryside], 3 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>247</sup> Uğur Ümit Üngör is professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD) in Amsterdam.

<sup>248</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Anfragebeantwortung der Staatendokumentation zu Syrien: Wehrdienst [query response on Syria: military service] [source: Uğur Ümit Üngör], 27 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>249</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Anfragebeantwortung der Staatendokumentation zu Syrien: Wehrdienst [query response on Syria: military service] [source: Uğur Ümit Üngör], 27 January 2022, [url](#), p. 15





that most draft evaders are recruited at checkpoints where their name is checked against the databases with lists of conscripts.<sup>250</sup>

According to confidential sources interviewed in January and June 2022 by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, men from former opposition-held areas were especially enlisted as reservists, including those over the age of 42.<sup>251</sup> Confidential sources interviewed in January and February 2022 by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that they had knowledge of cases of returnees who were called up to serve as conscripts or reservists.<sup>252</sup>

AI stated that inside Sweida governorate, the Druze are ‘protected through an agreement with the government from forced conscription’.<sup>253</sup> According to sources, between 30 000<sup>254</sup> and 50 000<sup>255</sup> young men evading military service sought refuge in Sweida governorate. Most do not leave the governorate out of fear of being conscripted.<sup>256</sup>

The GoS is generally not able to recruit conscripts in SDF-controlled areas.<sup>257</sup> Some sources reported that forced recruitment in the SAA is being carried out in GoS-controlled security squares located in Hasaka and Qamishli<sup>258</sup>, while others contrarily did not expect that persons entering these security squares would be conscripted.<sup>259</sup>

As for demobilisation efforts, according to a confidential source interviewed in January 2021 by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘most reservists and military personnel have served for an indefinite period’ since 2011.<sup>260</sup> Over the course of 2021, the president of Syria issued two administrative orders to discharge certain groups of reservists who had already served a certain number of years.<sup>261</sup> In June 2021, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs cited COAR, which stated that the effect of the ‘demobilisation was still very limited in scope.’<sup>262</sup> While reservists who met the criteria of the orders were demobilised, ‘thousands of

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<sup>250</sup> 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. 10

<sup>251</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [Country report Syria]*, May 2022, [url](#), p. 53

<sup>252</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [Country report Syria]*, May 2022, [url](#), p. 53

<sup>253</sup> AI, *Syria: Peaceful protesters detained in Sweida must be released immediately*, 24 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>254</sup> New Arab (The), *Why protests in Suweida are deeply troubling for the Syrian regime*, 11 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>255</sup> Syria Untold, *Men evading military service in southern Syria’s Suwayda feel ‘trapped’*, 9 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>256</sup> New Arab (The), *Why protests in Suweida are deeply troubling for the Syrian regime*, 11 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>257</sup> EUAA, *Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Military Service*, April 2021, [url](#), p. 18; Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, 1 July 2022 [source: Journalist and writer], [url](#), p. 50

<sup>258</sup> Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, 1 July 2022 [source: Fabrice Balanche, Local residents, Representation of AANES in KRI], [url](#), pp. 44, 58, 65

<sup>259</sup> Denmark, DIS, *Syria – Military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate*, 1 July 2022 [source: Wladimir van Wilgenburg, Syrian Kurdish Journalist], [url](#), pp. 60, 72

<sup>260</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, 14 June 2021, [url](#), p. 39

<sup>261</sup> SANA, *الرئيس الأسد يصدر أمراً إدارياً بإنهاء الاحتفاظ والاستدعاء للضباط الاحتياطيين وصف الضباط والأفراد* [President Al-Assad issues an administrative order to end the retention and summons of reserve officers, non-commissioned officers and officers], 10 May 2021, [url](#); SANA, *الرئيس الأسد يصدر أمراً إدارياً بإنهاء الاحتفاظ والاستدعاء لضباط احتياطيين وصف ضباط وأفراد احتياطيين* [President Al-Assad issues an administrative order to end the retention and summons of reserve officers, non-commissioned officers and reserve personnel], 12 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>262</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, 14 June 2021, [url](#), p. 39



other civilians were called up for reserve military duty’, according to a confidential source interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in March 2021.<sup>263</sup>

According to a confidential source interviewed in March 2022 by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, persons with special military expertise might serve for longer than the two years prescribed by the military service law, while those with professions that are in great demand in society, such as doctors, were more likely to be demobilised after completing the official duration of the military service.<sup>264</sup>

In October 2021, a new demobilization order was issued concerning the following categories: officers who had served as reservists for at least two years on 31 December 2021, doctors specialized in the management of medical services who had served as reservists for at least two years on 31 December 2021, and non-commissioned officers and reservists who had served at least 6.5 years on 31 December 2021.<sup>265</sup> Confidential sources interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that the exact number of persons to whom this demobilization order applied is unknown and that doctors concerned by this order needed additional permission from their unit in order to leave the army.<sup>266</sup>

No further information on demobilisation efforts could be found among the sources consulted within time constraints.

## 2.4 Deployment strategies

According to Kheder Khaddour<sup>267</sup>, interviewed in December 2021 by the Austrian BFA Staatendokumentation, persons who did not pay the exemption fee and are wanted for military service would first be detained for one to three weeks and then sent to the army. A specialised military officer decides who is drafted into the army as a soldier. Whether a draft evader is sent directly to the front ‘depends on the military situation at the moment on the ground’. Draft evaders would not be treated differently from regularly recruited soldiers in the army. Persons with a university degree will more likely have to work in an office, while someone without a degree is more likely to be deployed to the front. A person’s specialisation ‘is more important than whether you were conscripted normally or not’.<sup>268</sup>

In a December 2021 interview with the Austrian BFA Staatendokumentation, Fabrice Balanche<sup>269</sup> explained that returnees who did not pay their exemption fee have to do their

<sup>263</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, 14 June 2021, [url](#), pp. 38-39

<sup>264</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [Country report Syria], May 2022, [url](#), p. 53

<sup>265</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [Country report Syria], May 2022, [url](#), p. 55

<sup>266</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [Country report Syria], May 2022, [url](#), p. 55

<sup>267</sup> Kheder Khaddour is a non-resident scholar at the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut.

<sup>268</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Anfragebeantwortung der Staatendokumentation zu Syrien: Wehrdienst [query response on Syria: military service] [source: Kheder Khaddour], 27 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 17-19

<sup>269</sup> Fabrice Balanche is an associate professor and research director at the University of Lyon 2 and adjunct fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.



military service and may be sent directly to the front lines. He does not know of draft evaders returning to GoS-controlled areas, but describes an example from Dar'a. As the GoS regained control over the area the inhabitants were given 18 months 'to get conscripted or go to university etc and after that they were integrated by force into the army and sent to the front line to die'.<sup>270</sup>

According to Uğur Üngör, arrested draft evaders are immediately sent to the army and most often 'to an active war zone where the violence is the most threatening'. However, Üngör also notes that draft evaders returning after some years abroad might be punished with imprisonment. According to the source, 'it's likely that you will be first imprisoned for a period and then when you are released, you're immediately released with an order to report to the nearest army point to be recruited and sent to battle'. The GoS 'can afford actually taking people into prison instead of arresting them and directly send them to the front, which is what would have happened in 2016 or 2017'.<sup>271</sup>

A case study on a family who returned from Lebanon in 2019 described in the September 2021 EIP report noted that one son of military age was detained at a checkpoint near the Damascus suburbs soon after returning. He was 'transferred to Sednaya Military Prison, where he was badly tortured, before being forcibly conscripted into the Syrian army and deployed to frontlines in north-western Syria'.<sup>272</sup>

## 2.5 Implementation practice regarding amnesties

Since March 2011 the GoS has issued 18 amnesty decrees.<sup>273</sup> These general decrees either 'retroactively nullified previously established legal liability only for a varying selection of crimes, or specifically for army desertion or evasion of military service'.<sup>274</sup> Most decrees are partial and selective in nature and several exemptions 'end up excluding the release of detainees who were arrested for their role in the uprising or for their political position'. Their implementation often takes place 'with a considerable level of corruption and extortion'.<sup>275</sup> Also, the amnesties targeting military service 'still required beneficiaries to complete their service after turning themselves in'.<sup>276</sup>

Decree 13/2021 was issued before the presidential elections in May 2021 and granted a general amnesty for crimes committed before 2 May 2021.<sup>277</sup> The decree included 'army deserters who turn themselves in within three months if they are in the country, or within six

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<sup>270</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Anfragebeantwortung der Staatendokumentation zu Syrien: Wehrdienst [query response on Syria: military service] [source: Fabrice Balanche], 27 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>271</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Anfragebeantwortung der Staatendokumentation zu Syrien: Wehrdienst [query response on Syria: military service] [source: Uğur Ümit Üngör], 27 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 15-16

<sup>272</sup> EIP, Refugee Return to Syria, September 2021, private document held on file, p. 28

<sup>273</sup> SACD, Normalisation of Horror - Security and Living Conditions in Assad-held Syria, 9 August 2021, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>274</sup> Both, Pieter, Manipulating National Trauma: The Assad Regime's Wartime Instrumentalisation of Presidential Amnesties, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>275</sup> SACD, Normalisation of Horror - Security and Living Conditions in Assad-held Syria, 9 August 2021, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>276</sup> Both, Pieter, Manipulating National Trauma: The Assad Regime's Wartime Instrumentalisation of Presidential Amnesties, EUI, October 2021, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>277</sup> SANA, President al-Assad grants general amnesty for crimes committed before May 2nd, 2 May 2021, [url](#)



months if they are abroad'.<sup>278</sup> The obligation to serve in the military remained unaffected.<sup>279</sup> According to Mustafa al-Qasem, a former judge who defected from the GoS, the effectiveness of the decree is limited, as the GoS leaves the possibility to apply the decree selectively.<sup>280</sup> Official data indicating how many people benefited from the May 2021 amnesty are missing. According to the Syrian Association for Citizens' Dignity (SACD), an association formed by a group of displaced people from Syria, amnesty decrees are used by the GoS to 'relieve international pressure and mislead both Syrians and international actors'.<sup>281</sup>

The latest legislative decree regarding desertion, Decree 3/2022<sup>282</sup>, was announced by the GoS in January 2022. Persons who present themselves to officials within three months, if they are inside the country or four months if they are abroad, are granted an amnesty for the full penalty stipulated in Articles 100 and 101 of the Military Penal Code.<sup>283</sup> According to these articles, desertion is punishable by one to five years imprisonment in peacetime. In times of war, it can result in a prison sentence up to twice as long. Those who have left the country following desertion in wartime can face a penalty of up to 15 years imprisonment.<sup>284</sup> The amnesty however did not waive the requirement to serve in the military.<sup>285</sup>

In January 2022, the chairman of the National Security Committee in the People's Assembly, Fayez al-Ahmad, advised 'the fugitives to return and settle their situation quickly'. Lawyer Abdel Nasser al-Hoshan, however, notes that desertion is not limited to the crime of internal and external escape. Articles 102 and 103 of the Military Penal Code stipulate penalties for fleeing by conspiracy, fleeing the enemy and fleeing in wartime.<sup>286</sup>

SACD noted that 'the Syrian regime has repeatedly proven how unreliable it is by constantly breaching its promises and agreements'.<sup>287</sup> After regaining control over Dar'a and Quneitra governorates in southern Syria in July 2018 a reconciliation agreement settled the status of compulsory military service evaders and people wanted by the GoS security apparatus. However, 'despite the settlements, regime forces have arrested hundreds of Daraa and Quneitra residents'.<sup>288</sup>

After the GoS completed the settlement procedures in the western and northern Dar'a countryside in October 2021, it launched similar procedures in Dar'a's eastern countryside.

<sup>278</sup> MEE, Syria: Amnesty announced ahead of presidential elections, 2 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>279</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Syria Country Report from the COI-CMS, Version 7, [source: Austrian Embassy in Damascus] 24 January 2022, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 60

<sup>280</sup> Syria Direct, Bashar al-Assad issues general amnesty excluding prisoners of conscience: Who benefits and why now?, 10 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>281</sup> SACD, Normalisation of Horror - Security and Living Conditions in Assad-held Syria, 9 August 2021, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>282</sup> See SANA, المرئكية والخارجي الداخلي الفرار جرائم عن عاماً عفواً يمنح الأسد الرئيس 25-1-2022 [President al-Assad grants a general amnesty for crimes of internal and external flight committed before 25-1-2022], 25 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>283</sup> Enab Baladi, General amnesty: Syrian regime's trap to capture military defectors, 18 January 2022, [url](#); COAR, IS Prison Raid, Biggest Attack since '19, Displaces 45,000, 31 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>284</sup> EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria: Military Service, April 2021, [url](#), p. 35

<sup>285</sup> COAR, IS Prison Raid, Biggest Attack since '19, Displaces 45,000, 31 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>286</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Mixed Reactions Following Desertion Amnesty, 27 January 2022, [url](#); Syria, Law No. 61 of 1950, as amended (Military Penal Code) [unofficial translation], 16 February 2017, [url](#)

<sup>287</sup> SACD, Syrian regime's amnesties are public relations stunts with dangerous consequences for displaced Syrians, 28 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>288</sup> Enab Baladi, Syrian regime closes in on opposition pockets in Quneitra and Daraa despite settlements, 26 May 2021, [url](#)



However, locals in Dar'a governorate 'do not trust the settlements'. Under the agreements army defectors were given three months to join their military units while draft evaders had six months to report to conscription.<sup>289</sup> However, according to a January 2022 report by Abdullah Al-Jabassini, the General Recruitment Directorate (GRD) in April 2021 'issued a decision which granted evaders from compulsory and reservist military services [from Dar'a] a one-year deferment'. In June 2021 the GRD instructed the granting of travel permits to these males. The decisions 'allowed hundreds of young adult males to leave Syria legally during the second half of 2021'.<sup>290</sup>

In January 2022, a new reconciliation drive in western Ghouta for military-age men was announced by the Syrian Military Security granting draft evaders a period of three months to join military units.<sup>291</sup>

## 2.6 Implementation practice regarding exemptions

The law stipulates certain categories eligible for exemption, such as being the only male child in a family, being unfit due to health reasons and having paid an exemption fee.<sup>292</sup> According to a Syrian academic interviewed by the EUAA, males who had clearly visible medical conditions and were unfit to perform military service still got exemptions. However, the medical committee that examines individuals was quite strict in its judgements. In some cases, males who had a certain medical condition could still be conscripted into the army to perform non-field military activities.<sup>293</sup> Confidential sources interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in January and February 2022 noted that it often happens that medical exemptions are ignored, and the person still has to undergo military service. Another source interviewed in November 2021 by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs mentioned however a case in which a person was exempted from military service on grounds of persistent obesity.<sup>294</sup>

A family's only son receives a temporary exemption that he would have to renew until he would - dependant on certain conditions - receive a permanent exemption. Until a family's only son receives a permanent exemption from military service, he has to renew his temporary military deferment, which is granted for one or more years.<sup>295</sup> In October 2021, the Austrian Embassy in Damascus mentioned 'increasing reports of the conscription of men who are the only sons in a family'.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Enab Baladi, Daraa returns to Syrian regime's control by forced settlement agreements, 17 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>290</sup> Al-Jabassini, A., Migration from Post-War Southern Syria: Drivers, Routes, and Destinations, Wartime and Post-Conflict in Syria, EUI, 6 January 2022, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>291</sup> COAR, IS Prison Raid, Biggest Attack since '19, Displaces 45,000, 31 January 2022, [url](#); Voice of Damascus, [Under the supervision of the "Military Security" .. a "collective" security settlement in Zakiya in Damascus countryside], 25 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>292</sup> Syria, Ministry of Defence, الحالات العلة للإعفاء [general reasons for exemption], n.d., [url](#)

<sup>293</sup> Syrian academic, email correspondence, 25 April 2022

<sup>294</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [Country report Syria], May 2022, [url](#), p. 54

<sup>295</sup> Syrian academic, email correspondence, 25 April 2022

<sup>296</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Syria Country Report from the COI-CMS, Version 7, [source: Austrian Embassy in Damascus] 24 January 2022, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 60



In October 2021 the Austrian Embassy in Damascus reported that ‘exemptions for students in particular have become increasingly difficult to claim, and students have been drafted on a case-by-case basis.’<sup>297</sup> However, a Syrian academic interviewed by the EUAA stated that students were not recruited as long as they had a valid one-year military deferment and these deferments could not be arbitrarily annulled.<sup>298</sup>

Fabrice Balanche notes that many conscripts that reside abroad use the option to pay to get exempted from military service. Rules regarding this option change regularly and besides the official fee, bribes have to be paid. In practice the process to get an exemption takes a long time.<sup>299</sup>

Whether the exemption from military service is respected after payment of the fee, or whether the person is nevertheless conscripted, depends on the individual profile, according to Uğur Üngör. Also, arbitrariness and unpredictability are a factor.<sup>300</sup> Balanche, however, stated that after payment of the exemption fee, no conscription would happen.<sup>301</sup> A Syrian human rights organisation that requested anonymity interviewed by DIS in April 2022 noted that ‘there have been no reports that those who have paid the exemption fee of USD 8 000 have faced issues upon return.’<sup>302</sup> Sources interviewed by the Swedish Migration Agency in April 2022 stated that persons who paid the exemption fee and have confirmation of the exemption on their military booklet would not be conscripted.<sup>303</sup>

According to Kheder Khaddour, to get the exemption people usually send the amount of money to their family in Syria, who takes care of the process from inside the country. Conscripts then receive a document and show this at the immigration office. Then the name of the person disappears from the list for military service and the person can enter Syria. This procedure, however, is mainly used by Syrians in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt and the Gulf States. Conscripts living in Europe, where the ‘corruption networks’ are not accessible, therefore need people inside Syria.<sup>304</sup> However, according to information published by the Syrian embassy in Berlin the procedure can be launched entirely through the Syrian embassies operating in several EU countries. The fee itself can be paid either to the embassy in EUR or by a relative in Syria in USD.<sup>305</sup>

Sources interviewed by DIS in August and October 2020 noted that ‘when the exemption fee has been paid, the person will receive a stamp in his military service book indicating his

<sup>297</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Syria Country Report from the COI-CMS, Version 7, [source: Austrian Embassy in Damascus] 24 January 2022, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 60

<sup>298</sup> Syrian academic, email correspondence, 25 April 2022

<sup>299</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Anfragebeantwortung der Staatendokumentation zu Syrien: Wehrdienst [query response on Syria: military service] [source: Fabrice Balanche], 27 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 2-3

<sup>300</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Anfragebeantwortung der Staatendokumentation zu Syrien: Wehrdienst [query response on Syria: military service] [source: Uğur Ümit Üngör], 27 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 3-5

<sup>301</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Anfragebeantwortung der Staatendokumentation zu Syrien: Wehrdienst [query response on Syria: military service] [source: Fabrice Balanche], 27 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>302</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Treatment upon return [source: Syrian human rights organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>303</sup> 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

<sup>304</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Anfragebeantwortung der Staatendokumentation zu Syrien: Wehrdienst [query response on Syria: military service] [source: Kheder Khaddour], 27 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6

<sup>305</sup> Syrian Embassy in Berlin, n.d., [url](#)





exemption from military service'. The person will also be handed a confirmation of the payment, which will have to be presented at 'the Recruitment Division in Syria upon return'.<sup>306</sup>

## 2.7 Treatment of draft evaders, deserters and defectors

According to Kheder Khaddour, not performing military service is seen as disloyalty or even political dissent towards the GoS.<sup>307</sup> Khaddour, however, also noted that draft evaders are targeted on an individual basis rather than in systematic action.<sup>308</sup> Uğur Üngör adds that draft evaders are regarded 'very negatively' by the authorities. They are seen as cowards and traitors. In a war situation, military field tribunals with summary execution are possible, as draft evasion is regarded as betrayal of the nation.<sup>309</sup> Balanche noted that the GoS does not necessarily regard persons evading military service as opposed to the government in general. He described an example from Latakia: the son of a family went to Lebanon after his university degree, 'but there is no retaliation on the family'. The GoS knows that 'many people escaped just because they don't want to die' and not because they are opposed to the government.<sup>310</sup> Balanche explained that he has no example of draft evaders who did not do their military service and then returned to the government area.<sup>311</sup>

According to a Syrian human rights organisation that requested anonymity interviewed by DIS in April 2022, draft evaders and military deserters who have not been involved in any opposition activities are detained for a short period (a few days or weeks) and then sent to military service. The same source noted that family members of draft evaders and deserters do not face any repercussions from authorities.<sup>312</sup>

According to AI, 'military conscription has been a motive of arrest' for returnees. Four interviewed returnees told the organisation that 'after intelligence forces released them, authorities ordered them to do their military service' and two of them were forced to join the army after they were released.<sup>313</sup>

According to SACD, every person returning to Syria 'is a potential detainee'. However, 'there is a particularly great fear for the lives of army defectors who might consider returning'.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Issues regarding return, October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>307</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Anfragebeantwortung der Staatendokumentation zu Syrien: Wehrdienst [query response on Syria: military service] [source: Kheder Khaddour], 27 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 9-10

<sup>308</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Anfragebeantwortung der Staatendokumentation zu Syrien: Wehrdienst [query response on Syria: military service] [source: Kheder Khaddour], 27 January 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>309</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Anfragebeantwortung der Staatendokumentation zu Syrien: Wehrdienst [query response on Syria: military service] [source: Uğur Ümit Üngör], 27 January 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>310</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Anfragebeantwortung der Staatendokumentation zu Syrien: Wehrdienst [query response on Syria: military service] [source: Fabrice Balanche], 27 January 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>311</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Anfragebeantwortung der Staatendokumentation zu Syrien: Wehrdienst [query response on Syria: military service] [source: Fabrice Balanche], 27 January 2022, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>312</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Treatment upon return [source: Syrian human rights organisation], May 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>313</sup> AI, "You're going to your death", Violations against Syrian refugees returning to Syria, 7 September 2021, [url](#), p. 36

<sup>314</sup> SACD, Syrian regime's amnesties are public relations stunts with dangerous consequences for displaced Syrians, 28 January 2022, [url](#)



After seeking refuge in Lebanon, the husband of a 25-year-old woman from Sayida Zeinab in Damascus was arrested in early 2018 for deserting the army in 2015. After being detained for nine months the man took part in the reconciliation process and agreed to re-enter the army. The wife described to HRW that her husband was beaten in prison and tortured while serving the army, ‘all because he deserted the Army previously’.<sup>315</sup>

According to Üngör ‘imprisonment equals torture’ and detained draft evaders most likely ‘undergo all of the forms of torture that the regime is infamous for’. Everybody in prison is tortured and the treatment of a soldier could even be worse. Also, a conviction under the anti-terror law for a draft evader ‘is possible, but draft evasion in itself is a bad enough crime in Syria’.<sup>316</sup>

According to a study by Refugee Protection Watch (RPW)<sup>317</sup> on refugee returnees with research rounds conducted in March and August 2021<sup>318</sup>, ‘an overwhelming majority of respondents (70 %) were concerned that either they themselves and/or friends or relatives will be forcibly conscripted into the Syrian Arab Army’. 43 % of the interviewed returnees knew a person at risk of being re-enlisted or were themselves at risk, although they already had served in the army. Some respondents had their names checked ‘to ensure that they were not wanted for the military or for any other security reasons’. According to RPW, however, ‘simply checking their name for a record does not provide a full guarantee of safety, especially for military aged men’.<sup>319</sup>

A male respondent from Douma city explained to RPW that one of his relatives was called ‘from the military detachment for a follow-up, he went but never returned’. Another male respondent from Rural Damascus, said that he was informed at the border that he was called for reserve service in the military and was given three months to enrol, although he had already completed his mandatory service.<sup>320</sup>

In July 2021 Military Police and Military Security Service operated patrols in a recruitment drive across Aleppo city. A member of the Military Security Service said that persons who were ordered to join the army and who had not shown up at their draft centres would face punitive measures. According to him, ‘they will have to serve longer than standard military service terms’ and ‘some of these young men might be sentenced to two years in prison if they refuse to perform mandatory military service’. According to a staffer from a draft centre in the Hanano

<sup>315</sup> HRW, “Our Lives Are Like Death”: Syrian Refugee Returns from Lebanon and Jordan, 20 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 34-35

<sup>316</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Anfragebeantwortung der Staatendokumentation zu Syrien: Wehrdienst [query response on Syria: military service] [source: Uğur Ümit Üngör], 27 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 16-17

<sup>317</sup> Refugee Protection Watch (RPW) is a coalition formed in 2019 by the Lebanese, Syrian and European organisations ALEF – Act for Human Rights, Basmeh and Zeitooneh, PAX, Upinion and 11.11.11. ‘Since 2019, RPW has conducted research and advocacy on protection issues facing Syrian refugees in Lebanon, as well as on the conditions for safe, voluntary, informed and dignified return to Syria’. (see: RPW, About, n.d., [url](#))

<sup>318</sup> RPW, “I Haven’t Known the Taste of Safety for Ten Years” - Syrians Trying to Survive in Lebanon and Syria, 17 November 2021, [url](#), pp. 12-13

<sup>319</sup> RPW, “I Haven’t Known the Taste of Safety for Ten Years” - Syrians Trying to Survive in Lebanon and Syria, 17 November 2021, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>320</sup> RPW, “I Haven’t Known the Taste of Safety for Ten Years” - Syrians Trying to Survive in Lebanon and Syria, 17 November 2021, [url](#), p. 32





Barracks in Mount Simeon the measures include a fine between SYP 43 000 and SYP 187 000 [about EUR 15 and EUR 66], and additional time in prison.<sup>321</sup>

In April 2021 measures regarding persons who want to transfer their real estate ownership in Aleppo governorate were reported. The granting of security permits needed for these transactions ‘became subject to close scrutiny’. Certain applicants, including evaders of compulsory military service and reserve service, are denied these permits.<sup>322</sup> In September 2021, SOHR reported on the arrest carried out by the Military Police against draft evaders in areas of Deir Ez-Zor governorate under GoS control.<sup>323</sup>

Regarding the role of background of draft evaders, Uğur Üngör says that ‘sanctions are pretty much similar for all draft evaders’. Even draft evaders from privileged Alawite families from Latakia and with contacts to the regime cannot return to Syria, unless someone in the intelligence apparatus removes their name from the wanted list, otherwise they are at risk of being detained and drafted into the army.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Enab Baladi, Syrian regime haunts draft evaders in Aleppo, 28 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>322</sup> Enab Baladi, No security permits: Aleppo residents hit by regime’s new arbitrary real estate measures, 17 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>323</sup> SOHR, Rising arrests | Regime security service arrest 40 persons of regime-backed factions and those fled conscription in Deir Ezzor, 17 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>324</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Anfragebeantwortung der Staatendokumentation zu Syrien: Wehrdienst [query response on Syria: military service] [source: Uğur Ümit Üngör], 27 January 2022, [url](#), p. 20





### 3. Persons with (perceived) links to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

The following information relates only to the area under control of the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES). No information on persons with perceived links to ISIL in other regions of the country could be found.

#### 3.1 Raids against ISIL and arrests

During the reference period, the SDF carried out raids in areas under its control east of the Euphrates in order to root out suspected ISIL members, some of which were supported by air strikes carried out by the Global Coalition.<sup>325</sup> Local media reported on anti-ISIL raids taking place in the governorates Deir Ez-Zor<sup>326</sup>, Raqqa<sup>327</sup> and Hasaka.<sup>328</sup> While in June 2021 the SDF was described as having ‘tightened the grip’ in Raqqa and movement of ISIL cells being limited there<sup>329</sup>, an SDF military leader in Deir Ez-Zor stated in October 2021 that anti-terror units were doing at least one operation every day targeting ISIL members in nearby towns.<sup>330</sup> Deir Ez-Zor was described as the region under the Kurdish-led AANES with an Arab-majority where most ISIL attacks took place in 2021 and where many ISIL-affiliates were said to still live.<sup>331</sup>

During SDF raids carried out during the reference period, villagers were arrested on suspicion of being ISIL members<sup>332</sup> or having links with ISIL cells.<sup>333</sup> When undertaking raids and

<sup>325</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 50; Rudaw, US-Kurdish raid kills five “dangerous” ISIS fighters in eastern Syria: statement, 13 December 2021, [url](#); NPA, SDF and Global Coalition arrest four ISIS members in Syria’s Deir ez-Zor, 8 May 2021, [url](#); USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve, Lead Inspector General Report to the US Congress, October 1, 2021–December 31, 2021, 8 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 72-73

<sup>326</sup> NPA, SDF kills ISIS leader and arrests another in Syria’s Deir ez-Zor, 16 February 2022, [url](#); Diyaruna, SDF, international coalition take out ISIS cell in eastern Syria raid, 14 December 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, “قصد” التحالف والتحاليف و”قصد”.. [url](#); [Global Coalition and SDF carry out raid and arrest people in Deir Ez-Zor], 7 December 2021, [url](#); Baladi News, “قصد تنفيذ حملة اعتقالات في دير الزور ومخيم الهول بالحسكة” [SDF carries out campaign of arrest in Deir Ez-Zor and Al-Hol Camp in Hasaka], 17 August 2021, [url](#); NPA, SDF and Global Coalition arrest four ISIS members in Syria’s Deir ez-Zor, 8 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>327</sup> Baladi News, “قصد تنفيذ حملة مدهامات في الرقة” [SDF carries out raids in Raqqa], 5 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>328</sup> Al-Hurra, “قصد تنفيذ حملة مدهامات بالليل ومدهامات بالنهار.. هل تستطيع قصد حماية الحسكة؟” [Nightly curfews and raids during the day – can the SDF protect Hasaka?], 6 February 2022, [url](#); Xeber24, “قصد تنفيذ حملة مدهامات لأوكار داعش بريف الحسكة” [SDF and Asayish carry out raid in ISIL hideouts in rural Hasaka], 22 January 2022, [url](#); Zaman Al-Wasl, “قصد اعتقال رجل إثر الحسكة..” [Hasaka: Man arrested during SDF-raid in Markada], 3 October 2021, [url](#); Baladi News, “قصد تنفيذ حملة اعتقالات في دير الزور ومخيم الهول بالحسكة” [SDF carries out campaign of arrest in Deir Ez-Zor and Al-Hol Camp in Hasaka], 17 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>329</sup> Al-Monitor, Kurdish-led forces intensify crackdown on Islamic State cells in northeast Syria, 30 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>330</sup> Guardian (The), ‘A lull not a loss’: Islamic State is rebuilding in Syria, say Kurdish forces, 14 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>331</sup> RIC, Annual Sleeper Cell Report (2021) For North And East Syria, February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>332</sup> Euphrates Appeal Media Network, “قصد تنتقم من المكون العربي باعتقال العشرات من الأهالي في الحسكة” [SDF takes revenge on Arabs by arresting dozens of people in Hasaka], 1 February 2022, [url](#);

<sup>333</sup> Baladi News, “قصد تنفيذ حملة مدهامات في الرقة” [SDF carries out raids in Raqqa], 5 February 2022, [url](#); SNHR, The Tenth Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced



subsequent arrests, the SDF reportedly provided no arrest warrant and took detainees to unknown locations.<sup>334</sup> SNHR also documented cases of kidnapping by SDF forces on account of suspected ISIL ties or affiliations.<sup>335</sup> Some of these detainees were later released, others remained disappeared.<sup>336</sup> Arrests made by the SDF also targeted citizens with no ties to ISIL<sup>337</sup> and SDF subsequently released these persons after civil and tribal mediation.<sup>338</sup> According to SNHR, women were also targeted by the SDF with detention, among other reasons for being relatives of suspected ISIL-members, with the aim of pressuring family members to turn themselves in.<sup>339</sup>

The UNCOI reported that SDF members arrested male civilians, including media workers and activists, during raids conducted ‘in the context of large-scale anti-terrorism operations initiated in summer 2020’. For example, one man recounted that following a critical social media post, he was arrested along with six neighbours and held in detention for about a month, accused of having links to ISIL. During a similar raid in August 2020, another man was arrested for purportedly being connected to ISIL sleeper cells. After being interrogated by US military personnel at the coalition base in Deir Ez-Zor, he was taken to Kasra prison where he was held incommunicado for at least 20 days and tortured by Asayish members during interrogations. In both cases, the detainees were neither presented to a court nor given access to a legal counsel.<sup>340</sup> SDF members also accused medical staff of ‘terrorism’ as they stormed a hospital in Deir Ez-Zor in the aftermath of a March 2021 attack that was attributed to ISIL. At least 12 civilians in the hospital, including 8 medical personnel, were detained and subjected to beatings before they were released the same day.<sup>341</sup>

Furthermore, sources reported on the security of civilians being affected by anti-ISIL raids. In November 2021 residents of Sobha village in eastern Deir Ez-Zor turned out in protests after two residents had been arrested by the SDF and a person from the same family was reportedly killed in an anti-ISIL operation.<sup>342</sup> According to SOHR, another operation targeting suspected ISIL hideouts in Deir Ez-Zor carried out in December 2021 led to four civilians

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Disappearances; Long Years of Constant Grief and Loss, 30 August 2021, [url](#), p. 27; SOHR, SDF-held areas in February 2022 | 40 deaths in acts of violence...ongoing military escalation by Turkish forces...ongoing protests over worsening living conditions, 6 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>334</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>335</sup> SNHR, The Tenth Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances; Long Years of Constant Grief and Loss, 30 August 2021, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>336</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>337</sup> Enab Baladi, [مداهمة واعتقال لأشخاص في دير الزور](#) [Global Coalition and SDF carry out raid and arrest people in Deir Ez-Zor], 7 December 2021, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>338</sup> Enab Baladi, [مداهمة واعتقال لأشخاص في دير الزور](#) [Global Coalition and SDF carry out raid and arrest people in Deir Ez-Zor], 7 December 2021, [url](#); SNHR, The Tenth Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances; Long Years of Constant Grief and Loss, 30 August 2021, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>339</sup> SNHR, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women: Tenth Annual Report on Violations against Females in Syria Mostly at the Hands of the Syrian Regime; At Least 29,661 Children Have Been Killed in Syria Since March 2011 Including 181 Due to Torture, with 5,036 Forcibly Disappeared, 25 November 2021, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>340</sup> 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. 102, 103

<sup>341</sup> 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. 104

<sup>342</sup> Enab Baladi, [مداهمة واعتقال لأشخاص في دير الزور](#) [Global Coalition and SDF carry out raid and arrest people in Deir Ez-Zor], 7 December 2021, [url](#)



being killed in the crossfire.<sup>343</sup> On 20 January 2022, ISIL fighters launched an attack on Al-Sina'a prison in Hasaka city in which ISIL suspects are being held.<sup>344</sup> A few days later, the SDF announced its recapture of the prison and the surrender of the remaining ISIL fighters in the prison, but clashes continued around the area of the prison until 30 January.<sup>345</sup> These clashes between ISIL fighters and SDF caused an unspecified number of civilian casualties as well as the temporary displacement of up to 45 000 residents from the southern part of the city.<sup>346</sup> In the wake of the prison attack, a local media source reported dozens of arbitrary arrests targeting local Arab residents, accusing them of being ISIL members. It also alleged that during the clashes, fleeing residents were prevented from entering predominantly Kurdish neighbourhoods because ISIL elements were suspected among them.<sup>347</sup> At the beginning of February 2022, the majority of those displaced had reportedly returned to their homes, while about 100 people remained displaced in a collective shelter.<sup>348</sup>

## 3.2 Situation of persons with (perceived) links to ISIL in detention

During the battles between Kurdish-led forces and ISIL in the north of Syria from 2017 to 2019, persons with perceived links to ISIL were taken to detention facilities run by the SDF. Many of the Syrian detainees were subsequently sentenced by courts of the Kurdish-led AANES.<sup>349</sup> In mid-2020, the AANES declared to have brought 8 650 cases to trial and having convicted 1 881 Syrian nationals for association with ISIL, with a further 1 600 detainees awaiting judicial process.<sup>350</sup> The wives and children of ISIL suspects, many of whom are foreign nationals, were taken to displacement camps such as Al-Hol and Al-Roj which were characterised by appalling living conditions and limited medical care and food.<sup>351</sup> In 2021, tens of thousands of persons suspected of ties to ISIL were still being held in Al-Hol without any access to due process, among them women and children.<sup>352</sup>

HRW stated to have received a number of allegations since 2019 that SDF had abused ISIL suspects in detention but was not able to verify the reports.<sup>353</sup> SNHR stated that detainees held by the SDF under pretexts such as having links to ISIL were held without trial and

<sup>343</sup> Al Jazeera, US-backed SDF forces carry out deadly operation in eastern Syria, 13 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>344</sup> HRW, Northeast Syria: Fate of Hundreds of Boys Trapped in Siege Unknown, 4 February 2022, [url](#); Al-Ahmed, S. and Hassan, M., A closer look at the ISIS attack on Syria's al-Sina Prison, MEI, 14 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>345</sup> USAID, Syria - Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #3, Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, 4 February 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>346</sup> UNOCHA, Syria: Qamishli Flash Update - Flash Update 1: Displacement from Al-Hasakeh (as of 23 January 2022), 23 January 2022, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>347</sup> Euphrates Appeal Media Network, قسد تنتقم من المكون العربي باعتقال العشرات من الأهالي في الحسكة. [SDF takes revenge on Arabs by arresting dozens of people in Hasaka], 1 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>348</sup> USAID, Syria - Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #4, Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>349</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 54

<sup>350</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/45/31], 14 August 2020, [url](#), para. 77

<sup>351</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 55

<sup>352</sup> Al, Amnesty International Report 2021/22 – Syria, 29 March 2022, [url](#), p. 355

<sup>353</sup> HRW, Northeast Syria: Fate of Hundreds of Boys Trapped in Siege Unknown, 4 February 2022, [url](#)





prevented from communicating with legal representatives or their families.<sup>354</sup> There were reportedly also cases of children being detained on suspicion of having ties with ISIL.<sup>355</sup>

The conditions in prisons for ISIL suspects were described as ‘dire’<sup>356</sup>, with ‘severely overcrowded cells with open latrines and poor ventilation’ and lacking adequate medical care.<sup>357</sup> Women’s detention centres were reportedly found to be similarly overcrowded and lacking ventilation and hygiene. Female inmates were subjected to abusive treatment.<sup>358</sup> Throughout 2020 and 2021, the Kurdish-led AANES decided to release groups of Syrian ISIL-suspects interned at Al-Hol camp in Hasaka governorate.<sup>359</sup> According to USDOS, most residents of Al-Hol camp had no connection to ISIL, but there were some women and children with family ties to ISIL fighters.<sup>360</sup> Releases were often granted following guarantees from Arab tribes.<sup>361</sup> The aim of these guarantees was to enable the released families to return to their home communities. However, many of those released from Al-Hol remained ostracised from their communities because of their perceived links to ISIL and there were no efforts to reintegrate these persons back into society.<sup>362</sup> An additional mechanism introduced in January 2021 allowed Al-Hol IDPs and detainees to apply for a release pending a vetting process undertaken by Asayish (Kurdish Internal Security Forces)<sup>363</sup> forces. Upon approval, applicants were reportedly handed over to municipal authorities with no reintegration support, while at the same time there were reported cases of individuals being prosecuted by Asayish after their release from Al-Hol.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> SNHR, The Tenth Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances; Long Years of Constant Grief and Loss, 30 August 2021, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>355</sup> SNHR, On World Children’s Day: Tenth Annual Report on Violations against Children in Syria, 20 November 2021, [url](#), p. 38; OHCHR, Position of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism on the human rights of adolescents/juveniles being detained in North-East Syria. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, May 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>356</sup> OHCHR, Position of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism on the human rights of adolescents/juveniles being detained in North-East Syria. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, May 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>357</sup> HRW, Thousands of Foreigners Unlawfully Held in NE Syria, 23 March 2021, [url](#); VOA, IS Attack on Syrian Prison Exposes Squalid Conditions for Detainees, 25 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>358</sup> SNHR, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women: Tenth Annual Report on Violations against Females in Syria Mostly at the Hands of the Syrian Regime; At Least 29,661 Children Have Been Killed in Syria Since March 2011 Including 181 Due to Torture, with 5,036 Forcibly Disappeared, 25 November 2021, [url](#), p. 25

<sup>359</sup> Al-Monitor, More women prisoners linked to Islamic State released from al-Hol camp, 31 July 2021, [url](#); VOA, Kurdish Authorities Release 324 Syrian Nationals From al-Hol Camp, 16 September 2021, [url](#); EUAA, Country of Origin Information Report, Syria Security situation, July 2021, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>360</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve, Lead Inspector General Report to the US Congress, October 1, 2021–December 31, 2021, 8 February 2022, [url](#), p. 26

<sup>361</sup> National (The), Syrian families released from Al Hol struggle for acceptance after ISIS trauma, 12 April 2021, [url](#); Al Jazeera, Kurdish-led authorities to remove Syrians from al-Hol camp, 5 October 2020, [url](#)

<sup>362</sup> National (The), Syrian families released from Al Hol struggle for acceptance after ISIS trauma, 12 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>363</sup> Kurdistan24, Kurdish Asayish forces besieged Syrian government bakery in Qamishlo: SOHR, 9 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>364</sup> COAR, Mapping and Assessing Release and Reintegration Models from NE Syria Camps, 27 February 2022, [url](#)



## 4. Members of and persons perceived to be collaborating with the Syrian Democratic Forces/Kurdish People's Protection Units

According to a Syrian academic interviewed by the EUAA, there were no specific criteria of a profile (such as place of origin, ethnic origin or family ties) that would make someone more likely to be perceived as having links to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) or the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). Since the YPG-led SDF has Arabs as well as other ethnic groups in their ranks, being Kurdish or hailing from a predominantly Kurdish region would not automatically lead to being perceived as collaborating with SDF or YPG. Rather, it would be locals or informants hiding among the local population who would identify collaborators.<sup>365</sup>

### 4.1 Targeting by the Syrian National Army (SNA)

The Syrian National Army (SNA) is an entity originally formed in December 2017 by the oppositional Syrian Interim Government based in Turkey through the unification of rebel factions fighting in Afrin and northern Aleppo governorate.<sup>366</sup> Although the main objective behind the formation of the SNA had been to unite all the different military factions that fought during the Turkish military operations in Syria<sup>367</sup>, each faction retained its own command and formation under a central umbrella.<sup>368</sup> The SNA has consequently been characterised by internal rivalries, mergers and splits.<sup>369</sup> SNA components were mainly present in northern Aleppo governorate, and to a lesser extent in Idlib, Raqqa and Hasaka governorates.<sup>370</sup> Turkey has supplied the SNA with training, salaries and weapons in exchange for using SNA fighters in its military operations. Laying the ground for collaboration between the Turkish state and the SNA was among other factors a common enemy, first the GoS but also later the Syrian Kurds representing the political party PYD and its military wing YPG.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Syrian academic, email correspondence, 25 April 2022

<sup>366</sup> Syria Direct, The Syrian National Army: For the Syrian revolution or against the Kurds?, 15 October 2019, [url](#)

<sup>367</sup> The Turkish military operations were 'Euphrates Shield' in 2016/2017, 'Olive Branch' in 2018, and 'Peace Spring' in 2019. For a map breaking down the three regions resulting from these military operations which are now controlled by the Turkish-backed SNA, please see map on p. 3 of this report: Al-Hilu, K., The Turkish Intervention in Northern Syria: One Strategy, Discrepant Policies, EUI, 14 January 2021, [url](#)

<sup>368</sup> Saban, N., The Past, Present, and Future of the Syrian National Army, Al Sharq Strategic Research, 31 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>369</sup> Carter Center (The), The State Of The Syrian National Army - Shifting networks of the Turkish-backed armed opposition in Syria's Northwest, March 2022, [url](#), p. 1; Al-Monitor, Turkey aims to keep tensions high in northeast Syria through targeted killings, 18 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>370</sup> Saban, N., The Past, Present, and Future of the Syrian National Army, Al Sharq Strategic Research [Infograph, Map], 31 August 2021, [url](#); Carter Center (The), The State Of The Syrian National Army - Shifting networks of the Turkish-backed armed opposition in Syria's Northwest, March 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>371</sup> Clingendael Institute, Strategies of Turkish proxy warfare in northern Syria, Turkey and the armed Syrian opposition: From Free Syrian Army to Syrian National Army, November 2019, [url](#)





In areas under their control, the SNA reportedly perpetrated torture, sexual violence, looting and arbitrary detention.<sup>372</sup> During the year 2021, SNA members were reportedly responsible for arbitrary arrests resulting in alleged cases of extrajudicial killings, incommunicado detention as well as looting and seizure of properties.<sup>373</sup>

STJ documented more than 200 arbitrary arrests in November and December 2020, with about half of the detained being released sometime later. A frequent charge brought against the arrested women and men was dealing with the Kurdish-led AANES, another charge was having performed the mandatory self-defence duty when the area was still under Kurdish control.<sup>374</sup> In February 2021, HRW reported arbitrary arrests of more than 60 Syrians (both Arabs and Kurds) carried out by SNA and Turkish forces in north-east Syria in 2019 and the subsequent transport of detainees to Turkey. According to the families of some of the arrested, the detainees were members of the PYD, but only held administrative positions and never fought with the YPG. In October 2020 five of the 63 detainees received life sentences in Turkey. A review by HRW of the Turkish case documents revealed that in most cases the Turkish authorities provided no evidence that 'the detainees were active fighters with the Kurdish-led authorities or that they committed crimes'.<sup>375</sup>

An Afrin-based human rights organisation reported 14 arrests of civilians at the beginning of April 2022 on charges of having previously dealt with the AANES. A court affiliated with the Turkish backed Military Police in the area sentenced a local resident to three years in prison for having 'intelligence contact and affiliation with the Kurdish Protection Units (YPG) and the Autonomous Administration'. In Jindires district, two men were arrested by a local SNA faction, one for previously having performed his compulsory military service for the AANES, the other for doing guard shifts at the time the region was under Kurdish control.<sup>376</sup>

A woman arrested in Afrin in 2018 and released two years later described how she and her fellow detainees were held in a prison run by the SNA faction Hamza Division, where they were subjected to various forms of torture and rape. One of the accusations levelled against her was being associated with the PKK and the GoS<sup>377</sup>, however, no formal charges were ever brought against her, nor was there an official legal process.<sup>378</sup>

In May 2021, a man detained by a SNA faction in Tall Abyad reportedly died under torture.<sup>379</sup> In September 2021, another SNA faction arrested a man during a home raid in Ras Al-Ayn on charges of having dealings with the SDF. Several days later the faction handed over his dead body to his family, apparently having suffered torture in custody.<sup>380</sup> STJ reported on the arrest

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<sup>372</sup> GCR2P, R2P Monitor, Issue 60 (1 March 2022), 1 March 2022, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>373</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 16, 24-25, 29-30

<sup>374</sup> STJ, Syria: 237 Persons Arrested in "Peace Spring" and "Olive Branch" Territories — in November and December 2020, 22 January 2021, [url](#)

<sup>375</sup> HRW, Illegal Transfers of Syrians to Turkey, 3 February 2021, [url](#)

<sup>376</sup> NPA, In week... Syria's north witnesses casualties, arrests by Turkish-backed factions, 15 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>377</sup> Turkey considers the YPG to be an extension of the PKK, see WINEP, Turkey vs. the YPG: What's Next?, 16 November 2021, [url](#)

<sup>378</sup> Jerusalem Post (The), Erdogan's secret prisons in Syria, 15 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>379</sup> STJ, Northeast Syria: Two Men Die from Torture and Medical Negligence, 20 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>380</sup> SNHR, 1,271 Civilians, Including 299 Children, 134 Women, and 104 Victims of Torture, Killed in Syria in 2021, 1 January 2022, [url](#), p. 17; STJ, Northeast Syria: Two Men Die from Torture and Medical Negligence, 20 January 2022, [url](#)





of eight men and one woman in September 2021 in Ras Al-Ayn and Tall Abyad by SNA-affiliated factions on charges of ‘dealing with the Autonomous Administration’ or, in one case, on claims that the man’s son had joined the SDF. One of the detainees died in detention after having been tortured by members of the Suqour Al-Sunna armed group.<sup>381</sup>

In March 2022, STJ reported two cases of deaths in SNA custody. A man who had tried to negotiate payment for the release of his nephew (who had previously been arrested for allegedly being affiliated with the PKK) was then himself detained, severely beaten and subsequently died in custody.<sup>382</sup> Another man was arrested on his way from Jalama to Jindires in Afrin region and accused of working for the YPG, even though he had reportedly been previously arrested by the YPG. Shortly after, the dead body of the man was delivered to his family, bearing marks of torture.<sup>383</sup>

There were reports of confiscation of property and looting affecting the local population living in SNA-held territories.<sup>384</sup> For example, by October 2020 in the town Ras Al-Ayn an estimated 800 homes had been seized by the SNA factions Hamza Division and Sultan Murad Division controlling the town. The homes had belonged to Kurdish and Arab residents affiliated with institutions of the AANES.<sup>385</sup>

International Crisis Group noted in a November 2021 report with reference to local sources that Turkish forces continued to attack senior YPG members along the Turkish-Syrian border and buffer zone on several occasions, thereby allegedly also killing civilians, as a senior SDF member claimed.<sup>386</sup> Drone strikes targeting individuals linked to the Kurdish-led AANES were reported in Ayn Al-Arab and Qamishli in the last quarter of 2021, leading to civilian casualties. The UNCOI noted that the targeting appeared deliberate and that it was likely that Turkish drones were used in the attacks. Turkish authorities have not admitted their involvement.<sup>387</sup> In 2022, several SDF commanders were killed in targeted Turkish air strikes.<sup>388</sup>

For violations committed by the SNA against the local Kurdish population in general, please refer to Section 10. Kurds.

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<sup>381</sup> STJ, Syria: 52 Arrested in “Olive Branch” and “Peace Spring Strips” in September 2021, 15 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 3-5

<sup>382</sup> STJ, Afrin: Ahrar al-Sharqiya Tortures a Civilian to Death, 1 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>383</sup> STJ, Afrin: Al-Sham Legion Tortured a Civilian to Death, 31 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>384</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 89; STJ, Syria: Sultan Murad and Mu’tasim Divisions Pillage the Industrial Zone in Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, 6 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>385</sup> Al-Hilu, K., The Turkish Intervention in Northern Syria: One Strategy, Discrepant Policies, EUI, 14 January 2021, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>386</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring up Raqqa’s shaky recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>387</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 99-101

<sup>388</sup> Asharq Al-Aswat, Ankara Announces Killing of 2 SDF Leaders in Northeastern Syria, 19 April 2022, [url](#); Rudaw, SDF commander vows to avenge fighters killed in drone strike, 24 July 2022



## 4.2 Targeting by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

Over the course of the reference period, ISIL carried out kidnappings and assassinations targeting SDF members<sup>389</sup>, persons working for the AANES, tribal leaders as well as civilians, predominantly in the countryside of Deir Ez-Zor governorate.<sup>390</sup> USDOS also reported that during the first three months of 2022, ISIL targeted persons affiliated with SDF and the AANES.<sup>391</sup>

In the January 2022 ISIL coordinated attack on Ghweiran/AI-Sina prison in Hasaka city<sup>392</sup> and ensuing clashes, at least 181 people were reportedly killed, among them 50 police, SDF members and prison guards.<sup>393</sup>

Regional media reported on cases of kidnapping carried out by ISIL during the reference period, including several such cases in the first quarter of 2022 alone.<sup>394</sup> In some of these cases, persons were kidnapped and subsequently killed, such as in the case of a civilian killed in January 2022 for allegedly cooperating with the SDF<sup>395</sup> and two SDF members found dead in Deir Ez-Zor in March 2022.<sup>396</sup>

Tribal leaders became potential assassination targets for ISIL when they were perceived to be supportive of SDF authority.<sup>397</sup> In the summer of 2020, a sheikh from the Aqidat tribe and a spokesperson for the same tribe were killed in SDF-held areas, with ISIL claiming

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<sup>389</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), Executive summary

<sup>390</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), Executive summary; NPA, SDF kills ISIS leader and arrests another in Syria's Deir ez-Zor, 16 February 2022, [url](#); NPA, داعش يتبنى اختطاف شخص وقتله شرقي دير الزور [ISIL claims kidnapping and killing of person in eastern Deir ez-Zor], 13 January 2022, [url](#); NPA, ISIS suspect arrested in Syria's Deir ez-Zor, 30 November 2021, [url](#); Syria TV, العثور على جثتي عنصرين من "قسد" خطفهما "داعش" شرقي دير الزور [Bodies of two SDF members found who were kidnapped by ISIL in eastern Deir ez-Zor], 29 March 2022, [url](#); NPA, ISIS claims responsibility for killing tribal notable in Syria's Deir ez-Zor, 3 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>391</sup> USDOD, Operation Inherent Resolve, Lead Inspector General Report to the US Congress, January 1, 2022 – March 31, 2022, 3 May 2022, [url](#), p. 73

<sup>392</sup> OHCHR, Press briefing notes on Syria, 25 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>393</sup> BBC News, Kurdish-led forces say they have retaken Syrian prison seized by IS, 26 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>394</sup> Syria TV, العثور على جثتي عنصرين من "قسد" خطفهما "داعش" شرقي دير الزور [Bodies of two SDF members found who were kidnapped by ISIL in eastern Deir ez-Zor], 29 March 2022, [url](#); Al-Hurra, داعش وجماعات مسلحة تبتز العائلات الخطف لأجل الفدية. [Kidnapping for ransom – ISIL and armed groups extort Syrian families], 7 March 2022, [url](#); Asharq Al-Awsat, داعش تكثف عملياتها باتجاه الخطف خلايا «داعش» [ISIL cells intensify their kidnapping operations], 28 February 2022, [url](#); NPA, العثور على جثتي عنصرين من "قسد" خطفهما "داعش" شرقي دير الزور [ISIL claims kidnapping and killing of person in eastern Deir ez-Zor], 13 January 2022, [url](#); Xeber24, داعش يخطف عددا من المدنيين في دير الزور [ISIL kidnaps a number of civilians in Deir ez-Zor], 3 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>395</sup> NPA, داعش يتبنى اختطاف شخص وقتله شرقي دير الزور [ISIL claims kidnapping and killing of person in eastern Deir ez-Zor], 13 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>396</sup> Syria TV, العثور على جثتي عنصرين من "قسد" خطفهما "داعش" شرقي دير الزور [Bodies of two SDF members found who were kidnapped by ISIL in eastern Deir ez-Zor], 29 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>397</sup> UN Security Council, Twenty-eighth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities, S/2021/655, 21 July 2021, [url](#), para. 33; International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 22



responsibility.<sup>398</sup> In November 2021, ISIL claimed responsibility for the assassination of a tribal sheikh in Suwar district about 40 kilometres north of the Deir Ez-Zor city. An ISIL-affiliated outlet claimed that the sheikh was killed because of his collaboration with the SDF.<sup>399</sup>

ISIL further targeted civilians cooperating with the SDF<sup>400</sup>, local teachers and civil servants accused of collaboration, as well as clerics supporting the SDF.<sup>401</sup> In one incident, ISIL threatened dozens of people from the town of Jadeed Akidat, by publishing a list of their names and describing them as ‘apostates’ because of affiliations with the SDF, further saying that if they did not ‘repent’ they would be killed and their homes destroyed.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Koontz, K. and Waters, G., Between the Coalition, ISIS, and Assad: Courting the Tribes of Deir ez-Zor, MEI, 3 November 2020, [url](#)

<sup>399</sup> NPA, ISIS claims responsibility for killing tribal notable in Syria’s Deir ez-Zor, 3 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>400</sup> International Crisis Group, Containing a Resilient ISIS in Central and North-eastern Syria, 18 July 2022, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>401</sup> Al-Monitor, Kurdish-led forces intensify crackdown on Islamic State cells in northeast Syria, 30 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>402</sup> Abu Layla, O., How Iranian Militias Have Swallowed Deir Ezzor, WINEP, 16 February 2022, [url](#)





## 5. Persons perceived to be opposing the Syrian Democratic Forces/Kurdish People's Protection Units

### 5.1 Profiles perceived as opposing Syrian Democratic Forces/Kurdish People's Protection Units and the Democratic Union Party

The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-led alliance backed by the United States<sup>403</sup>, have been described as the 'key powerbroker in north-eastern Syria'.<sup>404</sup> The SDF is a multi-ethnic force consisting of Kurds and Arabs, as well as Christians, Yezidis and Turkmen.<sup>405</sup> It operates through the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration<sup>406</sup>, an officially unrecognised government entity under the effective control of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is ideologically linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).<sup>407</sup> The PYD's military arm is the People's Protection Units (YPG)<sup>408</sup>, which forms a major component of the SDF.<sup>409</sup>

Kurdish forces as of mid-July 2022 controlled the territories east of the Euphrates River (Hasaka and parts of Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor and eastern Aleppo) with the exception of an area spanning north-eastern Raqqa and north-western Hasaka that is under the occupation of Turkish forces. West of the Euphrates, the Kurdish forces control the areas of Manbij and Tall Rifaat, located in the north-eastern and western parts of Aleppo governorate.<sup>410</sup>

Kurdish forces in the SDF-controlled areas have been targeting individuals with real or perceived links to a variety of groups or activities. Against the backdrop of ongoing intra-Kurdish tensions, the SDF continue to arbitrarily arrest persons who have links to political parties opposing the PYD or the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration<sup>411</sup> or criticise their policies.<sup>412</sup> These detainees included political activists<sup>413</sup>, humanitarian workers<sup>414</sup>, civil society activists and media professionals.<sup>415</sup> For information on the treatment of journalists by

<sup>403</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), pp. 1, 8

<sup>404</sup> Wilgenburg, W., Syrian Democratic Forces (Syria), ECFR, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>405</sup> Wilson Center, SDF's Arab majority rank Turkey as the biggest threat to NE Syria, 2019, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>406</sup> Wilgenburg, W., Syrian Democratic Forces (Syria), ECFR, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>407</sup> CSIS, Rescuing Aid in Syria, 14 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 6, 8

<sup>408</sup> SSG, Final Report and Recommendations, USIP, 24 September 2019, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>409</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>410</sup> Liveuamap, Syria [Map], 13 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>411</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 102

<sup>412</sup> SNHR, The Tenth Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances; Long Years of Constant Grief and Loss, 30 August 2021, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>413</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>414</sup> SNHR, The Tenth Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances; Long Years of Constant Grief and Loss, 30 August 2021, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>415</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 102



SDF/YPG, see Section 7.5 Targeting by the SDF/YPG of this report. The majority of these individuals were either affiliated to parties within the Kurdish National Council (KNC)<sup>416</sup> including the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)<sup>417</sup>, or worked for organisations closely aligned to the KNC.<sup>418</sup> The KNC has been long accused by the PYD of entertaining too close relations with Turkey and its proxy factions in Syria.<sup>419</sup> In other cases, as reported in Hasaka governorate in the first half of 2021, the SDF arrested teachers who taught students based on the GoS curriculum and opened fire on demonstrators protesting against a policy of the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration that was linked to a rise in fuel prices, killing at least seven people.<sup>420</sup>

Moreover, the SDF reportedly targeted individuals under the pretext of fighting terrorism.<sup>421</sup> The SDF, primarily through their anti-terrorism unit YAT [Yekîneyên Antî Teror], have been carrying out raids against suspected members of ISIL. During these campaigns, accused individuals have been arrested without judicial warrants and taken to unknown places. Some of the detainees were later released while others have reportedly disappeared.<sup>422</sup> Members of the SDF have reportedly also detained relatives of persons involved in the armed opposition/the Syrian National Army (SNA).<sup>423</sup> Moreover, there have been accusations that Kurdish militias displaced communities of Arabs and Turkmens in the context of anti-ISIL operations.<sup>424</sup>

In many reported cases of repression, detention and enforced disappearance of critics of the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration or SDF, those targeted were ethnic Arabs.<sup>425</sup> This included arbitrary arrests of Arabs who were protesting against Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration on issues such as poor services and high prices as well as the SDF's policy of forcibly conscripting Arab residents.<sup>426</sup> In late May and early June 2021, SDF personnel, in attempts to disperse crowds, opened fire on protesters in the (Arab-majority)<sup>427</sup> Manbij area of north-eastern Aleppo governorate<sup>428</sup>, killing several Arab protesters.<sup>429</sup>

<sup>416</sup> The KNC is a coalition of Syrian Kurdish political parties backed by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Iraq. The KNC's opposition to the PYD is based on the latter's links to the PKK and history of suppression of opposition parties. MEI, *Borders Beyond Borders: The Many (Many) Kurdish Political Parties of Syria*, October 2019, [url](#), pp. 6-7

<sup>417</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 103-104

<sup>418</sup> SHRC, *The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria*, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>419</sup> COAR, *PYD-KNC peace talks: Whither peace in Syria's northeast?*, 28 September 2020, [url](#)

<sup>420</sup> 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. 99, 106

<sup>421</sup> SNHR, *The Tenth Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances; Long Years of Constant Grief and Loss*, 30 August 2021, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>422</sup> SHRC, *The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria*, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>423</sup> SNHR, *The Tenth Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances; Long Years of Constant Grief and Loss*, 30 August 2021, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>424</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2022: Syria*, February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>425</sup> SNHR, *The Tenth Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances; Long Years of Constant Grief and Loss*, 30 August 2021, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>426</sup> SHRC, *The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria*, 9 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 50-51

<sup>427</sup> RFI, *Arab-Kurd unrest in Syria's Manbij leave 6 dead: monitor*, 2 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>428</sup> 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. 100

<sup>429</sup> RFI, *Arab-Kurd unrest in Syria's Manbij leave 6 dead: monitor*, 2 June 2021, [url](#)



The policy of forced conscription manifested in the arrest of hundreds of people in various Arab-majority areas controlled by the SDF following a conscription law issued by the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration in 2019.<sup>430</sup> According to the SNHR, conscription campaigns have also involved abductions and detentions of children.<sup>431</sup> Across various Kurdish-controlled areas, kidnappings with the aim of recruitment into the YPG and Revolutionary Youth Organisation were primarily targeting teenage Kurdish girls.<sup>432</sup>

## 5.2 Treatment of persons perceived as opposing SDF/YPG and PYD

### 5.2.1 Political opponents of the Democratic Union Party (PYD)

During the reference period, intra-Kurdish power-sharing negotiations aimed at unifying the PYD and KNC into a single Kurdish political party reportedly made progress towards an agreement<sup>433</sup>, with restrictions on the KNC's political activities relaxed as the talks progressed.<sup>434</sup> A new umbrella structure called 'Kurdish National Unity Parties' (PYNK), comprising 25 Kurdish parties including the PYD and various KNC-affiliated Kurdish parties, was formed in May 2020.<sup>435</sup>

Nonetheless, the reference period saw a number of reports of detentions of individuals perceived as holding views opposing the PYD, the most powerful political force in the Kurdish-held areas.<sup>436</sup> As the SNHR noted, the majority of these detainees (including political activists) were released, although in exceptional cases detainees died from torture in prisons of the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration.<sup>437</sup>

In one case highlighted by the UNCOI, Asayish arrested a member of the KDP (an affiliate of the KNC) at his home Hasaka city in May 2021, allegedly to have him testify in a corruption case. The following month, it was revealed that he had died in the city's military hospital, with his body found bearing marks of torture.<sup>438</sup>

In July 2021, masked persons in different towns arrested four KDP members, including two journalists. They were subsequently held incommunicado. Three of the detainees, including one of the two journalists, were reportedly freed in November 2021.<sup>439</sup> Further arrests of KDP members and local journalists, allegedly by a group linked to the PYD, were reported in

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<sup>430</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>431</sup> SNHR, The Tenth Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances; Long Years of Constant Grief and Loss, 30 August 2021, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>432</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 51

<sup>433</sup> WINEP, Intra-Kurdish Unity Talks in Northeastern Syria Are Potentially in Jeopardy, 20 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>434</sup> COAR, PYD-KNC peace talks: Whither peace in Syria's northeast?, 28 September 2020, [url](#)

<sup>435</sup> Orsam, Background of PYD-KNC Union Meetings in Syria, 10 February 2021, [url](#)

<sup>436</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022: Syria, February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>437</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>438</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 103

<sup>439</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 104



February 2022.<sup>440</sup> In February 2022, an unidentified armed group set the car of a lawyer affiliated to the KNC on fire<sup>441</sup>, while several arson attacks on KNC offices in Hasaka, Darbasiya, Malikiya and Kobane were reported in April 2022.<sup>442</sup> While the KNC blamed the PYD for setting the offices on fire<sup>443</sup>, the latter refuted these charges.<sup>444</sup>

In Arab-majority areas, protests against SDF rule became a common feature of life since 2017. While the SDF purports that it is run by a multi-ethnic coalition based on democratic principles, 'Arabs living under its rule claim it is dominated by Kurdish political interests, and run for their benefit', with local residents occupying the lowest positions under the governance of Kurdish-imposed military councils.<sup>445</sup> USDOS reported that 'protests generally occurred throughout the north-east on a variety of topics without interference from local authorities.'<sup>446</sup>

The UNCOI reported on violence committed against civilian protesters who were against specific policies of the Kurdish-led AANES. For example, in May 2021, SDF personnel in rural Hasaka governorate opened fire on demonstrators who were protesting a decision by the Kurdish-led AANES resulting in a threefold rise in fuel prices, killing at least seven individuals.<sup>447</sup> In late May/early June 2021, protests erupted in the Manbij area following a decision that mandated the conscription of men aged 18 to 21 (the decision was later revoked). SDF members opened fire at protesters<sup>448</sup>, killing five and injuring dozens of others.<sup>449</sup> The protests had ostensibly been triggered by a series of raids carried out by SDF units in search of males of conscription age.<sup>450</sup>

The SDF claimed that during these protests in Manbij, as well the May 2021 protests in Hasaka mentioned further above, some people allegedly used armed violence and attacked SDF military positions. As of August 2021, investigations into these incidents were reported to be ongoing.<sup>451</sup>

In September 2021, demonstrators and journalists in Qamishli who were covering protests against the arrests of KNC members and civilians were reportedly beaten by supporters of the Revolutionary Youth Movement<sup>452</sup>, an organisation described as an arm of the PKK.<sup>453</sup> According to Jusoor for Studies, this movement, alongside the Kurdistan Women Union (KWU), has been accused of 'multiple human rights violations' linked to the 'suppression and

<sup>440</sup> Kurdistan24, KNC calls on US to stop arrests and media restrictions in northern Syria, 21 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>441</sup> Kurdistan24, KNC calls on US to stop arrests and media restrictions in northern Syria, 21 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>442</sup> Al-Monitor, Intra-Syrian Kurdish tensions rise amid Turkey's new anti-PKK offensive, 20 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>443</sup> COAR, Under Pressure: New Plans in Turkey to Ease Syrians' 'Voluntary' Return, 3 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>444</sup> Al-Monitor, Intra-Syrian Kurdish tensions rise amid Turkey's new anti-PKK offensive, 20 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>445</sup> Syrian Observer (The), In Raqqa, SDF from Liberator to Occupier, 17 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>446</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 47-48

<sup>447</sup> 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. 99

<sup>448</sup> 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. 100

<sup>449</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 50-51

<sup>450</sup> COAR, Deadly SDF Crackdown as Conscription Sparks Menbij Unrest, 7 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>451</sup> 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. 101

<sup>452</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 105

<sup>453</sup> Jusoor for Studies, SDF and the Revolutionary Youth Organization: The nature of the relationship and its effects, 28 December 2021, [url](#)





confrontation of demonstrations and activists' who opposed the Kurdish-led AANES' policies. These two organisations launched 'repeated attacks on the offices, members and rallies organised by the "Kurdish National Council"', including an attack on the KNC office in Al-Darbasiyah in December 2021.<sup>454</sup>

The Kurdish-led AANES, starting from 2020, also closed down private schools that offered tuition in Arabic in Qamishli, arresting those operating them.<sup>455</sup> According to the SNHR, the SDF arbitrarily arrested 61 teachers between 1 January 2021 and 15 February 2021, including over matters relating to school curricula.<sup>456</sup> Amongst others, Asayish members arrested six teachers in Darbasiya (Hasaka governorate) in January 2022 who had been 'tutoring students enrolled in university exams on the government curriculum'.<sup>457</sup> These arrests were linked to the fact that from 2016 onwards, the Kurdish-led AANES, was removing the GoS' school curriculum in Kurdish-majority areas, replacing it with its own Kurdish curriculum. However, as the Kurdish graduation certificates were not recognised in other parts of the country and thus limited pupils' prospects of pursuing higher education, some parents sent their children to private schools or paid private tutors to teach them based on the Arabic GoS-accredited curriculum.<sup>458</sup>

During protests calling for the release of the teachers detained in January 2021, some participants were assaulted and ten protesters (including teachers and pupils) were arrested. As the UNCOI reported, prior to being released, the teachers were 'forced to sign a pledge that they would no longer tutor students per the government curriculum'. The following month, eight more teachers were detained on similar grounds in Amuda (also Hasaka governorate).<sup>459</sup>

## 5.2.2 Persons with (perceived) links to ISIL

For information regarding the treatment of persons with perceived links to ISIL, see also Section 3. Persons with (perceived) links to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) of this report.

## 5.2.3 Persons with (perceived) links to the Syrian National Army (SNA)/Turkish forces

During the reference period, Syrian human rights groups and other sources reported that the SDF intelligence service and Asayish arrested individuals of various profiles who were suspected of collaboration with the SNA and Turkish forces, including espionage for Turkish

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<sup>454</sup> Jusoor for Studies, SDF and the Revolutionary Youth Organization: The nature of the relationship and its effects, 28 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>455</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>456</sup> SNHR, Syrian Democratic Forces Have Arrested/ Detained at Least 61 Teachers Over Educational Curricula and for Forced Conscription Since the Beginning of 2021, 19 February 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>457</sup> 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. 106

<sup>458</sup> International Crisis Group, Syria: Shoring Up Raqqa's Shaky Recovery, 18 November 2021, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>459</sup> 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. 106





intelligence services.<sup>460</sup> In July 2020, for example, SDF intelligence arrested three Kurdish individuals in Kobane for allegedly ‘spying for Turkish intelligence’. Amongst others, they were accused of informing Turkish intelligence about military movements and of providing the coordinates of the venue of a local event which was subsequently targeted in a Turkish drone attack that left several people dead.<sup>461</sup> A similar case of arrest, followed by a confession, was reported in Deir Ez-Zor in October 2021.<sup>462</sup>

Individuals arrested for alleged espionage on behalf of Turkish intelligence also included SDF personnel. In November 2020, the SOHR reported that SDF military security arrested two Kurdish SDF members from Hasaka for ‘communicating with Turkish intelligence’. One of them, a driver of the SDF’s deputy commander-in-chief, reportedly confessed that he was receiving money for reporting to Turkish intelligence the movements of the deputy commander-in-chief. The other person was reportedly working as an SDF security guard and used to inform Turkish intelligence about military delegations and commanders.<sup>463</sup> In December 2020, a member of the border control from the Derbasiya countryside was arrested by Asayish. He was reportedly involved in human trafficking and ‘suspected of collaborating with Turkish-backed factions’.<sup>464</sup>

In November 2020, the SDF arrested a man during a raid on his home in a village in the northern suburbs of Raqqa on unspecified allegations that he was dealing with the SNA. He was taken to an undisclosed location.<sup>465</sup> The following month, Asayish arrested a couple in rural Hasaka ‘after the wife returned from a visit to her family in the area of rural Abu Racine, which is under the control of Turkish-backed factions’.<sup>466</sup> Most recently, in February 2022, a man and woman were arrested in the city of Manbij for allegedly ‘communicating with ISIS and Turkish forces’.<sup>467</sup>

According to the SNHR, Kurdish forces have also targeted civilians who were relatives of SNA members.<sup>468</sup> In June 2020, Asayish arrested a young woman in the Ayn Issa area (Raqqa governorate) whose father was working for the SNA. She was arrested while travelling to

<sup>460</sup> See, for example, SOHR, Security campaign | SDF intelligence arrests three persons in Ain Al-Arab (Kobani) for “spying for Turkish intelligence”, 10 July 2020, [url](#); SNHR, SDF arrested a civilian in Skeirou village in Raqqa suburbs on November 25, 29 November 2020, [url](#); SOHR, Al-Raqqa | Asayish Forces arrest young woman in rural Ain Issa, as her father works for Turkish-backed “National Army”, 16 June 2020, [url](#); ISW, Syria Situation Report: October 28 - November 10, 2020, 13 November 2020, [url](#)

<sup>461</sup> SOHR, Security campaign | SDF intelligence arrests three persons in Ain Al-Arab (Kobani) for “spying for Turkish intelligence”, 10 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>462</sup> ANHA, SDF captures MIT agent in rural Deir-ez-Zor, 28 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>463</sup> SOHR, Al-Raqqa | SDF intelligence arrests driver of “SDF commander-in-chief’s deputy” and another official for “communicating with Turkish intelligence”, 3 November 2020, [url](#)

<sup>464</sup> SOHR, For “collaborating with Turkish-backed factions” | “Asayish” arrests civilians in rural Hasakeh, and Al-Shabiba Al-Thawriya searches passers-by in al-Derbasiya streets, 27 December 2020, [url](#)

<sup>465</sup> SNHR, SDF arrested a civilian in Skeirou village in Raqqa suburbs on November 25, 29 November 2020, [url](#)

<sup>466</sup> SOHR, For “collaborating with Turkish-backed factions” | “Asayish” arrests civilians in rural Hasakeh, and Al-Shabiba Al-Thawriya searches passers-by in al-Derbasiya streets, 27 December 2020, [url](#)

<sup>467</sup> SOHR, Ongoing security campaign | “Intelligence” service and SDF arrest seven ISIS cells, including women and child, 18 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>468</sup> SNHR, The Tenth Annual Report on Enforced Disappearance in Syria on the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances; Long Years of Constant Grief and Loss, 30 August 2021, [url](#), p. 27





areas controlled by Turkish forces and their proxy factions. Following her arrest, the Asayish turned the woman over to the SDF intelligence service.<sup>469</sup>

Against the backdrop of Turkish efforts aimed at reaching out to disaffected local tribal actors in Kurdish-controlled areas<sup>470</sup>, the SDF arrested two sheikhs from Arab tribes in November 2020. The arrests were made after some tribal representatives had called for ‘a Turkish presence around Qamishli’.<sup>471</sup>

While little information could be found on the subsequent treatment of those detained for their alleged links to Turkish forces, in December 2020 it was reported that one person from Ain Issa (rural Raqqa governorate) who had been arrested for ‘spying and communicating with the Turkish intelligence and Turkish-backed factions’ died under torture. He had initially been arrested by Asayish, who then handed him over to the SDF national intelligence security department.<sup>472</sup>

### 5.3 Forced and child recruitment

As the SHRC reported, individuals continued to be targeted in 2021 in connection with the conscription law passed by the Kurdish-led AANES in 2019<sup>473</sup>, which applies to all Kurdish-controlled areas including most of Hasaka governorate, large parts of Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zor and the cities of Kobane and Manbij in eastern Aleppo governorate.<sup>474</sup> Raqqa city and its countryside, as well as Aleppo’s eastern countryside were the scene of large-scale arrest and recruitment campaigns in early 2021.<sup>475</sup>

Following a May 2021 amendment that expanded eligibility for conscription to those aged between 18 and 31 years, the SDF carried out large-scale campaigns in various Arab-majority communities to arrest<sup>476</sup> and forcibly recruit boys and girls born between 1990 and 2003. These campaigns were reported in the cities of Raqqa, Deir Ez-Zor, Qamishli, Hasaka, Ain Al-Arab, Al-Malikiyah and Al-Darbasiyah, amongst others. SDF units reportedly ‘pursued young men in their homes and arrested anyone who refused to comply with these decisions’.<sup>477</sup> In the city of Raqqa and nearby villages, for example, 150 men were arrested by the SDF in late May 2021 for avoiding conscription.<sup>478</sup> During the period from 1 January to 15 February 2021,

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<sup>469</sup> SOHR, Al-Raqqah | Asayish Forces arrest young woman in rural Ain Issa, as her father works for Turkish-backed “National Army”, 16 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>470</sup> COAR, Northeast Syria Social Tensions and Stability Monitoring: April Update, 28 May 2021, [url](#), p. 5; Syrian Observer (The), In Raqqa, SDF from Liberator to Occupier, 17 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>471</sup> ISW, Syria Situation Report: October 28 - November 10, 2020, 13 November 2020, [url](#)

<sup>472</sup> SOHR, Torture victims | Person dies in SDF intelligence service’s prison, after arrest for “communicating with the Turks and factions”, 2 December 2020, [url](#)

<sup>473</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>474</sup> Enab Baladi, Under guise of duty: patterns of coercion enabled by SDF’s draft law, 15 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>475</sup> SOHR, SDF’s mandatory conscription campaign | SDF arrests nearly 400 young men from al-Raqqah, and sends them to its centres, 12 March 2021, [url](#); Enab Baladi, Under guise of duty: patterns of coercion enabled by SDF’s draft law, 15 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>476</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>477</sup> Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, Syria: Manbij Military Council’s decision to stop forced conscription is not enough – civilians must be protected, 3 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>478</sup> Carter Center (The), Syria Weekly Conflict Summary, 24 - 30 May 2021, Syria Mapping Project, 2 June 2021, [url](#)



SNHR reported that teachers from the governorates of Hasaka, Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zor were arrested and dismissed by SDF for refusing military conscription.<sup>479</sup>

In Manbij city and its countryside, more than 150 local young men were arrested in 2021 with the aim of ‘enrolling them into forced conscription camps’.<sup>480</sup> With tensions rising due to deaths and injuries in ensuing protests in Manbij in late May/early June 2021 (for further information on these protests, see Section 5.2 Treatment of persons perceived as opposing SDF/YPG and PYD of this report), the SDF stopped these mass arrests and suspended conscription following agreements with tribal elders.<sup>481</sup> Meanwhile, the SHRC reported that the SDF resorted to carrying out individual arrests for recruitment purposes.<sup>482</sup>

The SDF and its components (including the YPG and the Women’s Protection Units (YPJ)), as well as the affiliated Asayish, have been reported to recruit and use children in large numbers, with approximately 500 cases documented by the United Nations between mid-2018 and mid-2020. Meanwhile, the UN Secretary-General noted that these cases had dropped significantly following the signing of a joint action plan against child recruitment with the United Nations in June 2019, with 119 cases recorded in 2020<sup>483</sup>, compared to 216 cases in the first half of 2019.<sup>484</sup> However, for the year 2021, the UN Secretary-General recorded an increase in cases of recruitment and use of children by the SDF to 221 cases (220 by the YPG/YPJ and one case by another component of SDF).<sup>485</sup> Other sources reported on the recruitment of minors by SDF in 2022<sup>486</sup>, although some sources pointed out that those minors who have joined SDF have done so voluntarily.<sup>487</sup>

Sources reported that recruitment of children into the ranks of PKK and its military arms was continuing into late 2021/early 2022<sup>488</sup>, including through kidnappings. According to the SHRC, most of these kidnappings have been targeting ‘young Kurdish girls, between the ages of 14 and 17’ who were then sent to closed camps where they were indoctrinated with PKK ideology.<sup>489</sup> The Kurdish Revolutionary Youth Movement and the Kurdistan Women Union (KWU) specifically have been accused of recruiting children<sup>490</sup> through ‘military and ideological

<sup>479</sup> SNHR, Syrian Democratic Forces Have Arrested/ Detained at Least 61 Teachers Over Educational Curricula and for Forced Conscription Since the Beginning of 2021, 19 February 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>480</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>481</sup> UNSG, Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018), 2504 (2020), 2533 (2020) and 2585 (2021), S/2021/735, 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 6

<sup>482</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 51

<sup>483</sup> UNSG, Children and armed conflict. Report of the Secretary-General, S/2021/437, 23 April 2021, [url](#), para 179

<sup>484</sup> UNSG, Children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, S/2021/398, 23 April 2021, [url](#), para. 7, 8, 10

<sup>485</sup> UNSG, Children and armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, S/2022/493, 23 June 2022, [url](#), para 189

<sup>486</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria - Military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate, 1 July 2022 [source: Child protection actor; International humanitarian coordinator, [url](#), pp. 38, 41, 47

<sup>487</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria – Military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate, 1 July 2022 [source: Child protection actor, Syrian Kurdish journalist, Wladimir van Wilgenburg], [url](#), pp. 40, 60, 71

<sup>488</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 107; Jusoor for Studies, SDF and the Revolutionary Youth Organization: The nature of the relationship and its effects, 28 December 2021, [url](#); SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 51; Denmark, DIS, Syria - Military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate, 1 July 2022 [source: expert from the International Crisis Group], [url](#), p. 46

<sup>489</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022 [url](#), p. 51

<sup>490</sup> Jusoor for Studies, SDF and the Revolutionary Youth Organization: The nature of the relationship and its effects, 28 December 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Child soldiers | “Al-Shabiba Al-Thawriyah” abducts and recruits displaced girl from Afrin countryside despite all demands to end children recruitment, 26 February 2022, [url](#)





training camps and events'.<sup>491</sup> Recruitment of minors by the PYD-affiliated Revolutionary Youth Movement was reported to take place at end of 2021 in north-eastern Syria and the Al-Shahbaa area of Aleppo.<sup>492</sup> According to the SOHR, in the first quarter of 2022, the Revolutionary Youth Movement was responsible for kidnapping 14 children aged between 13 and 16 years, including at least eight girls, across various Kurdish-controlled areas.<sup>493</sup>

A confidential source interviewed by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in January 2021 elaborated that the SDF conscripted minors without parental consent and kept them in training camps without informing their parents about their children's whereabouts. The source observed that the SDF indoctrinated the children for combat roles and—after a six- to eight-month training period—deployed them 'in combat operations and/or in tasks such as transporting ammunition, cleaning and manning checkpoints'. The same source pointed to at least 34 cases of children being conscripted by the SDF between May 2020 and January 2021, of whom 13 were then returned to their families following 'pressure from families, important local figures such as tribal leaders and the media'. It also recorded the death of one child in combat operations while in the service of SDF.<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> Jusoor for Studies, SDF and the Revolutionary Youth Organization: The nature of the relationship and its effects, 28 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>492</sup> STJ, Northeastern Syria: Complaints about Child Soldiers Falling on the Autonomous Administration's Deaf Ears, 13 January 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>493</sup> SOHR, SDF-controlled areas in January 2022 | Nearly 527 deaths in acts of violence...ongoing military escalation by Turkish forces...growing protests...and Ghwayran attack tops the agenda, 6 February 2022, [url](#); SOHR, SDF-held areas in February 2022 | 40 deaths in acts of violence...ongoing military escalation by Turkish forces...ongoing protests over worsening living conditions, 6 March 2022, [url](#); SOHR, SDF-held areas in March 2022 | 22 deaths in acts of violence...escalating public protests...disastrous living conditions and poor public services, 7 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>494</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, 14 June 2021, [url](#), p. 44





## 6. Persons associated with the Government of Syria (GoS)

### 6.1 Treatment of GoS officials, members of the Syrian Arab Army and pro-government fighters by different armed actors

Attacks and other acts of violence reported during the reference period targeted a variety of individuals affiliated with the GoS. These incidents included (attempted) assassinations of mayors<sup>495</sup>, members of city councils<sup>496</sup>, and the Dar'a Central Committee.<sup>497</sup> Attacks and assassinations also targeted government employees<sup>498</sup>, including members of intelligences services<sup>499</sup>, police officers<sup>500</sup>, former members of the Baath Party<sup>501</sup>, and persons affiliated with the GoS armed forces or pro-Assad militias.<sup>502</sup> In many of the cases found, the acts were carried out by unidentified armed men in the countryside of Dar'a<sup>503</sup> (where security deteriorated from June 2019 onwards)<sup>504</sup> and Quneitra governorate.<sup>505</sup>

<sup>495</sup> See, for example, 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. 27; SOHR, Eastern countryside of Daraa | New assassination targeting head of town collaborator with regime security services in southern Syria, 28 February 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Car bomb attack | Village mayor killed in Daraa, 23 December 2021, [url](#); NPA, Ten Individuals Lost Lives Within Week In Syria's Daraa, 20 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>496</sup> SOHR, Assassinations | Unknown assailants shoot dead chief of "Al-Sanamayn City Council", 26 October 2020, [url](#); SOHR, Armed attack | Member of Al-Quneitra Council assassinated in Al-Baath city, 16 February 2021, [url](#)

<sup>497</sup> SOHR, Two assassinations in few hours | Central Committee member and a deputy mayor killed in Daraa countryside, 9 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>498</sup> Al Monitor, Who's to blame for ongoing assassinations in Syria's Daraa province?, 10 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>499</sup> SOHR, Al-Suwaitdaa | In response to arresting civilian, local gunmen kidnap the governor's driver and member of intelligence service, 29 July 2020, [url](#); SOHR, Al-Quneitra | Regime officer and "collaborator" assassinated in southern countryside, while Israeli aircraft flies over Yarmouk Basin, 5 September 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Escalating attacks in Daraa | Five killed in three assassinations since morning, 10 January 2022, [url](#); NPA, Ten Individuals Lost Lives Within Week In Syria's Daraa, 20 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>500</sup> OHCHR, Syria: Bachelet warns of 'ticking time-bomb' as civilian killings mount, 8 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>501</sup> New Arab (The), Former Baath official, relatives killed in southern Syria: reports, 28 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>502</sup> SOHR, Assassination attempt | Unknown assailants shoot informer of "Air-Force Intelligence" in northern Homs, 7 September 2020, [url](#); Asharq Al-Awsat, Hezbollah Senior Official Killed in Syria's Southern Daraa Province, 28 June 2021, [url](#); Al Monitor, Who's to blame for ongoing assassinations in Syria's Daraa province?, 10 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>503</sup> See, for example, SOHR, Assassinations | Unknown assailants shoot dead chief of "Al-Sanamayn City Council", 26 October 2020, [url](#); SOHR, Eastern countryside of Daraa | New assassination targeting head of town collaborator with regime security services in southern Syria, 28 February 2021, [url](#); 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. 27; SOHR, Two assassinations in few hours | Central Committee member and a deputy mayor killed in Daraa countryside, 9 December 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Car bomb attack | Village mayor killed in Daraa, 23 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>504</sup> SOHR, Escalating attacks in Daraa | Five killed in three assassinations since morning, 10 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>505</sup> See, for example, SOHR, Armed attack | Member of Al-Quneitra Council assassinated in Al-Baath city, 16 February 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Al-Quneitra | Regime officer and "collaborator" assassinated in southern countryside, while Israeli aircraft flies over Yarmouk Basin, 5 September 2021, [url](#)





Between January 2020 and the end of 2021, at least nine mayors<sup>506</sup> and one deputy mayor were targeted in assassinations or attempted assassinations. For example, in December 2021, the deputy mayor of Enkhel town in the northern Dar'a countryside was killed by unknown gunmen who stormed the building of the local municipal assembly.<sup>507</sup> In another case recorded in the same month, a car bomb killed the mayor of Al-Naima village (eastern countryside of Dar'a) and injured members of his family.<sup>508</sup> In some of the cases, reports specified that the targeted mayors had been collaborating with the GoS security services.<sup>509</sup>

Targeted members of city councils included the chief of the Al-Sanamayn city council (northern countryside of Dar'a), who was shot dead by unknown assailants.<sup>510</sup> Another senior government official, a Dar'a Central Committee member who was in charge of the governorate's western sector, was assassinated by unidentified gunmen in the town of Tel Shihab (western Dar'a) in December 2021.<sup>511</sup>

Assassinations of members of pro-GoS forces in Dar'a included the June 2021 killing of a senior Hezbollah leader, Aref al-Jahmani, by unidentified gunmen while he was travelling off-duty on a highway. His militia, operating in Saida (eastern Dar'a), was believed to have staged missions, such as the killings of local opposition activists, for the Damascus-based intelligence division '215'<sup>512</sup>, a prison run by the Military Intelligence Directorate.<sup>513</sup>

Meanwhile, in Sweida governorate, in the aftermath of crackdowns by security forces on local protesters<sup>514</sup>, local militia members in late July 2020 abducted a member of the General Intelligence Department and the driver of Sweida's governor during a highway blockade.<sup>515</sup>

For more information on the situation in Dar'a and Sweida governorates, see [EUAA COI Report Syria: Security situation \(July 2021\)](#) and upcoming update.

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<sup>506</sup> NPA, Local mayor assassinated in Syria's eastern Daraa countryside, 28 January 2021, [url](#); 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. 27; SOHR, Collaborated with regime security services | Head of town dies of injuries sustained in eastern Daraa countryside, 1 February 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Eastern countryside of Daraa | New assassination targeting head of town collaborator with regime security services in southern Syria, 28 February 2021, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), Assassinations Continue in Daraa, With the Mayor of Atman as the Last of its Victims, 7 June 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Car bomb attack | Village mayor killed in Daraa, 23 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>507</sup> SOHR, Two assassinations in few hours | Central Committee member and a deputy mayor killed in Daraa countryside, 9 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>508</sup> SOHR, Car bomb attack | Village mayor killed in Daraa, 23 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>509</sup> SOHR, Collaborated with regime security services | Head of town dies of injuries sustained in eastern Daraa countryside, 1 February 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Eastern countryside of Daraa | New assassination targeting head of town collaborator with regime security services in southern Syria, 28 February 2021, [url](#)

<sup>510</sup> SOHR, Assassinations | Unknown assailants shoot dead chief of "Al-Sanamayn City Council", 26 October 2020, [url](#)

<sup>511</sup> SOHR, Two assassinations in few hours | Central Committee member and a deputy mayor killed in Daraa countryside, 9 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>512</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, Hezbollah Senior Official Killed in Syria's Southern Daraa Province, 28 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>513</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Branch 215. A Slaughterhouse in Syria, 3 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>514</sup> HRW, Syria: Protesters Describe Beatings, Arrests, 28 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>515</sup> SOHR, Al-Suwaidaa | In response to arresting civilian, local gunmen kidnap the governor's driver and member of intelligence service, 29 July 2020, [url](#)





## 6.2 Civilians perceived as supporting the GoS

There were multiple reports of civilians being targeted with guns or improvised explosive devices (IED) for alleged acts perceived as collaboration with GoS entities, including its security services.<sup>516</sup> Amongst others, unidentified assailants carried out attempted or successful assassinations of alleged informants/collaborators of the Air-Defence Intelligence (in Dar'a)<sup>517</sup>, the Airforce Intelligence Directorate (in Dar'a<sup>518</sup> and the northern countryside of Homs<sup>519</sup>), and the Department of Military Intelligence (mostly in Dar'a<sup>520</sup> but also in Quneitra<sup>521</sup>). In two cases of assassination of alleged collaborators from early 2022, the reports indicated that those targeted were the son of an employee of a state-run TV channel<sup>522</sup> and the son of a former army general, respectively.<sup>523</sup>

### 6.2.1 Targeting of reconciled former opposition fighters and other persons associated with reconciliation

During the reference period, sources reported a number of targeted killings of former armed opposition members by unidentified gunmen in Dar'a.<sup>524</sup> In late 2021, SACD reported a 'sweep' of assassinations of young men in Dar'a who had undergone the so-called reconciliation process.<sup>525</sup> These assassinations targeted reconciled individuals who had afterwards joined the Military Intelligence Division or collaborated with it, but also others who were no longer involved with any armed force.<sup>526</sup>

<sup>516</sup> See, for example, SOHR, Assassination attempt | Unknown assailants shoot informer of "Air-Force Intelligence" in northern Homs, 7 September 2020, [url](#); SOHR, Southern Syria | New assassination targeting collaborator with security services in northern countryside of Daraa governorate, 14 January 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Deteriorating security in Daraa | Unknown gunmen assassinate regime "collaborator", 2 February 2021, [url](#); NPA, Four killed by anti-government militants in Syria's Daraa, 11 July 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Escalating attacks in Daraa | Five killed in three assassinations since morning, 10 January 2022, [url](#);

<sup>517</sup> SOHR, Assassination attempt | Unknown gunmen open fire on "informant" of "Air-Defence Intelligence" in eastern Daraa, 6 January 2021, [url](#);

<sup>518</sup> NPA, Four killed by anti-government militants in Syria's Daraa, 11 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>519</sup> SOHR, Assassination attempt | Unknown assailants shoot informer of "Air-Force Intelligence" in northern Homs, 7 September 2020, [url](#)

<sup>520</sup> SOHR, Deteriorating security in Daraa | Unknown gunmen assassinate regime "collaborator", 2 February 2021, [url](#); SOHR, Escalating attacks in Daraa | Five killed in three assassinations since morning, 10 January 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Ongoing security chaos in Daraa | Unknown gunmen assassinate "collaborator" with Military Intelligence Branch, 16 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>521</sup> SOHR, Attacked two days ago | "Collaborator" with regime security services dies of his wounds in southern Al-Quneitra, 24 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>522</sup> SOHR, Southern Syria | New assassination targeting collaborator with security services in northern countryside of Daraa governorate, 14 January 2021, [url](#)

<sup>523</sup> SOHR, Security chaos in Daraa | Unidentified gunmen assassinate collaborator with regime forces in western countryside, 27 January 2021, [url](#)

<sup>524</sup> See, for example, STJ, Fresh Wave of Violence Storms Already Vulnerable "Settlement Agreement" in Daraa, 10 May 2020, [url](#); SOHR, Assassinations | Unknown assailants shoot dead chief of "Al-Sanamayn City Council", 26 October 2020, [url](#); SOHR, Daraa since early 2022 | 12 attacks kill 11 people, mostly civilians, 11 January 2022, [url](#); UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic [A/HRC/45/31], 14 August 2020, [url](#), para. 17; Carter Center (The), Syria Weekly Conflict Summary 22-28 February 2021, 3 March 2021, [url](#); 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. 25

<sup>525</sup> Detailed information on the so-called reconciliation agreements and impact on the population is available in the EUAA COI Report: [Syria - Exercise of authority in recaptured areas \(January 2020\)](#)

<sup>526</sup> SACD, Assassinations sweep Daraa province with regime top suspect, 10 December 2021, [url](#)





Other unclaimed assassinations, reported in autumn 2020 in Rural Damascus, targeted prominent civilian figures who had mediated reconciliation deals between the GoS and opposition fighters.<sup>527</sup> These included the killing of Sheikh Mohammed Adnan Afyouni, one of Syria's most senior Sunni clerics, who in 2016 had played a 'highly active' behind-the-scenes role in the reconciliation agreement in the then-opposition-held towns of Qudsaya and Hameh.<sup>528</sup> Moreover, in late 2020 an IED explosion targeted the car of a member of the local reconciliation committee in the town of Ataman in Dar'a's western countryside.<sup>529</sup>

## 6.2.2 Targeting by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an armed group which emerged in early 2017 as the successor organisation of Jabhat al-Nusra (an al-Qaeda affiliate)<sup>530</sup>, as of mid-April 2022 controlled the north-western half of Idlib, areas in western Aleppo governorate, parts of north-eastern Latakia, and north Hama.<sup>531</sup>

According to the UNCOI, as of early February 2022, HTS subjected its perceived political opponents to a 'pattern of arbitrary detention' that was part of a 'systematic effort to stifle political dissent'.<sup>532</sup> The group has a history of executing civilians for a number of offences based on sentences handed down by sharia courts, including for espionage<sup>533</sup>, with executions 'frequently carried out in secret, usually in buildings occupied by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham's security apparatus'.<sup>534</sup>

A number of individuals were targeted based on allegations of collaboration with the GoS. For example, in April 2020, a former member of parliament was put to death for allegedly passing on information to pro-GoS forces.<sup>535</sup> In June 2021, SNHR reported that HTS detained five civilians in Idlib for their alleged involvement in communicating and reconciling with the GoS.<sup>536</sup> The group executed several persons it accused of having provided coordinates of military positions<sup>537</sup> or other details about the local situation to the GoS forces<sup>538</sup>, including a

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<sup>527</sup> SOHR, IED attacks | Explosion targets prominent "reconciliation" figure in Zakyah, Rif Dimashq, 14 September 2020, [url](#); AP, Report: Bombing kills Syrian cleric key to deals with rebels, 22 October 2020, [url](#)

<sup>528</sup> Makki, D., Assassination of Top Cleric Invokes New Challenges & Old Memories in Syria, Newlines Institute, 10 November 2020, [url](#)

<sup>529</sup> SOHR, IED attacks | Explosion targets member of "reconciliation commission" in western Daraa, 21 November 2020, [url](#)

<sup>530</sup> CSIS, Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), n.d., [url](#)

<sup>531</sup> Liveuamap, Syria [Map], n.d., [url](#)

<sup>532</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 54, 67, 72

<sup>533</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 67

<sup>534</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/44/61, 3 September 2020, [url](#), para. 94

<sup>535</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/44/61, 3 September 2020, [url](#), para. 94

<sup>536</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 31

<sup>537</sup> See, for example, SOHR, Confessing collaboration with regime in documentary movie | HTS executes young man and woman from Idlib, 11 January 2022, [url](#); SOHR, For "collaborating with regime and providing them with coordinates of officers' locations" | HTS executes mosque imam "preacher" in Idlib, 18 February 2022, [url](#); SOHR, On charges of "communicating with Syrian regime" | HTS executes man from Idlib, 17 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>538</sup> SOHR, HTS executes a person in Idlib for espionage, 1 April 2020, [url](#)



young man and woman<sup>539</sup> and an imam in early 2022.<sup>540</sup> In January 2022, it was reported that the Idlib-based ‘Salvation Government’ and HTS media agencies posted a documentary film that showed several alleged collaborators confessing to ‘dealing with regime forces, informing coordinates for military positions, detonating IEDs in residential positions and providing coordinates to target residential areas with warplanes’.<sup>541</sup>

Moreover, the UNCOI pointed to reports and witness accounts indicating that HTS confiscated properties of individuals who fled the area or were perceived as political opponents, including alleged GoS supporters. The UNCOI also reported that HTS targeted the property of minority groups such as Christians.<sup>542</sup>

### 6.2.3 Targeting by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)

ISIL, as reported in March 2021, targeted and detained ‘perceived enemies, including alleged supporters or members of armed opposition groups or the Government and its forces’.<sup>543</sup> A Syrian academic interviewed by the EUAA noted that there are numerous reports of incidents where ISIL selectively targeted SAA soldiers and other members of the GoS security forces, government employees, Baath Party officials and tribal notables.<sup>544</sup> Such incidents were mostly reported in Raqqa and Deir Ez-Zor (including the Badia region).<sup>545</sup> ISIL reportedly also carried out attacks in Dar’a governorate, where it claimed responsibility for at least 37 attacks between January 2020 and April 2022, which targeted SAA soldiers, members of the intelligence services, Baath Party officials, former opposition fighters, and civilians.<sup>546</sup> For example, in April 2020, the group claimed responsibility for assassinating the Secretary of the Baath Party’s Nawa Branch (Dar’a governorate)<sup>547</sup> while suspected ISIL gunmen killed a woman accused of communicating with GoS forces in the eastern countryside of Deir Ez-Zor.<sup>548</sup> In May 2020, ISIL executed four people in the Al-Sukhnah area in the Homs countryside for ‘providing the regime forces with information about ISIS locations’.<sup>549</sup> In May 2022, ISIL claimed responsibility for two bombings south of Damascus which killed two members of local militia committees affiliated with the Fourth Division.<sup>550</sup>

<sup>539</sup> SOHR, For “collaborating with regime and providing them with coordinates of officers’ locations” | HTS executes mosque imam “preacher” in Idlib, 18 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>540</sup> SOHR, For “collaborating with regime and providing them with coordinates of officers’ locations” | HTS executes mosque imam “preacher” in Idlib, 18 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>541</sup> SOHR, Confessing collaboration with regime in documentary movie | HTS executes young man and woman from Idlib, 11 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>542</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 72

<sup>543</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 72

<sup>544</sup> Syrian academic, email correspondence, 25 April 2022

<sup>545</sup> New Arab (The), Islamic State group militants kill three regime fighters in Syrian Desert, 22 June 2022, [url](#); VOA, IS Kills 9 Pro-Regime Fighters in Eastern Syria, Monitor Says, 23 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>546</sup> Syrian academic, email correspondence, 25 April 2022

<sup>547</sup> ISW, Syria Situation Report: April 1 - 14, 2020, 16 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>548</sup> SOHR, ISIS cells kill a woman in Al-Zar village for “communicating with regime forces”, 7 April 2020, [url](#); Carter Center (The), Weekly Conflict Summary | 6 - 12 April 2020, 12 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>549</sup> SOHR, ISIS resurgence | Four people executed for “spying for regime”, 17 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>550</sup> COAR, Islamic State Claims Responsibility for Damascus Bombings, 23 May 2022, [url](#)





## 6.2.4 Arrests by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)

There were several reports of members of the SDF arresting individuals with links to the GoS, including several Baath Party members from the party's Hasaka branch<sup>551</sup> and members of the Arab Al-Baggara tribe in Deir Ez-Zor (on allegations that they were recruiting people to join GoS-funded local armed resistance units 'to undermine the SDF').<sup>552</sup> The SDF also arrested a number of persons on accusations of spying/collaborating with the GoS or Iranian militias, including civilians<sup>553</sup> and members of the SDF<sup>554</sup> or the Kurdish-led AANES.<sup>555</sup> For example, in June 2021, in Ain Issa city in the northern countryside of Raqqa governorate, four SDF members were arrested for spying for the GoS. According to SDF claims, the men were recruited and paid by GoS intelligence services to carry out assassinations against SDF commanders.<sup>556</sup> In another case, the SDF and international coalition troops in February 2022 arrested nearly 30 people in Al-Basira city (Deir Ez-Zor governorate) for allegedly collaborating with Iranian militias, based on recorded conversations between the arrested individuals and Iranian militias located nearby.<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>551</sup> SOHR, SDF-held areas in March 2022 | 22 deaths in acts of violence...escalating public protests...disastrous living conditions and poor public services, 7 April 2022, [url](#); Asharq Al-Awsat, SDF Arrests 4 Members of Baath Party in Syria's Hasakeh, 15 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>552</sup> COAR, Northeast Syria Social Tensions and Stability Monitoring: April Update, 28 May 2021, [url](#), pp. 2-3

<sup>553</sup> SOHR, Security campaign | SDF and Coalition forces arrest person in eastern Deir Ezzor for "working for ISIS cells", 4 September 2021, [url](#); SOHR, "Dealing with Iranian militias" | SDF arrests nearly 30 collaborators during raid campaign with "International Coalition" in Deir Ezzor, 9 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>554</sup> SOHR, For "spying for regime" | SDF arrest four agents recruited by the regime intelligence service to assassinate commanders in Ain Issa, 26 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>555</sup> COAR, Northeast Syria Social Tensions and Stability Monitoring: April Update, 28 May 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>556</sup> SOHR, For "spying for regime" | SDF arrest four agents recruited by the regime intelligence service to assassinate commanders in Ain Issa, 26 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>557</sup> SOHR, "Dealing with Iranian militias" | SDF arrests nearly 30 collaborators during raid campaign with "International Coalition" in Deir Ezzor, 9 February 2022, [url](#)





## 7. Journalists and other media professionals

### 7.1 General overview

Human rights organisations indicate that journalists and media workers in Syria were exposed to major risks and threats during the reference period<sup>558</sup>, including arrests and detention<sup>559</sup>, abductions<sup>560</sup>, physical danger<sup>561</sup> and attacks<sup>562</sup> as well as killings.<sup>563</sup> The Reporters Sans Frontières's (RSF) World Press Freedom Index ranked Syria 174<sup>th</sup> in 2020, 173<sup>rd</sup> in 2021 and 171<sup>st</sup> in 2022 out of 180 countries.<sup>564</sup> Freedom House described Syria as not free, with an aggregate freedom score of 1/100 for 2021 and 2022. Freedom of press was reported to be restricted and journalists faced censorship, torture and death while in custody.<sup>565</sup> According to the Global Impunity Index 2021 of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Syria ranked second among the 12 countries with the highest levels of impunity in the world, indicating that the country had the second-lowest prosecution rate in connection to the deaths of journalists.<sup>566</sup>

Journalists were targeted by various parties involved in the conflict in Syria: the GoS, Turkish-backed forces, forces affiliated with the Kurdish-led AANES, as well as groups such as HTS and ISIL.<sup>567</sup> According to RSF, although the situation for journalists remains extremely dangerous throughout Syria, the few areas that the GoS has not yet retaken pose a particularly high risk for journalists.<sup>568</sup> The report of the UN Secretary General for April 2020 specifically indicated that in areas under the control of various non-state armed groups in the north of Syria, journalists were targeted for allegedly belonging to an opposing party or for being critical of the armed group controlling the area.<sup>569</sup> According to a January 2022 article by RSF, independent media professionals are almost certainly perceived as enemies and 'could be crushed between the fronts' in areas not controlled by the GoS. Additionally, journalists and media personnel have repeatedly faced direct attacks.<sup>570</sup>

<sup>558</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 27; Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022: Syria, February 2022, [url](#); RSF, Syria, 2022, [url](#)

<sup>559</sup> SHRC, The 19th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, January 2021, [url](#), p. 33; RSF, Syria, 2022, [url](#)

<sup>560</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 27; SCM, Syria: The Black Hole for Media Work - 10 Years of Violations, May 2021, [url](#), pp. 33-34; RSF, Syria, 2022, [url](#)

<sup>561</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022: Syria, February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>562</sup> SCM, Syria: The Black Hole for Media Work - 10 Years of Violations, May 2021, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>563</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 27; SHRC, The 19th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, January 2021, [url](#), p. 33; SCM, Syria: The Black Hole for Media Work - 10 Years of Violations, May 2021, [url](#), p. 39; RSF, Syria, 2022, [url](#)

<sup>564</sup> RSF, Syria, 2022, [url](#)

<sup>565</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2021: Syria, March 2021, [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022: Syria, February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>566</sup> CPJ, Killers of journalists still get away with murder, 28 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>567</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>568</sup> RSF, Germany: Second group of endangered journalists rescued from Syria, 2 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>569</sup> UNSG, Implementation of resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018) and 2504 (2020), S/2020/327, 23 April 2020, [url](#), para. 12

<sup>570</sup> RSF, Germany: Second group of endangered journalists rescued from Syria, 7 February 2022, [url](#)



SHRC<sup>571</sup> and CPJ documented four killings of media workers and journalists in 2020<sup>572</sup>, while<sup>573</sup> the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) recorded six cases of extrajudicial killings and executions of journalists in 2020 compared to 12 in 2019 and 27 in 2018.<sup>574</sup> In 2021, SHRC recorded the killing of one civil defence journalist<sup>575</sup>, while CPJ did not cite any killing of a journalist during this period.<sup>576</sup> For the period January to May 2022, the SNHR had not registered any murders of journalists or media workers.<sup>577</sup>

In 2020, SCM reported on 12 attacks against media professionals, defined as physical violence, compared to two in 2019 and three in 2018<sup>578</sup>, while SHRC documented four incidents, in which journalists and media workers were injured in 2020<sup>579</sup> and nine such incidents in 2021.<sup>580</sup>

In terms of detentions of media professionals, CPJ listed four cases each in 2020 and 2021.<sup>581</sup> For 2021, SHRC<sup>582</sup> counted 33 arrests of media professionals, noting that SDF and associated security agencies were responsible for 19 of these, followed by security agencies of the GoS with seven arrests, HTS with six arrests and the SNA with one arrest.<sup>583</sup>

Ten years after the anti-GoS riots that marked the beginning of the Syrian civil war, RSF reported that between March 2011 and March 2021, at least 300 professional and non-professional journalists were killed by the various parties to the conflict while reporting, 300 were arrested and over 100 were still missing.<sup>584</sup> SNHR stated that between March 2011 and May 2022, 711 journalists and media workers were killed. Statistics show that the majority of journalists and media professionals who were detained or have been forcibly disappeared as of May 2022 were initially arrested in Aleppo governorate, followed by Deir Ez-Zor governorate and Damascus.<sup>585</sup>

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<sup>571</sup> Please note that in the SHRC Annual Report for 2020, there is a discrepancy between the number of journalists killed (p. 33) cited in the text and the cases listed in the respective table (p. 35).

<sup>572</sup> SHRC, The 19th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, January 2021, [url](#), p. 35; CPJ, Syria, last updated 2022, [url](#)

<sup>573</sup> Please note that discrepancies in the figures provided by different sources may be a result of differences in the terminology and definitions used (e.g., definition of ‘journalist’ and ‘media worker’ or distinctions regarding their cause of death, etc.). For more detailed information on definitions and terminology, see, e.g., CPJ, Methodology, n.d. [url](#); SCM, Syria: The Black Hole for Media Work - 10 Years of Violations, May 2021, [url](#), p. 2; SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 27

<sup>574</sup> SCM, Syria: The Black Hole for Media Work - 10 Years of Violations [Chart], May 2021, [url](#), p. 39

<sup>575</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>576</sup> CPJ, Syria, last updated 2022, [url](#)

<sup>577</sup> SNHR, The Annual Report on the Most Notable Violations against Media Workers in Syria on World Press Freedom Day, 4 May 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>578</sup> SCM, Syria: The Black Hole for Media Work - 10 Years of Violations [Chart], May 2021, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>579</sup> SHRC, The 19th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, January 2021, [url](#), pp. 35-36

<sup>580</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 29-32

<sup>581</sup> CPJ, Syria, last updated 2022, [url](#)

<sup>582</sup> Please note that only SHRC's 2021 annual report includes specific data on arrests of journalists; the 2020 annual report did not include this data.

<sup>583</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 27-28

<sup>584</sup> RSF, Toll of ten years of civil war on journalists in Syria, 12 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>585</sup> SNHR, The Annual Report on the Most Notable Violations against Media Workers in Syria on World Press Freedom Day, 4 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 12, 17



## 7.2 Targeting by government forces and affiliated armed groups

Although the constitution stipulates limited freedom of expression, including for the press, those who attempted to exercise this right often faced abuse, mistreatment, arrest, or death at the hands of the GoS according to USDOS<sup>586</sup>, reportedly making areas controlled by the GoS one of the most difficult places for journalists.<sup>587</sup> The Syrian Arab Republic is considered one of the most restrictive places for media and journalism. Since 1974, Syrian journalists must register with the state-run Union of Syrian Journalists, which sets strict barriers to admission. Since the 2011 civil war, the GoS has restricted press freedom even further.<sup>588</sup>

In its report on human rights practices in Syria for 2021, USDOS reported on the detention, arrest, harassment and killings of journalists and other writers by forces of the GoS for allegedly speaking critically of the state.<sup>589</sup> This reportedly was also the case for journalists associated with pro-GoS networks.<sup>590</sup> Harassment included intimidation, banning individuals from the country, dismissing journalists from their positions, and ignoring requests for continued accreditation.<sup>591</sup> The GoS forces routinely detained, intimidated, and tortured YouTubers and other citizen journalists.<sup>592</sup> Of the above-mentioned 66 violations against media personnel recorded by SCM in 2020, 12 were attributed to the GoS.<sup>593</sup>

In March 2018, the GoS ‘gave itself a new tool for cracking down’<sup>594</sup> on what it considered online crimes by creating a so-called anti-cybercrime department as well as cybercrime courts that put massive pressure on journalists and media professionals.<sup>595</sup> In October 2020, the Minister of Information announced that arrests of journalists would stop, however, arrests continued.<sup>596</sup>

As part of a campaign to ‘combat the spread of false news and rumors’, in January 2021, eight people, including a well-known Damascus television host, were arrested for comments made on Facebook.<sup>597</sup> Ahead of the presidential election in May 2021, the GoS released 400 civil servants, judges, lawyers, and journalists detained during the year under Syria’s cybercrime

<sup>586</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 40

<sup>587</sup> New Arab (The), Syrian regime forces raid home of former state media journalist after Assad comments, 8 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>588</sup> MEE, Syria's Assad approves new law tightening freedom of speech, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>589</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 42

<sup>590</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 42; New Arab (The), Syrian regime forces raid home of former state media journalist after Assad comments, 8 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>591</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 42

<sup>592</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 42; see, e.g. VOA, Syria's Civil War Marks Rise and Fall of Country's Journalism, 16 March 2021, [url](#); GCHR, Syria: Prominent media figure and seven citizens arrested for using Facebook to express their views, 5 February 2021, [url](#); SHRC, Re-arrest of former detainee Mazen al-Hamada, 24 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>593</sup> SCM, Syria: The Black Hole for Media Work - 10 Years of Violations, May 2021, [url](#), pp. 126-128

<sup>594</sup> RSF, Syria, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>595</sup> SOHR, Violations against media activists | Nearly 750 activists and journalists killed, while hundreds forcibly disappeared, 24 November 2020, [url](#); Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2022 Country Report - Syria, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p.11; RSF, Syria, 2022, [url](#)

<sup>596</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2022 Country Report - Syria, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p.11

<sup>597</sup> IFEX, Syria: Eight arrested for critical online posts, 8 February 2021, [url](#)





law. The majority of the released social media critics were ‘supporters of Syrian authorities’ handling of the uprising in 2011’ and were detained for online posts criticising the economic situation and state corruption.<sup>598</sup> In February 2022, a journalist from Tartous was arrested after criticising on Facebook a lavish reception held by Assad at the presidential palace, while the economic situation of the general population was deteriorating.<sup>599</sup> The journalist was previously arrested twice for reporting on corruption.<sup>600</sup>

The 2018 anti-cybercrime law further threatened the already precarious abilities to express opinions online.<sup>601</sup> In March 2022, Syria’s president signed into law a bill imposing new restrictions on the media further limiting freedom of expression. While under the 2018 law only Syrians residing abroad could be sentenced to imprisonment, the new legislation also provides for imprisonment of at least six months for Syrians residing within the country for spreading ‘fake or exaggerated news’ deemed harmful to the state. The new law also stipulates at least one year in jail for Syrians who wrote or verbally called for the cession of Syrian territory.<sup>602</sup>

In April 2022, Syria’s President ratified Cybercrime Law No 20 of 2022 which classified certain acts as cybercrime, including ‘publishing online content that the government finds objectionable, as well as publishing digital content on the internet with the intention of “overthrowing or changing the regime in the country”, or “undermining the prestige of the state and compromising national unity”’. The new law prescribed penalties for these acts which ranged from one month to 15 years in prison, as well as fines of between SYP 200 000 to SYP 15 million.<sup>603</sup> In June 2022, the GoS arrested 11 persons in Aleppo under the new cybercrime law under the accusation of spreading ‘fake news’, after having ‘communicated’ with social media pages who were run from outside Syria.<sup>604</sup> The arrest of citizen journalists including women carried out by the Criminal Security Branch was recorded in the cities of Latakia, Tartus and Damascus on charges of cooperation in reporting news to foreign media outlets.<sup>605</sup>

Moreover, in its country report on Syria, the Austrian BFA Staatendokumentation refers to reports indicating that family members of journalists working for opposition media in Europe were arrested, detained for days and allegedly tortured.<sup>606</sup>

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<sup>598</sup> Reuters, Syria releases hundreds of social media critics ahead of election, 11 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>599</sup> RSF, Syrian journalist detained for third time in 18 months, 9 February 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, After criticizing al-Assad, Kenan Wakkaf is missing and abandoned by fellow journalists, 2 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>600</sup> RSF, Syrian journalist detained for third time in 18 months, 9 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>601</sup> GCHR, Syria: Newly enacted Anti-Cybercrime Law threatens online freedom of opinion and expression, 16 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>602</sup> MEE, Syria’s Assad approves new law tightening freedom of speech, 28 March 2022, [url](#); Media Line (The), Assad Signs New Syrian Law That Limits Freedom of Speech, 29 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>603</sup> Civicus, Media networks and journalists face brutal repression, 10 May 2022, [url](#)

<sup>604</sup> New Arab (The), Syrian regime arrests citizens under new cybercrime law, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>605</sup> SNHR, At Least 1,024 Arbitrary Arrests/Detentions Documented in Syria in the First Half of 2022, Including 49 Children and 29 Women, with 164 of These Cases Documented in June, 5 July 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>606</sup> Austria, BFA Staatendokumentation, Syria Country Report from the COI-CMS, Version 7 [source: Uğur Ümit Üngö], 24 January 2022, [url](#), p. 140



## 7.3 Targeting by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)

Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) continued to repress freedom of expression in areas under its control.<sup>607</sup> Harsh punishments and executions of individuals deemed critical of the rules or suspected of having ties to the GoS were imposed by self-appointed courts.<sup>608</sup> Throughout the referencing period, reports on arrests of journalists and media activists for criticising HTS continued.<sup>609</sup> While some of the detained media activists were reportedly released within days, others remained in detention.<sup>610</sup>

According to journalists and media activists, the safety of journalists depended on the degree to which they praise the HTS and its civilian arm, the Syrian Salvation Government (SSG). Media activists were arrested without judicial involvement and without clearly communicated charges, and at times were subjected to detention under harsh conditions, torture, and ill-treatment. Many media activists and journalists resorted to using pseudonyms and worked in secrecy, in fear of arrest.<sup>611</sup> Other journalists described being intimidated and threatened by the HTS, which forced them to leave.<sup>612</sup> According to the USDOS report on human rights practices in Syria for 2021, the HTS 'routinely targeted and killed both local and foreign journalists'.<sup>613</sup>

In July 2020, the HTS-linked SSG imposed a regulation which prescribed that journalists were not allowed to work in areas under its control without obtaining its permission. Since then, an SSG-issued press card is required in order to carry out media work. Journalists who do not carry a card risked restriction of movement as well as arrest. According to one cardholder, the card facilitates work by allowing taking photographs in public, without being restricted by security forces. In order to obtain this card, journalists are required to provide a range of information to the SSG. 'Media activists and correspondents working in north-western Syria heavily criticized these procedures.' By applying for the card, some journalists fear subordination to the SSG as well as its interference in their reporting.<sup>614</sup> According to the UNCOI, HTS interfered in media reporting during the second half of 2021.<sup>615</sup>

<sup>607</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 67; AI, Amnesty International Report 2021/22 – Syria, 29 March 2022, [url](#), p. 355; UNSG, Implementation of resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018) and 2504 (2020), S/2020/327, 23 April 2020, [url](#), para. 12

<sup>608</sup> UNSG, Implementation of resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018) and 2504 (2020), S/2020/327, 23 April 2020, [url](#), para. 12

<sup>609</sup> Al-Monitor, Journalists flee northwest Syria as intimidation ramps up, 18 April 2022, [url](#); AI, Amnesty International Report 2021/22 – Syria, 29 March 2022, 29 March 2022, [url](#); Syrian Observer (The), HTS Arrests Media Activist in Syria's Idlib, 10 March 2022, [url](#); NPA, Journalists in HTS prisons in Syria's Idlib face unknown fate, 23 February 2022, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Syrian journalists in Idlib face crackdown from jihadist-affiliated government, 26 October 2020, [url](#)

<sup>610</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 68

<sup>611</sup> NPA, Journalists in HTS prisons in Syria's Idlib face unknown fate, 23 February 2022, [url](#); RSF, Sexist hate campaign against Idlib-based reporter, 4 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>612</sup> Al-Monitor, Journalists flee northwest Syria as intimidation ramps up, 18 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>613</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 42

<sup>614</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian journalists in Idlib face crackdown from jihadist-affiliated government, 26 October 2020, [url](#)

<sup>615</sup> 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. 71





In May 2021, the SSG released a statement criticising media outlets and media workers in northern Syria for allegedly not complying with the media regulations it had introduced. In the months leading up to the statement, the group clamped down on several media workers.<sup>616</sup> During the same month, a media activist and reporter from the northern Idlib Governorate was allegedly forced to sign a pledge not to post anything critical about HTS on his personal Facebook page, according to SNHR.<sup>617</sup>

## 7.4 Targeting by the Syrian National Army (SNA)

In an April 2020 report, the UN Secretary-General stated that in northern Syria armed groups controlling the area systematically targeted civilians, including journalists, who were considered members of an opposing party or perceived to be critical of the de facto authorities. The 'whereabouts and fate' of many of these individuals remained uncertain.<sup>618</sup> A February 2022 report by the UNCOI referred to continuing reports of the SNA detaining civilians for criticising its factions and indicated that investigations into arbitrary detention of journalists were underway. According to the report, released detainees cited torture and ill-treatment in SNA detention centres in 2021.<sup>619</sup>

In August 2022, journalists covering protests against the SNA-led administration of Al Bab city were threatened with arrest by members of the SNA affiliated police for their reporting.<sup>620</sup>

## 7.5 Targeting by the Syrian Democratic Forces/Kurdish People's Protection Units

During the reference period, SDF continued to obstruct freedom of expression, to target civilians, who were considered members of an opposing party or perceived to be critical of the de facto authorities, and to harass the media including arrests of its personnel.<sup>621</sup> According to the UNCOI, sufficient reasons exist to believe that the SDF 'continued to unlawfully deprive [...] media workers of their liberty'.<sup>622</sup>

The US broadcaster Voice of America (VOA) reported in a March 2021 article, that north-eastern Syria, controlled by the US-backed SDF, is considered to be 'marginally more open to

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<sup>616</sup> BBC Monitoring, Syria jihadist-backed authority criticises media 'breaches', 7 May 2021

<sup>617</sup> SNHR, The Annual Report on the Most Notable Violations against Media Workers in Syria on World Press Freedom Day, 4 May 2022, [url](#), pp. 10, 11

<sup>618</sup> UNSG, Implementation of resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018) and 2504 (2020), S/2020/327, 23 April 2020, [url](#), para. 12

<sup>619</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 83-84

<sup>620</sup> Syrian Observer (The), Turkish-Backed Civil Police Attacks Journalists in al-Bab, 3 August 2022, [url](#)

<sup>621</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 104-105; UNSG, Implementation of resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017), 2401 (2018), 2449 (2018) and 2504 (2020), S/2020/327, 23 April 2020, [url](#), para. 12

<sup>622</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 106





media' than other parts of Syria.<sup>623</sup> However, while international journalists are largely treated friendly, local reporters may face arrests, harassment or attacks if reporting critically on the local administration. According to VOA, '[r]ed lines for media often include major corruption cases, oil deals made by the local administration and military matters, particularly those related to terrorism.'<sup>624</sup>

A Dutch journalist who has reported repeatedly from north-eastern Syria in recent years was quoted by VOA in 2021 as saying that the situation for local media workers had improved slightly since 2013: while critical reporters were expelled from the country in the past, they have more recently been subjected to short-term arrests.<sup>625</sup>

During the reference, period cases of repressions against journalists, including arrests were reported, as the following examples illustrate: In April and May 2020, the authorities in North-eastern Syria reportedly revoked the press credentials of three local reporters. One of the journalists was subjected to a 60-day work ban for using the word 'killed' instead of 'martyr'.<sup>626</sup> In March 2021, RSF reported an increase in arrests of journalists by the SDF, often in the form of enforced disappearances and without notifying their families.<sup>627</sup> I

Journalists who covered demonstrations against child recruitment by the SDF were briefly detained in December 2021<sup>628</sup>, while those covering demonstrations against the arbitrary arrest of KNC members were beaten by members of the Kurdish Revolutionary Youth Movement.<sup>629</sup>

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<sup>623</sup> VOA, Syria's Civil War Marks Rise and Fall of Country's Journalism, 16 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>624</sup> VOA, Reporter Kidnapped, Beaten in Northeast Syria, 19 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>625</sup> VOA, Syria's Civil War Marks Rise and Fall of Country's Journalism, 16 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>626</sup> VOA, Reporter's Credentials Yanked in Northeast Syria for 'Offending Martyrs', 13 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>627</sup> RSF, Wave of Kurdish arrests of Syrian journalists, 8 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>628</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 105; VOA, Reporter Kidnapped, Beaten in Northeast Syria, 19 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>629</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para 105



## 8. Doctors and other medical personnel

For information on attacks on medical facilities, please see the [EUAA COI report on Syria: Security Situation](#) published in July 2021.

### 8.1 Targeting by government forces and affiliated armed groups

As of June 2022, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) recorded the killings of 945 medical personnel<sup>630</sup> since 2011, with 93 % of deaths attributed to GoS or their allied forces. Over half of all medical personnel killed was due to aerial attacks and shelling.<sup>631</sup> As of March 2022, PHR stated that at least 167 health personnel have been executed or tortured before their death by GoS forces since the start of the conflict. Most of these cases had occurred in Rural Damascus governorate, with 157 recorded deaths of medical personnel.<sup>632</sup>

According to SNHR, GoS forces and allied militia were considered to be responsible for the death of nine medical workers and for at least nine attacks on medical facilities in 2020, as well as for the death of one medical worker and attacks on at least two medical facilities in 2021.<sup>633</sup> Russian forces were held responsible for the death of four medical professionals as well as for at least 13 attacks on medical facilities in 2020. In 2021, SNHR was not able to document any deaths of medical workers or attacks on medical facilities in attacks attributed to Russian forces.<sup>634</sup> In February 2022, SNHR reported on the extrajudicial killing of one medical worker by GoS forces.<sup>635</sup> SHRC recorded fewer attacks on medical and emergency rescue personnel and facilities in 2020 and 2021 respectively compared to previous years<sup>636</sup>, but noted that assaults by security and military personnel in areas under different control continued, and civilians attacking health professionals were taking advantage of the poor application of law in these areas.<sup>637</sup>

The UNCOI noted in several reports published during the reporting period the deliberate targeting of medical facilities and medical personnel by GoS forces since the beginning of the

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<sup>630</sup> PHR's definition of 'medical personnel' includes doctors, nurses, paramedics, pharmacists, dentists, veterinarians, lab technicians, and health professional students. PHR, Medical Personnel Are Targeted in Syria, updated June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>631</sup> PHR, Medical Personnel Are Targeted in Syria, updated June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>632</sup> PHR, Physicians for Human Rights' Findings of Attacks on Health Care in Syria. Findings as of March 2022, March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>633</sup> SNHR, Eleventh Annual Report: The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2021: The State's Collapse and Society's Fragmentation, 21 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 12, 34

<sup>634</sup> SNHR, Eleventh Annual Report: The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2021: The State's Collapse and Society's Fragmentation, 21 January 2022, [url](#), p. 43

<sup>635</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in February 2022, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>636</sup> SHRC, The 19th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, January 2021, [url](#), p. 25; SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>637</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 21



conflict.<sup>638</sup> In February 2022, the UNCOI reported on the use of precision-guided artillery shells by pro-GoS forces in north-western Syria against first responders in an incident in Sarjah village in July 2021, killing two people and injuring five, as well as against a medical facility in Mar'yan village in September of the same year. The UNCOI stated that these apparently deliberately targeted attacks potentially constituted war crimes<sup>639</sup>, as it had already observed with regard to previous incidents such as a rocket attack by GoS forces<sup>640</sup> on a cave hospital in Atarib in western Aleppo in March 2021<sup>641</sup>, where 8 civilian patients were killed and 13 injured, including 5 medical personnel.<sup>642</sup>

According to a report by SNHR on the detention or enforced disappearance of medical personnel in the period March 2011 to February 2021, at least 3 364 personnel were still detained or forcibly disappeared across Syria as of February 2021.<sup>643</sup> The UNCOI made a similar observation in its March 2021 report.<sup>644</sup> SNHR noted that GoS forces were responsible for 99 % of all recorded cases of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance of health care personnel, namely 3 329, including 282 women. Most of these cases took place in the period 2011 to 2014, apparently deliberately targeting medical personnel who treated injured protesters and opponents of the GoS.<sup>645</sup> PHR observed that detentions and enforced disappearances aimed not only at punishing medical professionals for helping injured opponents<sup>646</sup>, but also to deprive non-government-controlled areas from access to medical care.<sup>647</sup>

Several NGOs noted in a joint submission to the UN Human Rights Council in November 2021 the continued displacement of doctors and medical personnel in north-eastern Syria because of threats, abductions and being targeted by GoS and terrorist groups.<sup>648</sup>

<sup>638</sup> See, for example, UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/43/57, 28 January 2020, [url](#), para. 29; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/44/61, 3 September 2020, [url](#), para. 71; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/54, 21 January 2021, [url](#), para. 29

<sup>639</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 59, 65

<sup>640</sup> SNHR holds both, Syrian government and Russian forces responsible for the attack. See SNHR, In Tandem with the Brussels V Conference, the Largest Russian Military Escalation in Nearly a Year, with al Atareb Hospital and Bab al Hawa Border Crossing Bombed, 29 March 2021, [url](#), pp. 4-8. PHR and SAMS similarly note that publicly available documents point to either Syrian government or Russian forces as the perpetrators. PHR and SAMS, 'No place is safe for health care'. The attack on Syria's Al-Atareb Hospital, July 2021, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>641</sup> 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. 64

<sup>642</sup> 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. 54

<sup>643</sup> SNHR, At Least 3,364 Health Care Personnel Still Arrested/Forcibly Disappeared, 98% by the Syrian Regime, 27 February 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>644</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 15

<sup>645</sup> SNHR, At Least 3,364 Health Care Personnel Still Arrested/Forcibly Disappeared, 98% by the Syrian Regime, 27 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 5-6

<sup>646</sup> PHR, The Survivors, the Dead, and the Disappeared. Detention of health care workers in Syria, 2011-2012, November 2021, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>647</sup> PHR, The Survivors, the Dead, and the Disappeared. Detention of health care workers in Syria, 2011-2012, November 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>648</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Summary of stakeholders' submissions on Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/WG.6/40/SYR/3, 1 November 2021, [url](#), para. 48





SHRC reported in March 2020 on the GoS' denial of any cases of Covid-19 infections and on the death of at least one medical professional that was attributed to leaking information about the virus – the leader of the radiology department of Qirdaha hospital, who was shot in the head a few days after having spoken about the spreading of the disease in the region.<sup>649</sup> Two doctors in a GoS-controlled area in Aleppo were reportedly attacked in September 2020 after the death of a Covid-19 patient. The perpetrators reportedly included a policeman. The case was never brought before court.<sup>650</sup> After the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in spring 2020, medical professionals reported on threats and intimidations by intelligence services present in hospitals and clinics, warning them not to register Covid-19 deaths, but to document them as pneumonia cases instead.<sup>651</sup>

## 8.2 Targeting by non-state armed groups

As of March 2022, PHR recorded the killings of at least 53 medical personnel by non-state armed groups since the beginning of the conflict. Moreover, eight killings were reportedly committed by international coalition forces, three by Kurdish forces and one by Turkish forces. Three killings were attributed either to SDF or GoS forces.<sup>652</sup>

At least 14 medical personnel detained or forcibly disappeared by SDF in the period March 2011 to February 2021, remained in detention or were unaccounted for, according to SNHR. Other perpetrators included ISIL which was responsible for the detention or enforced disappearance of five medical personnel, including two women, as well as HTS and the SNA each with presumably being responsible for 8 detained or forcibly disappeared medical personnel.<sup>653</sup>

In March 2021, SDF fighters reportedly raided the Public Surgical Hospital of Al-Shiheel city in Deir Ez-Zor governorate, where they verbally and physically abused medical personnel and accused them of being 'terrorists'. SDF members reportedly damaged medical equipment and detained eight civilians, including a doctor and three nurses (at least twelve civilians including eight medical personnel, according to another report)<sup>654</sup>, who were brought to a detention facility where they were submitted to further beatings and abuse.<sup>655</sup>

In June 2021, 2 medical personnel were killed and 3 more injured in a rocket attack on Al-Shifa hospital in the city of Afrin, which caused the death of all together 15 persons, while 43 were injured.<sup>656</sup> Moreover, artillery shelling destroyed the emergency ward, where victims

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<sup>649</sup> SHRC, Syrian regime continues to deny the corona virus crisis, 22 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>650</sup> SPHN, Responsibility to Protect: Syrian Healthcare Workers in the Face of COVID-19, February 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>651</sup> Tsurkov, E. and Jukhadar, Q., Ravaged by war, Syria's health care system is utterly unprepared for a pandemic, MEI, 23 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>652</sup> PHR, Physicians for Human Rights' Findings of Attacks on Health Care in Syria, March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>653</sup> SNHR, At Least 3,364 Health Care Personnel Still Arrested/Forcibly Disappeared, 98% by the Syrian Regime, 27 February 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>654</sup> 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. 104

<sup>655</sup> SNHR, Eleventh Annual Report: The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2021: The State's Collapse and Society's Fragmentation, 21 January 2022, [url](#), p. 55; 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. 104

<sup>656</sup> Syria Direct, Who is behind the massacre at Afrin's al-Shifa Hospital?, 14 June 2021, [url](#)



from a first attack on Afrin less than an hour earlier had been brought, as well as other parts of the hospital.<sup>657</sup> While Turkey and the Turkish-backed SNA, which control Afrin, accused the YPG, PYD and PKK of being responsible for the attack, SDF denied any responsibility.<sup>658</sup> STJ concluded that GoS forces and their Russian allies were ‘most likely’ responsible for the attack.<sup>659</sup>

In January 2020, SDF-affiliated gunmen reportedly stormed a hospital in Al-Kasrah in Deir Ez-Zor, beating medical personnel and severely injuring one nurse. Reasons for the attack were unknown.<sup>660</sup> In July 2020, SOHR reported that a doctor at Al-Fayhaa hospital in the village of Abreeh in the Deir Ez-Zor countryside was beaten by a leader of the Deir Ez-Zor military council, allegedly for not allowing him to film injured patients.<sup>661</sup> Three nurses at the National Hospital in Al-Raqqa city were reportedly injured in an attack by SDF forces after one of their relatives died of Covid-19 in October 2020.<sup>662</sup>

Arab medical personnel from Deir Ez-Zor and Raqqa reportedly were reluctant to access trainings offered at facilities in the Kurdish-controlled areas, as they feared persecution should they later return to SNA -controlled areas or to Turkey in search of work.<sup>663</sup>

SHRC reported on the arrest of a nurse working in a hospital in Idlib city by HTS fighters in January 2021.<sup>664</sup> SOHR reported on the arrest of a doctor in his clinic in Al-Dana city in northern Idlib by a HTS security patrol in July 2021 for unknown reasons.<sup>665</sup>

In the period April 2013 to January 2022, SNHR recorded the killing of at least 36 medical personnel, half of them women, by ISIL.<sup>666</sup> In the same period, five medical personnel were abducted by ISIL, including two women.<sup>667</sup> SNHR noted that ISIL often focused on killing or abducting well-known personalities and activists, including medical personnel, with the aim of

<sup>657</sup> 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. 79

<sup>658</sup> Syria Direct, Who is behind the massacre at Afrin’s al-Shifa Hospital?, 14 June 2021, [url](#); 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. 79

<sup>659</sup> STJ, Syria: An Investigation on the Attack on Afrin’s Al-Shifaa Hospital, 20 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 55-56

<sup>660</sup> New Arab (The), Kurdish militia filmed beating up hospital staff in eastern Syria, 2 January 2020, [url](#); SOHR, Popular resentment ignites after SDF members assaulted medical staff in a rural Deir Ezzor hospital, 1 January 2020, [url](#)

<sup>661</sup> SOHR, After the incident of beating and insulting medical staff | Administration of Al-Fayha hospital closes the hospital and decides to relocate it to Al-Hasakeh city, 7 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>662</sup> Reported by Insecurity Insight with reference to ACLED data, see Insecurity Insight, Attacks on Health Care Monthly News Brief, October 2020, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>663</sup> PHR, Destruction, Obstruction, and Inaction, December 2021, 15 December 2021, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>664</sup> SHRC, Arrests and Releases in January 2021, 8 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>665</sup> SOHR, Idlib. HTS arrests doctor in al-Dana, 15 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>666</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable ISIS Violations against Syrian Society and ISIS’ Contribution to Distorting the Popular Uprising Calling for Freedom and Dignity, 10 February 2022, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>667</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable ISIS Violations against Syrian Society and ISIS’ Contribution to Distorting the Popular Uprising Calling for Freedom and Dignity, 10 February 2022, [url](#), p. 14



instilling as much fear as possible in the population<sup>668</sup>, but also to deprive society of highly educated people.<sup>669</sup>

### 8.3 Targeting by unspecified armed actors

As of March 2022, PHR recorded the killings of at least 43 medical personnel by unknown forces since the beginning of the conflict.<sup>670</sup> SNHR recorded 6 killings of medical professionals in 2021, and 5 killings in 2020, committed by unknown perpetrators.<sup>671</sup> In the first half of 2022, the same organisation documented 6 attacks on medical facilities and the death of 5 medical personnel killed at the hands of unspecified parties.<sup>672</sup>

During the reference period, the UNCOI observed an increase in reports on targeted killings across Sweida and Dar'a Governorates<sup>673</sup>, including where medical personnel were among the victims of targeted killings.<sup>674</sup> In most cases, the UNCOI noted in August 2020, the killings reportedly were carried out by men on motorcycles and with small arms, making identification of the perpetrators difficult.<sup>675</sup> In some cases, medical doctors who had treated fighters seemed to be specifically targeted.<sup>676</sup> In one incident, in April 2021, a former paramedic who had been active in the period when Dar'a governorate was under control of armed groups, and who had reportedly refused so-called reconciliation with the GoS, was shot dead in front of his children by unidentified gunmen.<sup>677</sup>

Several local sources reported on the killing or attempted killing of medical personnel by unknown perpetrators during the reporting period, including in February 2020<sup>678</sup> and February 2022<sup>679</sup> in Dar'a governorate, in December 2020 in Idlib city<sup>680</sup>, as well as in March<sup>681</sup> and

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<sup>668</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable ISIS Violations against Syrian Society and ISIS' Contribution to Distorting the Popular Uprising Calling for Freedom and Dignity, 10 February 2022, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>669</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable ISIS Violations against Syrian Society and ISIS' Contribution to Distorting the Popular Uprising Calling for Freedom and Dignity, 10 February 2022, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>670</sup> PHR, Physicians for Human Rights' Findings of Attacks on Health Care in Syria, March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>671</sup> SNHR, Eleventh Annual Report: The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2021: The State's Collapse and Society's Fragmentation, 21 January 2022, [url](#), p. 59

<sup>672</sup> SNHR, The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in June and the First Half of 2022, 7 July 2022, [url](#), pp. 21, 23

<sup>673</sup> 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. 24; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/45/31, 14 August 2020, [url](#), para. 17

<sup>674</sup> 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. 25; UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/45/31, 14 August 2020, [url](#), para. 17

<sup>675</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/45/31, 14 August 2020, [url](#), para. 17

<sup>676</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/45/31, 14 August 2020, [url](#), para. 18

<sup>677</sup> 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. 26

<sup>678</sup> SOHR, Three separate assassinations leave three persons dead in rural Daraa, 2 February 2020, [url](#)

<sup>679</sup> SNHR, The most notable human rights violations in Syria in February 2022, 4 March 2022, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>680</sup> SOHR, Idlib. Assassination attempt on displaced doctor from southern Damascus to Idlib province, 21 December 2021, [url](#)

<sup>681</sup> SNHR, Pharmacist killed by unidentified gunmen in Swaidan Jazira village in Deir Ez-Zour suburbs on March 27, 29 March 2021, [url](#)



October<sup>682</sup> 2021, and in March 2022<sup>683</sup> in Deir Ez-Zor governorate. In January 2022, a doctor reportedly working for the ICRC was stabbed and injured in an attack by unknown perpetrators in Al-Hol camp, Hasaka governorate, according to a local media report.<sup>684</sup> Likewise in Al-Hol camp, a nurse working for the Kurdish Red Crescent was shot dead a day earlier by unknown gunmen, although it was presumed that ISIL was behind the attack.<sup>685</sup> A community health worker working for a UN-funded health project was killed in a car bomb explosion in Al-Bab city (Aleppo governorate) in February 2021.<sup>686</sup>

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<sup>682</sup> SOHR, Deir Ezzor security instability. Unidentified gunmen storm hospital and open fire on a doctors [sic] inside, 16 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>683</sup> SNHR, The most notable human rights violations in Syria in March 2022, 7 April 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>684</sup> Kurdistan24, Foreign doctor injured in stabbing attack in Syria's al-Hol camp: Report, 12 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>685</sup> New Arab (The), Doctor, nurse shot dead in separate eastern Syria attacks, 14 January 2022, [url](#); Kurdistan24, Kurdish paramedic killed in notorious al-Hol camp, 12 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>686</sup> UN, Syria, Office of the Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis, Statement by Mark Cutts, 17 February 2021, [url](#), p. 1; SNHR, Humanitarian association volunteer killed in a blast of IED of unknown origin in al Bab city in Aleppo on Feb 16, 17 February 2021, [url](#)



## 9. Sunni Arabs

Sunni Arabs constitute the majority of the Syrian population but, according to various experts, cannot be considered a homogeneous or unified group.<sup>687</sup> According to Kheder Khaddour from the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, the conflict ‘reshaped Sunni Islamic identity in Syria’, resulting in a situation characterised by several competing Sunni identities.<sup>688</sup> As Sunni Arabs differed significantly in their political affiliations during the Syrian civil war, they became targeted by different actors.<sup>689</sup> For more detailed background information on intra-Sunni diversity in Syria, please see Section 10.3 of the previous [EUAA COI report on Syria: Targeting of Individuals](#) published in March 2020.

In its annual report for 2021, SHRC raised concerns over the broad prevalence of educational deprivation and illiteracy in Syria, which affected certain regions and population groups to a greater extent, namely areas that rebelled strongly against the GoS and which were primarily inhabited by Arabs and Sunnis.<sup>690</sup> In 2021, it was reported that among the 40 highest-ranking officers heading various Syrian army units, either all were held by Alawites<sup>691</sup> or only one Sunni was represented.<sup>692</sup> Sunni officers who did retain high-ranking posts commanded less influential units and were put under close supervision of officially lower-ranking Alawite colleagues.<sup>693</sup>

### 9.1 Targeting by the government forces and affiliated armed groups

For 2021, USDOS reported in its annual report on religious freedom that Sunnis, the largest demographically in the country, were found to be the group most frequently subjected to human rights abuses and violations by the GoS, including unlawful killings, torture, arbitrary detention, confiscation of property and enforced disappearances. The report also maintained that the majority of those deemed opponents of the GoS were Sunnis.<sup>694</sup> Although the political

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<sup>687</sup> Al-Haj Saleh, Y., *The Dark Path of Minority Politics: Why Privileging Minorities Will Only Perpetuate the Syrian Catastrophe*, TCF, 18 April 2019, [url](#), p. 4; Khaddour, K., *Localism, War, and the Fragmentation of Sunni Islam in Syria*, Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, 28 March 2019, [url](#); Balanche, F., *Sectarianism in Syria’s Civil War*, WINEP, [url](#), p. 13

<sup>688</sup> Khaddour, K., *Localism, War, and the Fragmentation of Sunni Islam in Syria*, Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, 28 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>689</sup> Al-Haj Saleh, Y., *The Dark Path of Minority Politics: Why Privileging Minorities Will Only Perpetuate the Syrian Catastrophe*, TCF, 18 April 2019, [url](#), pp. 4, 11

<sup>690</sup> SHRC, *The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria*, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>691</sup> USDOS, *International Religious Freedom Report 2020 - Syria*, 12 May 2021, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>692</sup> Pierret, T., *Syria’s “Sunni Question” Is Here to Stay*, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, 24 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>693</sup> Pierret, T., *Syria’s “Sunni Question” Is Here to Stay*, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, 24 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>694</sup> USDOS, *International Religious Freedom Report 2021 - Syria*, 2 June 2022, [url](#), p. 7



elite included Sunnis, the Sunni majority makes up most of the anti-GoS opposition and has been the most heavily repressed by the authorities because of this perceived affiliation.<sup>695</sup>

For more information on the situation of individuals affiliated or associated with the opposition, please see [Section 1. Persons perceived to be opposing the government.](#)

Sunni Arabs were the hardest hit by the war and the GoS' repressions and have experienced the greatest exodus/displacement from the country. This demographic group, who used to represent a clear majority of the population, was estimated to make up only between 49 % and 52 % of the population in 2020. The demographic shifts are reportedly benefiting the GoS.<sup>696</sup>

A May 2020 report by the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center noted that the structural damage caused during the war allegedly occurred 'along sectarian lines, with a majority of destroyed areas being Sunni'.<sup>697</sup> Thomas Pierret argues in March 2021 that during the Syrian civil war collective punishment of whole communities was reserved for Sunni towns.<sup>698</sup>

Kheder Khaddour stated that Syria's March 2011 uprising profoundly changed the country's 'Sunni Islamic religious landscape'. In areas under its authority, the GoS sustained a 'security-based version of Islam' by supporting religious interpretations it considered tolerable.<sup>699</sup> According to a joint NGO statement published in a November 2021 report by the UN Human Rights Council, the Syrian law required all religious groups to register with the GoS. Membership in an organisation considered by the GoS to be linked to Sunni fundamentalism, may result in arrest, torture, and execution.<sup>700</sup>

In November 2021 it was reported that Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad eliminated the position of Grand Mufti of Syria. The mufti's main task, issuing fatwas, was transferred to a council appointed by the GoS called the 'Scientific Jurisprudence Council', composed of a number of religious groups and minorities, among them Sunni Muslim representatives. Experts reportedly assumed that the fatwas of the newly established council will not correspond to the wishes of the Syrian Sunnis, given that their representatives will only be serving as members of the multi-sectarian council.<sup>701</sup>

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<sup>695</sup> Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022: Syria, February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>696</sup> Orient XXI, Syria: Communitarianism as a Combat Strategy, 1 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>697</sup> Abou Zainedin, S. and Fakhani, H., Syria's Reconstruction Between Discriminatory Implementation and Circumscribed Resistance, Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, 15 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>698</sup> Pierret, T., Syria's "Sunni Question" Is Here to Stay, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, 24 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>699</sup> Khaddour, K., Localism, War, and the Fragmentation of Sunni Islam in Syria, Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, 28 March 2019, [url](#)

<sup>700</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Summary of Stakeholders' submissions on Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/WG.6/40/SYR/3, 1 November 2021, [url](#), para. 36

<sup>701</sup> Arab Weekly (The), Doing away with the Mufti in Syria, 19 November 2021, [url](#)





## 9.2 Forced displacement and denial of return

The GoS continued to impede the return of Syrians through laws such as Law No 10/2018, which was reportedly used for the confiscation of property and land of refugees and IDPs without due process.<sup>702</sup> According to a November 2021 research paper focusing on displacement and rezoning in north-eastern Damascus, the GoS has been pursuing an expropriation policy that unjustifiably undercuts the rights of ‘forcibly displaced local communities’.<sup>703</sup> By doing so, ‘extended families of foreign militias and imported loyal populations’ were settled in various areas.<sup>704</sup> Sunnis reportedly suffered disproportionately from the negative impact of Law No 10/2018.<sup>705</sup> More detailed background information on Law No 10/2018 can be found in Section 3.5.3 of [the EUAA COI report on Syria: Socio-economic situation: Damascus City \(April 2021\)](#).

With reference to the Damascus suburbs bombed during the war, a September 2020 think tank publication referred to a ‘demographic swap in which Shiites from Iran and Afghanistan were transferred to the area once the Sunnis were expelled’ in order to consolidate the Shiite presence and supplant Sunni Arab communities.<sup>706</sup> As noted by former Syrian diplomat Bassam Barabandi to the US magazine Foreign Policy (FP) in January 2022, the strong ties between the Syrian president and Iran also hinders the return of the predominantly Sunni refugee population. According to Barandi, Iran seeks to have a major impact on Syria’s future, but a ‘large Sunni Arab population [would] make that almost impossible. That’s why Iran never talks about the refugee issue.’<sup>707</sup> On instances of denied return of displaced Sunnis reported prior to January 2020, please see Section 10.3.2 of the previous [EUAA COI report on Syria: Targeting of Individuals](#) published in March 2020.

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<sup>702</sup> Arab News, Assad flogs off stolen Syrian lands to the Ayatollahs, 20 February 2022, [url](#); Manara Magazine, Crimes Against Syrian Human Plurality: Critiquing Legitimacy in Syria Under the Assad Government, 5 November 2021, [url](#); USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report 2021 - Syria, 2 June 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>703</sup> Ezzi, M., On the Edge of the Capital: Social Engineering in North-Eastern Damascus, EUI, 5 November 2021, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>704</sup> Arab News, Assad flogs off stolen Syrian lands to the Ayatollahs, 20 February 2022, [url](#), 8

<sup>705</sup> USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report 2021 - Syria, 2 June 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>706</sup> New Global Order (The), The Demographic Catastrophe in Syria, 23 September 2020, [url](#)

<sup>707</sup> FP, The Human Cost of Normalizing Assad, 3 January 2022, [url](#)



## 10. Kurds

For information on targeting of persons with (perceived) links to SDF/YPG, see [Section 4. Members of and persons perceived to be collaborating with the Syrian Democratic Forces/Kurdish People’s Protection Units.](#)

### 10.1 Stateless Kurds

A large part of the Kurdish population – 120 000, about 20 % of the entire Syrian population at that time - became stateless following the census of 5 October 1962 in Hasaka governorate. The census divided the local population into three categories: Syrian citizens, foreigners (*ajanib*, Sg.: *ajnabi*), and *maktoumeen* (concealed, muted, Sg. *maktoum/a*). As a result, *ajanib* and *maktoumeen* who did not hold any other citizenship, were left stateless. They were also considered to be illegal residents since they were not officially registered in the country.<sup>708</sup> Syrian Kurds represented the overwhelming majority of those who lost citizenship, although individuals of other population groups such as Arabs and Christians were affected as well, as a member of the Peoples’ Assembly noted to the Kurdish news website Rudaw.<sup>709</sup>

A Syrian academic interviewed by the EUAA noted that according to local sources, nearly 10 % of the people who were stripped of the Syrian citizenship based on the 1962 census were Arabs who descended from big tribes and resided near the Syrian-Iraqi borders, such as Shammar, Adwan, Al-Baggara, and Harb.<sup>710</sup> Children inherited the status of their father, as prescribed by the Syrian law. Consequently, even children whose mother was a Syrian citizen would be considered *ajnabi* or *maktoumeen* if their father belonged to one of these two categories.<sup>711</sup>

Ten years after the issuance of Decree 49/2011, which granted citizenship to individuals registered as *ajnabi*<sup>712</sup>, nearly 20 000 *ajnabi* still remained stateless.<sup>713</sup> There were several reasons for this: *ajnabi* who lacked the necessary documentation, or were not able to submit an application in person inside Syria as required were excluded from obtaining citizenship.<sup>714</sup> Some stateless Syrians refrained from submitting an application as they mistrusted government institutions or feared harassment from the security services whose permission

<sup>708</sup> Benslama-Dabdoub, M., Colonial legacies in Syrian nationality law and the risk of statelessness, July 2021, [url](#), pp. 26-27

<sup>709</sup> Rudaw, Syria’s stateless Kurds can’t afford to become citizens, 1 December 2020, [url](#); Rudaw, عضو بمجلس الشعب [Member of the Syrian People’s Assembly to Rudaw: Article 49 grants the Kurds who are not registered the right to claim citizenship], 16 November 2020, [url](#); STJ, Syrian Citizenship Disappeared. How the 1962 census destroyed stateless Kurds’ lives and identities, 15 September 2018, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>710</sup> Syrian academic, email correspondence, 25 April 2022

<sup>711</sup> ENS and ISI, Stateless in Syria. Country Position Paper, August 2019, [url](#), p. 15. According to the Syrian Nationality Law, mothers can transfer their nationality to their children only in case the child is born inside Syria and the father is unknown, see NRC and ISI, Syrian nationality law, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>712</sup> STJ, Decades of statelessness and the absence of basic rights, 6 July 2021, [url](#), p. 4, FN 2

<sup>713</sup> STJ, Decades of statelessness and the absence of basic rights, 6 July 2021, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>714</sup> ENS and ISI, Stateless in Syria. Country Position Paper, August 2019, [url](#), p. 17





was required for the application process.<sup>715</sup> STJ monitored the legal proceedings of citizenship applications of 17 stateless families - including stateless Kurds - in the period November 2020 to February 2021 and noted that only five families eventually were naturalized. In all cases, families reported difficulties in hiring lawyers or receiving security permissions, and with civil servants who delayed or denied applications or had insufficient knowledge of the legal framework. Moreover, in many cases papers were denied by government or security services without giving any explanation.<sup>716</sup>

Sources interviewed by DIS in January 2022 stated that either most or all *ajanab* were granted Syrian citizenship after the implementation of Decree 49/2011<sup>717</sup> and that those who are still *ajanab* deliberately refrained from applying for citizenship to avoid military service.<sup>718</sup>

Decree 49/2011 did not include *maktoumeen* who consequently were not able to apply for citizenship under this law<sup>719</sup>, despite a Ministerial statement annexed to Decree 49/2011, which was supposed to facilitate that, as a Syrian academic interviewed by the EUAA pointed out. Citizenship applications of thousands of *maktoumeen* based on this decree were still in process and there was no reported case in which a *maktoum* had been granted citizenship directly this way.<sup>720</sup> At present, the only apparent way for *maktoumeen* to obtain citizenship was to be registered as *ajanib* and then to apply for naturalisation under Decree 49/2011, which required the services of a lawyer.<sup>721</sup> Rudaw reported in December 2020 on *maktoumeen* who had to pay USD 500 to USD 2 000 to their lawyers to obtain an identity card and citizenship.<sup>722</sup> Decree 49/2011 did not foresee any form of reparation or compensation for those who were deprived of Syrian citizenship in the context of the Hasaka census of 1962.<sup>723</sup> As of July 2021, more than 46 000 *maktoumeen* were living in Syria, noted STJ with reference to an inside source in the Hasaka Civil Affairs Directorate.<sup>724</sup> However, the Representation of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq stated in a January 2022 interview with DIS that the number of *maktoumeen* living in north-east Syria is of around 20 000.<sup>725</sup>

In GoS-controlled areas, stateless Kurds were denied the right to work, form and join trade unions, and the right to social security, health care and education. They had no right to travel freely without prior permission of the security service. Stateless persons were denied the right

<sup>715</sup> STJ, Decades of statelessness and the absence of basic rights, 6 July 2021, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>716</sup> STJ, Decades of statelessness and the absence of basic rights, 6 July 2021, [url](#), pp. 17-20

<sup>717</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria - Military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate, 1 July 2022 [source: Political analyst; Representation of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Suleimania; University professor, [url](#), pp. 54; 58; 68

<sup>718</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria - Military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate, 1 July 2022 [source: Representation of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Suleimania], [url](#), p. 58

<sup>719</sup> ENS and ISI, Stateless in Syria. Country Position Paper, August 2019, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>720</sup> Syrian academic, email correspondence, 25 April 2022

<sup>721</sup> STJ, Syrian Citizenship Disappeared. How the 1962 census destroyed stateless Kurds' lives and identities, 15 September 2018, [url](#), p. 48; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [Country report Syria], May 2022, [url](#), p. 48

<sup>722</sup> Rudaw, Syria's stateless Kurds can't afford to become citizens, 1 December 2020, [url](#)

<sup>723</sup> VDC, إحصاء ال 24 في الحسكة 1962 الذي جعل آلاف الكرد السوريين بلا جنسية [The 24th census in Hasaka in 1962, which rendered thousands of Syrian Kurds stateless], 6 October 2021, [url](#); STJ, Syrian Citizenship Disappeared. How the 1962 census destroyed stateless Kurds' lives and identities, 15 September 2018, [url](#), p. 22

<sup>724</sup> STJ, Decades of statelessness and the absence of basic rights, 6 July 2021, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>725</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria - Military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate, 1 July 2022 [source: Representation of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Suleimania], [url](#), p. 58





to register property in their name (and had to rely on registering it in the name of relatives), nor could they hire a lawyer, unless they had permission from the political security branch. They were not allowed to inherit or bequeath property.<sup>726</sup>

The Kurdish-led AANES reportedly did not differentiate between stateless Kurds and those holding citizenship. *Ajanib* and *maktoumeen* had equal access to the AANES' services and institutions, and to education. Enjoying these rights in the Kurdish-controlled areas, however, would not affect their status within the framework of Syrian national law. In the Kurdish-controlled areas, stateless Kurds were obliged to do military service under the AANES 'Self-Defence Law'.<sup>727</sup> According to an iMMAP report of December 2021, the Kurdish-led AANES in Qamishli city<sup>728</sup> issued special identity cards for *maktoumeen*, which allowed them to pass Internal Security Forces (ISF) and SDF checkpoints. They were, however, not recognised by the GoS and its security and military forces.<sup>729</sup> Due to their lack of citizenship and any official identity documents, stateless persons faced numerous problems, especially those who have been displaced into GoS-controlled territory or who have sought refuge abroad.<sup>730</sup>

## 10.2 Targeting in territories controlled by the Syrian National Army (SNA)

As of May 2021, Kurds reportedly constituted about 25 % of the population in Afrin, while before Turkey's Olive Branch operation in 2018, 96 % (92 %, according to another report)<sup>731</sup> of the population had been Kurds.<sup>732</sup> Since 2018, thousands of internally displaced Syrian Arabs, fighters' families and Turkmen were relocated to the area with Turkey's support, while more than half of the Kurdish population had left. Many of the IDPs relocated to Afrin reportedly originated from Ghouta as well as from Aleppo, Rural Damascus, Homs, Idlib and Hama governorates<sup>733</sup>, while many of the Turkmen families relocated to Afrin had previously fled from Iraq, or were families of fighters from the Turkmen-majority Sultan Murad Division.<sup>734</sup> Two local human rights organisations issued statements in September 2021 and February 2022 that Turkey was constructing new settlements with the financial support of organisations from Kuwait and of Israeli Palestinians, such as the Muslim Brotherhood charity 'Living in Dignity', to

<sup>726</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 55; STJ, Decades of statelessness and the absence of basic rights, 6 July 2021, [url](#), pp. 12-13

<sup>727</sup> ENS and ISI, Stateless in Syria. Country Position Paper, August 2019, [url](#), pp. 16-17; Syria Direct, 'Shadow of a human': Syria's stateless Kurds navigate shifting authorities decades after losing citizenship, 18 October 2018, [url](#); Denmark, DIS, Syria - Military recruitment in Hasakah Governorate, 1 July 2022, [url](#), p. 48; RIC, Translation: Law concerning military service in North and East Syria, 10 June 2020, [url](#), art. 1(A) and (D)

<sup>728</sup> Qamishli city is located in Al-Hasakah governorate close to the Syrian-Turkish border. Most of the city is under control of the Kurdish Autonomous Administration, however, a few areas, including the city's airport, are under the control of the GoS. iMMAP, Return and Reintegration Profile No. 16 Quamishli City, December 2021, [url](#), pp. 9-10

<sup>729</sup> iMMAP, Return and Reintegration Profile No. 16 Quamishli City, December 2021, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>730</sup> ENS and ISI, Stateless in Syria. Country Position Paper, August 2019, [url](#), pp. 16-17

<sup>731</sup> Ceasefire Center for Civilian Rights and YASA, Cultivating Chaos: Afrin after operation Olive Branch, July 2020, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>732</sup> Kurdistan24, Kurds becoming a minority in Kurdish region of Afrin: Statement, 30 May 2021, [url](#); Human Rights Organisation–Afrin–Syria [Facebook], 28 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>733</sup> ACAPS, Syria. Humanitarian Needs in Afrin, 3 March 2021, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>734</sup> Ceasefire Center for Civilian Rights and YASA, Cultivating Chaos: Afrin after operation Olive Branch, July 2020, [url](#), p. 20





house families of pro-Turkish militia members.<sup>735</sup> Similarly, the Kurdish Hawar News Agency reported on the construction of mosques and Islamic schools financed by Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated organisations.<sup>736</sup>

ACAPS stated in March 2021 that at least 80 % of Afrin's total population of 442 000 (including 154 682 residents, 285 550 IDPs, and 2 596 returnees) were in need of humanitarian assistance, with the Kurdish population reportedly being one of the most affected groups.<sup>737</sup> Access to shelter was reportedly particularly problematic for Kurdish residents, as in many cases their property had been looted, occupied by IDPs from GoS-controlled areas or the families of SNA fighters. Other residents, predominantly of Kurdish origin, had reportedly been forced to leave their homes through threats, extortion, detention, and abduction by SNA-affiliated local militia groups.<sup>738</sup> Fighters of SNA factions had reportedly forced former residents to pay large sums of money to take some of their belongings from their houses, or to share their houses with families relocated by the militia groups.<sup>739</sup> The UNCOI reported in August 2020 that it had received accounts by Kurdish civilians from Afrin and Ras Al-Ayn on the looting and appropriation of their property by members of SNA factions, including Division 14, Brigade 142 (Suleiman Shah Brigade) and Division 22 (Hamza Brigade).<sup>740</sup> Al-Monitor reported in May 2020 on similar incidents in Tall Abyad.<sup>741</sup> In Ras Al-Ayn, members of the Sultan Murad and Hamza Divisions reportedly confiscated about 800 houses belonging to Kurds and Arabs affiliated with AANES institutions.<sup>742</sup>

Moreover, Kurdish neighbourhoods were reportedly discriminated when it came to the provision of services such as electricity supplies and road network maintenance.<sup>743</sup> The UNCOI noted in its February 2022 report that in Afrin 'patterns of looting, pillage, occupation and confiscation' continued, in particular during the olive harvest season, to the detriment of displaced owners. Armed groups reportedly seized the harvest of thousands of olive trees, including under the pretext of 'taxes', ignoring the fact that the absent owners had formal or informal powers of attorneys for the management of their property. Some owners reportedly got their property back by paying bribes to SNA factions while some owners, who had filed official complaints to retrieve their property or receive compensation, reportedly had suffered threats, beatings, abductions and even killings by members of the armed groups. In Ma'batli and Bulbul, Aleppo governorate, members of the Levant Front and the Sultan Murad Division,

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<sup>735</sup> Human Rights Organisation–Afrin–Syria [Facebook], 21 February 2022, [url](#); National Initiative for Afrin [Facebook], 13 September 2021, [url](#); NPA, Turkey goes ahead implementing demographic change in Syria's Afrin, 21 February 2022, [url](#); NPA, Civil organization warns of demographic change's seriousness in Syria's Afrin, 13 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>736</sup> Hawar News Agency, Turkey continues the crime of demographic change in occupied Afrin, 24 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>737</sup> ACAPS, Syria. Humanitarian Needs in Afrin, 3 March 2021, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>738</sup> ACAPS, Syria. Humanitarian Needs in Afrin, 3 March 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>739</sup> Ceasefire Center for Civilian Rights and YASA, Cultivating Chaos: Afrin after operation Olive Branch, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 20-21

<sup>740</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/45/31, 14 August 2020, [url](#), para. 47-50

<sup>741</sup> Al-Monitor, Turkey's occupation of northern Syria includes population transfers, 7 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>742</sup> Al-Hilu, K., The Turkish Intervention in Northern Syria: One Strategy, Discrepant Policies, EUI, 14 January 2021, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>743</sup> Al-Hilu, K., The Turkish Intervention in Northern Syria: One Strategy, Discrepant Policies, EUI, 14 January 2021, [url](#), p. 14





reportedly sold the rights to harvest olives to third parties, although the displaced owners had objected.<sup>744</sup>

AI noted in its 2021 report on Syria that the SNA continued to commit abuses such as arbitrary detention, abduction, as well as torture and ill treatment against civilians – predominantly of Kurdish origin - in Afrin and Ras Al-Ayn.<sup>745</sup> Similarly, the UNCOI noted in its August 2021 report that several SNA-affiliated armed groups including Division 22 (the Hamza Brigade), Division 14 (the 141st Brigade) and Division 13 (the Muhammad Al-Fatih Brigade), and Faylaq Al-Sham continued to unlawfully detain civilians, the majority of them Kurds. Former detainees reported that they were beaten and tortured by SNA members to coerce confessions and other information, which in some cases was later taken as the main source of evidence in criminal proceedings. The detainees were not told why they had been detained and were transferred to a centralized prison only after they had been forced to confess. Only then were they allowed to contact a lawyer and their families.<sup>746</sup> STJ reported that in Afrin in 2021, 584 people were detained - in most cases for political reasons, including cases where people ‘were arrested for the simple fact that they were Kurds’.<sup>747</sup> USDOS reported on alleged extrajudicial killings, including of a Kurdish Yezidi civilian, by SNA-affiliated Faylaq al-Sham militia in August 2020<sup>748</sup>, and noted that victims of abductions by Turkish-backed armed groups were often of Kurdish or Yezidi origin or activists who had been critical of these armed groups.<sup>749</sup>

Syrian human rights groups noted in a joint submission to the UN Human Rights Council Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review in November 2021 that authorities in Afrin had ceased to issue official documents in the Kurdish language, publishing them in Arabic or Turkish instead. Moreover, also traffic signs and other institutional signs were changed into Arabic and Turkish. The Kurdish school curriculum was replaced with Turkish and Arabic and a focus on Islamic religious education.<sup>750</sup> ACAPS noted in its March 2021 report that the Kurdish population’s access to education and health care was restricted due to language barriers.<sup>751</sup> A Kurdish man interviewed by AI-Monitor in March 2022 spoke about restrictions by the local administration regarding the celebration of Nowruz in Afrin and surrounding districts when the area came under control of the Turkey-backed SNA.<sup>752</sup>

The UNCOI noted in its August 2020 report that it was investigating reports on the detention of at least 49 Kurdish and Yazidi women by SNA factions in Ras Al-Ayn and Afrin in the period November 2019 to July 2020.<sup>753</sup> It further noted that in these areas, Kurdish women faced intimidation by SNA faction members, creating a climate of fear which in effect made them

<sup>744</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 89-91

<sup>745</sup> AI, Amnesty International Report 2021/22 – Syria, 29 March 2022, [url](#), p. 355

<sup>746</sup> 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. 80-82

<sup>747</sup> STJ, Syria: 584 Persons Arrested in Afrin Over 2021, 11 January 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>748</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Syria, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>749</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>750</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions on Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/WG.6/40/SYR/3, 1 November 2021, [url](#), para. 77

<sup>751</sup> ACAPS, Syria. Humanitarian Needs in Afrin, 3 March 2021, [url](#), pp. 4, 6

<sup>752</sup> AI-Monitor, Nowruz not what it used to be for Afrin’s Kurds, 23 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>753</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/45/31, 14 August 2020, [url](#), para. 56





unable to leave their homes.<sup>754</sup> Detained women and girls were reportedly subjected to rape and sexual violence.<sup>755</sup> Some women were reportedly abducted or forced into marriage, primarily by members of the Sultan Murad Division.<sup>756</sup>

## 10.3 Targeting in territories under control of the GoS

Syrian human rights groups noted in a joint submission to the UN Human Rights Council in November 2021, that as the Syrian constitution recognised only the Arabic language, authorities engaged in preventing speakers of Kurdish and other minority languages from speaking their native language. Kurds were reportedly frequently detained for teaching Kurdish in private classes or were sentenced on charges of undermining national harmony or trying to annex parts of Syria's territory to a foreign country.<sup>757</sup> USDOS noted in its 2021 Human Rights Report that the GoS continued to restrict the use and teaching of the Kurdish language, the publication of books and other materials in Kurdish, as well as other forms of Kurdish cultural expressions. The Kurdish population 'faced official and societal discrimination and repression' and 'regime-sponsored violence', according to USDOS.<sup>758</sup>

In spring 2022, tensions increased between the GoS and the Kurdish-led AANES, after the GoS imposed restrictions, and later a total ban, on the entry of basic food items, especially flour<sup>759</sup>, but also other items such as fuel and medical aid<sup>760</sup>, into the Kurdish-majority neighbourhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiyye, under control of the Kurdish-led AANES. The blockade forced local bakeries to close, prompting residents to go to GoS-controlled neighbourhoods to buy necessary food items, especially bread. Shortage of basic items and increasing prices have led to deterioration in living conditions in the two neighbourhoods.<sup>761</sup> As a retaliatory measure, the Kurdish-led AANES imposed a blockade on bakeries in Qamishli and Hasaka, and later also 'security measures' on areas in Qamishli that were under control of the GoS, similarly causing food shortages in these areas.<sup>762</sup>

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<sup>754</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/45/31, 14 August 2020, [url](#), para. 59, 61;

<sup>755</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/45/31, 14 August 2020, [url](#), para. 59, 61; openDemocracy, How Syria's Afrin became hell for Kurds, 11 November 2020, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Turkish-backed rebels leave trail of abuse, criminality in Syria's Afrin, 22 July 2021, [url](#)

<sup>756</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/45/31, 14 August 2020, [url](#), para. 62

<sup>757</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Summary of Stakeholders' submissions on Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/WG.6/40/SYR/3, 1 November 2021, [url](#), para. 61

<sup>758</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 66

<sup>759</sup> STJ, Aleppo: The Syrian Government Denies Basic Foodstuffs to Kurdish Neighborhoods, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>760</sup> COAR, SDF Imposes Siege on Government of Syria Enclaves in Response to Siege of Sheikh Maqsoud, 18 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>761</sup> STJ, Aleppo: The Syrian Government Denies Basic Foodstuffs to Kurdish Neighborhoods, 12 April 2022, [url](#); SOHR, Amid lack of flour in most of bread bakeries | Fourth Division "besieges" SDF-held neighbourhoods in Aleppo, 5 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>762</sup> COAR, SDF Imposes Siege on Government of Syria Enclaves in Response to Siege of Sheikh Maqsoud, 18 April 2022, [url](#)



## 11. Christians

Christian communities in Syria included a variety of denominations, such as the Greek or Byzantine Orthodox Church, the Greek Catholic Church, Maronites, Armenian, Suryanis (members of the Syriac Orthodox Church), members of the Syrian Catholic Church and Christian Assyrians (belonging to the Assyrian Ancient Church of the East or the Chaldean Catholic Church).<sup>763</sup> Most Christians continue to live in and around Damascus, Aleppo, Latakia, Homs, Hama and Hasaka governorate.<sup>764</sup> US sources estimated that 10 % of the population are Christians.<sup>765</sup> However, the number of Christians is estimated to have fallen to 3.3 % of Syria's entire population, according to a report published by the Christian NGO Open Doors.<sup>766</sup> SOHR noted in June 2021 that only about 300 to 500 Christians were still living in regions controlled by HTS, including in Idlib city and the countryside, while before 2015, there had been almost 20 000 Christians residing in Idlib City and four villages, Al-Ya'qoubiyyah, Al-Qinniyah, Al-Ghassaniyah and al-Jadidah.<sup>767</sup> About 30 Christian families were living Raqqa city as of February 2022.<sup>768</sup>

According to Syrian law, Christian groups, like all other religious groups, must register with the GoS. Registered religious groups and clergy receive free utilities and enjoy some tax exemptions. Public schools are run by the GoS and are non-sectarian, however, Christian and Druze communities are allowed to operate some public schools. Religious instruction is mandatory in public schools but covers only Christianity and Islam.<sup>769</sup> Christian and Muslim religious leaders are exempted from mandatory military service based on conscientious objection.<sup>770</sup> The Personal Status Law stipulates that a Muslim man may marry a Christian woman, but a Muslim woman may not marry a Christian man. A Christian woman marrying a Muslim is not entitled to inherit property or wealth from her husband, even if she converts.<sup>771</sup> Conversions are generally reportedly rare due to societal conventions and religious rules and converts face pressure from society to move to other areas within the country or to emigrate to freely practice their new religion. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is prohibited by law.<sup>772</sup>

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) noted that in the Kurdish-controlled areas, Christians and other religious groups were able to openly express and exercise their religious beliefs, including converting to other religions.<sup>773</sup> There were however

<sup>763</sup> MRG, Syria: Christians, Armenians and Assyrians, March 2018, [url](#); USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report 2021 - Syria, 2 June 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>764</sup> USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report 2021 - Syria, 2 June 2022, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>765</sup> USCIRF, Annual Report 2021 - Syria, 21 April 2021, [url](#), p. 45; USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report 2021 - Syria, 2 June 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>766</sup> Open Doors, World Watch List Syria 2022, [url](#)

<sup>767</sup> SOHR, Exclusive interviews. Tens of Christians live in HTS-held villages, despite repression, 9 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>768</sup> SOHR, Four years after liberation of Al-Raqqa city. Christians are still deprived of practicing their rituals in churches, 4 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>769</sup> USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report 2021 - Syria, 2 June 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6

<sup>770</sup> USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report 2021 - Syria, 2 June 2022, [url](#), pp. 10-11

<sup>771</sup> USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report 2021 - Syria, 2 June 2022, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>772</sup> USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report 2021 - Syria, 2 June 2022, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>773</sup> USCIRF, Annual Report 2021 - Syria, 21 April 2021, [url](#), p. 44



concerns by Syriac Christian communities regarding the school curriculum.<sup>774</sup> Several students, teachers and members of the Syriac Christian Orthodox Creed Council were arrested mainly in Hasaka governorate and Ein Arab city in Aleppo governorate by SDF in September 2021, after they had criticised and refused to adopt the school curriculum introduced by the Kurdish-led AANES in the areas under their control. SNHR specifically mentioned the arrest of two council members in Qamishli city. Both were reportedly released the following day.<sup>775</sup> SHRC explained that the main reason for rejecting the curriculum was that it was not recognised by institutions outside the Kurdish-controlled areas, preventing students from pursuing higher education.<sup>776</sup>

Sources reported on the confiscation of homes and property of Christians by HTS in areas under its control.<sup>777</sup> The UNCOI noted in February 2022 that it had received reports and witness accounts that HTS confiscated or used private property such as houses and land of individuals who had fled the country and that Christians and other minority groups were specifically targeted.<sup>778</sup> ‘Islamist factions’ operating in Idlib governorate imposed so-called ‘jizya’ taxes (a tax historically imposed on non-Muslims by Muslim rulers)<sup>779</sup> on Christians, to pressure them to leave their homes. An office of ‘Christians’ properties’, established by HTS, reportedly notified Christian tenants and property owners to consult with HTS administrative offices before renewing contracts or setting new terms, including increasing the rent of houses or shops.<sup>780</sup> Christians who fled their homes in Idlib were reportedly also prohibited by HTS from appointing someone to appeal against rulings handed down by Sharia courts regarding their property.<sup>781</sup> HTS reportedly banned Christians from ringing the bells and celebrating holidays in the only church in a neighbourhood in Idlib city. They were, however, allowed to pray inside secretly. Media was reportedly not allowed to report from the neighbourhood in a manner that would reflect the Christian populations’ grievances.<sup>782</sup> USCIRF pointed in its 2022 Annual Report to HTS seizing properties and churches of Christians and restricting their right to worship in the north-western region of Idlib.<sup>783</sup>

Individuals converted to Christianity reportedly faced threats in areas under control by Turkish forces and the SNA. USCIRF reported in its 2021 Annual Report on the case of a Kurdish convert to Christianity who was detained and charged with apostasy by an SNA-backed court in Afrin.<sup>784</sup> According to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), a Christian NGO advocating for freedom of religion or belief, the man was detained in August 2020 by Failaq Al-Sham, an Islamist militia and part of the SNA, after refusing to hand over a school building to the group,

<sup>774</sup> USCIRF, Annual Report 2021 – Syria, 21 April 2021, [url](#), p. 44; SNHR, 193 Arbitrary Arrests/ Detentions Documented in Syria in September 2021, Including 10 Children and Five Women, 2 October 2021, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>775</sup> SNHR, 193 Arbitrary Arrests/ Detentions Documented in Syria in September 2021, Including 10 Children and Five Women, 2 October 2021, [url](#), pp. 6, 14

<sup>776</sup> SHRC, The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria, 9 January 2022, [url](#), p. 38

<sup>777</sup> HRW, World Report 2022 - Syria, 2022, [url](#); Enab Baladi, “Absent Christian”... Confiscation of real property of Idlib’s Christians, 11 July 2020, [url](#); SOHR, Exclusive interviews. Tens of Christians live in HTS-held villages, despite repression, 9 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>778</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/49/77, 8 February 2022, [url](#), para. 72

<sup>779</sup> See Britannica, jizyah, last updated 24 September 2019, [url](#)

<sup>780</sup> USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report 2020 - Syria, 12 May 2021, [url](#), p. 16

<sup>781</sup> SOHR, HTS confiscates property of Christian community in Idlib, 25 April 2020, [url](#)

<sup>782</sup> SOHR, Exclusive interview. Elderly Christian describes suffering of Christians in HTS-held areas, 20 May 2021, [url](#)

<sup>783</sup> USCIRF, Annual Report 2022 – Syria, 25 April 2022, [url](#), p. 34

<sup>784</sup> USCIRF, Annual Report 2021-Syria, 21 April 2021, [url](#), p. 45



where he was working as headmaster, and that was supposed to be transformed into an Islamic school.<sup>785</sup> He was reportedly released in March 2021.<sup>786</sup> USDOS reported with reference to local news media reports that in August 2020 some militia groups that form part of the Turkish-backed SNA abducted 14 Syrian Kurds living in Afrin, who had converted to Christianity.<sup>787</sup>

In March 2021, STJ issued a report on the looting of crops and land confiscations by six SNA-affiliated militia groups in Ras Al-Ayn and Tall Abyad in the period April to August 2020. The twelve incidents described in the report included the looting of crops of a Christian family in the eastern countryside of Ras Al-Ayn and the looting of crops of several Christian farmers in Abbah village by members of the Sultan Murad Division. The militia later also confiscated one of the farmer's agricultural lands.<sup>788</sup>

In June 2020, SOHR reported on one incident in Dar'a governorate, where a Christian woman from Izra'a city was abducted by unknown perpetrators.<sup>789</sup> Two Christian men were shot by unknown perpetrators in the eastern countryside of Dar'a in April 2022.<sup>790</sup>

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<sup>785</sup> CWS, Kurdish man arrested and accused of apostasy, 13 August 2020, [url](#)

<sup>786</sup> CWS, Kurdish Christian man released after seven months in detention, 1 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>787</sup> USDOS, International Religious Freedom Report 2020 - Syria, 12 May 2021, [url](#), pp. 13-14, see also SyriacPress, SYRIA: 14 Kurds kidnapped from Turkish-occupied Afrin after converting to Christianity, 19 August 2020, [url](#)

<sup>788</sup> STJ, Syria: Crops Looted, Lands Seized in "Peace Spring" Territories, March 2021, 11 March 2021, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>789</sup> SOHR, Kidnappings in Daraa. Communication lost with Christian young woman in Izra'a, 19 June 2020, [url](#)

<sup>790</sup> NPA, Two Christian Civilians Killed In Syria's Daraa, Apr 21, 2022, [url](#)



## 12. Palestinians

### 12.1 Recent situation of Palestinians

According to figures provided by United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) as of 31 December 2020, there were 569 990 Palestinian refugees<sup>791</sup> registered with UNRWA in Syria.<sup>792</sup> As of 31 December 2020, an estimated 438 000 stayed in Syria. The remainder have fled the country.<sup>793</sup> 52 % of the estimated Palestinian refugees that remained in Syria were women and 31 % were children.<sup>794</sup> As of December 2021, there were 12 camps in the country, nine of which were official and three unofficial camps. The official camps were the Dera'a Camp, the Hama Camp, the Homs Camp, the Jaramana Camp, the Khan Dunoun Camp, the Khan Eshieh Camp, the Neirab Camp, the Qabr Essit Camp and the Sbeineh Camp. The unofficial camps were the camps Ein el Tal, Latakia and Yarmouk. UNRWA stated that it had access to 10 out of 12 camps, without naming them.<sup>795</sup>

In January 2021, UNRWA estimated that 40 % of Palestinian refugees residing in Syria were still displaced, of whom two thirds were displaced at least once since the onset of the conflict.<sup>796</sup> Palestinian refugees in state of protracted displacement were subject to the 'combined impact of the conflict, COVID-19 and an economic crisis' which were 'reinforcing an already dire humanitarian situation' according to UNRWA.<sup>797</sup>

### 12.2 Legal status of the Palestinian refugees in Syria

The legal status of Palestinian refugees in Syria evolved along a number of displacement flows into the country since 1948.<sup>798</sup> The majority of Palestinian refugees in Syria remain stateless with only 3 500 Palestinians having obtained Syrian citizenship, 'most probably before 1948'.<sup>799</sup> Based on Legislative Decree 276 of 24 November 1969, Palestinian refugees cannot apply for Syrian citizenship.<sup>800</sup> However, a Palestinian refugee woman who is married to a Syrian national can apply for citizenship by handing in an application to the Immigration

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<sup>791</sup> The total number of people registered with UNRWA in Syria amounts to 658 058 including non-refugee wives, husbands and descendants as well as adopted descendants and frontier villagers registered with UNRWA.

UNRWA, UNRWA Registered Population Dashboard, n.d., [url](#), p. 4

<sup>792</sup> UNRWA, UNRWA Registered Population Dashboard, n.d., [url](#), pp. 3, 4

<sup>793</sup> UNRWA, Where We Work, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>794</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arabic Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>795</sup> UNRWA, Where We Work, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>796</sup> UN General Assembly, Report of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 27 August 2021, [url](#), para. 13; UNRWA, UNRWA and EU help Palestine refugees in Syria with emergency cash assistance, 4 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>797</sup> UN General Assembly, Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. 1 January–31 December 2020, 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 9

<sup>798</sup> Omran Center for Strategic Studies, Palestinians of Syria: Violations of Rights and Identity Challenges, October 2019, [url](#), p. 18; Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., Palestinian Refugees in International Law, 2020, [url](#), pp. 220-221

<sup>799</sup> Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., Palestinian Refugees in International Law, 2020, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 221

<sup>800</sup> Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., Palestinian Refugees in International Law, 2020, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 223



and Passports Department under the Ministry of Interior<sup>801</sup> according to Article 8 of the Legislative Decree 276. From the date of the application, the marriage has to remain valid for two years. During this period of time, the woman has to be residing in Syria.<sup>802</sup> With reference to an independent source interviewed by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), DIS reported in October 2021 that in case the woman has a child or is pregnant, ‘the application will always be approved.’<sup>803</sup>

ACAPS, a non-profit, non-governmental project which aims at providing independent humanitarian analysis, reported in March 2014 that the legal status of Palestinians in Syria generally falls into two main categories:

- Palestinians who fled to Syria in or before 1956 and their descendants (approximately 85 % of the total), and
- Palestinians who fled to Syria after 1956 and their descendants.<sup>804</sup>

Palestinians who fall into the first category, while preserving their Palestinian nationality, have the ‘same rights as Syrian citizens in terms of residence, freedom of movement, work, trade and access to civil service positions and public services’ based on Law 260 of July 1956.<sup>805</sup> However, for those who fled to Syria in 1956, work in the public sector is only possible on short term contracts. Compulsory military service in the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA), a Palestinian unit within the Syrian Armed Forces, is only required from those who fled in 1948. Under the named law, Palestinians cannot vote or hold public office. They are not allowed to own agricultural land and can only own one house per person.<sup>806</sup> According to a 2020 publication on Palestinian refugees in international law by researchers Albanese and Tekkenberg, those who arrived in the period between 1948 and 1956 were registered as ‘Palestinian refugees’ by the governmental General Administration for Palestinian Arab Refugees (GAPAR)<sup>807</sup> in charge of regulating and administering the presence of Palestinian refugees in the country and closely cooperating with UNRWA.<sup>808</sup> The registration with GAPAR officially confers legal status to Palestinian refugees in Syria. Palestinian refugees registered

<sup>801</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates, October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; Syria, Parliament of Syria, 24/11/1969 قانون الجنسية المرسوم التشريعي رقم 276 تاريخ 276 [Legislative Decree No. 276 of 1969], 24 November 1969, [url](#), no English translation available; UNRWA, Regional Information Relating to Women’s Nationality, n.d., [url](#), p. 2

<sup>802</sup> UNRWA, Regional Information Relating to Women’s Nationality, n.d., [url](#), p. 2; Syria, Parliament of Syria, 24/11/1969 قانون الجنسية المرسوم التشريعي رقم 276 تاريخ 276 [Legislative Decree No. 276 of 1969], 24 November 1969, [url](#), art. 8, no English translation available.

<sup>803</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: independent source interviewed by the Danish MoFA on 11 August 2020], October 2021, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>804</sup> ACAPS, Palestinians from Syria: Syria Needs Analysis Project, March 2014, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>805</sup> Law 260 of 1956 is ‘the main instrument that gives Palestinians substantial legal rights and protection in Syria while preserving their original nationality’. The rights established by this law were expanded by subsequent laws and regulations. Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., Palestinian Refugees in International Law, 2020, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 222

<sup>806</sup> ACAPS, Palestinians from Syria: Syria Needs Analysis Project, March 2014, [url](#), p. 4; Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., Palestinian Refugees in International Law, 2020, available with subscription, [url](#), pp. 222-223

<sup>807</sup> The Palestine Arab Refugee Institute (PARI) was founded in 1949 by the Syrian authorities and was later renamed General Administration for Palestinian Arab Refugees (GAPAR). It deals with issues regarding Palestinians in Syria and operates under the Ministry of Social Affairs. Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates, October 2021, [url](#), p. 9; Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., Palestinian Refugees in International Law, 2020, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 222, footnote 358

<sup>808</sup> Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., Palestinian Refugees in International Law, 2020, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 221





with GAPAR with some restrictions are treated equal to Syrian nationals<sup>809</sup> and are allowed to join the PLA.<sup>810</sup> Refugees registered with UNRWA have access to the agency's education, health and social services.<sup>811</sup>

Those in the second category mentioned by ACAPS were 'registered with UNRWA in other countries or the occupied Palestinian Territories and are treated as Arab foreigners'.<sup>812</sup> They have a renewable 10-year residence permit, have to apply for work permits and cannot work in the public sector. Meanwhile, they have free access to public health and education services, except for university education, for which they have to pay fees.<sup>813</sup> Albanese and Tekkenberg stated that Palestinian refugees who belong to this group do not enjoy the same status as the GAPAR-registered refugees, despite having access to all UNRWA services. While the two authors confirmed that Palestinians belonging to this group have restricted access to employment and education, they noted that these Palestinians do not have access to governmental health services 'except for minor interventions'.<sup>814</sup> However, they may be registered with GAPAR by presidential decree or, in the case of female Palestinian refugees, by marrying a refugee who is registered with GAPAR.<sup>815</sup>

Based on their registration status, Albanese and Tekkenberg define four categories of Palestinian refugees in Syria. Those who were registered with both GAPAR and UNRWA; those who were registered with GAPAR only; those registered with UNRWA only; and Palestinians living in Syria without being registered at all. All Palestinian refugees arriving before 1956 were registered with GAPAR. Those who met the UNRWA definition of Palestinian refugee were also registered with UNRWA, which applied to the majority of Palestinian refugees arriving in Syria prior to 1956.<sup>816</sup> According to GAPAR, as of January 2022, 563 613 Palestinian refugees were registered with GAPAR.<sup>817</sup>

## 12.3 UNRWA operations and available assistance

As stated by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) in February 2022, Palestinian refugees in Syria continued to experience 'dire humanitarian and protection

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<sup>809</sup> Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law*, 2020, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 222; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Country of origin information report Syria*, 15 May 2020, [url](#), p. 44

<sup>810</sup> Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law*, 2020, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 223

<sup>811</sup> Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law*, 2020, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 222; Omran Center for Strategic Studies, *Palestinians of Syria: Violations of Rights and Identity Challenges*, October 2019, [url](#), pp. 20-22

<sup>812</sup> ACAPS, *Palestinians from Syria: Syria Needs Analysis Project*, March 2014, [url](#), p. 4

<sup>813</sup> ACAPS, *Palestinians from Syria: Syria Needs Analysis Project*, March 2014, [url](#), pp. 4-5

<sup>814</sup> Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law*, 2020, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 225

<sup>815</sup> Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law*, 2020, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 224

<sup>816</sup> Albanese, F. and Takkenberg, L., *Palestinian Refugees in International Law*, 2020, available with subscription, [url](#), p. 221

<sup>817</sup> Syria, GAPAR, 3/1/2022 جدول تعداد اللاجئين الفلسطينيين المسجلين في الهيئة العامة للاجئين الفلسطينيين العرب حتى تاريخ [Table of Palestinian Refugees registered with GAPAR until 3 January 2022], [url](#)



needs', with 420 000 (96 %) of them in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>818</sup> A UNRWA survey conducted in May 2021 found that 82 % of the individuals in the 503 Palestinian refugee households in Syria who took part in the survey lived on less than USD 1.9 [approximately EUR 1.7]<sup>819</sup> per day, including the UNRWA cash assistance.<sup>820</sup> In a January 2021 interview with DIS, consultant and analyst Musaab Balchi stated that the services of the agency had declined 'with the overall situation in Syria'. While there was high demand in needs, UNRWA was unable to cover the demand with the services it provided, according to Balchi.<sup>821</sup>

In 2020 UNRWA provided emergency cash assistance to 415 781 Palestinian refugees and in-kind food assistance to 145 365 of 'the most vulnerable'<sup>822</sup>.<sup>823</sup> As of March 2022, UNRWA provided cash assistance to 145 000 Palestine refugees of 'the most vulnerable categories'.<sup>824</sup> Figures provided by UNRWA as of 31 December 2020 revealed that the agency operated 102 schools with a total of 50 609 students; 23 primary health centres; five community rehabilitation centres, and 13 women's programme centres.<sup>825</sup> The agency further supports livelihoods through a microfinance programme and offers water and sanitation service to the camps for Palestinian refugees that are accessible to it.<sup>826</sup>

In recent years, UNRWA's funding gap grew, which led to a limited provision of humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees in Syria.<sup>827</sup> As of 31 October 2021, 49.6 % of the total UNRWA funding requirements in Syria for 2021 were pledged or received from donors and partners.<sup>828</sup>

As of late 2018, almost all UNRWA installations needed rehabilitation or reconstruction due to severe damages. This was particularly the case in Yarmouk, Ein el Tal and Dar'a. In August 2021, UNRWA reported that the situation 'remained similar in 2020'.<sup>829</sup> In March 2021, UNRWA reported that 40 % of its classrooms were lost due to the conflict and almost 25 % of UNRWA's health centres were unusable at the time.<sup>830</sup> As stated by UNRWA in undated website entries,

<sup>818</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arabic Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>819</sup> Exchange rates from European Commission, Exchange rate (InforEuro), n.d., [url](#), accessed on 28 March 2022

<sup>820</sup> UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan Emergency Appeal 2022, 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>821</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: Palestinian consultant and analyst Musaab Balchi], October 2021, [url](#), p. 71

<sup>822</sup> Female-headed households, families with members with disabilities or headed by an older person, and unaccompanied minors or orphans; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arabic Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 45; UNRWA, UNRWA and EU help Palestine refugees in Syria with emergency cash assistance, 4 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>823</sup> UNRWA, Annual Operational Report 2020, 10 August 2020, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>824</sup> UNRWA, UNRWA Cash Assistance: Vital Assistance for Palestine Refugees in Syria, 25 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>825</sup> UNRWA, Where We Work, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>826</sup> UNRWA, Where We Work, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>827</sup> UNRWA, Syria Regional Crisis: Emergency Appeal 2021, [url](#), pp. 3, 9; DW, UN Palestinian refugee agency still short of cash, 18 February 2022, [url](#); UNRWA, UNRWA issues emergency call for humanitarian assistance amid end-of-year shortfall; salaries of 28,000 staff at risk, hopes to avoid suspension of essential services, 9 November 2020, [url](#)

<sup>828</sup> UNRWA, Syria – Humanitarian Snapshot, September & October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>829</sup> UN General Assembly, Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. 1 January–31 December 2020, 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 55

<sup>830</sup> UNRWA, 5th Brussels Conference on Syria: UNRWA Calls for Support to Help Palestine Refugees, 29 March 2021, [url](#)



installations in five of a total of five camps majority of UNRWA in Rural Damascus governorate have been reconstructed wholly or in parts and were functional.<sup>831</sup>

## 12.4 Situation in Palestinian refugee camps

With reference to UNRWA figures provided to DIS as of January 2021, 327 995 Palestinian refugees' residential addresses were registered in Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates, of whom 68 % lived outside the six camps located in these governorates.<sup>832</sup> However, the actual place of residence may differ from what is recorded.<sup>833</sup>

As of the beginning of 2022, the basic safe water and electricity provision infrastructure had not been completely restored in the camps Yarmouk, Dar'a and Ein el Tal.<sup>834</sup> According to UNRWA, the situation in Dar'a governorate was precarious throughout 2021.<sup>835</sup> The escalation of tensions between GoS forces and non-state armed groups led to clashes during August 2021 and resulted in the displacement of 36 000 civilians, including 3 000 Palestinian refugees from Dar'a refugee camp.<sup>836</sup>

As reported by DIS in October 2021 with reference to an international organisation, there were frequent power shortages in Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates. The situation in Palestinian camps according to the source 'can be even worse than in other areas'.<sup>837</sup> DIS further reported referring to an interview with Action Group for Palestinians of Syria (AGPS)<sup>838</sup> that all camps were connected to the public electricity infrastructure, but they only had electricity for two to four hours per day, which correlated with the general situation in these two governorates.<sup>839</sup> In contrast, the international organisation interviewed by DIS in February 2021 stated that there was no intact water or electricity infrastructure in Yarmouk camp and 'no repair of this has been initiated'.<sup>840</sup> In general, residents of these camps would therefore have to rely on private generators running on gas, which is expensive and difficult to get as a result of shortages.<sup>841</sup> Only Jaramana, Khan Dunoun, Sbeineh and Khan Eshieh camp were still connected to the water network after 2011. However, the water network did not operate

<sup>831</sup> UNRWA, Jaramana Camp, n.d., [url](#); UNRWA, Khan Dunoun Camp, n.d., [url](#); UNRWA, Khan Eshieh Camp, n.d., [url](#); UNRWA, Qabr Essit Camp, n.d., [url](#); UNRWA, Sbeineh Camp, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>832</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: UNRWA's emergency database], October 2021, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>833</sup> Denmark, DIS, Palestinian Refugees [source: interview with UNRWA], June 2020, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>834</sup> UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan Emergency Appeal 2022, 2022, [url](#), p. 15; UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, February 2022, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>835</sup> UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan Emergency Appeal 2022, 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>836</sup> UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan Emergency Appeal 2022, 2022, [url](#), p. 14; UNRWA, Syria - Humanitarian Snapshot, July & August 2021, [url](#); New Arab (The), Palestinian refugees being killed, displaced amid Syrian regime's Daraa assault: UNRWA, 17 August 2021, [url](#); UNOCHA, Syria: Dar'a Governorate Situation Report, 7 September 2021, [url](#), pp. 1-2

<sup>837</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: interview with international organisation], October 2021, [url](#), p. 66

<sup>838</sup> AGPS is a London-based human rights organisation that monitors the situation of Palestinian refugees in Syria.

<sup>839</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: interview with AGPS], October 2021, [url](#), p. 58

<sup>840</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: interview with international organisation], October 2021, [url](#), p. 66

<sup>841</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: interview with AGPS], October 2021, [url](#), p. 58



consistently and not all areas of these camps were connected to it. There was a need for additional water from private suppliers in almost all camps, mainly provided through water trucking.<sup>842</sup> In September 2021, the Syria Report stated that Damascus governorate had started to provide electricity and drinking water to some points in Yarmouk. Residents had to extend the lines to their places of residency at their personal cost.<sup>843</sup>

UNRWA reported four incidents of unauthorized entry by Syrian authorities or third parties in its installations in 2020, of which one was an incursion that involved an armed group.<sup>844</sup> UNRWA is not responsible for administering or policing the refugee camps, as the host authorities are responsible for matters of safety and public order in UNRWA's operating territories.<sup>845</sup>

## 12.5 Restrictions on return

In its Emergency Appeal for 2022, UNRWA stated that the total number of Palestinian refugees returning from outside the country decreased in the first eight months of 2021 as a result of border closures and restrictions due to COVID-19 prevention measures.<sup>846</sup> In August 2021, UNRWA reported that 1 383 Palestinian refugees, mostly from Lebanon and Jordan, had returned to Syria during 2020.<sup>847</sup> Between January 2021 and December 2021, 1 039 Palestinian refugees had returned to Syria.<sup>848</sup>

Palestinian refugees registered with GAPAR who have left the country legally and were in possession of a valid Syrian travel document were able to return to the country<sup>849</sup>, regardless of the duration of their absence.<sup>850</sup> Their return procedures were similar to those of Syrian

<sup>842</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: interview with AGPS], October 2021, [url](#), p. 58; Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: interview with Palestinian consultant and analyst Musaab Balchi], October 2021, [url](#), p. 70

<sup>843</sup> Syria Report (The), Yarmouk Camp: Daily Security Approval Allows Temporary Return, 21 September 2021, [url](#)

<sup>844</sup> UN General Assembly, Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. 1 January–31 December 2020, 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 55

<sup>845</sup> UNRWA, Where We Work, n.d., [url](#); Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, 15 May 2020, [url](#), p. 45; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of origin information report Syria, 14 June 2021, [url](#), p. 79

<sup>846</sup> UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan Emergency Appeal 2022, 2022, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>847</sup> UN General Assembly, Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. 1 January–31 December 2020, 18 August 2021, [url](#), para. 12

<sup>848</sup> UNRWA, Syria – Humanitarian Snapshot, November & December 2021, January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>849</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: Denmark, MoFA query responses from 22 September 2021 and 14 October 2021 available to DIS, Palestinian consultant and analyst Musaab Balchi], October 2021, [url](#), pp. 36, 72

<sup>850</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: Denmark, MoFA query responses from 22 September 2021 and 14 October 2021 available to DIS], October 2021, [url](#), p. 36



citizens.<sup>851</sup> In an interview with DIS, AGPS stated in March 2021 that Palestinian refugees were subject to scrutiny and needed a security approval to return to the country.<sup>852</sup>

Palestinian refugees registered with GAPAR who want to return to Syria from outside the country, but have unsettled issues with the Syrian authorities have to apply for status settlement.<sup>853</sup> In an interview with DIS in January 2021, Tom Rollins, journalist and researcher with a focus on Syria, stated that the likelihood for persons from camps formerly held by the opposition, such as Yarmouk, Sbeineh or Khan Eshieh, to have their security clearance rejected, was higher in comparison to people who come from places that were controlled by GoS throughout the conflict.<sup>854</sup>

Return to some camps, such as Handarat (northern Aleppo), has been prevented due to the large-scale destruction of buildings.<sup>855</sup>

In October 2020, referring to a statement by an administrative official of Damascus governorate, Al-Monitor reported that former residents of Yarmouk camp would be allowed to return to the camp on the condition that the houses they wanted to return to were safe or did require only small renovation. Furthermore, returnees needed to prove ownership of their property and 'obtain approvals from the security authorities'.<sup>856</sup> UNRWA reported that the official registration process for those wishing to return to Yarmouk camp started on 10 November 2020.<sup>857</sup> According to an AGPS report published in April 2021, Syrian security and administrative bodies were still preventing the return of people to Yarmouk camp. The source stated that security bodies granted or refused approvals for entering the camp after verifying ownership of a property in Yarmouk or proof of residency, for example by checking the ownership documents, a personal ID card or an electricity or water bill.<sup>858</sup> Information obtained from Palestinian activists interviewed by Al Jazeera in March 2021 stated that the Syrian authorities only allowed pro-GoS Palestinians to return to Yarmouk camp.<sup>859</sup>

As of the beginning of 2022, approvals for over 2 000 families based on GoS data and around 700 families according to UNRWA calculations have been granted.<sup>860</sup> By mid-2021 UNOCHA recorded that 480 vulnerable Palestine refugee families had returned to Yarmouk, while

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<sup>851</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: interview with AGPS], October 2021, [url](#), p. 59; Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: interview with international organisation], October 2021, [url](#), p. 67; Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: Denmark, MoFA query response from 22 September 2021 available to DIS], October 2021, [url](#), p. 36; Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: interview with Palestinian consultant and analyst Musaab Balchi], October 2021, [url](#), p. 72

<sup>852</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: interview with AGPS], October 2021, [url](#), p. 59

<sup>853</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Issues regarding return [source: Syria, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, Syrian Embassy in Stockholm], October 2021, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>854</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: interview with Tom Rollins], October 2021, [url](#), p. 76

<sup>855</sup> AGPS, Residents of Handarat Camp Enduring Protracted Displacement, 29 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>856</sup> Al-Monitor, Palestinians displaced from Syria's Yarmouk camp to finally go home, 13 October 2020, [url](#)

<sup>857</sup> UNRWA, Syria: UNRWA – Progress Highlights of Emergency Appeal January – June 2021, [url](#); UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan Emergency Appeal 2022, 2022, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>858</sup> AGPS, أوروبا وإعادة لاجئي سورية - فلسطينيو دمشق وريفها نموذجاً [Back from Europe: Syria's refugees – Palestinian refugees of Damascus and Rural Damascus], 2 April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>859</sup> Al Jazeera, 'Afraid of Return', Palestinians Fearful of Life in Yarmouk Camp, 30 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>860</sup> UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan Emergency Appeal 2022, 2022, [url](#), p. 15, footnote 14



noting that the camp lacked basic infrastructure and services.<sup>861</sup> As of June 2021, 1 642 Palestinian refugees (400 families) were living in the camp at the time.<sup>862</sup> The sources do not provide further information on the reasons for approval of return or profile of returnees. With reference to UNRWA data, AGPS stated that 38 826 families were living in Yarmouk before the outbreak of the conflict in 2011.<sup>863</sup> Around 120 returnee families were living in Ein al Tal camp as of June 2021.<sup>864</sup>

According to AGPS, so-called reconciliation committees created lists of people who wanted to return to their homes in Sbeineh (Rural Damascus) camp. These lists were checked by security bodies who administered the return after checking and verifying. As a first step, military and government personnel were allowed to return. Civilians, who had family members abroad, were obliged to prove that those family members had left the country regularly and via official border crossings by presenting a document certified by the Department of Immigration. The source further stated that families of missing, detained or absent persons or persons affiliated with the opposition were subject to stricter procedures than others.<sup>865</sup> Referring to statements of activists, AGPS stated that around 40 % of the Hussayniya camp population were not allowed to return to their homes and properties in Rural Damascus by the Syrian army as of April 2021.<sup>866</sup>

In mid-2021, AGPS reported that 15 Palestinian refugees who returned via Damascus were arrested. The source further stated that Palestinian returnees were often summoned for interrogation after they arrived in Syria.<sup>867</sup>

## 12.6 House, land and property issues

Syrian authorities confiscated houses and property of various groups, including displaced persons, within the framework of antiterrorism and national security legislation.<sup>868</sup>

Furthermore, Liwa Al-Quds, a pro-GoS militia consisting of Palestinians, reportedly confiscated homes and shops of (perceived) pro-opposition Palestinians in Neirab, a Palestinian refugee camp in central Aleppo.<sup>869</sup>

<sup>861</sup> UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 45

<sup>862</sup> UNRWA, Syria: UNRWA – Progress Highlights of Emergency Appeal January – June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>863</sup> AGPS, [url](#) [Back from Europe: Syria's refugees – Palestinian refugees of Damascus and Rural Damascus], 2 April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>864</sup> UNRWA, Syria: UNRWA – Progress Highlights of Emergency Appeal January – June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>865</sup> AGPS, [url](#) [Back from Europe: Syria's refugees – Palestinian refugees of Damascus and Rural Damascus], 2 April 2021, [url](#), pp. 5-6

<sup>866</sup> AGPS, [url](#) [Back from Europe: Syria's refugees – Palestinian refugees of Damascus and Rural Damascus], 2 April 2021, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>867</sup> AGPS, [url](#) [15 لاجئاً فلسطينياً اعتقلهم الأمن السوري بعد عودتهم من أوروبا ودول الجوار إلى سورية, Syrian security after they returned from Europe and Syria's neighbouring countries], 17 June 2021, [url](#)

<sup>868</sup> SJAC, Return is a Dream, Options for Post-Conflict Property Restitution in Syria, September 2018, [url](#), p. 12; PAX and Impunity Watch, Violations of Housing, Land and Property Rights, An Obstacle to Peace in Syria, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 5-6; TIMEP, Part 1, Violations in Government-held Areas, 4 February 2021, [url](#); HRW, Syria: Government Stealing Opponents' Land, 8 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>869</sup> Syria Report (The), Neirab Camp: Liwa Al-Quds Seizes Properties of Pro-Opposition Palestinians, 20 January 2021, [url](#); AGPS, Pro-Gov't Group in Syria Seizes Palestinian Property in Neirab Camp, 17 October 2020, [url](#)





According to an AGPS report published in October 2020 on the expropriation of Palestinian refugees in Syria, dozens of Palestinian families in Syria in different parts of the country lost their properties. The properties were divided among GoS institutions such as security bodies or certain ministries, said the source. It further stated that laws made it possible for official bodies or individuals who belong to militias that fought alongside GoS forces or ‘certain confessional groups’ to use the houses. Referring to sources from inside Syria, AGPS stated that GoS, its security bodies and militias have seized movable and immovable property of Palestinian refugees in several Palestinian camps and settlements.<sup>870</sup>

## 12.7 Instances of targeting of Palestinians by different actors

Reportedly Palestinian refugees in Syria have been targeted by the GoS throughout the conflict in the whole country, including in Damascus and Rural Damascus governorates.<sup>871</sup> According to a report published in July 2020 by SNHR, 3 196 Syrian Palestinians were killed by GoS forces between March 2011 and July 2020 and 2 663 imprisoned by GoS during this time period were still detained or remained forcibly disappeared. The source mentions GoS repression against Palestinians for supporting the anti-GoS opposition in the conflict.<sup>872</sup> SNHR further stated that GoS was ‘responsible for approximately 87 % of all the violations’ inflicted on Palestinian refugees in Syria since 2011 according to its own database.<sup>873</sup> In April 2021, AGPS reported that more than 1 700 Palestinian refugees were still imprisoned in Syria, while over 620 had died under torture in prison, including women, children and elderly persons. The source does provide details on the reasons behind the imprisonment.<sup>874</sup> AGPS reported in April 2021 that Syrian security bodies periodically summon males from Khan Eshieh camp (Rural Damascus) for interrogation. The men are blackmailed, arrested and threatened with arrest and forced to pay money.<sup>875</sup> AGPS further reported on the arrest of a number of Palestinian refugees by GoS security forces in 2020, including 56 Palestinian children aged 10 to 16 years.<sup>876</sup> Residents of Hussayniya camp according to the source also complain about a tightened security situation including arrest campaigns and home raids by GoS and affiliated popular forces.<sup>877</sup>

<sup>870</sup> AGPS, الاستيلاء على املاك اللاجئين الفلسطينيين في سورية [Seizure of Palestinian refugee properties in Syria], 2020, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>871</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates, October 2021, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>872</sup> SNHR, 3,196 Syrian Palestinians Were Killed by Syrian Regime Forces, including 491 Due to Torture, Between March 2011 and July 2020, and 49 Appeared in Caesar Photos, 29 July 2020, [url](#), pp. 3, 6

<sup>873</sup> SNHR, 3,196 Syrian Palestinians Were Killed by Syrian Regime Forces, including 491 Due to Tor ture, Between March 2011 and July 2020, and 49 Appeared in Caesar Photos, 29 July 2020, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>874</sup> AGPS, Over 1,700 Palestinian Refugees Secretly Held in Syrian Prisons, 17 April 2021, [url](#)

<sup>875</sup> AGPS, أوروبا وإعادة لاجئي سورية - فلسطينيو دمشق وريفها نموذجاً [Back from Europe: Syria’s refugees – Palestinian refugees of Damascus and Rural Damascus], 2 April 2021, [url](#), p. 5

<sup>876</sup> AGPS, أوروبا وإعادة لاجئي سورية - فلسطينيو دمشق وريفها نموذجاً [Back from Europe: Syria’s refugees – Palestinian refugees of Damascus and Rural Damascus], 2 April 2021, [url](#), pp. 5 - 7

<sup>877</sup> AGPS, أوروبا وإعادة لاجئي سورية - فلسطينيو دمشق وريفها نموذجاً [Back from Europe: Syria’s refugees – Palestinian refugees of Damascus and Rural Damascus], 2 April 2021, [url](#), p. 6



A number of sources stated that looting by pro-GoS militias and GoS forces on a large-scale has happened in Yarmouk.<sup>878</sup> As stated by consultant and analyst Musaab Balchi in an interview with DIS, it did not take place on a similar scale in the other camps.<sup>879</sup>

For information on targeting in relation to participation of the Palestinian community in the armed conflicts until March 2020, please refer to Section 11.3 of the previous [EUAA COI report on Syria: Targeting of Individuals](#) published in March 2020.

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<sup>878</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: interview with Palestinian consultant and analyst Musaab Balchi], October 2021, [url](#), p. 69; AGPS and PRC, Palestinians of Syria (PRS): Destruction and Reconstruction – Annual Field Report 2019, 10 April 2021, [url](#), p. 25; Rollins, T., Talking about water pipes: The fraught reconstruction of Syria’s Yarmouk camp, MEI, 6 May 2020, [url](#)

<sup>879</sup> Denmark, DIS, Syria: Palestinians in Damascus and rural Damascus governorates [source: interview with Palestinian consultant and analyst Musaab Balchi], October 2021, [url](#), p. 69



## 13. Women

### 13.1 General overview of violations against women

Please also see the [EUAA COI report on Syria: Situation of women](#), published in February 2020, for further background information on the situation of women.

Women and girls were disproportionately affected by gender-based violence.<sup>880</sup> In 2021, women and girls in all governorates faced physical violence, psychological and emotional violence, sexual violence, social violence, forced and early marriage, denial of economic resources and education, movement restrictions, and exploitation.<sup>881</sup>

Violence against women was treated as a social matter rather than a criminal one by security forces. According to observers cited by USDOS, 'when some abused women tried to file a police report, police did not investigate their reports thoroughly, if at all, and that in other cases police officers responded by abusing the women.'<sup>882</sup> According to UNOCHA, the prevalence of gender-based violence, 'impunity of perpetrators, and the absence of functional institutions that guarantee women' and girls' rights and safety, negatively impact women and girls and limiting their freedom and eroding their resilience.' Women and girls are relegated to positions of subordination by inequitable gender norms' and face obstacles in accessing the job market, which is 'still constrained by social norms and family restrictions'.<sup>883</sup>

Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) was present in Syria 'prior to 2011, but the ongoing conflict has dramatically increased the frequency of SGBV, changing its nature, broadening its scope, and multiplying the perpetrators involved'.<sup>884</sup> According to UNOCHA, armed hostilities restricted freedoms of women and girls, 'trapping them in cycles of vulnerability and abuse'.<sup>885</sup>

Based on the information collected from eight sources documenting civilian deaths<sup>886</sup> during the period March 2011 to March 2021, OHCHR identified 26 727 women fatalities which amounted to one in every 13 deaths recorded.<sup>887</sup> Between March 2011 and March 2022 SNHR documented at least 16 228 cases of adult women dying at the hands of the different actors involved in the conflict. GoS forces (among them army, security forces, local militias and Shiite foreign militias) were responsible for 11 952 deaths, amounting to approximately 74 % of

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<sup>880</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 57

<sup>881</sup> UNFPA, Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 23 December 2021, [url](#), p. 10; UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 59; UNFPA, Overview of Funding Needs: UNFPA Regional Syria Crisis Response, updated May 2022, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>882</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 63

<sup>883</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 57-58

<sup>884</sup> The Syrian Initiative to Combat Sexual and Gender-based Violence, The Realities of SGBV in Syria, February 2020, [url](#), p. 38

<sup>885</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>886</sup> The sources are: Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies, Center for Statistics and Research – Syria, SNHR, SOHR, Violations Documentation Center, Syrian Arab Republic Government records, Syria Shuhada records, and OHCHR Syria records. UN Human Rights Council, Civilian Deaths in the Syrian Arab Republic; Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/50/68], 28 June 2022, [url](#), para 13

<sup>887</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Civilian Deaths in the Syrian Arab Republic; Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [A/HRC/50/68], 28 June 2022, [url](#), para 19



extrajudicial killings compared to the other parties, as observed by the source.<sup>888</sup> SNHR further noted that as of March 2022, 9 774 women arrested since March 2011 were still under arrest or subject to enforced disappearance. 8 096 of these cases were attributed to GoS forces.<sup>889</sup> At least 93 women died due to torture between March 2011 and March 2022. Of these, 74 died at the hands of GoS forces.<sup>890</sup> SNHR also recorded at least 11 523 incidents of sexual violence against females in the same period. GoS forces were responsible for 8 013 of these incidents.<sup>891</sup>

According to SNHR, 134 women ‘were documented as being killed at the hands of the parties to the conflict and the controlling forces in Syria in 2021’. In 32 of these cases, the women were killed by GoS forces. Seven women were killed by Russian forces. Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army forces killed two women. Furthermore, two women were killed by the Kurdish-led SDF.<sup>892</sup>

SNHR documented approximately 2 218 cases of arbitrary arrest or detention in 2021, including 77 women. GoS forces were responsible for the arbitrary arrest or detention of 23 women. Armed Opposition factions such as the SNA were responsible for the arbitrary arrest or detention of 47 women. The SDF were responsible for the arbitrary arrest or detention of seven women.<sup>893</sup>

## 13.2 Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

### 13.2.1 Rape, intimate partner violence, family violence, and domestic violence

Rape and sexual assault are criminalised but the law is not effectively enforced. Spousal rape is specifically excluded. If the rapist marries the victim, punishment is reduced or suspended. Rape and sexual violence were described as ‘endemic, underreported, and uncontrolled in the country’.<sup>894</sup>

<sup>888</sup> SNHR, On International Women’s Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups’ Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security, 8 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6

<sup>889</sup> SNHR, On International Women’s Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups’ Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security, 8 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-7

<sup>890</sup> SNHR, On International Women’s Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups’ Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security, 8 March 2022, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>891</sup> SNHR, On International Women’s Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups’ Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security, 8 March 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>892</sup> SNHR, Eleventh Annual Report: The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2021: The State’s Collapse and Society’s Fragmentation, 21 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-11

<sup>893</sup> SNHR, Eleventh Annual Report: The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2021: The State’s Collapse and Society’s Fragmentation, 21 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-11

<sup>894</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 62



Domestic violence is not specifically prohibited by law and ‘men may discipline their female relatives in a form permitted by general custom.’<sup>895</sup> SNHR stated that domestic violence was rarely reported, making this type of violations difficult to document.<sup>896</sup>

Incidents of domestic violence ‘increased significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic’.<sup>897</sup> The pandemic, rising food prices and economic downturn pushed many Syrians into unemployment. As men lost their work and spent more time at home, intimate partner, physical, and family violence against women and girls, as well as further restrictions on women’s and girls’ movements increased.<sup>898</sup> In its Voices from Syria 2022 report<sup>899</sup>, The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) noted a ‘dramatic increase in reports’ of intimate partner violence in 2021. It was reported that physical or verbal violence might be ‘triggered by a woman simply expressing her opinion on a family matter’. Being forced into a position of inferiority, being denied access to a phone, friends and relatives, and having their movements controlled were some forms of intimate partner violence mentioned by the respondents.<sup>900</sup> UNFPA further mentioned that community members are unwilling or unable to intervene in intimate partner violence.<sup>901</sup>

Similarly to intimate partner violence, family violence was ‘perceived as on the rise due to the combined effects of the economic crisis, COVID-19, unemployment and displacement’. Adolescent girls faced various forms of violence perpetrated by parents and older and younger brothers. Respondents frequently mentioned ‘the use of physical violence to control adolescent girls’ behaviours and ensure their adherence to gender norms’.<sup>902</sup>

Regarding SGBV outside the home, the UNCOI maintained that rape and other forms of sexual violence were used by GoS and affiliated forces against women to extract information, as punishment, or to humiliate them and their families.<sup>903</sup> Armed groups were reported to have perpetrated sexual and gender-based violations since late 2011 in Damascus and Aleppo ‘for motives related to exploitation, sectarianism or revenge’.<sup>904</sup>

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<sup>895</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 62

<sup>896</sup> SNHR, On International Women’s Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups’ Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security, 8 March 2022, [url](#), p. 18

<sup>897</sup> STJ, How is Violence Against Women Written into Syrian Laws and Society?, Seeking a remedy to the historical injustice against women is a moral and legal responsibility which falls upon states, communities, and individuals., November 2021, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>898</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 13; UNFPA, Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 23 December 2021, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>899</sup> The Voices from Syria 2022 presents data collected in the framework of the 2022 UNOCHA humanitarian needs overview. The report is based on both quantitative and qualitative data from a variety of sources (involving focus group discussions, secondary literature desk review, etc.). UNFPA, Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 23 December 2021, [url](#), pp. 20-21

<sup>900</sup> UNFPA, Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 23 December 2021, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>901</sup> UNFPA, Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 23 December 2021, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>902</sup> UNFPA, Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 23 December 2021, [url](#), p. 38

<sup>903</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 21

<sup>904</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 33



In 2021, respondents to a UNFPA survey mentioned rape ‘more frequently than in past years, in particular within the context of kidnapping and detention’, however, according to UNFPA ‘a level of discomfort in discussing this specific type of GBV’ was revealed.<sup>905</sup> UNFPA noted other cases of family violence where young girls, some before marriage, were subjected to virginity tests, ‘an invasive inspection of their genitalia of no scientific merit’.<sup>906</sup> According to an expert cited by UNFPA, as a result of GBV ‘women and girls resort mainly to negative coping mechanisms: early marriage, dropping out from school, keeping women and girls in the house, isolation, mental health issues, self-withdrawal, suicide attempts.’<sup>907</sup>

### 13.2.2 Honour crimes

In March 2020, Legislative Decree No 2 for the year 2020 was issued, cancelling Article 548 of the Penal Code.<sup>908</sup> The article was known as the ‘mitigating circumstances excuse’. The law had previously been amended in 2011<sup>909</sup>, however, Article 548 treated ‘honour killings’ as a provoked crime or non-premeditated murder until March 2020. This led to perpetrators facing lower sentences in relation to other murder cases.<sup>910</sup> However, not all courts under GoS control dealt with ‘honour killing’ cases in this way by passing lower sentences.<sup>911</sup>

Following the repeal of Article 548, ‘in many areas, practice has not caught up to the change.’ Investigating honour killings is often not a priority, as it is regarded as a family matter. Other articles of the Penal Code allow judges to reduce sentences if mitigating circumstances apply, such as including the events that can lead to an honour killing. In some cases, families brought children forward as the perpetrator. Because of their age, they are usually immediately released.<sup>912</sup>

The extent to which honour killings occur in Syria is not known.<sup>913</sup> No official statistics are kept regarding ‘honour’ used as a defence in murder and assault cases and so-called honour crimes were reportedly rarely prosecuted.<sup>914</sup> A confidential source interviewed by the Dutch MFA in March 2022 stated that honour killings are recorded mainly in areas where tribes play

<sup>905</sup> UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview*, 23 December 2021, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>906</sup> UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview*, 23 December 2021, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>907</sup> UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview*, 23 December 2021, [url](#), pp. 49-50

<sup>908</sup> SANA, *A new law on canceling article no. 548 of Penal Code which grants mitigating excuse for “honor crimes”*, 17 March 2020, [url](#); STJ, *A Woman Disappeared in Southern Syria — Reports Say She was Killed for Honor*, 25 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>909</sup> Enab Baladi, *New law abolishes honor killings’ mitigating excuse in Syria*, 14 March 2020, [url](#)

<sup>910</sup> SJAC, *Spike in “Honor Killings” Fuels Protests for Accountability in Northeast Syria*, 12 August 2021, [url](#); STJ, *How is Violence Against Women Written into Syrian Laws and Society?, Seeking a remedy to the historical injustice against women is a moral and legal responsibility which falls upon states, communities, and individuals.*, November 2021, [url](#), pp. 4-5

<sup>911</sup> SJAC, *Spike in “Honor Killings” Fuels Protests for Accountability in Northeast Syria*, 12 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>912</sup> SJAC, *Spike in “Honor Killings” Fuels Protests for Accountability in Northeast Syria*, 12 August 2021, [url](#)

<sup>913</sup> Netherlands (The), *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [Country report Syria]*, May 2022, [url](#), p. 61

<sup>914</sup> USDOS, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria*, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 63





an important role such as Sweida or north-east Syria, but they are not limited to a specific ethnic group.<sup>915</sup>

There are indications that ‘honour killings increased following the onset of the crisis in 2011.’<sup>916</sup> In November 2020, Al-Monitor reported an increase in ‘honour killings’ of women in the city of Sweida. A women’s rights activist interviewed by Al-Monitor stated that many women and girls in Sweida were killed by their brothers, husbands or other relatives for inheritance. The victims were accused of being involved in obscene acts to justify the crime as ‘honour killing’.<sup>917</sup> Between January 2020 and February 2021, STJ documented three honour killings in the governorates of Dar’a and Sweida.<sup>918</sup> SNHR recorded 24 gender-based killings of women between March 2021 and March 2022. Most of these killings were labelled ‘honour crimes’, some being recorded in in Hasaka city in June 2021, in the towns of Taftanaz and Hazzano in Idlib governorate as well as in Damascus city in December 2021.<sup>919</sup>

Please also see Section 13.4.2 Situation of women in areas controlled by Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and Section 13.4.3 Situation of women in areas controlled by the Syrian National Army and other Turkish-backed armed groups for details regarding honour killings in areas controlled by Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and Syrian National Army (SNA) forces.

### 13.2.3 Sexual harassment

Discrimination in employment on the basis of gender is prohibited by law, however, sexual harassment is not explicitly prohibited. The law was not effectively enforced and ‘sexual harassment was pervasive and uncontrolled.’<sup>920</sup>

UNFPA described in a 2021 report cases of ‘sexual harassment and assault, including verbal comments and inappropriate touching’. Sexual harassment of particularly adolescent girls occurred in public transport and private taxis, schools, markets and public spaces. Working women and girls tended ‘to be exposed to increased levels of sexual harassment and assault, as well as sexual exploitation in exchange for work or wages’.<sup>921</sup>

### 13.2.4 Early and forced marriage

The Personal Status Law of 2019 puts the legal age for marriage at 18 for women and 15 for marriages consented by the male guardian of the girl and authorized by a judge.<sup>922</sup> Child marriage had reportedly increased ‘alarmingly’ since the beginning of the conflict in 2011,

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<sup>915</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Algemeen ambtsbericht Syrië [Country report Syria], May 2022, p. 61

<sup>916</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 63

<sup>917</sup> Al-Monitor, Honor killings against women increase in southeast Syrian city, 25 November 2020, [url](#)

<sup>918</sup> STJ, Under the Guise of Honor: Women Continue to Fall Victims to Violence Across Syria, May 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>919</sup> SNHR, On International Women’s Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups’ Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security, 8 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 18-19

<sup>920</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 64

<sup>921</sup> UNFPA, Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 23 December 2021, [url](#), pp. 27-28

<sup>922</sup> Syrian Arab Republic, قانون 4 المتضمن تعديل بعض مواد من قانون الأحوال الشخصية السوري [Law 4 amending some articles of the Syrian Personal Status Law], 7 February 2019, [url](#)



however, there is a lack of comprehensive data. Child marriage disproportionately and significantly affected adolescent girls. Reasons of the increased risk included income insecurity and rising poverty.<sup>923</sup> In its February 2022 report, UNOCHA stated that 71% of the communities interviewed<sup>924</sup> mentioned child marriage as an issue for adolescent girls.<sup>925</sup>

Early marriage continued to increase while the age of marriage decreased for girls. Adolescent girls between 12 and 17 years of age continued to be disproportionately affected by early marriage. The economic situation was linked to the rise in early marriage, whereby girls were perceived as burdens for parents and relief was sought through marriage. Financial hardship and protection from sexual violence was used as justification for early marriage.<sup>926</sup>

According to UNOCHA, across the country households were ‘reverting to negative coping mechanisms’, including ‘child labour and child marriage and the sale of productive assets’.<sup>927</sup> Economic hardship made families push their adolescent girls into marriage. However, early marriage was sometimes also regarded as a way out of family violence and became itself a coping mechanism.<sup>928</sup> The UN report of the Secretary-General from March 2021 stated that ‘in 2020, there were cases of girls as young as 10 being forced to marry’ and there were reports that parents in north-west Syria forced prepubescent girls ‘to take hormones to induce puberty in anticipation of early marriage’.<sup>929</sup>

ISIL had practiced forced marriage in a widespread manner.<sup>930</sup> Forced marriage was also noted in areas under control of HTS and the GoS, however, SNHR was ‘unable to document widespread use of this practice by the two parties due to the difficulty of determining this crime’. Women and their families feared speaking out on this issue.<sup>931</sup>

Respondents surveyed in a UNFPA 2021 report described cases regarding the ‘practice of forcing widows and, sometimes, divorced women to marry again’. In order to avoid having to abandon their children, the only available option for widows is often to marry the deceased husband’s brother. Divorced women are forced to remarry, as the new husband is seen as the

<sup>923</sup> World Vision International, *Stolen Future: War and Child Marriage in Northwest Syria*, 25 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 9-

10; UNFPA, *Syria’s decade of conflict takes massive toll on women and girls*, 15 March 2021, [url](#)

<sup>924</sup> UNOCHA’s assessment was based on data collection from 33 171 interviewed households across Syria.

UNOCHA, *2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic*, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

<sup>925</sup> UNOCHA, *2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic*, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 59

<sup>926</sup> UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview*, 23 December 2021, [url](#), pp. 31-32

<sup>927</sup> UNOCHA, *2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic*, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>928</sup> UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview*, 23 December 2021, [url](#), p. 50

<sup>929</sup> UNSG, *Conflict-related sexual violence; Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2021/312, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 21

<sup>930</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic*, A/HRC/46/54, 21 January 2021, [url](#), para. 53; SNHR, *On International Women’s Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups’ Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security*, 8 March 2022, [url](#), p. 19

<sup>931</sup> SNHR, *On International Women’s Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups’ Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security*, 8 March 2022, [url](#), p. 19



person who will preserve the honour and save the family from having to look after the woman and supporting her financially.<sup>932</sup>

Sources reported in 2022 on an increase in the number of customary marriages in Syria.<sup>933</sup> The Syria Report defines customary marriage as ‘a marriage contract between a man and a woman that is usually carried out by a religious cleric either orally or in writing’.<sup>934</sup> Reportedly, this type of marriage has become common among young Syrian men who want to avoid obtaining marriage licenses from military recruitment centres.<sup>935</sup> In addition, a researcher at the Syrian Dialogue Centre attributed the increase in customary marriage rates in Syria to the economic situation whereby women’s need for financial support was exploited.<sup>936</sup> As opposed to official marriages, customary marriages may lead to the wife’s loss of her financial, housing, land and property (HLP) rights<sup>937</sup> as the husband is not bound by any legal obligations towards the wife.<sup>938</sup> The Syria Report stated that a customary marriage has to be registered in order for the woman to obtain her right to the dowry payment for example.<sup>939</sup>

## 13.3 Profiles of vulnerable women

### 13.3.1 Female-headed household/single/widowed

Divorced and widowed women were stigmatised and exposed to ‘specific forms of discrimination, abuse, and GBV’. Judgement by society led to verbal violence. The stigma affected every aspect of life and made divorcees and widows one of the most marginalized groups. In order to marry again, widows and divorced women were forced to abandon their children.<sup>940</sup> Divorced women and girls specifically faced disproportionate stigma. They and their children faced rejection from their families, as the women were often blamed for the divorce and ‘accused of having shamed or brought dishonour to their families’.<sup>941</sup>

Divorced and widowed women were at risk of being excluded from humanitarian services<sup>942</sup>, faced financial exploitation when trying to access humanitarian assistance and were deprived

<sup>932</sup> UNFPA, Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 23 December 2021, [url](#), p. 33

<sup>933</sup> Souria TV, سوريا «ارتفاع معدلات الزواج العرفي في دمشق يحذر من ارتفاع معدلات الزواج العرفي في سوريا» [Sharia judge in Damascus warns of an increase in the rates of customary marriages in Syria], 10 January 2022, [url](#); Al-Quds Al-Arabi, «الزواج العرفي» [Increase in customary marriage rates in Syria... Researchers link this to the outcomes of war], 11 January 2022, [url](#); Al-Hal, «الزواج العرفي في سوريا: نساء بلا حقوق وأطفال مكتومو القيد» [Customary marriage in Syria: women with no rights and unregistered children], 31 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>934</sup> Syria Report (The), Explained: How Customary Marriage Harms Women’s HLP Rights, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>935</sup> Souria TV, سوريا «ارتفاع معدلات الزواج العرفي في دمشق يحذر من ارتفاع معدلات الزواج العرفي في سوريا» [Sharia judge in Damascus warns of an increase in the rates of customary marriages in Syria], 10 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>936</sup> Al-Quds Al-Arabi, «الزواج العرفي» [Increase in customary marriage rates in Syria... Researchers link this to the outcomes of war], 11 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>937</sup> Syria Report (The), Explained: How Customary Marriage Harms Women’s HLP Rights, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>938</sup> Al-Hal, «الزواج العرفي في سوريا: نساء بلا حقوق وأطفال مكتومو القيد» [Customary marriage in Syria: women with no rights and unregistered children], 31 March 2022, [url](#)

<sup>939</sup> Syria Report (The), The Financial ‘Privileges’ Granted to Syrian Women through Marriage, 26 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>940</sup> UNFPA, Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 23 December 2021, [url](#), pp. 47-48

<sup>941</sup> UNFPA, Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 23 December 2021, [url](#), pp. 47-48

<sup>942</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 59



of inheritance and control over their assets by relatives.<sup>943</sup> In the long-term ‘inheritance deprivation and denial of ownership meant that women and girls faced higher risks of homelessness and eviction, and remained dependent on male family members for shelter.’<sup>944</sup> In addition, the lack of access to civil documentation constituted a severe problem for people living in northern Aleppo, Raqqa, Hasaka, Deir Ez-Zor and Idlib. Particularly widowed or divorced women were restricted in ‘their ability to inherit property, get custody of children, legally remarry, or register children born through subsequent relationships, increasing their exposure to violence and stigma’.<sup>945</sup>

Female-headed households faced a substantially higher risk of exploitation and abuse, including GBV, relative to other vulnerable population groups.<sup>946</sup> Widows and divorced women faced a greater risk of ‘sexual exploitation when seeking accommodation, trying to access services, and within the workplace’.<sup>947</sup> They were affected by sexual harassment from employers and landlords<sup>948</sup> and they were especially likely to have to resort to survival sex.<sup>949</sup>

In urban areas or larger displacement camps, widows were sometimes living in ‘widows’ camps’. These camps are meant to provide women and their children with protection. Adolescent boys and adult men are usually banned from entering these areas. While women might enjoy the relative safety in the camps it ‘also comes with severe restrictions and limitations to women’s freedom, in addition to potentially increasing the stigma that widows face’. For example, widows are forced to abandon older children, as adolescent boys are not allowed to reside in the ‘widows’ camps’. Women and girls within these sites face violation of their basic rights and exacerbated GBV risks, including mainly movement restrictions and economic violence as well as sexual exploitation, abuse and early marriage.<sup>950</sup>

### 13.3.2 Women activists

Women participated in public life, the political process and in most professions. Women made up for around 13 % of the members of Parliament.<sup>951</sup> Women involved in the political sphere and women human rights defenders were ‘frequently silenced, belittled, harassed and targeted - online and offline - simply for demanding participation or because they are affiliated to a feminist or gender equality network or movement’.<sup>952</sup> According to a July 2021 report published by Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), women human

<sup>943</sup> UNFPA, Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 23 December 2021, [url](#), pp. 47-48

<sup>944</sup> UNFPA, Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 23 December 2021, [url](#), p. 35

<sup>945</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 26

<sup>946</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>947</sup> UNFPA, Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 23 December 2021, [url](#), p. 48

<sup>948</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Syria, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 64

<sup>949</sup> UNFPA, Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 23 December 2021, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>950</sup> UNFPA, Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, 23 December 2021, [url](#), p. 48

<sup>951</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), pp. 58; 66

<sup>952</sup> OHCHR, Syrian Women’s Rights Civil Society Conference, Combatting violence against women as a barrier to women’s participation in decision-making and peace-building, Statement Birgit Van Hout, UN Human Rights (OHCHR) Regional Representative for Europe, 9 December 2021, [url](#)



rights defenders and activists ‘face several risks including restrictions to freedom of movement, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances, displacement and violence, including sexual violence in detention’.<sup>953</sup>

SNHR documented ‘many cases of women workers and activists being subjected to multiple types of violence in north-east and north-west Syria’ between March 2021 and March 2022. Women active within the community, politics, media and the humanitarian sector were exposed to various types of risks and threats, as well as to both verbal and physical assault. Violations included recurring summons to security centres or being forced to vow to stop their activities and work. In some of the cases documented by SNHR ‘the levels of violence reached the point of threats or death’. Some women were forced to stop their work and women’s families were threatened. Activities and programs ‘related to sexual violence against women or the political empowerment of women’ in women’s centres were sometimes suspended, mainly in areas under HTS control. Many forms of violence against women varied from one area to another, although violations against women ‘were similar in practice by the controlling parties in north-west and north-east Syria, in areas under the control of HTS, Syrian National Army, and SDF’.<sup>954</sup>

Between March 2021 and March 2022 SNHR recorded ‘at least 107 incidents of assault and intimidation against women activists and workers, or against centers for women in connection with their activities in north-east and north-west Syria’. HTS was responsible for 27 incidents, the SDF for 19 incidents and ‘Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army’ for 23 incidents. Unidentified perpetrators and extremist cells were responsible for 38 incidents.<sup>955</sup>

### 13.3.3 Women in IDP Camps

According to UNOCHA ‘camps, overcrowded living arrangements, shelters lacking privacy or inability to lock homes or having sealed windows and doors are shelter issues that create GBV risks for women and girls’.<sup>956</sup> As of the beginning of 2022, 1.72 million people were living in 1 397 ‘last-resort sites’ in the governorates of Aleppo and Idlib in north-west Syria, ‘of which 80 per cent are women and children’.<sup>957</sup>

In north-eastern Syria, 49 % of IDP households were headed by females. Women and children in overcrowded informal sites faced ‘serious protection and GBV risks’ due to ‘no proper site planning, limited or no access to services nor camp management structures’.<sup>958</sup> UNFPA noted that in IDP camps, ‘the dire economic situation, combined with the harsh living conditions can

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<sup>953</sup> WILPF, Joint Submission for the UPR of Syria 40th session of the UPR Working Group, 15 July 2021, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>954</sup> SNHR, On International Women’s Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups’ Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security, 8 March 2022, [url](#), p. 9

<sup>955</sup> SNHR, On International Women’s Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups’ Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security, 8 March 2022, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>956</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 57

<sup>957</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 17

<sup>958</sup> UNOCHA, 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 62



expose women and girls to transactional sexual exploitation, or survival sex'. In an IDP camp in Hasaka, for example, an increase in prostitution was reported.<sup>959</sup>

IDP women headed households reported lower rates of employment than male-headed households and were 'nine times more likely to report having had no income in the last month compared to male-headed households'.<sup>960</sup> AI-Monitor reported in February 2022 that deteriorating security conditions and absence of the family's breadwinner prompted women in IDP camps in north-west Syria to seek work, which was often arduous and physically demanding.<sup>961</sup>

IDP women faced problems in exercising their right to pass on their nationality to their children, especially in areas outside GoS control, due to missing civil documentation or lack of recognition of documents.<sup>962</sup>

Female ISIL members in Al-Hol camp imposed ISIL ideology and norms on displaced women and children and committed violent actions, including murder on those who perceived to oppose ISIL.<sup>963</sup>

## 13.4 Situation of women in areas controlled by non-state armed groups

### 13.4.1 Situation of women in the Kurdish-controlled areas

Between March 2011 and March 2022, the SNHR documented the SDF as being responsible for 165 women being killed<sup>964</sup> and 522 being arrested or subjected to enforced disappearance.<sup>965</sup> SDF were also responsible for two cases of torture against women<sup>966</sup> and 12

<sup>959</sup> UNFPA, *Voices from Syria 2022; Assessment Findings of the Humanitarian Needs Overview*, 23 December 2021, [url](#), p. 29

<sup>960</sup> UNOCHA, *2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic*, 22 February 2022, [url](#), p. 36

<sup>961</sup> AI-Monitor, *Women in northwest Syria take on physically demanding jobs*, 15 February 2022, [url](#)

<sup>962</sup> WILPF, *Joint Submission for the UPR of Syria 40th session of the UPR Working Group*, 15 July 2021, [url](#), p. 10

<sup>963</sup> Soz, J., *The Crisis of Female Jihadists in Al-Hawl Displacement Camp*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 14 July 2022, [url](#); SHRC, *The 20th Annual Report of the Human Rights Situation in Syria*, 9 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 52-53

<sup>964</sup> SNHR, *On International Women's Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups' Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security*, 8 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6

<sup>965</sup> SNHR, *On International Women's Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups' Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security*, 8 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-7

<sup>966</sup> SNHR, *On International Women's Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups' Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security*, 8 March 2022, [url](#), p. 7







cases of sexual violence against females in the same period.<sup>967</sup> In 2021, two women were killed<sup>968</sup> and seven women arrested or detained by SDF.<sup>969</sup>

In areas under control of the SDF, women who demanded their right to work and freedom of opinion faced attacks by the SDF, resulting in detention in some cases. SNHR further documented discrimination against Arab women, including denial or suspension of work and restrictions on freedom of movement. Women activists faced threats because of their opinion.<sup>970</sup>

### **13.4.2 Situation of women in areas controlled by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)**

In 2021, HTS continued to arbitrarily detain activists, humanitarian workers, and civilians in Idlib. HTS was 'increasingly interfering in every aspect of civilian life, limiting women's movements, imposing dress codes and even hair styles'.<sup>971</sup>

HTS targeted women media workers and activists for exercising freedom of expression, such as speaking out against the group's rule. Women activists were detained by the group without respect for judicial guarantees. For example, an activist was held incommunicado by HTS for at least three months before being released in January 2021. In March 2021, HTS members raided the premises of an education organisation in Idlib following a gathering against polygamous marriages'. The group shut down the offices and confiscated the keys of the premises.<sup>972</sup>

Summarising the key trends in arbitrary imprisonment and detention, the UNCOI noted that HTS 'detained women and girls, for instance for travelling without a male member of their family or for being "inappropriately dressed"'.<sup>973</sup> The group also 'banned women and girls from wearing makeup, forbade women from living alone'.<sup>974</sup> In 2020, HTS operated all-female police units to support the religious Hisbah police in enforcing regulations among women. Punishments 'ranged from corporal punishment, such as lashing, to execution'.<sup>975</sup>

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<sup>967</sup> SNHR, On International Women's Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups' Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security, 8 March 2022, [url](#), p. 8

<sup>968</sup> SNHR, Eleventh Annual Report: The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2021: The State's Collapse and Society's Fragmentation, 21 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-11

<sup>969</sup> SNHR, Eleventh Annual Report: The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2021: The State's Collapse and Society's Fragmentation, 21 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-11

<sup>970</sup> SNHR, On International Women's Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups' Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security, 8 March 2022, [url](#), p. 15

<sup>971</sup> HRW, World Report 2022 - Syria, 13 January 2022, [url](#)

<sup>972</sup> 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. 70, 73

<sup>973</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/46/55, 11 March 2021, [url](#), para. 63

<sup>974</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 66

<sup>975</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 - Syria, 30 March 2021, [url](#), p. 66





The group was using women's organisations and institutes, such as its Women's Preaching Office in Idlib governorate, 'to tighten its grip on civil society and expand its public base, despite its multiple violations against women'.<sup>976</sup>

Between March 2011 and March 2022, SNHR documented HTS as being responsible for 77 women being killed<sup>977</sup> and 44 being arrested or subjected to enforced disappearance.<sup>978</sup>

A January 2022 report by SNHR further documents incidents in which women who have been involved in public affairs have been subjected to harassment and intimidation in an effort to force them to abandon their work in the areas controlled by HTS. The report also documents at least 108 incidents in which women were targeted because of their work or opposition to HTS practices between early 2014 and December 2021.<sup>979</sup>

Between January 2020 and February 2021 STJ documented 'five honor killings, committed in the villages of Salqin, Atmeh, and Killi, among others' in Idlib governorate, which is 'almost entirely controlled by the military faction Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)'.<sup>980</sup> For example, in February 2021 a father shot and killed his daughter 'for allegedly taking her hijab off on the street and bringing dishonor to his name'. In November 2020, a father stabbed and killed his daughter 'for bringing dishonor upon the family name because she became pregnant after an affair.' Both incidents occurred in Idlib's countryside.<sup>981</sup>

### 13.4.3 Situation of women in areas controlled by the Syrian National Army (SNA)

Between July 2020 and June 2021, the UNCOI 'continued to document gender-based violations, including of a sexual nature' in northern Aleppo and Ra's al-Ayn regions. Formerly detained women described that members of the SNA forces had subjected them to multiple rapes, beatings and torture, including regularly denying them access to food. Other women were harassed, assaulted and threatened during interrogation sessions or while being held in solitary confinement. The UNCOI noted that there were 'reasonable grounds to believe that SNA elements committed torture, cruel treatment and outrages upon personal dignity, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, which constitute war crimes'.<sup>982</sup>

Between March 2011 and March 2022, SNHR documented that the SNA and other armed opposition factions were responsible for the killing of 882 women, the arrest or enforced disappearance of 857, as well as for two case of torture and 11 cases of sexual violence

<sup>976</sup> Al-Monitor, Syrian jihadist faction establishes 'Women's Preaching Group' in Idlib, 29 October 2021, [url](#)

<sup>977</sup> SNHR, On International Women's Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups' Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security, 8 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-6

<sup>978</sup> SNHR, On International Women's Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups' Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security, 8 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-7

<sup>979</sup> See SNHR, The Most Notable Hay'at Tahrir al Sham Violations Since the Establishment of Jabhat al Nusra to Date, 31 January 2022, [url](#), pp.65-68

<sup>980</sup> STJ, Under the Guise of Honor: Women Continue to Fall Victims to Violence Across Syria, May 2021, [url](#), p. 3

<sup>981</sup> STJ, Under the Guise of Honor: Women Continue to Fall Victims to Violence Across Syria, May 2021, [url](#), pp. 4-5

<sup>982</sup> 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. 86-92





against women.<sup>983</sup> In 2021, two women were killed<sup>984</sup> and 47 women arrested or detained by SNA and other armed opposition factions.<sup>985</sup> Other sources reported in 2022 on cases of sexual harassment<sup>986</sup>, abuse and detention of women at the hands of SNA armed factions.<sup>987</sup>

According to SNHR, Armed Opposition factions/Syrian National Army carried out various types of harassment against women, including the summoning of working women and media activists to security headquarters, for their criticism of the practices of the SNA forces.<sup>988</sup>

Between January 2020 and February 2021, STJ documented ‘at least seven honor killings, mostly committed in the areas of Azaz, Afrin, Jarabulus, and al-Bab’ in the northern countryside of Aleppo, which was ‘controlled by the Turkey-backed Syrian National Army (SNA)’.<sup>989</sup>

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<sup>983</sup> SNHR, On International Women’s Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups’ Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security, 8 March 2022, [url](#), pp. 5-8

<sup>984</sup> SNHR, Eleventh Annual Report: The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2021: The State’s Collapse and Society’s Fragmentation, 21 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-11

<sup>985</sup> SNHR, Eleventh Annual Report: The Most Notable Human Rights Violations in Syria in 2021: The State’s Collapse and Society’s Fragmentation, 21 January 2022, [url](#), pp. 6-11

<sup>986</sup> Syria Direct, Blackmail, threats, bullying, harassment: Women working in the public sphere targeted in northern Syria, 4 July 2022, [url](#)

<sup>987</sup> STJ, Peace Spring: Violations Against Women at Opposition-Run Smuggling Points, 20 June 2022, [url](#); STJ, Input for the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes, and Consequences During Their Visit to Turkey, 22 June 2022, [url](#)

<sup>988</sup> SNHR, On International Women’s Day: Multiple Violations Committed by Various Parties to the Conflict in Syria, Oppression of Women in All Groups’ Areas of Control Perpetuates a State of Lack of Development, Equality, and Security, 8 March 2022, [url](#), p. 14

<sup>989</sup> STJ, Under the Guise of Honor: Women Continue to Fall Victims to Violence Across Syria, May 2021, [url](#), p. 3





## 14. LGBTIQ persons

For targeting of LGBTIQ individuals from the outbreak of the armed conflict in Syria in 2011 up until January 2020, please refer to Section 13 of the previous [EUAA COI report on Syria: Targeting of Individuals](#) published in March 2020.

### 14.1 Legal framework

The Syrian legislation makes same-sex activities punishable by law as stipulated in Article 520 of the Penal Code of 1949.<sup>990</sup> Article 520 states: ‘any sexual intercourse against the order of nature can be punished with up to three years of imprisonment’ [informal translation].<sup>991</sup> Article 517 of the Penal Code states: ‘Violation of public decency in one of the means mentioned in Article 208 is punishable with imprisonment from three months to three years’ [informal translation]. According to Article 208 ‘public indecencies’ are defined as follows [informal translation]:

1. Actions and movements if they took place in a public space (sphere), or a space accessible for the public or visible, or if observed by outsiders/third parties due to the fault of the person carrying them [actions and movements] out.
2. Speech or shouting whether uttered openly or transmitted by mechanical means whereby they [the speech or shouting] are heard by third parties.
3. Writings, paintings, pictures (whether manual or solar [taken by camera], videos, signs, and all kinds of photography if displayed in public or in a space that is accessible for public or visible, or if sold or presented for sale, or if distributed to one person or more’.<sup>992</sup>

The International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), based on its interpretation of this text, defines a violation of public decency as any ‘act carried out in a public or open area where one could possibly see, intentionally or accidentally, the act’.<sup>993</sup> The law makes no explicit reference to same-sex marriage.

<sup>990</sup> Syria, 2011 لعام 1 التشريعي 1 المرسم المعدل بـ 1949 لعام 148 قانون العقوبات العام [Penal Code 148 of 1949, as amended by Legislative Decree no. 1 of 2011], 2011, [url](#), no English translation available. Information on the interpretation of the legal texts can be found in HRW, LGBT Rights, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>991</sup> Syria, 2011 لعام 1 التشريعي 1 المرسم المعدل بـ 1949 لعام 148 قانون العقوبات العام [Penal Code 148 of 1949, as amended by Legislative Decree no. 1 of 2011], 2011, [url](#), art. 520; ILGA, State-Sponsored Homophobia, December 2020, [url](#), p. 137; HRW, Annex: Lois interdisant le comportement homosexuel et l’expression du genre, April 2018, [url](#), p. 82

<sup>992</sup> Syria, 2011 لعام 1 التشريعي 1 المرسم المعدل بـ 1949 لعام 148 قانون العقوبات العام [Penal Code 148 of 1949, as amended by Legislative Decree no. 1 of 2011], 2011, [url](#), art. 208

<sup>993</sup> ILGA, State-Sponsored Homophobia, December 2020, [url](#), p. 137





According to a confidential source interviewed by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands in March 2022, in practice LGBTI persons are not prosecuted under Articles 515 and 520 but rather they are charged with drug-related offences or prostitution.<sup>994</sup>

According to a June 2021 Center for Operational Analysis and Research (COAR) report, ‘the Syrian legal system is inherently hostile to LGBTQ+ individuals, who are a disfavoured class in several critical ways.’<sup>995</sup> A November 2020 article by Syria Untold stated that Syrian law does not provide for protection from ‘discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity’. Moreover, there is no legal basis for transgender people to change their documents accordingly. Since only the sexes male and female were acknowledged by the Syrian law, transgender and gender non-conforming individuals were in ‘constant danger of verbal and physical violence whenever they present their IDs’, according to the article. Surgeries were legally allowed only for intersex individuals in possession of a doctor’s diagnosis.<sup>996</sup> In 2018, it was reported that the GoS allowed an intersex person to change the gender and register a new gender status on official documents.<sup>997</sup>

A source interviewed in March 2022 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands stated that he was ‘not aware of the presence of trans men in Syria and that [trans] form the smallest part of the entire Syrian LGBTIQ community and would only begin transition from woman to man outside of Syria.’<sup>998</sup> Another source stated that not only is specialist care for transgender people unavailable in Syria, but the entire LGBTIQ community was likely to experience difficulties in seeking mainstream or specific medical care.<sup>999</sup>

## 14.2 Treatment of LGBTIQ persons by GoS and armed groups

According to GlobalGayz.com, a travel and culture website that focusses on LGBTIQ matters around the world, ‘instances of persecution are limited to non-existent’ and Article 520 is ‘de-facto suspended.’ Yet the same source mentions being an LGBTIQ individual to be a leverage for mistreatment by Syrian authorities by stating that ‘the Syrian authorities can use individuals’ sexual orientation to blackmail, harass and eventually abuse members of the LGBT community. Law enforcement officers have zero tolerance toward the LGBT community.’<sup>1000</sup> As reported by USDOS in April 2022, the abovementioned Syrian legal provisions were used in the past by police to prosecute LGBTIQ individuals. However, USDOS further stated that no prosecutions were reported under the law during 2021. With reference to a report of COAR, USDOS explained that the ‘lack of protections in the legal framework created an environment of impunity for rampant, targeted threats and violence against LGBTQI+ individuals.’ According to USDOS, NGO reports ‘indicated the regime had arrested dozens of LGBTQI+ persons since 2011 on charges such as abusing social values; selling, buying, or consuming illegal drugs; and

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<sup>994</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of Origin Information Report Syria, June 2022, [url](#), p. 57

<sup>995</sup> COAR, LGBTQ+ Syria: Experiences, Challenges, and Priorities for the Aid Sector, June 2021, [url](#), p. 12

<sup>996</sup> Syria Untold, Voices breaking the silence, 3 November 2020, [url](#)

<sup>997</sup> New Arab (The), Syria allows intersex person to register new gender status for first time, 10 February 2018, [url](#)

<sup>998</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of Origin Information Report Syria, June 2022, [url](#), p. 58

<sup>999</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of Origin Information Report Syria, June 2022, [url](#), p. 59

<sup>1000</sup> GlobalGAYZ.com, Syria, Middle East, n.d., [url](#)





organizing and promoting “obscene” parties’.<sup>1001</sup> According to an October 2020 article by Syria Direct, Article 520 of the Syrian Penal Code is rarely applied, but LGBTIQ people instead are ‘prosecuted under other petty charges, such as disturbing public order’.<sup>1002</sup> The director of SNHR as cited in an April 2022 article by Al-Monitor stated that the LGBTIQ community in Syria was ‘unable to obtain its rights given the strong rejection of all religions and the societal culture’ against it and therefore ‘no entity is able to defend them.’<sup>1003</sup>

A source interviewed in March 2022 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands stated that it is not possible to an LGBTIQ person to request protection from the authorities. This does not only apply if the authorities commit the violence themselves, but also if it concerns (expected) violence from society. The person in question runs the risk of being arrested, humiliated, mistreated or abused.<sup>1004</sup>

In August 2020, the All Survivors Project (ASP) and SNHR stated that the Syrian armed conflict evolving from 2011 onwards had led to an ‘increased vulnerability of LGBTI persons to sexual violence in Syria’. However, according to ASP and SNHR, this was the exacerbation of an already existing discrimination and persecution problem against LGBTIQ individuals.<sup>1005</sup> A source interviewed in March 2022 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands stated that in both government and opposition areas, the number of cases of discrimination, violence, exploitation and violation of civil, political and socio-economic rights for LGBTIQ people is ‘quite high’ [informal translation].<sup>1006</sup>

In a report published in July 2020, based on 44 interviews with Syrian homosexual and bisexual men, transgender women and non-binary individuals, as well as four heterosexual men, HRW stated that all of their interview partners had experienced sexual violence in Syria.<sup>1007</sup> 42 of the interviewees were living in Lebanon by the time of the interview and two others in the Netherlands and Italy, respectively.<sup>1008</sup> The report further stated that the violence had occurred in a variety of settings, such as ‘Syrian detention centers, checkpoints, central prisons, and within the ranks of the Syrian army’.<sup>1009</sup> While heterosexual men and boys in Syria are vulnerable to sexual violence, men who are or are perceived to be homosexual or bisexual as well as transgender women are ‘particularly at risk’ according to HRW.<sup>1010</sup>

HRW further reported that male adults and minors were sexually assaulted and raped in detention centres, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBTIQ people interviewed by HRW, however, believed that ‘perpetrators increased or intensified the

<sup>1001</sup> USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2021 - Syria, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 72

<sup>1002</sup> Syria Direct, At home and abroad, LGBT Syrians fight to have their voices heard, 11 October 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1003</sup> Al-Monitor, Rare Syrian NGO formed to defend LGBT community, 21 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1004</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of Origin Information Report Syria, June 2022, [url](#), p. 59

<sup>1005</sup> ASP and SNHR, Joint submission by the Syrian Network for Human Rights and ASP to the UN Human Rights Committee on the Syrian Arab Republic, 130th Session, 21 August 2020, [url](#), p. 3; see also UK, House of Commons Library, LGBT+ rights and issues in the Middle East, 9 February 2022, [url](#), p. 37; MOSAIC and Gender Justice & Security, Impacts of the Syrian Civil War and Displacement on SOGIESC populations, December 2020, [url](#), p. 6; Reuters, ‘I wish they killed you’: trauma of Syrian LGBT+ rape survivors, 29 July 2020, [url](#)

<sup>1006</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of Origin Information Report Syria, June 2022, [url](#), p. 58

<sup>1007</sup> HRW, “They Treated Us in Monstrous Ways”, July 2020, [url](#), p. 1

<sup>1008</sup> HRW, “They Treated Us in Monstrous Ways”, July 2020, [url](#), p. 7

<sup>1009</sup> HRW, “They Treated Us in Monstrous Ways”, July 2020, [url](#), p. 2

<sup>1010</sup> HRW, “They Treated Us in Monstrous Ways”, July 2020, [url](#), p. 1





violence<sup>1011</sup> once they learned that the interviewees were LGBTIQ individuals. LGBTIQ individuals who served in the GoS army had faced sexual violence such as rape by other members of the army and in military prisons.<sup>1012</sup> HRW found that there was a fear among LGBTIQ people to join the Syrian army, because the prevalence of sexual violence in the army and in military prisons against LGBTIQ people was widely known. Out of the fear to join the army, most LGBTIQ individuals fled the country, according to the source. HRW interviewees stated that they or friends of them serving in the army were taken to Tadmur Prison and Palestine Branch for being LGBTIQ individuals.<sup>1013</sup> Moreover, based on the HRW interviews, male adults and minors were targeted at checkpoints, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, while gay and bisexual persons and transgender women were ‘targeted for their “soft looks”’.<sup>1014</sup> If an LGBTIQ person was identified, particularly by security forces at checkpoints, this could ‘escalate into physical and sexual violence, arrest and detention’.<sup>1015</sup>

According to a January 2021 report of the UNCOI, ‘[u]nauthorized “courts” created by Hay’at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) and other armed groups issued death sentences, particularly ‘against women and sexual minorities, including men accused of homosexuality’. Additionally, the report informed that executions of homosexuals also took place in ISIL-controlled areas.<sup>1016</sup> In an April 2022 article by Al-Monitor, a homosexual man from Rural Damascus is cited to have stated that he was betrayed to HTS, upon which he ‘was arrested and faced the most severe forms of torture and humiliation for eight months’ before being released. Another LGBTIQ individual told Al-Monitor that he was arbitrarily arrested by HTS in 2021. His ‘mental and health condition severely deteriorated because of the beating’ he was exposed to, and he was transferred to a hospital on the fourth day of his arrest, before he was released. However, HTS members ‘kept raiding’ his house ‘almost daily for a month’ before he managed to move to the countryside, from where he was planning to leave the country.<sup>1017</sup>

MOSAIC and Gender Justice & Security published a study in December 2020 based on seven focus group discussions with LGBTIQ people and ten in-depth interviews with key informants conducted between September 2019 and September 2020 in Syria, Lebanon and Turkey.<sup>1018</sup> The study found that while ‘[n]o-one denied the omnipresence of the threat of violence’, much of it was regarded as coming from other civilians such as family members, and armed actors were ‘less prominent in the narratives’ of the respondents.<sup>1019</sup> Respondents of focus group discussions in Aleppo were an exception in that matter. They highlighted that there was a ‘risk of being “disappeared” by militias’<sup>1020</sup> or kidnapped.<sup>1021</sup> However, a constant in the

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<sup>1011</sup> HRW, “They Treated Us in Monstrous Ways”, July 2020, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>1012</sup> HRW, “They Treated Us in Monstrous Ways”, July 2020, [url](#), pp. 32-33, 37

<sup>1013</sup> HRW, “They Treated Us in Monstrous Ways”, July 2020, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>1014</sup> HRW, “They Treated Us in Monstrous Ways”, July 2020, [url](#), p. 38

<sup>1015</sup> HRW, “They Treated Us in Monstrous Ways”, July 2020, [url](#), p. 44

<sup>1016</sup> UN Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic A/HRC/46/54, 21 January 2021, [url](#), paras. 52-53

<sup>1017</sup> Al-Monitor, Rare Syrian NGO formed to defend LGBT community, 21 April 2022, [url](#)

<sup>1018</sup> MOSAIC and Gender Justice & Security, Impacts of the Syrian Civil War and Displacement on SOGIESC populations, December 2020, [url](#), p. 11

<sup>1019</sup> MOSAIC and Gender Justice & Security, Impacts of the Syrian Civil War and Displacement on SOGIESC populations, December 2020, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>1020</sup> MOSAIC and Gender Justice & Security, Impacts of the Syrian Civil War and Displacement on SOGIESC populations, December 2020, [url](#), p. 28

<sup>1021</sup> MOSAIC and Gender Justice & Security, Impacts of the Syrian Civil War and Displacement on SOGIESC populations, December 2020, [url](#), p. 32



respondents' narratives were the threat of 'harassment and abuse by state authorities'.<sup>1022</sup> Respondents of the study further mentioned the fear of being entrapped over social media sites by both GoS security agents and members of Islamist armed groups who would pose as homosexual men in dating applications or on social media with the aim of trapping LGBTIQ persons.<sup>1023</sup>

Within the time constraints of this report, no recent information on targeting of LGBTIQ individuals in SDF/YPG held regions could be found.

### 14.3 Treatment of LGBTIQ persons by society and family

A February 2022 report of the House of Commons Library stated that 'LGBT+ individuals within Syrian society have long been targeted and subjected to violence by not only the regime and pro-regime militias, but also their families who seek to defend the family "honour"'.<sup>1024</sup> Respondents of the abovementioned MOSAIC and Gender Justice & Security study further reported of harassment on a daily basis and the need to reduce their visibility as LGBTIQ individuals by adjusting their behaviour as well as violent threats from family members, including the threat to report them to militias.<sup>1025</sup> Few respondents received support by family members. Some had lost their inheritance rights.<sup>1026</sup> A confidential source interviewed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands stated that 'sexual orientation of an LGBTIQ person is seen as a problem by the community rather than by the authorities'.<sup>1027</sup>

According to the Rights in Exile Programme, 'Lesbianism is less acknowledged in Syrian society due to the greater restrictions faced by women by virtue of their gender, regardless of their sexuality'.<sup>1028</sup> In its 2021 report, COAR stated that the stigma faced by all LGBTIQ people in Syria was probably 'even more pronounced for women because of a widespread view that women carry (and therefore risk) the collective honour of the family'. COAR reported of cases, where women who were open about their LGBTIQ identity were forbidden to communicate outside the family. Furthermore, they could be subjected to violence or 'conversion therapy' or be forced to marry.<sup>1029</sup> According to one focus group discussion held by MOSAIC and Gender Justice & Security, 'lesbians in some families in Aleppo were kept essentially as "domestic slaves"' and were forbidden to have contact outside the family.<sup>1030</sup>

<sup>1022</sup> MOSAIC and Gender Justice & Security, Impacts of the Syrian Civil War and Displacement on SOGIESC populations, December 2020, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>1023</sup> MOSAIC and Gender Justice & Security, Impacts of the Syrian Civil War and Displacement on SOGIESC populations, December 2020, [url](#), p. 32

<sup>1024</sup> UK, House of Commons Library, LGBT+ rights and issues in the Middle East, 9 February 2022, [url](#), p. 37

<sup>1025</sup> MOSAIC and Gender Justice & Security, Impacts of the Syrian Civil War and Displacement on SOGIESC populations, December 2020, [url](#), p. 32

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<sup>1027</sup> Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Country of Origin Information Report Syria, June 2022, [url](#), p. 58

<sup>1028</sup> Rights in Exile Programme, Syrian Arab Republic LGBTI resources, n.d., [url](#)

<sup>1029</sup> COAR, LGBTQ+ Syria: Experiences, Challenges, and Priorities for the Aid Sector, June 2021, [url](#), p. 15

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In an October 2020 article, Syria Direct reported about experiences of LGBTIQ individuals in Syria interviewed by the source. According to one of the interviewees, the more affluent areas of Malaki and Bab Touma in Damascus served ‘as a safe space for LGBT Syrians’ in contrast to more conservative neighbourhoods. According to Syria Direct, in more conservative neighbourhoods, LGBTIQ individuals were not afraid of the law ‘but rather [of] how society will cast judgement upon them’.<sup>1031</sup> As reported by COAR in June 2021, ‘the cultural elite in Syria’s most cosmopolitan cities, Damascus and Aleppo, have shown some toleration for semi-overt expressions of homosexual identity’. However, only a ‘privileged few’, namely ‘ruling class LGBTQ+ Syrians’ have enjoyed this acceptance and ‘relative liberty’.<sup>1032</sup>

Another Syria Direct interviewee recounted how he was locked in the house after his family found out that he was gay. His phone was taken away and he was threatened to be imprisoned or burned alive if he ever went ‘back to being gay’. Of seven additional LGBTIQ individuals from Damascus, Latakia, Sweida and Homs governorates interviewed by Syria Direct, six ‘had experienced some form of physical and verbal abuse, public humiliation or had received threats from their peers’. One 25-year-old transgender man remained locked in the house by his parents for the past seven years. Another interviewee explained that his former hometown, the central city of Hama, was conservative and stated that his parents had thrown him out in 2018.<sup>1033</sup>

In an interview with Reuters, a HRW Syria researcher, reported based on documented cases by HRW how families of gay people in Syria, who had been attacked for being ‘soft’, had told them to ‘[g]et out, leave the country’ and had wished that they had rather been killed.<sup>1034</sup>

According to the June 2021 COAR report, LGBTIQ individuals in Syria faced ‘hiring discrimination and abuse in the workplace’. Furthermore, they had experienced hostile treatment by landlords and neighbours.<sup>1035</sup>

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<sup>1031</sup> Syria Direct, At home and abroad, LGBT Syrians fight to have their voices heard, 11 October 2020, [url](#)

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## Annex 2: Terms of Reference

The research should **focus on the period between January 2020 – August 2022** with the aim of including the most recent information available. For certain profiles the reference period is slightly different as they have been updated separately (March 2021 – August 2022 for Military service, May 2021 – August 2022 for returnees from abroad).

Background information and older trends should be kept very brief and crosslinked as much as possible with previous reports published: [Targeting of Individuals \(March 2020\)](#), [Situation of women \(February 2020\)](#), [Military service \(April 2021\)](#) and [Situation for Returnees from abroad \(June 2021\)](#)

Research should cover the following profiles:

- Persons perceived to be opposing the Government of Syria (GoS)
- Persons fearing recruitment in the Syrian Arab Army, military draft evaders and deserters
- Persons with (perceived) links to ISIL
- Members of and persons perceived to be collaborating with the Syrian Democratic Forces/Kurdish People's Protection Units
- Persons perceived to be opposing the Syrian Democratic Forces/Kurdish People's Protection Units
- Persons associated with the Government of Syria (GoS)
- Journalists and other media professionals
- Doctors, other medical personnel
- Sunni Arabs
- Kurds
- Christians
- Palestinians
- Women
- LGBTIQ persons



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